

**MONSTROUS CREATORS:
THE FEMALE ARTIST IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S GOTHIC**

by

Kathleen A. Miller

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partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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Kathleen A. Miller

Approved:

Iain Crawford, Ph.D.
Chair of the Department of English

Approved:

George H. Watson, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved:

Charles G. Riordan, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Margaret D. Stetz, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of dissertation

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Heidi Kaufman, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Ann L. Ardis, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed:

Maria Frawley, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

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ABSTRACT

Using archival research, as well as literary, cultural, and media criticism and the theoretical frameworks of women's studies and disability studies, this dissertation creates a new understanding of the "Female Gothic," as it demonstrates that the presence of the artistic heroine is the genre's true defining feature and that the issue of women's art is its much-contested focus. The work analyzes distinctions among nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first-century figurations of the female artist in Gothic texts by women across a variety of media, from Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* through Sandra Goldbacher's Neo-Victorian film, *The Governess*. It illuminates how and why anxieties regarding women's economic and social independence, gender norms, sexuality, ethnic and racial difference, physical disability, and questions of representation have been and continued to be filtered through a Gothic lens.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of a prominent female artist-figure serves as a common practice in twentieth-and-twenty-first-century constructions of Victorian Gothic narratives. Films such as Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess* (1998), a re-telling of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and novels like Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002) and Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990) all participate in the neo-Victorian and neo-Gothic genres and feature their female protagonists engaged in different kinds of artistry. For example, Goldbacher's governess, Rosina da Silva, becomes a photographer; Waters's Maud Lilly becomes a writer; and Martin's Mary Reilly not only writes her account of the events in Dr. Jekyll's house, but also engages in the domestic arts, such as gardening. It seems that in adaptations of the Victorian Gothic narrative for contemporary audiences, the form becomes associated with the mapping of the development of a female artist-figure.

These neo-Victorian texts appear to be adding "extra" feminist content, through more obvious examples of women's art practices, perhaps because they do not trust the audience to be satisfied with what is already present in the original nineteenth-century Gothics. Or, these figures may be included for readers and viewers—especially women—who might not expressly identify themselves as feminist, but who still like and expect to see feminist "role models," particularly antecedents who are long past and who appear to be "romantic" characters, as opposed to living or more recent feminist figures. In *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007) Cora Kaplan suggests that the

proliferation of “Victoriana,” or texts that re-envision the Victorian past, is due not so much to nostalgia, but rather to an attempt to self-consciously rewrite “historical narratives to highlight the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and empire” (3). Thus, for Kaplan, contemporary authors and filmmakers may illuminate more explicitly the ideas that Victorian writers introduced covertly.

While the creators of these adaptations may believe that they need to make the narratives of female artistic development more prominent, because these elements are supposedly either too faint or are lacking altogether in the originals I contend that the figure of the female artist was always uniquely integral to the genre of the nineteenth-century Gothic by women. Gothic texts written by men during the nineteenth century do not include the presence of a female artist-figure as heroine. The presence of female artist-figures in neo-Victorian Gothic by women is not a development exclusive to the neo-Victorian genre; instead, it is a translation of a nineteenth-century phenomenon.

“Monstrous Creators” focuses primarily on the uses of the female artist-figure in nineteenth-century Gothic by women. By observing the distinctions, however, between nineteenth-century and twentieth-and-twenty-first century instances of the female artist-figure in Gothic works by women, the project illuminates Victorian concerns and anxieties surrounding the contested figure of the female artist and, at the same time, highlights the influence of feminism within contemporary transatlantic popular culture, as revealed through the transformation of female artist-figures in neo-Victorian/neo-Gothic works. The project considers what occurs during this transformation—what issues are supplanted or overtaken and what cultural anxieties are being created and reflected in both nineteenth-century and twentieth-and twenty-first-century Gothic works.

A significant number of texts written by women and aligned with the Gothic tradition during the nineteenth century feature female artist-figures, including important canonical works such as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Examining Gothic texts written by men from 1760-1901—Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* (1864), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), for instance—shows that these usually do not include the presence of a female artist-figure as protagonist. If male writers do include female protagonists as artist-figures, their artistic endeavors lead to mental and physical deterioration and, ultimately, death. The eponymous heroines of both Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832) and George DuMaurier's *Trilby* (1894) meet this fate, as does Sibyl Vane in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Clearly, the issue of women's art and artistry in many forms and formats, whether visual, musical, theatrical, or domestic, was of particular concern to women writers, but this work breaks new ground in looking at why and how they turned to the Gothic as the preferred vehicle for addressing this culturally contested subject. Ultimately, I argue that these women writers deploy a Gothic discourse, using the figure of the female artist as a contested site for representing a variety of gendered fears and anxieties belonging both to the authors themselves and to their Victorian, and neo-Victorian, audiences. These chapters focus on authorship and on depictions of artists in order to illuminate what these women writers used female artist-figures to say about their status as women and, as artists.

The Female Gothic Tradition and the World of the Nineteenth-Century Artist

Although a coherent definition of the Female Gothic has yet to emerge, many critics will agree that the genre uses the elements of the traditional Gothic novel including: enclosure, entrapment, secrets, doubles, landscape, setting, and narrative structure in order to explore women's social experience. And much like Gothic criticism, the field has experienced a shift from largely psychoanalytic studies to more nuanced historical ones. Anne Williams's *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of the Gothic* (1995) does an excellent job of establishing what is at stake in studies of the Female Gothic. Like Williams, I contend that much Female Gothic scholarship has proven inadequate for a variety of reasons. One explanation for the simplistic scholarship that generally defines the field is its reliance on psychoanalytic criticism as "a means of social diagnosis rather than as a model of interpretation" (Williams 137). Williams offers one manifestation of this trend, suggesting that the Gothic castle may not always be a simple metaphor for the middle-class Victorian home. She concludes that scholars have ignored the Female Gothic as a *literary* tradition; for example, she explains that the institution of marriage is a literary phenomenon (an old metaphor), not just a social phenomenon resulting in female oppression. Also, she states that critics feel embarrassment about women readers' response to these works and consequently argue that the texts reconcile female readers to patriarchy by reassuring them that gender inequality is not so bad after all. As Janice Radway writes, these texts are "opiates for the masses" (qtd. in Williams 138).¹

¹ Here it seems important to note that much Female Gothic scholarship echoes the tradition of 1980's feminist romance criticism that suggests all narratives following a courtship plot and ending in marriage result in female oppression. Female Gothic scholars rely on the work of romance critics such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Janice Radway, both of whom argue that the romance quest plot muffles all other women's quests. Instead, I prefer the analysis of the romance genre offered by Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance* (2004) that suggests marriage in literature can be a

Originating in the 1970s with Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1977) the term "Female Gothic" came to be understood as the Gothic written by and primarily read by women. Thus, the Female Gothic has long been identified with the gender of the author and the reader. Subsequent scholarship such as that undertaken by Juliann E. Fleenor, Michelle Masse, and Diane Long Hoeveler has continued to employ such a gendered divide—attempting to define the genre as related to women's gender, women's experiences, women's processes of sexual maturation, and women's complicated relationship to the home-space. Yet, we cannot assume all women writing Gothic fiction have something in common because they were women, or because they chose to write in a Gothic discourse.

Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) illuminates the complicated relationship between the categories of "women" and "fiction." Armstrong makes clear that not all eighteenth-and-nineteenth century women wrote the same way, for the same audiences, or for the same purposes. A range of differences—class, region, marital status, sexual preferences, religion, access to publishers, and education—vary the experiences of these women writers. Armstrong argues that scholars cannot understand the development of the English novel without comprehending its relationship to the construction of gender—gender does not transcend history, but rather it is shaped, created, and recreated by it (8). The figure of the woman in the early British novel serves as a site where competing gender ideologies were negotiated; nineteenth-century domestic fiction redefined what it meant to be "woman" and "female." Since women's interests and issues change over time, she suggests that a certain feminine discourse developed during the nineteenth century in order shape and reshape gender formation.

powerful metaphor and that women may read these novels because they reinforce feelings of freedom and joy, instead of oppression.

Literature, in this case, specifically Gothic literature, is not merely a reflection of life, or a simple mirror for a monolithic “female” experience of gendered oppression: the tyrannical lord of the manor may not always be the husband of the middle-class household.

In addition to challenging the genealogy of the contested term “Female Gothic” “Monstrous Creators” expands on the scholarship of Antonia Losano regarding nineteenth-century female art practice. Losano’s *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* (2008) offers a groundbreaking analysis of women protagonists in Victorian novels who participate in the visual arts. Losano focuses on prominent female novelists during the Victorian era, such as the Brontës, and examines the trend of including a woman painter-figure as the novel’s heroine. My argument expands on her work in the following ways: while Losano observes the trend of the female painter in nineteenth-century literature by women, she does not identify this trend in relationship to the corresponding trend of the use of Gothic discourse in these novels, nor does she note the numerous other examples of female art practice found in these books—narrative, performing, and domestic artistry. Thus, my project synthesizes these discussions of Female Gothic criticism, gender studies, and Victorian interart scholarship by examining the uses of female artist-figures in nineteenth-century Gothic texts by women. In addition, it compares the depictions of nineteenth-century women artist-figures with their twentieth-and-twenty-first-century continuations. By focusing on the figure of the female-artist, the project illuminates the self-referential mode of creation employed by these women artists, looking at the relationship between the author and the artist she creates. Moreover, it suggests the complicated interaction between the construction of gender and the development of Gothic discourse—in other words, how does using Gothic

discourse help to re-imagine gender? And how does recreating and redefining gender serve to re-imagine Gothic discourse?

In light of the troublesome genealogy of the term “Female Gothic,” this work argues that the characters created through nineteenth-century Gothic discourse—especially, the female artist-figure—is evidence of a Female Gothic tradition. Rather than relying on the gender of the author or the reader to prove that a text participated in the Female Gothic tradition, I posit that it is the presence of the artistic heroine in these texts that serves as the true marker of the genre critics term “the Female Gothic.” With a Gothic discourse and the figure of the woman artist, women writers in the nineteenth century used both form and subject to engender the category of “female” in Female Gothic. Gothic discourse helped women writers to articulate different aspects of what it meant to be a “woman” in the nineteenth century; it meant not only to have talent, genius, and a desire for expression and creativity, but also to have a fearsome, “unwomanly” ambition and skill. Thus, the terms “female” and “Gothic” worked to shape each other.

According to Pamela Gerrish Nunn in *Victorian Women Artists* (1987), the female artist-figure had a host of complex associations and implications for nineteenth-century audiences. Although Nunn’s study solely examines female visual artists (painters, sculptors, and designers), she acknowledges that as many sorts of women in the arts—including female writers and actors—came to the fore in the nineteenth century, they challenged “western beliefs about the nature and status of art. At the same time, [they were] to challenge women’s relationship to society and culture” (1-2). Kerry Powell in *Women and Victorian Theater* (1997) echoes a similar sentiment regarding Victorian female actresses: “Actresses, even the greatest, were absorbed in this formulation, for in their supposed excesses performing women were represented as diseased or inhuman monstrosities, not women at all” (xi). In addition, Mary Poovey’s *The Proper Lady and*

the Woman Writer (1984) illuminates the tensions surrounding the figure of the female author and how fears regarding female propriety collided with professionalism. Thus, the female artist-figure embodied a host of anxieties regarding the women's roles, female economic and social independence, changing gender norms, and issues of representation/control.

Women who pursued the arts, especially as paid professionals, questioned the “very bases of Victorian society” (Nunn 4). Although some forms of women's art were encouraged as signs of female accomplishment—for example, copying from painting, sketching or playing the pianoforte—when women attempted to engage in professional artistry, or demonstrated originality in skill, their art practices became very frightening to Victorian audiences. Artists struggling for acceptance and validation of their talent experienced anxiety, as did a culture confronting a fearsome and terrifying “other” that had the potential to disrupt gender ideology and social hierarchy. The rise of Victorian feminism coincided with the nineteenth-century women's Gothic's preoccupation with the female artist, and the figure became a contested site through which to negotiate issues of gendered power imbalances and female isolation, entrapment, and alienation. I contend that as nineteenth-century female authors commented on fictional women artists, they also spoke to their own situations as female authors in a hostile artistic environment and, by speaking through their characters, they linked many forms of female art practice in an interart, gendered discourse. Here I expand the argument of Tracy C. Davis in *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991): “I do not see how actresses' professional and personal lives can be separated; they are integrated components, and must be recognized as such in the writing of history. Only then can women be accurately accessed as artistic producers and social entities” (xi). Although Davis's work specifically deals with actresses, I believe this notion of the intersection of

a woman's professional and personal life—of her ability to contribute her own life to the discourse of artistic pursuit in general—is valuable to a discussion of other female artists' experience.

The Gothic: An Overview

I posit that the intersection of individual anxiety and cultural fear that surrounded the female artist may account for the frequent appearance of this figure in nineteenth-century Gothic by women. While various scholars have identified a variety of elements which represent the Gothic genre, arriving at a consensus regarding its definition has proven difficult. Considerations of gender as defining the genre have only further complicated matters, and I will develop this analysis further when considering Gothic by women in the nineteenth century and the recent scholarship in the “Female Gothic” genre. Ultimately, for the purposes of my study, I favor a simple definition of the Gothic genre, such as that offered by Elizabeth MacAndrews in *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (1979), David Punter in *The Literature of Terror* (1980), or Anne Williams in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995): Gothic literature is the literature of nightmare and terror. Fundamentally, the Gothic genre has to do with fear.

I use this definition as a starting point, because thus far attempts to account for the entire genre with any single definition have failed. As I will discuss later, critics who add too many elements, beyond a sense of terror, seem to encounter conflict within their own arguments, leading to theses that are just as easily disproven as proven. I do believe, though, that the definition can be productively problematized, as Eugenia DeLamotte shows in *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Gothic Fiction* (1990), relying on the work of Maurice Lévy and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. She argues for a “spatial model” of genre study, suggesting that Gothic terror “has its primary source in an

anxiety about boundaries and that Gothic romance offers a symbolic language congenial to the expression of psychological, epistemological, religious, and social anxieties that resolve themselves most fundamentally into a concern about the boundaries of the self” (13-14). Hence in this spatial model of Gothic genre study Gothic texts typically include certain tropes, though a Gothic text may not contain all of them. A “core” body of Gothic texts exists, exemplified by Gothic fiction of the 1760s-1790s. Other works that include some of these elements branch out from this central group, like spokes from the center of a wheel.

Like DeLamotte and others who focus on anxiety and on the notion of violated boundaries as central to Gothic literature, in “Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,” Julia Kristeva defines Gothic horror as “abjection,” that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). It is what human life and culture exclude in order to sustain themselves; it is also the basis for all horror—that which transgresses order and authority. Kristeva writes, “Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-Objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be” (10). Thus, Kristeva's objects of abjection tend to revolve around the female body; women and femininity are abjected. If a heroine engages in writing, painting, performing, or imagining that which attempts to reclaim or revalorize the realm of the Imaginary or the semiotic, she is in some way engaging in an abject, transgressive act that undermines the “Law of the Father,” or the symbolic. For Kristeva, the Gothic could then be created by the story of an artistic woman, whose quest towards fulfillment and whose strong female identity includes transgressive artistic endeavors. By considering the Gothic’s emphasis on fear, terror, and the transgression of boundaries, we can see, historically situated, the cultural anxieties expressed in these texts through the figure of the female artist. We can

thus explore a moment in the life-cycle of a genre in order to examine and attempt to discover the possible import of these figures at a given moment in time in Gothic writing by women.

My work builds on the foundations of now-classic scholarship in the Gothic, as well as more recent studies. In beginning to synthesize these discussions, I first turn my attention to Gothic studies' rich heritage of scholarship. In considering where this scholarly study has been, and its possible new directions, Valdine Clemens's *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from The Castle of Otranto to Alien* (1999), Robert Miles's *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy* (1993), Jacqueline Howard's *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (1993), and Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall's "Gothic Criticism" (in *A Companion to the Gothic* 2000) all provide excellent overviews of the field, since its inception in the 1920s. These scholars reveal that a significant criticism of much Gothic scholarship has been leveled at its scope—its not-always-successful attempts at bringing together texts from a variety of historical periods, participating in a host of traditions, by making tenuous connections among texts based on a laundry-list of supposed "Gothic" tropes. Furthermore, such scholarship has muddied the waters by attempting to conclude, through these dubious connections and idiosyncratic selections of representative texts, whether the *entire* genre is conservative or radical. Like Clemens, Miles, Howard, Baldick, and Mighall, I contend that these broad-based studies ignore the genre's changes in form over time and the different kinds of cultural work the genre performs during the period of the 1760s through 1901.

Early studies of the Gothic such as Montague Summers's *The Gothic Quest* (1938) or Robert Hume's "Gothic versus Romantic: Re-evaluation of the Gothic Novel" (1969) hoped to validate the study of the genre by linking it to the work of the Romantic poets. Scholars such as Hume argued that the study of the Gothic was worthwhile, despite

the counter claims of F.R. Leavis, Ian Watt, and Wayne Booth, who all neglected to consider the Gothic when defining and examining the “great” realist tradition of the English novel. Pivotal studies in early Gothic scholarship covered a wide range of topics. In addition to positioning Gothic novels alongside the poetry of the Romantics, Summers asserted that conservative applications of Edmund Burke’s philosophy of the Sublime were central to the Gothic novel. Devendra P. Varma’s *The Gothic Flame* (1957) and Maurice Lévy’s *Le Roman “Gothicque” anglais, 1764-1824* (1968) argued that the genre relies primarily on a relationship to medieval architecture as its symbolic and structural model. Another major vein in early Gothic criticism established the genre’s focus on religious/spiritual doubt and anti-Catholic sentiment. Varma and G.R. Thompson’s *The Gothic Imagination* (1957) suggested that, in an age of rationalism, the Gothic offered a religious or spiritual dimension, a way of approaching the sacred. Many of these limited definitional approaches have remained in Gothic studies—for example, in *The Gothic Imagination* (1982) Linda Bayer-Berenbaum posits medieval architecture as a defining element of Gothic fiction and Maggie Kilgour’s *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (1995) associates the Gothic with a nostalgic longing for a safer, spiritual medieval past that offers a critique of Protestant bourgeois values.

Another popular mode of early Gothic scholarship, such as that by Maurice Lévy, used a “checklist” approach to Gothic studies—cataloging and examining texts as Gothic based on whether or not they have certain characteristics: the manuscript, the frame narrative, the castle, ghosts, magic, and blood. With such considerations reining in the Gothic definition’s scope, studies of the Gothic usually centered on limited number of texts, highlighting the “heyday” of Gothic fiction in the 1790s, beginning with the appearance of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), including writers such as

Ann Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis, and ending in 1820, with the publication of Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*.

In subsequent Gothic criticism, however, scholars have begun to suggest that Gothic works also appeared after 1820, and that the form grew to absorb a new range of genres (for example, Gothic tropes appeared in realist novels and sensation fiction) in order to perform new cultural work. While these scholars attempted to expand the canon, they did so by continuing to rely on “the collapse of history into universal psychology [which] has been a consistent feature of Gothic criticism since at least the 1930s” (Baldick and Mighall 218). For example, Elizabeth MacAndrews's *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (1979) asserts that all Gothic fiction is about psychological evil. David Punter's *The Literature of Terror* (1980) and Fred Botting's *Gothic* (1996) operate under similar assumptions, offering a monolithic view of the Gothic—positioning a diverse body of texts in the same project through the use of common tropes and psychoanalytic criticism.

Alongside psychoanalytic approaches, critics of the Gothic have also defined the genre according to Marxist or feminist frameworks. Robert Miles cautions against such a consensus approach in his *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy*, suggesting that attempts to insist upon a highly theoretical underpinning for the Gothic may ultimately result in merely imposing the theoretical frameworks onto these texts, so that one is “encountering not evidence of a late eighteenth-century ‘gap’, only ghosts of twentieth-century ones” (4). Significant studies of Victorian Gothic include Alison Milbank's *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* (1992), Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (1996) and Julian Wolfrey's *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny, and Literature* (2002). All of these works focus on important trends in

Victorian Gothic—notably the development of the bourgeois domestic world or the new urban landscape as the center of Gothic fear and anxiety. The Gothic terrain was no longer situated outside England; rather, fear and terror existed in England’s own backyard. The scholars named above cite the development of the ghost story, a focus on psychological realism, and the “domestication” of horror by locating it in the private sphere of the middle-class home as elements essential to Victorian Gothic.

Here it proves relevant to note that much Gothic scholarship focusing on the Victorian period puts Gothic works and sensation novels in the same category. While these traditions share many similarities, they also possess significant differences.² Nineteenth-century Gothic looks back to the works of writers such as Ann Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis; the texts rely on a Gothic fear or terror originating in some kind of supernatural source. On the other hand, sensation fiction more closely aligns itself with a realist tradition. Its horrors, such as adultery, bigamy, and crime, are taken not from supernatural sources, but rather from “modern life.” The genre is often identified with the 1860s and the anxieties occurring during that decade, especially those fears related to the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857.

Much scholarship on Victorian Gothic has come under fire for the consensus approach; critics contend that those who historicize the Victorian Gothic in accord with a particular framework have succeeded only in replicating the already existing theoretical framework. One example of this trend would be Alison Milbank’s “The Victorian Gothic in English Novels and Stories, 1830-1880” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic*

² Works such as Tamar Heller’s *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and The Female Gothic* (1992), Robert Mighalls’s *A Geography of Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares* (1999), and Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfrey’s *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century* (2000) help to illuminate the division between Gothic and sensation fiction.

Fiction (2002). Milbank looks at political tyranny in Gothic works by men and examines how this trope becomes more heavily psychologized in women's domestic Gothic of the same period. Another example of a Victorian/Gothic studies theory-based criticism, as opposed to of a literature-based criticism, is Stephen Arata's *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (1996). His argument focuses primarily on Gothic texts, even though his study covers the fin de siècle as a whole, not the Gothic, specifically. Arata shows how Victorian Gothic takes historically specific concerns such as "the retrenchment of empire, the spread of urban slums, the growth of the "criminal" classes, the proliferation of the "deviant" sexualities...and even the demise of the three-decker novel' " and recasts them in a narrative that accounts for society's troubles and tries to assuage its anxieties (223).

Much as in David Punter's model of Gothic fiction in *The Literature of Terror*, the anxious Victorian bourgeoisie represents itself in its horror fiction. Both Punter and Arata adopt an anxiety model of criticism; for them, anxious context leads to fear-filled texts. Glennis Byron offers a similar anxiety model of criticism in his chapter "Gothic in the 1890s" in *A Companion to the Gothic* (2000) , which examines fears surrounding degeneration and empire in late Victorian works such as *Dracula* (1897), *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall suggest that these scholars rewrite the Victorian age as a "Gothic" age in its own right, one of delusion, tyranny, and repression. While I highly value these scholars' attempts to historicize the Gothic, I do agree with Baldick and Mighall's argument. I believe that historicizing the Gothic is extremely valuable to Gothic scholarship; yet it would be made even more worthwhile, if scholars either narrowed the scope of their work or looked for particular characters, themes, figures, and settings that recur in order to show a particular anxiety (rather than suggest

that all Gothic fiction creates a transgressive figure such as Dracula simply as a “tonic” to Victorian repression).

As Baldick and Mighall assert, it is too simplistic to claim that any character who goes against bourgeois values is a hero for “radical” Victorian Gothic writers. While Dracula, for example, may encourage a certain kind of sexual freedom, he is also a monstrous aristocratic bloodsucker who threatens the promise of young, forward-thinking individuals like Jonathan Harker and Mina Murray. Based on the discussions above, I contend, much as Jacqueline Howards suggests, that reading all Gothic fiction synchronically as a system of certain unifying stylistic and structural features leads to perceiving the genre as an inconsistent, confused failure (13-14). Elizabeth Napier’s *The Failure of the Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (1987) deals exactly with this problem. By using a laundry list approach to Gothic, or a narrowly defined theoretical framework, scholars only reveal ruptures in the genre rather than coherence; unfortunately, this leads to scholars claiming the Gothic genre is a failure.

Instead, I favor the approaches of Robert Miles and Jacqueline Howard, who recognize Gothic texts as being in dialogue with one another; the Gothic becomes an intertextual genre where texts may not necessarily “build upon a predecessor. On the contrary, [they] may initiate a ‘dialogue’ with it, extending, or opening, a previous text, or texts, but also, at times, imposing closure upon it or them” (4). Here Miles seems to echo DeLamotte and Kofosky Sedgwick. In *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach*, Jacqueline Howard remarks that

For those who conceive of the Gothic primarily as a system of codifiable conventions, there are difficulties in giving sufficient recognition to historical variability and change. The reader is caught in a hermeneutically circular process of interpreting a text in such a way as to produce the

generic frame against which the text is being read. From this in turn can flow aesthetic judgments which can deny a text's specific historical, social, cultural, or political meaning and significance. (1)

Thus, these scholars see that while Gothic criticism may be, on some level, evolutionary, the development of Gothic narrative is not. In addition, they advocate examining particular moments in the Gothic in order to draw conclusions about given "moments" in the history of the genre; for example, Miles only covers the years 1750-1820 and consciously decides not to include certain writers, such as Mary Shelley, in his argument. He posits that while Shelley was writing Gothic novels, she was nevertheless writing in a different discourse community from than the other writers featured in his study, such as Radcliffe and Lewis. This way of historicizing the Gothic is important for literary scholars, and my argument deploys similar methods used by Howard and Miles. In addition, the idea of writers using the Gothic mode and participating in different discourse communities seems to align with my interest in uncovering an interart discourse among women writers and female artists of the nineteenth century.

Some additional studies that have proven influential to my thinking about new directions for Gothic studies have been the aforementioned Eugenia DeLamotte's *Perils of the Night*, E.J. Clery's *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction* (1995), and George Haggerty's *Queer Gothic* (2006). Haggerty urges critics to can expand the current understanding of the Gothic to include a "wide range of writers, dispersed historically and culturally, [who] use 'Gothic' to evoke a queer world that attempts to transgress the binaries of sexual decorum" (2). Although I do not see Gothic criticism as primarily privileging either heterosexuality or queer sexuality, *per se*, I think Haggerty's assertion that genre study should take account of shifting ideological concerns of fear and anxiety is compelling. All of these works differ from earlier psychoanalytic studies or from those that attempted to define the entire genre, by looking at moments in Gothic fiction and

establishing relationships among a smaller number of texts, to define a Gothic movement at a given time and to consider what that movement's import may have been. I believe this more closely aligns with my goals of examining a specific figure, the female artist, at a particular time—i.e., in nineteenth-century British women's Gothic.

The Female Gothic: An Overview

In addition to focusing on Gothic studies in general, my project considers the sizeable body of scholarship focusing on Gothic and gender, especially on the Female Gothic genre. The process of linking the Gothic with gender is a long established one; Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, which served as a response to M.G. Lewis's *The Monk*, may be credited with starting the division between men's "horror" and women's "terror" Gothic. Radcliffe describes terror as "'expanding the soul...awaken[ing] the faculties to a high degree of life'" (qtd. in Howard 20), while horror Gothic awakens the reader's consciousness to vice. For Radcliffe, in male horror texts the reader's consciousness is with the victimizer; readers learn to hate and fear vice by experiencing it alongside the perpetrator. On the other hand, terror Gothic, which became identified with the feminine, places the readers' consciousness with the victim and inspires readers to learn the values of goodness and sensibility through the virtuous characters. Later scholars, such as Anne Williams in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), echo this analysis. She claims that, "Gothic" is not one but two (like the human race it has a "male" and "female" genre)" (1).

Traditionally, the Female Gothic narrative has been suspect amongst scholars who argue for the genre's conservative depiction of women's agency, most often evidenced in the Female Gothic narrative's concluding in gender-conservative unions (marriage and motherhood). Critics such as Tania Modleski in *Loving with a Vengeance:*

Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women (1982), Michelle Masse in *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism and the Gothic* (1992), and Diane Long Hoeveler in *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (1998) insist that by reading these books, women participate in glamorizing their own oppression and in promoting traditional gender roles. Modleski places so-called Female Gothic novels in the larger literary tradition of women's fiction and suggests that women are drawn to these novels, because they express female paranoia and enable the heroine to work through extreme feelings of ambivalence without assuming too much guilt for having these negative emotions (82-83). She concludes that Female Gothic novels reflect women's discomfort with the "social and psychological processes which transform them into victims" (84), but she does not credit these novels and their heroines with offering any agency or empowerment. Masse also claims that the heroines in these novels are submissive and that the model of feminine development these texts advocate is actually a form of culturally induced trauma. Long Hoeveler posits that the Female Gothic novel embodies gender conservative values, and these values are detrimental to women readers. Instead of attempting to prove that the Female Gothic makes a single monolithic statement regarding female empowerment, however, I demonstrate that the heroines of these nineteenth-century novels—heroines who engage in women's art practices—may offer readers more complicated models. The female artist-figure heroines depicted in earlier women's Gothic may be far less expressly feminist exemplars than those female protagonists present in twentieth-and twenty-first century Gothic by women.

Although I have already put forward a definition of the Female Gothic earlier in the essay, circling back to a discussion of the genre's definition will allow me to articulate more fully developments in the genealogy of Female Gothic scholarship. As I noted earlier, it was Ellen Moers who, in *Literary Women* (1977), coined the term

“Female Gothic.” She described it as “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (90). Essentially, for Moers, the Female Gothic was the Gothic as written and read by women. Defining Female Gothic according to the author of the gender has continued in much criticism, although a few scholars, such as Anne Williams and Susan Becker in *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions* (1999), have suggested that Female Gothic may be male-authored. Becker looks to break down the divide between Gothic written by men and women by shifting focus from novels written by women to women-centered novels—what she calls the feminine Gothic (16). While I do not plan to take up the issue of whether or not to include men in the category of Female Gothic, I think that acknowledging fluidity between gender categories of writing is valuable, so scholars do not become moored in static category binaries based solely on biological sexual difference. Yet, at the same time, I believe there is much value in a project that examines Gothic solely by women—a project that underscores gender as one important social element in both reading and writing. I contend that such study may highlight some issues that male-authored texts may not address in the same way. By examining predominantly nineteenth-century Gothic written by women, rather than all Gothic fiction written by women, my project presents a unique opportunity to consider a female aesthetic that is both self-referential and socially symbolic—in other words, the woman writer speaks to the text’s female artist-figure, as the text’s female artist-figure is in dialogue with the woman writer. Although men may use the trope of the female artist-figure, the conversation between author/artist-figure is not the same.

Juliann Fleenor’s groundbreaking *The Female Gothic* (1983) continues the work begun by Moers, further defining the genre and exploring its literary manifestations. Fleenor says, “It [the Female Gothic] has many levels and many forms and is a protean

entity not one thing. There is not one Gothic but Gothics” (4). She and the volume’s scholarly contributors examine literature written and read by women and explain how it helps them confront their patriarchal fears and “settle[s] female doubts and fears about the purpose of women’s lives” (4). Much criticism of the Female Gothic from the 1970s and early 1980s approaches these texts as a psychoanalytic fiction that rehearses the fears and guilt attendant on sexual maturation. Juliann E. Fleenor and Kate Ferguson Ellis in *The Contested Castle* (1989), respectively, have suggested that the genre illuminates the perceived dangers inherent in female sexual maturation in conjunction with the Freudian paradigm and the problems of women’s experience of subordination and oppression in patriarchal society. On the other hand, Diane Long Hoeveler claims that these works can more accurately be read as elided representations of the political, socioeconomic, and historical complexities of women’s lives under a newly codified bourgeois identity. Most recently, Gary Kelly in *Varieties of Female Gothic* (2002) has examined the conditions of literary production during the first flowering of the Gothic romance in the late eighteenth century. He argues that the “Gothic romance and the ‘Female Gothic’ were designed to play a part, a complex and often self-contradictory part, in [a] revolution” (xiv). The revolution to which he refers concerns women’s fight for equality in the social, cultural, economic, political, and religious spheres. Kelly is concerned less with a definition of the genre, and more with creating a historical context for such women’s writing, in order to explain its import and purpose. I tend to agree with Kelly’s approach in examining women’s Gothic in the nineteenth century, worrying less about it as a marker of a “female” genre defined by biological gender difference and more as a historical document with its own particular import and purpose at a given moment.

An excellent example of a study of Gothic that includes gender but does not do so through the lens of “female” Gothic per se is Kate Ferguson Ellis’s *The Contested*

Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology (1989). She notes the recurring theme of the failed home, which appears often in Victorian Gothic novels, and she concludes that the nineteenth-century middle class idealization of the home and the popularity of Gothic novels among women novel readers were linked (x). In explaining what made such fare appealing to women readers, she also considers what in Victorian culture demanded such stories. Her argument regarding how heroines of women's Gothic purged the infected home and created a new home landscape that empowered the heroines (and readers) is quite persuasive. Yet, despite her discussion of women transforming the home-space and fashioning a physical realization of their imaginative desires, she never conceives of the heroines as artist-figures or domestic artists.

Thus far, few works have begun the project of examining artist-figures in Victorian fiction, especially in the so-called Female Gothic. To my knowledge, only Susan Wolstenholme's *Gothic (Re)Visions: Writing Women as Readers* (1993), Diane Long Hoeveler's *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*, and E.J. Clery's *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (2000) have conjoined the female artist-figure with the Female Gothic genre. Wolstenholme contends that the genre's structure and allusions to theatricality and to individual plays in Gothic works establish woman as a "textual position—or to frame the issues in a different discourse, that they suggest a meditation on the issue of writing as a woman—and that, recurring from text to text, they establish a pattern that becomes a recognizable symbolic code" (xi). She continues, "I focus on moments where women writers write their writing acts into texts, sometimes explicitly, sometimes in passages that suggest metaphors for the act of writing as a woman. The writing act presents itself as performance, where the action and the audience (and hence the reader) are written into the text as 'scene.'" (xiv). Wolstenholme concludes that "Women's Gothic is concerned

with coded moments that suggest the texts' preoccupation with their own production, instances where these texts teach us to read them as re-writings that are re-readings" (xiv). Thus, women novelists are engaged in a discourse with other women novelists. But Wolstenholme does not relate these "coded" moments to other kinds of art, despite her references to theater and performance; neither does she focus on instances of women's art practices within the novels, for she confines her discussion to authors, not fictional protagonists. Ultimately, though, I find Wolstenholme's thesis very provocative and very helpful for thinking about women's use of dialogue about art and for the question of exchange among Gothic texts, even though it does not illuminate my own concern with artist-figures in the novels.

Other studies in the field, too, deal with performance in relation to women's Gothic. E.J. Clery in *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (2000), argues that the figure of the tragedian Sarah Siddons served as an iconic figure for women writers, especially for women writing in the Gothic mode. Siddons's artistic genius showed women that not only could they be creators, but they could combine pity and terror (essential elements to the Gothic) in order to evoke a response in their audience, while transgressing gender expectations and doing so for fame and fortune: "To imagine death, to imagine violence, supernatural agency, madness, uncontrollable passion: this is the art of the Gothic writer. This is the ability women needed to lay claim to, and actively assert, in order to find success in this literary field" (13). Nonetheless, while Clery notes the importance of Siddons for the Gothic authors, she does not consider performative aspects in their texts' female protagonists.

Diane Long Hoeveler does look at performing heroines in *Gothic Feminisms*: "In short, the Female Gothic novelist constructs female characters who masquerade as professional girl-women caught up in an elaborate game of playacting for the benefit of

an obsessive and controlling male *gaze*. (4). What Hoeveler terms “Gothic feminism” or “victim feminism” allows these women to appear to be submissive, even as, in actuality, they try to subvert the father’s/patriarchy’s control at every turn. Yet, Hoeveler does not ultimately view this performance as liberating or empowering; rather she views it as a dangerous charade encouraging female weakness as a form of agency. Despite relying on Marxist and feminist theoretical frameworks, she appears, ultimately, to be most influenced by Judith Butler’s conception of gender in *Gender Trouble*, especially when discussing female performance theory in relation to the performance of gender.³ In addition, she never links the notion of performing gender to nineteenth-century discourse about women in the theater or acting profession. While she addresses novels from 1780-1853, she does not fully historicize the heroines of these texts in relationship to actual actresses, nor does she consider “performance” as an acting term.

Although her argument does move scholarship on the Female Gothic beyond the sphere of the psychoanalytic alone, Hoeveler does not take her theory of performance in the Gothic far enough. Hoeveler’s work could be productively extended, and the conclusions she draws about nineteenth-century Gothic novels by women enriched, if one were to link it to the issues of nineteenth-century theater and gender. While E.J. Clery’s scholarship on Sarah Siddons proves essential to my argument, I also draw upon Kerry Powell’s *Women and Victorian Theater* (1997), Tracy C. Davis’s *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991), Sandra Richards’s *The Rise of*

³ In addition to Butler’s notions of gender performance and sexual difference, influential works dealing with the concept of gender in the Victorian period include: Mary Poovey’s *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1988) which exposes the binary logic and artifice of the Victorian symbolic economy of gender ideology and Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987) and “Gender in the Victorian Novel” (*The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* [2001]).

the English Actress (1993) and Kerry Powell's anthology *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theater* (2004). All of these texts help to illuminate how nineteenth-century women felt about the theater, female performance, and the potentialities of acting/the acting profession. While these scholars have noted a recurring interest in performance and in the theatrical in Gothic texts, none has posited Gothic heroines as artist-figures *per se*, nor has anyone considered other representations of female artistry as recurring tropes throughout this body of fiction.

"Monstrous Creators" is comprised of four chapters. "Performance Anxiety: Acting and (Re)-Enacting Female Gothic Scripts" focuses on fictional heroines such as Mary Shelley's Mathilda and Jane Austen's Catherine Morland, characters who may not be professional actresses, but who demonstrate women's art practice through performance. "Swapping Smocks for Aprons: Women Painters and the Visualization of a Domestic Artistry" examines Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850), novels that privilege the domestic sphere over that of the professional art world, at least for women. I argue that *Olive* offers a rewriting of *Jane Eyre* in which the plight of the female artist, and "deviant" sexual, ethnic, and racial identities, become coded in physical disability. "Ghostly Stories, Ghastly Storytellers: Women's Narrative Artistry" looks at Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's Gothic short stories, which feature fictional characters whose art is the narrating of a novel, such as Nelly Dean, or oral storytelling, such as the female narrators in Gaskell's Gothic tales. My concluding chapter, "The Portrait of the Artist as a Modern Woman: The Female Artist-Figure as Feminist Role Model in Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess*," explores Goldbacher's film *The Governess* (1998), which employs a female photographer as heroine. The chapter argues that the role modern feminism plays in these neo-Victorian creations and adaptations simultaneously reproduces some of the anxieties

and concerns about gender of the Victorian period and reflects those involving women today.

Ultimately, “Monstrous Creators” poses a variety of questions related to genre, feminist, and reception theory: What changes in form and cultural work occur in Gothic literature over the span of time from the genre’s inception through the nineteenth century? What differences exist between Gothic written by men and Gothic written by women, especially during the Victorian era? What functions do female artist-figures perform in women’s Gothic in the nineteenth century? Do female artist-figures perform different functions in neo-Victorian and neo-Gothic works of the twentieth-and twenty-first centuries? And how do the intersections of various kinds of female artistry—domestic, narrative, visual, and performative—create an interart feminist discourse among Victorian female creators and their neo-Victorian antecedents? And it attempts to find the answers lurking in the dark, twisted corridors of the Gothic imagination and in the perhaps even more Gothic experiences of female artist-figures.

Chapter 2

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY: ACTING AND (RE)-ENACTING FEMALE GOTHIC SCRIPTS IN MARY SHELLEY'S *MATHILDA* AND JANE AUSTEN'S *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

The Gothic genre rose to prominence in the 1790s with the success of novels such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and its popularity sparked numerous late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century debates about the possibly dangerous influence on its female readers. Despite assertions by many twentieth-century critics that heroines in Gothic novels foster passivity and helplessness in female readers, scholars such as Nora Nachumi suggest that Regency and Romantic readers thought that Gothic novels, and their heroines, instead were to blame for promising unsettling liberatory and progressive messages—destroying middle-class women's contentment with their domestic lives, encouraging them to indulge in fantasies of dark passion and exoticism, and promoting sexual license beyond the bounds of social propriety (58). Thus while some twentieth-century scholars may condemn Female Gothic novels for their conservative messages, late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century audiences of Gothic novels, such as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* (written 1819, published 1959), in actuality, reflected a new set of emerging and circulating values regarding female education and women's place in society.

In *Borderlines: The Shifting of Gender in British Romanticism* Susan J. Wolfson offers an excellent overview of the cultural context of the 1790s, whose gender debates closely proceeded the creation of Austen and Shelley's texts. Wolfson suggests that the French Revolution sparked "an international flashpoint" for "questions about

language in social and political process” (3) ushering in an era that questioned earlier distinctions of gender. Authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, mother of Mary Shelley, relied on political rhetoric and the language of revolution to critique gender politics in her influential *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790). Yet despite this process of questioning, anxieties regarding shifting gender paradigms caused a conservative backlash about women’s roles. As a publishing woman, Wollstonecraft faced censure and the “stigma of monstrosity” (15) by both revolutionaries and anti-Jacobins alike.

However bold and controversial Wollstonecraft’s message of educational, legal, and political equality appeared to eighteenth-century audiences, Claudia Johnson argues in *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (1995) that “*Rights of Woman* is preoccupied with championing a kind of masculinity into which women can be invited rather than with enlarging or inventing a positive discourse of femininity” (24). Thus, Johnson suggests that Wollstonecraft’s message was far from a feminine or feminist discourse. However, in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988) Claudia Johnson does trouble her later claim by contending that Wollstonecraft may have originated a “positive feminine discourse” through her participation in the writing of Gothic novels. Johnson writes that Gothic novels of the 1790s were imbued with political content and, in particular, those Gothic texts written by women, or Female Gothic, served to promote a “progressive agenda to protect the powerless and the feminine from the abuses of a decaying but still powerful patriarchy, and some progressive novelists such as [...] Wollstonecraft in *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, did employ the form or much of its imagery for precisely that purpose” (33). According to Johnson, Gothic novels came to “figure forth realities which young girls ought to know about” (33) and served as an important training tool for young girls looking to locate information about developing

discourses of gender and ideas regarding their place in the political, social, and economic sphere.

I extend Claudia Johnson's arguments concerning the gender discourses of the late eighteenth-century to contend that Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* take up, and expand upon, the project begun by writers such as Wollstonecraft by offering fictional responses to discussions about the import of Gothic texts and illuminating their powerful impact on female readers by highlighting these narratives' language of theater and performance. In both texts the heroines negotiate the typical Gothic trajectories, or Gothic "scripts," created for, and by, the genre's female protagonists. Through their carefully constructed performances, Catherine Morland, in *Northanger Abbey*, and Mathilda, in the eponymously named *Mathilda*, become Gothic actresses, combating the "performance anxiety" of middle-class women's experience by acting and re-enacting early Female Gothic scripts, such as those found in the novels of Ann Radcliffe. Their heroines adopt, but simultaneously rewrite, these Radcliffe-ian Gothic scripts to argue that certain tropes inherent to female-authored Gothic of the 1790s may be rewritten in favor of new possibilities. In other words, Austen and Shelley prove that Female Gothic is not a static genre. Thus, both the authors and the audiences reshape Gothic discourse, as they simultaneously recreate and redefine the concept of gender.

Austen's and Shelley's Gothic fiction demonstrates a new terror for Regency and Romantic audiences, the fear of the "monstrous" female artist. Their work introduces a significant new trope to the Female Gothic genre—a central narrative of anxious, and anxiety-producing, female artistic development. Both Austen and Shelley use the figure of the female artist to re-code women's Gothic, creating a new set of references for readers of the Gothic and infusing it with fresh meanings and import. Hence the Gothic

becomes, for these writers, a fluid space in which women writers and readers have fresh opportunity to engage in the production and consumption of the text. In particular, the Gothic novel then develops into an interdisciplinary field of interart dialogue, where representations of different kinds of female artists influence each other.⁴

For late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century women who were involved in theatrical performance or the creation of novels, allegations of impropriety were frequent occurrences. As women writers, who were both in some way involved with the theater, Austen and Shelley experienced such prejudices first-hand. Jane Austen was a frequent theatergoer and participated in amateur theatricals in her home. Mary Shelley came from a literary family whose patriarch had dramatic aspirations. Her father, William Godwin, was a frequent theater-goer, and a playwright who authored four plays.⁵ While Mary and her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, remain best known for their prose and poetry, around 1820, Mary and Percy collaborated on a number of plays—in particular, they wrote fragments of a drama based on the life of the Cenci family. In addition, Mary Shelley completed two dramas, *Proserpine* and *Midas*.

In *Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists and the Eighteenth-Century Theater* (2008), Nora Nachumi, writes,

⁴ Emily Allen in *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (2003) writes that “theater and theatricality not only enabled [the novel’s] continual process of self-definition, but they also gave novelists and critics a set of tropes through which to understand and regulate the nineteenth century’s rapidly changing literary market” (3). In essence, the public (theater) and the private (novel) were not opposed, but rather the same language that described the growth of the theater was used to explain the rise of the novel.

⁵ See *The Plays of William Godwin* (2010). Godwin wrote four plays; *Antonio; or, The Soldier’s Return* (1800) and *Faulkener, A Tragedy* (1807) were published in his lifetime; *St. Dunstan* (1790) and *Abbas, King of Persia* (1801) exist only in manuscript.

Theatrical women called into question the concept of a direct and unmediated relationship between a woman's appearance and demeanor and her quality of mind [...] they raised the unsettling possibility that all women could act in a theatrical sense. Given this fact, the self-representation of female novelists involved with and/or exposed to the theater on a regular basis may be understood as a kind of performance [...] they use their fiction to dramatize the theatrical nature of female experience. Ultimately, and in different ways, each demonstrates what it means to *act* like a lady. (75)

Actresses were seen as dangerous "others," monstrous transformations of proper femininity. Audiences associated them with lascivious sensuality and performances that could challenge the culturally dominant images of the feminine ideal (for example, actresses might make audiences sympathize with the murderous, controlling, and thoroughly "unfeminine" Lady MacBeth). Furthermore, women actresses had the potential for economic independence; since their careers allowed them to be self-sustaining, some individuals worried that these women would choose not to marry or would disrupt traditional marital power relations. Above all, women actors endangered the developing doctrine of separate spheres, and suggested,

the unsettling possibility that *all* women could act and appear as characters other than themselves. Implicitly, then, actresses offered women a way to evade the surveillance that disciplined their conduct. In short, the possibility that ladies were no different from actresses who threatened an ideological system that equated the lady's appearance with her quality of mind. It implied that every woman possessed a private self that remained hers even though her body belonged to her father, brother or husband. (12)

Here, Nachimi's repetition of the word "lady" indicates a question of class. The doctrine of separate spheres imposed a particularly rigid set of expectations on middle-class women who were expected to be models of propriety, truth, docility, modesty, and purity. Hence, middle class individuals would have been appalled to think

of “lady-like” daughters, wives, and mothers possessing an actress’s talent for artifice. Thus, actresses and their spectators were negotiating new categories of femininity, in essence, re-imagining what it meant to be “woman,” through the language of the theater. Perhaps not coincidentally, many female novel writers, such as Austen and Shelley, had their roots in the theater.

Although Austen and Shelley had connections to the theater, their most useful form of female artistic expression was in the written word. Statistics suggest that women turned to the novel as the most popular form of artistic expression, after the 1720s. For example, from 1660-1800, 22 percent of novelists were women, while only 7.8 of playwrights were women (Nachumi 48). Novels offered a variety of incentives that the theater did not—there were no closing nights, writers’ profits were not dependent on the success of an opening night, no classical training was required, and subscription publication could be more lucrative than theater wages (Nachumi 48). Austen and Shelley remain best known for their work as writers of fiction, albeit novelists heavily influenced by theatrical language and conventions.

Regardless of their chosen medium, Laura Dabundo argues in *Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, and Their Sisters* (2000) that Austen and Shelley are “sister writers,” writers who worked in a period when “women are excluded from power, property, dominion, and authority, [and] literary expression opens up a single avenue of opportunity for talent to speak, for intelligence to shine, for imagination to sparkle” (3). She suggests that these novelists do not create escapist fantasies that remove them and their readers from the realities of late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century life but rather their works “undertake skillful, articulate, and energetic encounters [...] with the prevailing established customs, institutions and verities. That is to say, these essays chart a dialogue in which these women engage with the documents and forms of their society

and culture” (3). Like Dabundo, I too posit that Austen and Shelley were writers involved in the social issues of their time, particularly the role of the female artist and the role of women in Regency and Romantic culture.

Thus far, few critics have begun the project of examining artist-figures in nineteenth-century fiction, especially in the so-called Female Gothic. Only Susan Wolstenholme’s *Gothic (Re)Visions: Writing Women as Readers* (1993), Diane Long Hoeveler’s *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (1998), and E.J. Clery’s *Women’s Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (2000) have conjoined the female artist-figure with the Female Gothic genre.

Wolstenholme’s, Hoeveler’s, and Clery’s scholarship all yoke the Female Gothic to issues of theatricality and female performance. Wolstenholme contends that the genre’s structure and allusions to theatricality and to individual plays in Gothic works establish woman as a “textual position—or to frame the issues in a different discourse, that they suggest a meditation on the issue of writing as a woman—and that, recurring from text to text, they establish a pattern that becomes a recognizable symbolic code” (xi). She continues, “Women’s Gothic is concerned with coded moments that suggest the texts’ preoccupation with their own production, instances where these texts teach us to read them as re-writings that are re-readings” (xiv). While Wolstenholme suggests that Gothic women novelists are engaged in a discourse with other women novelists, across time periods, she does not relate these “coded” moments to other kinds of art, despite her references to theater and performance. Neither does she focus on instances of women’s art practices within the novels, for she confines her discussion to authors, nor does she refer to their fictional protagonists.

Other studies in the Female Gothic field, too, deal with performance in relation to women’s Gothic. In *Women’s Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley*

(2000), E.J. Clery argues that the figure of the tragedian Sarah Siddons served as an icon for women writers, especially for women writing in the Gothic mode such as Sophia Lee and Joanna Baillie. Siddons's artistic genius showed women that not only could they be creators, but that they could combine pity and terror (essential elements to the Gothic) in order to evoke a response in their audience, while transgressing gender expectations and doing so for fame and fortune: "To imagine death, to imagine violence, supernatural agency, madness, uncontrollable passion: this is the art of the Gothic writer. This is the ability women needed to lay claim to, and actively assert, in order to find success in this literary field" (13). Her role as "tragedian," one who manipulates the emotions of pity and terror, associates Siddons's performances with the authority of Shakespeare (13). Scholars have cited Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as the ur-text of "Gothic" tropes such as Hamlet's madness, the text's preoccupation with death, and the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father that signals the return of the repressed.⁶ In the preface to the first Gothic novel in English, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Walpole writes that he modeled his work after the tragedies of Shakespeare, which successfully married the greatness of kings with the humor of grave-diggers (11). For women writers who were searching for a pedigree for their own artistry, this powerful relationship between the cultural status of Shakespeare's tragedies and the potential of Gothic as a liberating, imaginative, and passionate genre proved irresistible. Nonetheless, while Clery notes the importance of Siddons for contemporary Gothic authors, she does not consider performative aspects of the female protagonists in their texts.

Diane Long Hoeveler does look at performing heroines in *Gothic Feminisms*, arguing, "In short, the Female Gothic novelist constructs female characters who

⁶ In particular, see Maggie Kilgour's *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (1995).

masquerade as professional girl-women caught up in an elaborate game of playacting for the benefit of an obsessive and controlling male *gaze*. (emphasis in original, 4). What Hoeveler terms “Gothic feminism” or “victim feminism” allows these women to appear to be submissive, even as, in actuality, they try to subvert the father’s/patriarchy’s control at every turn. Hoeveler sees female performance as a dangerous charade promoting female weakness as a form of agency.

Hoeveler’s work can be productively extended by linking it to the issues of nineteenth-century theater and gender. Even though Emily Allen states, “For the first half of the nineteenth century, the terms *actress* and *propriety* enjoyed only an oppositional relationship” (20), scholars such as Kerry Powell, in *Women and Victorian Theater* (1997) and in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theater* (2004), Tracy C. Davis in *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991), and Sandra Richards in *The Rise of the English Actress* (1993) suggest that this lack of propriety encouraged a host of positive potentialities for women. Kerry Powell writes, “These women were less impressed by the ‘mystery’ and ‘glamour’ that seduce a masculine spectator than by the independence, professionalism, and hard work that were required of an actress, and by the power which enabled her to hold crowded assemblies of men as well as women in the palm of her hand” (12). Likewise, although Tracy C. Davis notes the stigmatization of nineteenth-century actresses (xvi), she too defends this contested figure as seeming to represent liberating possibilities for nineteenth-century women in general. Hence, authors such as Austen and Shelley relied on a powerful late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century trope, the figure of the female actress, to foster in their texts narratives of female empowerment and authority, rewriting Gothic scripts to transition their heroines into aggressive, assertive artist figures.

Re-scripting Gothic Romance: Jane Austen and *Northanger Abbey*

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* has received no shortage of critical attention related to the novel's Gothic plot and its relationship to gender and reading practice.⁷ However, my approach differs by illuminating how the text intersects its Gothic narrative with late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century anxieties regarding the theater, women, and performance. Furthermore, I suggest that through Austen's creation of her performing heroine, Catherine Morland, she ushers in a new coded figure for nineteenth-century Female Gothic, the woman artist as protagonist. Two pivotal scholarly books by Penny Gay and Paula Byrne released in 2002 explore Austen's relationship to the theater. Both of these works are titled *Jane Austen and Theatre* and posit that theatricality was at the heart of Austen's world. The latter was a world in which the barriers between prose fiction and drama were blurred, a society that performed and read aloud novels in domestic settings (as opposed to contemporary reading practice, when we tend to think of novels as being read by individuals, alone, silently). Gay and Byrne argue that a character's line of dialogue in a play or in a novel is, ultimately, a line of dialogue, and if the novel is read aloud, then the reader is performing it, whether the work from which it is drawn is called a novel or a play. Austen's own theatre-centered world is a short step away from her heroine, Catherine Morland's, who scripts her own life according to certain fictions.

Paula Byrne writes, "Austen herself had a strong sense of the importance of dramatic dialogue in the novel. She and her family, like many others of their class, loved to read aloud together. The Austen women ranked novels according to how well they stood up to repeated readings" (ix). She continues,

⁷ James R Keller's "Austen's *Northanger Abbey*: A Bibliographic Study" in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies* (2000) offers an excellent overview of contemporary scholarship that historicizes Austen, the Gothic, and reader response.

Jane Austen's letters reveal that she was steeped in theatre. As a young woman, she wrote short plays. She copied her brothers in the writing of burlesques in the style of Sheridan and Henry Fielding. She even turned her favourite novel, Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, into a five-act comedy. Her interest in the theatre, both amateur and professional, and her lifelong preoccupation with the drama undoubtedly influenced her mature writing. (xi)

While some critics view Austen merely as the sheltered daughter of a cleric, living a rural life, both Byrne and Gay demonstrate that she enjoyed an urban life and took enormous pleasure in the theater.

The insights of performance studies have already been applied to Austen's work, most notably by Paula Byrne and Penny Gay, and much of the early discussion of Austen and theater has centered on *Mansfield Park* (1814), particularly on its characters' participation in an amateur theatrical, *Lover's Vows*. Joseph Litvak in "The Infection of Acting: Theatrical and Theatricality in *Mansfield Park*" (1986) offers an excellent overview of late eighteenth-century theater critics' anxiety over performance, morality, and gender. In *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), Thomas Gisborne states that the problem of theater is that it does not stay within its bounds. Theater is an infection, a poison that leads to discontent and anxiety. He suggests that women are more susceptible to corruption through play acting, because they have a strong "propensity to imitation":

Acting, whose essence is imitation, seduces by diminishing the distance between negative and positive terms—between poison and cure, sickness and health. Properly controlled, of course, the latent theatricality of the female sex, 'implanted' in them by 'Providence,' can have a salutary effect, ensuring that they will 'conform to the wishes and examples' of their (male) superiors. Yet at what point does the very act of 'obeying' turn into its opposite, with the result that these no longer merely latent actresses are 'ensnared into errors and excesses?' (336).

Gisborne argues that although theater has the potential to corrupt the female mind, it also may have a beneficial effect; women may use their talents of mimicry for good purpose, as long as they know the “right” scripts.

However, another popular discourse on acting during this time, Hannah More’s *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), states that theatricality in everyday life is a problem far worse than Gisborne suspects. In Volume One More asserts, “If the life of a young lady, formerly, too much resembled the life of a confectioner, it now too much resembles that of an actress; the morning is all rehearsal, and the evening is all performance” (115). She fears that the upper-class ladies of British society are more like exotic actresses than like “proper” Englishwomen. Despite her condemnation of the theater, as Litvak notes, More often employs theatrical language in her texts; for example she writes at length about what duties are proper for a Christian woman to “perform” (338). Even if their positions on the extent to which the theater endangers the morality and sensibility of female audiences vary, both Gisborne and More do conclude that the theater is a treacherous entertainment for female spectators. Summarizing their positions, Litvak concludes, “If the theater starts to look a little more like the world, the world starts to look a little more like the theater; as the different poisons play upon the mind, it becomes hard to tell where reality ends and art begins” (341).

In articles such as Litvak’s, *Mansfield Park* has been placed within the continuum of theater criticism contemporary with the novel’s composition and publication. Similarly, other novels by Austen have received scholarly treatment that puts them in relation to the theater. However, Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* has been given little critical attention in terms of theater studies. Paula Byrne’s thorough study of Austen and theater makes only a passing reference to *Northanger Abbey* (xi), for Byrne sees

Northanger Abbey as evidence of Austen's engagement with the tradition of the novel, rather than with that of the theater:

In *Northanger Abbey* there is a special irony at play, for Austen's novel about an ingenue's entrance into Bath society self-consciously mirrors [Frances] Burney's *Evelina: or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* [...] *Northanger Abbey*'s status as a burlesque Gothic novel has unwittingly deflected attention away from Austen's parody of the heroine-centred sentimental novel popularised by female writers like Burney and [Maria] Edgeworth. (36)

Although *Northanger Abbey* is undoubtedly engaged with discussions of genre fiction, I would argue that in *Northanger Abbey* Austen also adopts, and adapts, the same wide range of techniques from the stage tradition that she does in her other fiction—dramatic entrances and exits (John Thorpe's explosive buggy rides which usher him into and out of the scene), comic misunderstandings (Catherine's belief that Henry Tilney's father, General Tilney, is a murderer), and ironic reversals (learning that General Tilney is a financial opportunist, rather than a murderer) (Byrne xii).

If Byrne dismisses *Northanger Abbey*'s importance as a theatrical text, Penny Gay's *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (2002) does pay more attention to its relationship to theater, on the grounds that a significant period of Austen's adult life coincided with the heyday of the Gothic drama, "which used exotic and spectacular locations to extend the effects produced by the emotionally extreme situations of the theatre of sensibility" (52). According to Gay, Austen saw such Gothic melodramas as *Blue Beard* and may have seen the other staple of The Bath Theatre Royal in Orchard Street, *The Castle Spectre* (52). Gay's reading of *Northanger Abbey* is astute, suggesting that Bath itself is like a theater, a place for self-display and for gazing at others. Furthermore, each character's dress, or costume, is integral to the action, as garments are semiotically coded (64). For Gay, theatricality signals the urban sophistication of Bath that is new for Catherine (67).

Gay does a fine job of reading the actual scenes of theater in the novel and relates Catherine's suspicion of General Tilney, which Austen couches in dramatic language, to the then new technologies of scenery and lighting in the period (71).⁸ Ultimately, she argues that

[Catherine] goes on to enact just such a performance of the Gothic heroine as she might have seen on stage or created in the theatre of her mind. But of course, she is in the real world, not the fashionable theatre, as the laundry-list so pointedly demonstrates (Gothic heroes and villains never need such mundane things). (70)

Gay concludes that Catherine realizes she has been "both audience and performer in her own private theatre" (71).

While Gay may assert that Catherine's theater is private, Paula Byrne writes that "one of the great lessons Austen took from drama," a lesson that is present throughout her fiction, "was the idea that social life always requires a strong element of role playing" (147). Thus, in Austen's world, all characters must learn certain "social scripts," becoming proficient in Regency manners in order to succeed. The private sphere of the Gothic script must play out on the larger public stage. However, I posit that while a number of characters in *Northanger Abbey* create social scripts in order to get along in fashionable Bath, only Catherine's attempts at role playing ensure her emotional and financial security and fulfillment. And since Catherine creates and performs a Gothic script, acting and re-enacting Gothic tropes deployed by other women writers at the time, rather than performing fashionable social roles, her unique creative vision successfully re-envisions both the Gothic and gender. Here, the language and situation of Gothic and

⁸ Gay states that Catherine foregoes looking at the play in order to catch Henry's eye: "This is the drama of emotional life in the real social world: as readers, we appreciate the more Austen's achievement by her setting this scene in the frame of a visit to the theatre, and showing the inauthenticity of its 'representation of human life' (charming though it be) against reality" (68).

theater intersect in order to promote a new set of codes for women in the female-authored Gothic genre.

Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is the coming-of-age story of its naïve, highly impressionable protagonist, Catherine Morland. The novel is divided into two sections—in Part One, Catherine visits Bath with her family's friends, the Allens. While there, Catherine is introduced to the duplicitous Isabella Thorpe, but also to the kindhearted, sensible Tilney siblings, Eleanor and Henry. Catherine is immediately attracted to Henry, who engages her in conversation and gently mocks her (Gothic) reading habits. Eventually, Catherine learns of Isabella's manipulation of her brother, James Morland (Isabella has pursued James, entered into engagement with him, and then jilted him for Captain Frederick Tilney), and she decides to leave Isabella, and Bath to accompany Eleanor and Henry to their home, Northanger Abbey. In a series of comic episodes, Catherine imagines Northanger Abbey and its inhabitants as enacting her beloved Gothic scripts, until Henry learns of her Gothic imaginings and chastises her for them. Catherine is sent away from the Abbey by Henry's father, General Tilney, because he learns that Catherine does not have a family fortune and would be a "poor" match for his son. Nonetheless, Henry comes after her and, despite General Tilney's disapproval of their union, they eventually marry. Terry Castle labels *Northanger Abbey* "a comedy of female enlightenment" (vii) in which Catherine Morland is educated out of the sentimental, Gothic tradition. After her time in Bath and her courtship by Henry Tilney, Catherine realizes that she *can* think independently; she has learned to relish her intellectual freedom (xxiv). Despite her initial naiveté and lack of reason and understanding, she becomes an unlikely "thinking woman's" heroine. Catherine turns into a more astute reader of texts and of people, as she gradually receives a social education that disciplines her Gothic imagination, while still leaving her receptive to the powers and pleasures of

romance in both senses of the word. Claudia Johnson extends this claim even further in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988) by suggesting that *Northanger Abbey* not only trains its heroine in right-reading practice, but also it “creates an audience not only able but also inclined to read their novels and their societies with critical detachment” (48).

Catherine is an avid reader who particularly relishes the novels of Ann Radcliffe. While in Bath, Catherine begins reading *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and she and Isabella Thorpe discuss it, along with various other Gothic texts (23-25). Catherine soon becomes so engrossed in her Gothic reading that she begins to script her own life along Gothic plot lines. Her suitor Henry Tilney, teases her about this fact, but Catherine remains unaware of his poking fun at her (135). Yet Catherine’s passion for Gothic novels proves to be more than simple proof of a young girl’s naïve fancies, as Henry imagines them to be. Catherine says of her reading practice,

The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page, the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so full, for a great deal of it must be invention. The speeches that are put into the heroes’ mouths, their thoughts and designs—the chief of all this must be invention, and invention is what delights me in other books. (84).

Rather than being a clueless, passive recipient of textual drivel, Catherine can clearly articulate what she wants in her reading material. And her standards are, in fact, far from frivolous, ridiculous, or lacking in thoughtfulness and intellect. She looks for texts that feature heroines and that deal with women’s issues in a creative manner. Specifically, Catherine claims to enjoy the “invention of speeches,” or the act of speaking. As she selects materials, she delights in the heroine’s performative qualities; in essence, how inventively they are able to voice their experiences and desires. Thus Catherine admires heroines who share her own ability to script and perform, who provide her with models of

creative speech and manner. For Catherine, the Gothic, the writer of Gothic novels, and performer of Gothic scripts have the power to invent a good story, one that frames and shapes the world to articulate best a woman's most meaningful adventures. In other words, she responds to the "invention" of the Female Gothic and its concern for women's experience, the way many savvy contemporary readers do today.

Initially, Catherine follows these scripts verbatim and gives her Gothic imagination full rein in the environment of the Tilney estate, Northanger Abbey. One of the most memorable and well-crafted scenes in the novel involves many of the most familiar tropes of late eighteenth-century Gothic: a dark and stormy night, a sealed chest, and a very excited and impressionable heroine. As the morning dawns and readers find Catherine let down by the "secret" of the sealed chest, which contains little more than a laundry bill, Austen clearly illustrates the humorous dangers of an excess of Gothic imagination. Eventually, however, Catherine begins to abandon her direct adaptation and performance of late-eighteenth-century Gothic scripts. Scholars have pointed to Henry frequently as the one who educates Catherine about the pitfalls of indulgence in Gothic scripts; however, it is *Catherine* who teaches herself that all scripts, even Gothic ones, should take second place to her own ability to reason, imagine, and interpret her surroundings. Catherine abandons her script about Mrs. Tilney's death even before Henry chastises her, and she hastens to leave the rooms of Henry's late mother (155-156). It is not Henry's displeasure that cuts her performance short, but her own decision to end the "play" of both theatrical work and self-amusement.

In fact, she blames Henry for attempting to manipulate her into adopting a Gothic script: "How could she have so imposed on herself?—Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her folly! And it was in a great measure his own doing, for had not the cabinet appeared so exactly to agree with his description of her adventures, she

should never have felt the smallest curiosity about it” (137). With her knowledge of Henry’s ability to guide and control her actions through the expectations of a gendered script, Catherine realizes that, by following certain Gothic scripts, she may be exposing herself to male tyranny and control. Catherine discovers that she does not want to rely on the directions of another, and her decision to act and re-enact scripts according to her own rules allows her to journey towards autonomy. She obeys the rules of Gothic heroine-ism, but only until she decides that tempering these and other scripts, could better suit her purpose.

In *Northanger Abbey*’s Bath, nearly everyone is an actor, aware of the performance of social scripts. In fact, even those individuals who seem to possess little imagination help to create alternate scripts that become central to the novel’s plot. In the case of John Thorpe, it is he who originates the fiction that Catherine Morland is rich:

The expectations of his friend, Morland, therefore, from the first over-rated, had ever since his introduction to Isabella, been gradually increasing; and by merely adding twice as much for the grandeur of the moment, by doubling what he chose to think the amount of Mr. Morland’s preferment, trebling his private fortune, bestowing a rich aunt, and sinking half the children, he was able to represent the whole family to the General in a most respectable light. (199)

It is this bit of make-believe that leads to Catherine’s troubles with the Tilney family, for General Tilney’s only reason for approving his son’s courtship of her is his mistaken notion of her financial worth. Similarly, General Tilney’s interest in using social scripts and performance to advance his wealth and status is discussed using theatrical language: “Enraged with almost everybody in the world but himself, he set out the next day for the Abbey, where his *performances* have been seen” (emphasis mine 201). In both cases, however, John Thorpe’s and General Tilney’s made-up scripts and performances backfire, as they attempt to manipulate social situations and fail.

Of course, the character with the most talent for acting proves to be Isabella Thorpe, who uses all (theatrical) means possible to further her goals of receiving masculine attention and making a profitable marriage. Isabella's ability to perform femininity and coquetry is exactly the kind of mimicry that Thomas Gisborne and Hannah More feared. She is the consummate actress, who first meets Catherine in the aptly named "Pump Room," as she begins to "pump" Catherine for personal information. Isabella engages in hyperbolic language, dramatic deliveries of her lies, and false displays of sentiment and attraction. Isabella also uses clothes as a form of costuming: "But my dearest Catherine, have you settled what to wear on your head to-night? I am determined at all events to be dressed exactly like you. The men take notice of *that* sometimes" (25). Later, she decides to wear all purple, when Catherine's brother James calls off his engagement to her, after Isabella has been seen flirting with Captain Tilney. Without genuine feeling, Isabella can do little more than dress and act the part of the forlorn lover (175). Although it may seem that Catherine's adaptation of Gothic scripts is troublesome and foolhardy *Northanger Abbey* suggests that Isabella's dishonest manipulation of realistic social scripts causes far more dangerous heartbreak and misunderstanding. Compared to Isabella Thorpe's artificial and sentimental performances, there is authenticity and validity in Catherine's Gothic scripts, both in their origins and their outcomes. And unlike Isabella, who longs for little more than a profitable match, Catherine articulates through the Gothic genre her desires for excitement, gender equality, and a fuller life based on more than finances.

Ultimately, Catherine begins to alter her self-conscious performance as an actress of scripts through her re-enacting of social and Gothic plots. And she learns that both scripts prove to be flawed, particularly in their relationship to courtship and gender relations. For example, Catherine initially attributes Mrs. Tilney's death to a Gothic

script: for Catherine she is the stereotypical Gothic heroine—imperiled, imprisoned, abused by her tyrannical husband, and possibly murdered by him. Eventually, she learns that while General Tilney was a bad spouse, his crimes were moral rather than melodramatic. He neglected, bullied, and failed to love his wife. Catherine's re-enacting of Gothic scripts not only reverses the Gothic trajectory of Mrs. Tilney's imagined relationship with General Tilney, but it also alerts her to the real dangers potentially present in her relationship with Henry due to his desire for control, especially through his knowledge of social and Gothic scripts. Thus, Austen and her heroine rewrite the conventional Gothic romance and its relationships between men and women. Catherine's assertive and aggressive act of female artistry, through the adaptation of Gothic scripts, allows her to seek alternative endings to the conventional late eighteenth-century Gothic novel—marriage and submission to a tyrannical, authoritarian man.

Earlier, I have suggested that Catherine becomes aware of Henry's role in her scripting of her life as Gothic tale during her stay at Northanger Abbey. However, this is not the only instance of Henry trying to make Catherine recite a script. At their first meeting, Henry attempts to control Catherine through the language and performance of social scripts, engaging in banal conversation about the weather and teasing her about her journal (12). In addition, when Catherine learns that Isabella has betrayed Catherine's brother and their friendship, she does not sink into the sentimental feminine doldrums as Henry suggests she will (167). Once again, she goes against his expectation of her adherence to Gothic, sentimental, and feminine scripts.

Henry and Catherine can only unite as equals, once she has become aware of her own ability to script and control the courtship. Unlike the conventional passive Gothic heroine, Catherine prompts and controls Henry's attraction to her; she plays with the Gothic script to further her Gothic romance. She delays leaving Northanger Abbey,

because she knows that she needs proof of his affection and an “expectation” (183) of marriage. And ultimately, at the climax of the courtship plot, Henry plays into

Catherine’s script:

I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine’s dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own. (198)

It is through Catherine’s manipulation of Gothic and social scripts—her assertive acts of creation in mapping and designing the desired trajectory of her life—that she achieves fulfillment.

In the final chapter of *Northanger Abbey* Catherine’s marriage almost does not occur when General Tilney forbids consent. Henry returns to his plantations, while Catherine “remain[s] at Fullerton to cry” and anxiously await Henry’s letters (203). Catherine’s powers as an actress do not resolve the novel’s final tension; instead, the narrative voice of *Northanger Abbey* takes over the role of lead performer. Throughout *Northanger Abbey* the narrative voice engages in a performance by seeming to be a Gothic novel’s standard narrator while actually making fun of such conventions. The novel’s end exemplifies this narrative performance. With the promise of fortune and consequence brought about by Eleanor Tilney’s profitable marriage, General Tilney consents to Henry’s and Catherine’s union. Henry and Catherine, who are about to embark on a lifetime of “perfect happiness,” are married while “the bells rang and everybody smiled” (205). However, Austen’s narrator does not merely conclude with the comic romantic ending popularized by the Gothic narratives of Ann Radcliffe. Instead, Austen’s narrator states, “I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial

disobedience” (205). The novel’s denouement mocks the sinister authoritarian male figure of the Gothic villain and reaffirms the Female Gothic marriage plot, while simultaneously poking fun at both genre conventions. Like her protagonist, Austen, and her narrator, embrace the Gothic plot but manipulate it for their own ends, creating a new coded figure of power and import in the genre—the female artist heroine.

“The Remembrance Haunts Me Like a Crime”: Narrative Control, the Dramatic, and the Female Gothic in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Mathilda*

After the death of her father, the eponymous heroine of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Mathilda* [published posthumously, 1959] feigns madness, steals money, and orchestrates her own death. Of her lies and deceptions she writes, “The remembrance haunts me like a crime--I know that if I were to endeavour to relate it my tale would at length remain unfinished” (218). During this pivotal moment of transition in the narrative, Mathilda proves unable to articulate the fictions she has created in order to “purchase freedom.” She writes her story from her deathbed in a document addressed to her friend and potential suitor, the young poet Woodville; in it she tells readers of her father’s incestuous desire, his eventual suicide, and her own self-imposed isolation after his death. With its themes of alienation, entrapment, and unutterable personal secrets, Mathilda’s life story participates in many of the conventions of the Female Gothic form, by which I mean to suggest not only Gothic texts authored by women but also those texts that deploy elements of the Gothic to address issues of profound concern to women.

Although Shelley’s novella appears to relate a conventional Female Gothic narrative of a young woman victimized by her father’s incestuous desire, the text suggests that, in fact, it is Mathilda, rather than her father, who wields control over the novel’s Gothic script. Throughout the novella, she imagines, orchestrates, and performs a

series of Female Gothic encounters in order to gain empowerment. She exerts a covert form of power through pretended and staged weakness, creating an incest narrative in which she appears to be victim, rather than victimizer (Hoeveler 7). By scripting her life using dramatic elements (such as dramatic monologue, role playing, and set design) and Female Gothic elements (such as tyrannical paternal authority, the woman in peril motif, and incest) she uses her self-created fictions to gain female liberty.

For later critics trying to arrive at a consensus regarding the definition of the Female Gothic it has proven difficult; yet, Shelley masterfully deploys the elements of Female Gothic typically attributed to the genre.⁹ For example, Juliann E. Fleenor and

⁹ *Mathilda* serves as one example of Shelley's demonstration of skill in the Female Gothic genre. In *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (1977), Ellen Moers identifies Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as a highly influential Female Gothic novel. Subsequent critics, including Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), Julian Fleenor, and Diane Long Hoeveler have continued to cite *Frankenstein* as a Female Gothic novel that expresses women's fears regarding sexual maturation, childbirth, and their marginalized position in the male-dominated Romantic movement. Moers identifies Shelley's novel as an important moment in the development of Female Gothic narratives, transitioning from earlier Female Gothic works, such as those by Ann Radcliffe, to later Female Gothic works such as those by nineteenth-century novelists Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Shelley's ability to manipulate Gothic forms may have come from her extensive reading in the genre; see Patricia Clemit's "*Frankenstein, Mathilda, and the Legacies of Godwin and Wollestonecraft*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* (2003). From 1814 to 1818 (it is presumed that *Mathilda* was composed during August-November 1819), Mary and Percy Shelley read the following: Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1814); Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1814); Friedrich von Schiller's *The Sorrows of Werter* (1815); William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1814-1816); Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1814) and *Christabel* (1816); Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*, *Edgar Huntley*, and *Ormond* (1814-1815); M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*, *Tales of Terror*, *Tales of Wonder*, *Romantic Tales*, and "Anaconda" (1814-1817); and Charles Robert Maturin's *Fatal Revenge* and *The Milesian Chief* (1816-1817). Especially noteworthy in this list are novels from two prominent Female Gothic authors, Radcliffe and Smith. According to Clemit, Shelley approached the power of the Gothic novel as her father did; the Godwinian novel "achieves a balance between psychological and social concerns, and between personal and political allegory" (32).

Kate Ferguson Ellis have suggested that the genre illuminates the perceived dangers inherent in female sexual maturation in conjunction with the Freudian paradigm and the problems of women's experience of subordination and oppression in patriarchal society. Traditionally, the Female Gothic narrative has been suspect among scholars who argue for the genre's conservative depiction of women's agency, most often evidenced in the Female Gothic narrative's closure in conservative heteronormative unions—i.e., in marriage and motherhood. Critics such as Kay Mussell, Eugenia DeLamotte, and Diane Long Hoeveler posit that the Female Gothic novel asserts gender conservative values and these values prove detrimental to women readers. They assert that by reading these books, women participate in glamorizing their own oppression and promoting traditional gender roles; instead, I contend that the heroines of these novels offer readers role models of female empowerment and agency. In the case of *Mathilda*, by reading elements of the dramatic¹⁰ in conjunction with elements of the Female Gothic genre, some readers will encounter a heroine whose performative activities code her as a powerful actress/artist-figure, rather than as a submissive victim.

In *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (2000) E.J. Clery cites the influence of tragic actress Sarah Siddons on the work of early Female Gothic novelists such as Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, Ann Radcliffe, Joanna Baillie, Charlotte Dacre, and Mary Shelley (4-5).¹¹ These female writers working in the Gothic mode adopted Siddons as a role model, a woman who represented the possibilities of female

Hence, the Gothic novel, for both Mary Shelley and Godwin, serves as an important didactic and revolutionary tool.

¹⁰ See Charles Robinson's "Mathilda as Dramatic Actress" (2000) and Charlene Bunnell's "*Mathilda*: Mary Shelley's Romantic Tragedy" (1997) for a discussion of *Mathilda* as "theatrum mundi" (all the world's a stage).

¹¹ According to Paula Byrne, Jane Austen had seen Sarah Siddons in her role as "Constance" in *Constance*. She may have seen her in *Macbeth* as well (48).

artistic genius. For Romantic era women writers and readers, Siddons showed the potential for women artists to manipulate the elements of passion and tragedy (elements central to both Siddons's performance artistry and to the Gothic genre) in order to foster artistic creation and to gain wealth and fame (Clery 21-23). Elaborating on work done by Pat Rogers, E.J. Clery, quotes Rogers and suggests that, "Siddons, by attracting praise in terms of the sublime 'extended the range of the feminine, that is, she made permissible the attribution to women of a less restricted and timid set of human qualities' and 'must have affected the way in which women were able to conduct themselves in ordinary life'" (4). Thus, for nineteenth-century writing and reading audiences, the actress served as an empowering figure that fostered female agency, expression, and creativity. Consequently, by examining Mathilda as an example of a nineteenth-century actress artist-figure, we see readers encountering, in a Female Gothic text, a positive and progressive role model rather than a submissive heroine trapped by a conservative narrative of gender oppression.

I read Mathilda as one who constructs and performs her own narrative by combining Female Gothic elements in conjunction with the dramatic tradition. That is, Mathilda seeks her own liberation and self-determination by seizing control of her narrative, and she reaches for this control by utilizing elements of the Female Gothic. Diane Long Hoeveler argues for Mathilda's lack of control throughout the novella.¹² For Hoeveler, Mathilda's actions are merely reactions to cultural forces beyond her control:

¹² Hoeveler identifies *Mathilda* as a Female Gothic text. She grounds her reading of Shelley's novella in traditional psychobiographical and feminist psychoanalytic critical approaches to *Mathilda* and the Female Gothic genre in order to suggest that Mathilda serves as a victim of the Oedipal drama origin myth and the institutions of patriarchal society. While the first to argue for *Mathilda* as Female Gothic, Hoeveler is not the first critic to cite *Mathilda*'s Gothic elements. See Charlene Bunnell's "*Mathilda*: Mary Shelley's Romantic Tragedy."

she does not consciously script her Female Gothic experience, nor does she possess any control or agency over her narrative. While accepting her categorization of Mathilda within “the Female Gothic,” I differ with Hoeveler in contending that Mathilda demonstrates control and agency in the novella’s introductory frame; in four pivotal scenes centering on wish-fulfillment, dreams, and imagination; and in the novella’s conclusion. When read through the lens of Female Gothic theory, the initial frame, instead of serving as a clumsy remnant left over from Shelley’s *The Fields of Fancy*,¹³ establishes Mathilda’s cleverness in scripting her own Female Gothic drama. It also demonstrates Shelley’s ability to construct a meaningful Female Gothic frame for her novella.

The four pivotal scenes that built on the power of Mathilda’s imagination are Mathilda’s early desire for reconciliation with her father, her dream of her father’s death, her prophecy of the tree, and her relationship with the gifted young poet Woodville. These scenes demonstrate Mathilda’s ability to create and perform her own narrative, and they reveal the origins of this narrative creativity in her own desire for control. Similarly, if *Mathilda*’s conclusion, her refusal of subordination to Woodville, serves as a means of self-constructed closure, she offers herself an agency not previously considered by Female Gothic scholars.¹⁴ In essence, Mathilda’s ability to manipulate her narrative

¹³ *The Fields of Fancy*, the initial draft of *Mathilda*, written from 5 August-12 September 1819. This version has been published in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*. Vol. II (1996).

¹⁴ Of course, the character of Mathilda is a creation of Mary Shelley and, as such, Mathilda’s narrative control simultaneously functions as both her character creating the narrative, and the author as creator shaping the narrative. Yet critics such as Susan Wolstenholme have suggested that this interplay between author and character help to constitute a tradition of women’s Gothic. In her *Gothic (Re)Visions: Writing Women as Readers* (1993) Wolstenholme suggests that the female author of women’s Gothic not only rewrites earlier Gothic narratives by creating her own new Gothic fiction in the form

proves liberating; she frees herself from male authority, gains control over her own narrative, and crafts her own Female Gothic closure separate from the traditional Female Gothic ending of bourgeois marriage. Shelley suggests that Mathilda's control over her narrative's ending offers an empowering depiction of female agency for women readers.

Although *Mathilda* was published in 1959, critical evaluation of it did not begin until the 1970s, at which time scholars read *Mathilda* psychoanalytically, as an autobiographical account of Shelley's feelings of estrangement both from her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and from her father, William Godwin.¹⁵ The biographical and psychoanalytic readings prevailed until the 1990s, when Charlene Bunnell and Charles Robinson introduced the notion of Mathilda as a dramatic actress. Citing the numerous references to acting, drama, and tragedy in the novella, as well as Mathilda's self-conscious posturing as actress, both critics claimed *Mathilda* as an example of "theatrum mundi." The *theatrum mundi* reading locates a tradition of Renaissance drama in Shelley's text and establishes the character of Mathilda as a creation quite separate from her author. Citing *Mathilda* as dramatic tragedy provides one useful reading of the text, but it does not fully consider the Female Gothic elements present in Mathilda's narrative.

of the novel, but also the woman author features moments *in* the text where her heroine consciously re-imagines or re-writes Gothic moments as well. Hence, both author and character work together in a mutual re-scripting process of the genre.

¹⁵ In *Mary Shelley: Author of Frankenstein* (1953) Elizabeth Nitchie established the biographical reading of this novel, arguing that Mathilda equals Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Mathilda's father equals William Godwin, and Woodville equals Percy Bysshe Shelley (xii). Terrance Harpold's "'Did You Get Mathilda from Papa?': Seduction Fantasy and the Circulation of Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*" (1989) contends that Godwin's reluctance to publish *Mathilda* not only stems from his discomfort with the "disgusting and detestable" subject of incest, but also may indicate a secret history of father-daughter desire in the Godwin/Shelley household.

In addition to E.J. Clery's observations about the importance of Sarah Siddons to early Female Gothic novelists, Hoeveler's notion of victimization feminism in the Female Gothic serves as another tool by which critics may link discussions of performance and the Female Gothic. Her provocative suggestions regarding victimization feminism in nineteenth-century Female Gothic novels¹⁶ potentially invite a discussion of dramatic elements in the Female Gothic, elements which may be essential in defining the genre. Defining victimization feminism as a form of "Gothic feminism," a cultivated pose of professional femininity relying on a masquerade of docility, passivity, wise passiveness, and tightly controlled emotions, Hoeveler sees victimization feminism as propaganda for a new bourgeois morality, emphasizing the Christian doctrines of submission and passivity.¹⁷ In her view, external forces, such as patriarchally structured government, church, and family, imperil female liberty, as do women's internalized feelings of feminine inadequacy. Hoeveler's notion of victimization feminism as "an ideology of female power through pretended and staged weakness" (7) proves most compelling in a discussion of drama and the Female Gothic. With "pretended" and "staged" as key terms in her discussion of the nineteenth-century Female Gothic, much like Clery, Hoeveler suggests that the same sense of the dramatic present in Mathilda's narrative is also present more generally in the Female Gothic. By extension, I argue that dramatic elements may be characteristic of Female Gothic works *and* Female Gothic

¹⁶ It is important to note that Shelley did not write Mathilda's story as a five-act drama, but rather as a novel, despite the numerous dramatic elements the novel contains.

¹⁷ Hoeveler argues that nineteenth-century victimization feminism was created at a time when "women [did not realize] that they had a formidable external enemy--the raving, lustful, greedy patriarch--in addition to their own worst internal enemy, their consciousness of their own sexual difference perceived as a weakness rather than a strength" (10).

heroines may serve as powerful actress artist-figures; consequently, both of these elements are a means of refining the genre's definition.

Hoeveler suggests that the Female Gothic project of "pretended" weakness proves a seductive but dangerous fiction for readers, for the Gothic feminist's assertion that the "meek will inherit the earth" through pretended weakness, manipulation, and guile does not provide Gothic heroines with real control over their narratives or their destinies. While the texts may posit female strength, their gender ideology does not offer readers a means for learning to assert power in the patriarchal paradigm (246). Yet I disagree, for I believe that Female Gothic authors, and the heroines they create, possess a greater degree of control over their narratives, and over the eventual closure of their narratives, than scholars of the Female Gothic have tended to acknowledge. And these demonstrations of control may empower female readers. The dramatic elements in Female Gothic texts, and the opportunity to serve as an actress-artist figure, encourage heroines to exert control, or at least to act in ways uncharacteristic of traditional depictions of female propriety, in order to gain liberty. Of course, not all readers read the same way, and these texts have not always been interpreted as evidencing female agency; however, I advocate a new way of reading them that can help to free readers of the Female Gothic from common (mis)understandings of the genre and offer them role models.¹⁸

¹⁸ While many contemporary scholars have been condemnatory of the Female Gothic genre, and of Austen's and Shelley's heroines, it is more difficult to discern how nineteenth-century audiences may have received these texts. Barbara M. Benedict's and Deidre Le Faye's Introduction to the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen* suggests that reviews of *Northanger Abbey* focused less on the moral influence the work may have on female readers and more on Austen's abilities as a satirist. Shelley's *Mathilda* was never read by nineteenth-century audiences, since it did not appear in print until 1959.

The initial draft of *Mathilda*, titled, *The Fields of Fancy*, contains much of the same narrative content as the finished novella. *The Fields of Fancy*'s introductory frame serves as the most significant difference between the two texts. It depicts a grieving narrator, often presumed to be Shelley,¹⁹ mourning the loss of two children. The spirit, Fantasia, or Imagination, visits her and takes her to the Elysian Fields as a means of comfort. While in the Elysian Fields, Fantasia and the narrator meet the prophetess Diotima, who is counseling a group of souls who have sought forbidden knowledge.²⁰ Mathilda, one of the souls present in the Elysian Fields, begins to tell her story as the narrator arrives. *The Fields of Fancy* does not return to this initial frame, as it shifts entirely to Mathilda's story. This frame primarily serves a didactic function, instructing readers as to the dangers present in the pursuit of forbidden knowledge and encouraging them to pursue beauty instead: "if I can teach but one other mind what is the beauty to which they ought to love—and what is the sympathy to which they ought to aspire...then shall I be satisfied" (Shelley qtd. in "From *The Fields of Fancy* to *Mathilda*" 66). In addition, it helps to distance Shelley from her literary character, Mathilda. The grieving narrator, serving as a depiction of the author, is a different character from the heroine Mathilda; no conflation of Shelley and Mathilda occurs in this draft.

In *Mathilda*'s opening frame, the heroine lies on her deathbed and writes her account of her life story for her affectionate, faithful friend, Woodville. The content of

¹⁹ It is significant that Shelley was grieving the deaths of her own children during 1818-1819: Clara Everina (d. September 1818) and William (d. June 1819). Patricia Clemit and Betty Bennett, in "From *The Fields of Fancy* to *Mathilda*: Mary Shelley's Changing Conception of Her Novella," (2000), suggest that *The Fields of Fancy* began as Shelley's attempt to reconcile herself to the deaths of her children, and they posit the grieving narrator as corresponding to Shelley.

²⁰ *Mathilda* deals with the individual pursuit of forbidden knowledge, as does Shelley's most famous novel, *Frankenstein*.

the frame is sparse—Mathilda describes her lonely cottage and the setting sun. She relates how happy she is to die and to reveal the secrets of her tragic history to Woodville.²¹ The Female Gothic elements present in *Mathilda*'s introductory frame echo the Gothic tradition of the frame tale. The Gothic and the Female Gothic novel alike frequently rely on the frame tale as an introductory device.²² The frame not only offers a portal for entering supernatural and fantastical worlds, but also serves as a means of distancing the author from the literary work.²³ In the novella's opening, Mathilda writes, "I live in a lone cottage on a solitary, wide heath: no voice of life reaches me"; she continues, "I am in a strange state of mind. I am alone--quite alone--in the world--the blight of misfortune has passed over me and withered me; I know I am about to die and I feel happy--joyous." In extreme isolation and alienation, Mathilda begins to "write [her] tragic history" (175). She addresses her tragic history to her friend, Woodville: "I do not know that any will peruse these pages except you, my friend, who will receive them at my death. I do not address them to you alone because it will give me pleasure to dwell upon our friendship in a way that would be needless if you alone read what I shall write"

²¹ Shelley's *Frankenstein* also famously relies on the frame tale. The novel hinges on the relationship of multiple frames: Mary Shelley (as writer), Margaret Saville (as recipient of her brother's letters), Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, the monster, the DeLaceys, and Safie. Female Gothic writers commonly use the frame tale; for example, Emily Brontë' deploys frame narration in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). The narration of Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean frame the Heathcliff, Earnshaw, and Linton stories.

²² While the frame tale is not unique to the Gothic, Gothic novels frequently use the frame tale, and it has become a characteristic of the genre. Gothic stories containing frame tales include Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

²³ Readers encounter the frame tale in what many critics consider to be the first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Walpole establishes an elaborate frame designed to distance himself from his politically subversive, experimental Gothic work.

(176). Mathilda ambiguously describes the nature of her tragedy: “While life was strong within me I thought indeed there was a sacred horror in my tale that rendered it unfit for utterance and now about to die I pollute its mystic terrors” (175-176). The notion of the unspeakable or unutterable commonly found in the Gothic genre employs a traditional psychoanalytic reading of the power of the unconscious mind. Using the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, critics such as David Punter identify the Gothic as the literature of nightmare and terror, literature based on unspeakable fears and deep personal secrets.²⁴ Although readers are unsure as to the exact nature of Mathilda’s *sacred horror*, they are aware of the unspeakable terror present in Mathilda’s narrative.

The opening frame establishes Mathilda’s early sense of control over her narrative through the use of dramatic and Female Gothic elements. The repetition of “I” shifts the reader’s focus to Mathilda as narrative center. This focus on Mathilda remains consistent throughout the novella; the reader hears only Mathilda’s voice. The almost stifling interiority of Mathilda’s narrative likens the novella to dramatic monologue, with its attendant epistemological dilemma. M. H. Abrams has observed that the dramatic monologue speaker’s narration of events presents readers with a decreased level of narrator objectivity and triggers skepticism about a potentially unreliable narrator. Since Mathilda’s point of view proves to be the only one offered to readers, her reliability is of paramount importance in understanding the text. In addition, Mathilda describes her story as a “tragic” history, self-consciously referencing the dramatic construction of her narrative.

Mathilda not only identifies her history as tragic, but she labels it as one “rendered unfit for utterance.” The unspeakable horror present in Mathilda’s narrative

²⁴ See Punter’s *A Companion to the Gothic* (2000).

indicates a Female Gothic state. Anxiety and fear in the Female Gothic state originate from confronting unspeakable situations, desires, and secrets. Mathilda cannot name her terror; her sacred horror exists either as unconscious knowledge or as fear that comes from an intense personal secret, the revelation of which would disrupt the entire construction of her identity. Many interpretations have cited *Mathilda*'s unspeakable horror as father-daughter incestuous desire.²⁵ Indeed, incest serves as a fitting origin for Mathilda's Female Gothic horror, for it proves to be a common Female Gothic trope, as one that represents women's victimized and oppressed position in patriarchal society.

Mathilda's alienated position also indicates a Female Gothic state, in addition to unspeakable horror. Setting proves essential to the Female Gothic. Setting in the Female Gothic, articulates, at least partly, the heroine's entrapment in patriarchal society. The vast structures and confining spaces that characterize the Female Gothic setting represent a similar aim.²⁶ Mathilda's cottage on the desolate heath proves to be as isolating a Female Gothic setting as those employed in other nineteenth-century Female Gothic novels, such as Jane Eyre's *Thornfield* or Catherine Earnshaw's *Wuthering Heights*. Through the use of the frame tale, the notion of the unspeakable, and the Female

²⁵ See Terrence Harpold and the following essays in the collection *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley After Frankenstein* (1997): Audra Dibert Himes's "'Knew shame, and knew desire': Ambivalence as Structure in Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*" and Ranita Chatterjee's "*Mathilda*: Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Ideologies of Incest."

²⁶ Vast structures, including ancestral mansions and crumbling abbeys, are present in many Female Gothic works as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) presents the confined space (the "Red Room") as Female Gothic setting (See Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* [1979]).

Gothic setting, Shelley's Mathilda begins her narrative in a Female Gothic state, as she confronts unutterable horror, unending isolation, and maddening alienation.²⁷

Mathilda's adoption of the frame tale attempts to hide, rather than reveal, her complicity in the construction of her narrative. She reveals her control over the narrative by introducing her story, while she simultaneously distances herself from her role as active participant in the creation of the body of the narrative. While she assumes ownership of the novella, she does not take responsibility for her complicity in creating the events of her narrative: "I believe few would say that they could, by a different conduct and superior wisdom, have avoided the misfortunes to which I am the victim. My fate has been governed by necessity, a hideous necessity" (176). In the opening frame, Mathilda feigns passivity--she is the victim of her incest narrative, not its creator. Not only does the frame demonstrate the illusion of Mathilda's narrative control, while simultaneously concealing her involvement in the narrative's construction, but the introductory frame also demonstrates Shelley's professionalism in deploying the Female Gothic frame tale. Mathilda's frame tale is not elaborate; she spends only one page introducing her tale. Although the frame proves modest, it functions the same way as other Gothic frame tales do. By using a characteristic Female Gothic frame tale, Shelley cleverly draws attention to Mathilda's manipulation of Female Gothic elements at the beginning of her novella, and distances herself from her literary creation. The story of unspeakable horror thus proves to be Mathilda's, not Shelley's.

²⁷ These characteristics are, of course, key tropes for British Romanticism. The British Romantic movement, particularly the latter half, after William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, featured writers like Lord Byron, Percy B. Shelley, and John Keats, who developed, in part, by modeling their work after the Gothic genre. Hence, the issues taken up in Female Gothic texts may also be prominent in other Gothic and Romantic works, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

Mathilda's ability to construct her own narrative and her desire for control are also evident in four pivotal scenes built on the power of Mathilda's imagination. In these four instances, Mathilda's desire for control appears in her uncanny ability to make her dreams, wishes, and imaginings come true. While at first glance Mathilda's confluences of fact and fiction seem little more than instances of coincidence, the frequency of such coincidence becomes particularly suspect, because of the dramatic monologue form. Mathilda's point of view characterizes all of the events surrounding her; thus, reading Mathilda's relation of her experience with a critical eye proves important. The fact that all of Mathilda's wishes, dreams, and imaginings find actualization seems unlikely in a purely realistic narrative. Yet if *Mathilda* serves as Female Gothic novel, then the narrative does not have to remain purely realistic. The Female Gothic genre relies on realistic conventions, but also includes highly ambiguous, coded language and images that blur the line between fact and fiction.²⁸ In *Mathilda*, such conflation results in the heroine's ability to realize all of her imaginative desires. While Mathilda's heightened sensations and imaginative faculties may be indicative of the heroine's sensibility,²⁹ they also cast doubt on the reliability of Mathilda's narration and on her overall control in the construction of the narrative.

A "self-nursed" child, Mathilda exhibits an early desire for control through her childhood imaginings. As a young girl she dreams of meeting her father at a ball or in a vessel, while she is clothed as a boy. In her fantasies, she wears a miniature around her neck, so that her father will recognize her as his daughter. Hoeveler cites the instance of

²⁸ According to Julian E. Fleenor's "Introduction," unrealistic tropes such as supernatural occurrences, doubled characters, and dream states often indicate unconscious desires and fears that cannot be articulated in a realistic manner.

²⁹ See Bunnell's discussion of Mary Shelley and the Gothic in "*Mathilda*: Mary Shelley's Romantic Tragedy."

the miniature as evidence of the text's Female Gothic elements; in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, the heroine, Ellena, wears a miniature of her (presumed) father around her neck. Upon seeing the miniature, the villain, Schedoni, believes he is her father and therefore cannot kill her. *Mathilda*'s Female Gothic intrusions, beginning with the introductory frame and echoed in the instance of the miniature, occur again in relation to Mathilda's description of her father. Throughout the narrative, her father remains unnamed. While the lack of naming performs a dramatic function, assuring that the narrative focus will stay on Mathilda, rather than shift to another named character, Hoeveler argues the lack of signification also performs a symbolic Female Gothic function (164). The father, denied a name, has no particular (masculine) identity; he serves as a stand-in for the danger of all men, the peril of all patriarchal power and its relationship to threatened female liberty. The unnamed father calls attention to the Female Gothic narrative and to the genre's expression of fear and anxiety regarding controlling, oppressive patriarchal forces.

In childhood, Mathilda imagines her father declaring, upon recognition, "My daughter, I love thee!" (185). In thinking of these words, Mathilda experiences "extatic moments" [sic], shedding tears of joy and laughing aloud (185). For Mathilda, this declaration of love shows her father's attachment to his daughter. Later in the narrative, when her father reveals his supposed desire for his daughter, "you are my light, my only one, my life.--My daughter, I love you!" (201), Mathilda is repulsed. Upon hearing his words, she "[sinks] on the ground, covering [her] face and almost dead with excess of sickness and fear: a cold perspiration covered [her] forehead" (201). Her physical response no longer is one of happiness, but rather one of horror. She perceives this declaration of love as a sign of unnatural sexual fixation, instead of natural father/daughter attachment. The father's declaration of love does not necessarily prove

alarming in its content; there is nothing inherently wrong or perverse in a father saying he loves his daughter. In fact, the father's declaration of love clearly echoes the language of Mathilda's youthful dreams. Perhaps it is alarming, then, only in so far as it resembles Mathilda's own imagined words so closely.

The similarity between the father's declaration and Mathilda's declaration serves as a clear example of Mathilda's assertion of narrative control and her conflation of fiction and fact. The declaration becomes alarming for Mathilda, and for the novella's readers, in terms of its implications. Before her father declares his love, Mathilda begs him to say such words: "Speak that word; it will bring peace, not death. If there is a chasm our mutual love will give us wings to pass it [...] Yes, speak, and we shall be happy; there will longer be doubt... we shall love each other as before, and for ever" (200). Although she assures her father that his declaration of love will bring "flowers and verdure," not horror and death, she turns against her father once he speaks. Due to her terror, they fail to cross the "chasm" of a mutual love. Her perception of her father's declaration, and her narration of her father's reaction to his alleged expression of desire, lend his speech horrific import: "After the first few moments of speechless agony [...] I tore my hair; I raved aloud; at one moment in my pity for his sufferings I would have clasped my father in my arms; and then starting back with horror I spurned him with my foot; I felt as if stung by a serpent" (202). Mathilda's reliability and judgment as narrator have proven suspect; thus, the horror with which Mathilda imbues her father's speech also becomes suspect.

The father's words and incestuous desires may be read as a perversion of Mathilda's initial wishes regarding recognition by and reconciliation with her father. However, paternal perversity seems less likely if readers acknowledge Mathilda's complicity in her father's declaration. Her seeming passivity and lack of control may be

mere pretense. Not only has her father's speech reiterated the fiction of her imagination, but Mathilda has served as an active participant in the seduction scene and repeatedly has revealed herself as a sexual aggressor. Mathilda, who hopes to win her father to her, chooses the location and the time for the airing of the sentiments she attributes to her father: "It was now the end of May [...] I thought the balmy air and the lovely face of Nature might aid me in inspiring him with mild sensations, and give him gentle feelings of peace and love preparatory to the confidence I determined to win from him" (198). She repeatedly goads her father into speech and self-consciously references dramatic works that deal with a daughter's incestuous desire for her father (*Myrrha*, *The Captain*, and *Metamorphoses*).³⁰

When her father asks her to stop her pursuit of his secret, commanding, "Do not again speak to me in this strain; but wait in submissive patience the event of what is passing around you" (199), Mathilda refuses. Although she appears to be a passive victim of her father's desire, her conduct proves only to be a matter of pretended and staged weakness. She does not exhibit the patience of the submissive heroine with "folded arms and downcast eyes" (199-200), at her father's behest; instead, she forces her father into reply: "In the despair of my heart I see what you cannot conceal: you no longer love me. I adjure you, my father, has not an unnatural passion seized upon your heart [...] Do I not embrace your knees, and you most cruelly repulse me? I know it--I see it--you hate me!" (201). Mathilda not only claims that her father hates her, but she asks explicitly if he no longer loves her. Thus, she establishes a situation where her father's reply to her queries must acknowledge his love for her. Although he merely answers her questions, his response can be interpreted as a declaration of romantic love. Thanks to her

³⁰ For a further discussion of literary allusions in *Mathilda* and their relationship to Mathilda's role as sexual aggressor, see Robinson's "Mathilda as Dramatic Actress."

manipulations, filial love now can be construed by the narrator and the reader as a sexual and “unnatural passion”. Scripting a role where she has power not only over the construction of the narrative but also in her relationship to male authority, Mathilda engages in the creation of her own tale of incest, one in which a woman consciously constructs and controls the narrative in an attempt *not* to be victimized and submissive. In the recognition and declaration scenes, she demonstrates control and complicity in the construction of her father’s incestuous desire. In her childhood fantasies she scripts her father’s declaration and later she coerces him into the voicing of his supposedly incestuous desire. When her father declares his love, Mathilda creates her next opportunity to script further her narrative using Female Gothic elements.

After her father’s speech, Mathilda not only curses him, but also creates another Female Gothic intrusion in the form of a dream state. Dreams are common in the Female Gothic, signaling a desire for Gothic wish fulfillment³¹ or the need for psychic integration and identity formation.³² Whether Mathilda’s father actually perverts her fantasy or merely plays into her incest narrative, Mathilda must continue to script her father’s fate in order to exercise control. After her father’s declaration, she says, “I awoke to life as from a dream” (203); yet the novella quickly finds Mathilda in another dream state in which her father’s fate becomes apparent. This dream shows her father, clothed in

³¹ Terence Harpold argues that Mathilda’s dream serves as a unconscious expression of Mathilda’s own ambivalence towards her father. Harpold grounds his analysis in the Freudian claim that dreams always represent a desire for wish fulfillment. The wish originates in repressed or unconscious desire (59).

³² For example, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* similarly uses dream states as a means of encouraging psychic integration and identity development. Jane experiences dreams of children throughout the novel, expressing her own unconscious fears and anxieties regarding marriage and motherhood (see Margaret Homans’s “Dreaming of Children: Literalization in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*,” in *The Female Gothic* [1983]: 257-280).

flowing white garments, jumping over a cliff into the sea. As he plunges to his death, Mathilda proves powerless to save him. Although troubled by the dream, she soon recovers: “for a few moments my heart beat hard, but the bright beams of sun and the chirping of the birds quickly restored me to myself, and I rose with a languid spirit, yet wondering what the events of the day would bring forth” (206). Demonstrating an uncannily heightened sensibility, Mathilda receives a letter from her father “with a beating heart and fearful” (207). Although she feigns ignorance of the future, her inexplicable physiological response to the letter suggests that she may have knowledge of the day’s as yet to be unfolded events. For no apparent reason, she fears that her father has left to commit suicide. His letter does serve as a farewell epistle, but it suggests that her father desires to leave the country and sever contact with her. Despite her father’s wish to put distance between himself and Mathilda, in order to avoid scandal and heartbreak, Mathilda follows him, supposedly in an attempt to stop his suicide.

Mathilda’s dream invites two Female Gothic readings, one that sees it as an exercise in wish-fulfillment, and one that interprets it as an attempt at psychic integration. In the first reading, Mathilda’s dream reveals her unconscious desire to eliminate her father’s presence in her life. In the second reading, Mathilda’s dream is an attempt to integrate her desires into a construction of her own identity. For Mathilda, much of her identity rests on her role as writer of her own narrative. Mathilda’s dream provides an opportunity for her not only to reveal her ambivalence towards her father, but also to channel that ambivalence into the construction of her narrative. Mathilda’s attempt at psychic integration encourages her identity as a writer; her dream state furthers her identity as writer/heroine of her own self-created Female Gothic script, one in which she attempts to assert liberty and control by constructing her own Female Gothic narrative. Her father’s desire to absent himself from her does not serve as enough assurance of

Mathilda's ability to direct her future. So long as her father lives, there remains a possibility that he will return to act as a lover to his daughter, to assume responsibilities over the family estate, and to wrest from Mathilda her newfound independence. By manipulating Female Gothic scripts of father-daughter incest, Mathilda has illuminated the threat of patriarchal male authority. Only the death of the nameless, but fearfully powerful, father will ensure her liberty.

In what serves as perhaps the most obvious Female Gothic scene in the novella, Mathilda rides through a storm towards the sea, in an attempt to save her father. The Gothic atmosphere echoes the Female Gothic intrusion of the dream state and occurs once again in the form of Mathilda's prophecy regarding the tree: "Mark, Gaspar, if the next flash of lightning rend not that oak my father will be alive" (213). Another example of Mathilda's fiction becoming fact happens when lightning strikes the oak, rending it in two, and she receives a prophetic confirmation of her father's death. Her prophecy destroys the oak, a well-chosen phallic image, signaling the death of her father and of his alleged desire. Mathilda's orchestration of her father's incestuous desire, its revelation, her dream, and the incident of the oak all illustrate her desire for control and her ability to construct her own narrative. The circumstances of her father's death echo those present in her dream; furthermore, Mathilda's dream signals her father's demise. She foresees her father's death in a dream, predicts it through external signs, and eventually witnesses the realization of her desire upon arriving at the seashore.

Her ambivalence towards her father suggests the dream may be wish-fulfillment, rather than prophecy. Upon arriving at the cottage and seeing her father's dead body she writes, "The first words that they uttered confirmed what I before knew. I did not feel shocked or overcome" (p. 214). Her lack of horror at her father's death may be because she not only has foreseen the events in her dream, but also because she has

desired the outcome: “Why is it that I feel no horror? I am quite callous...I do not weep or sigh; but I must reason with myself, and force myself to feel sorrow and despair. This is not resignation that I feel, for I am dead to all regret” (215). Mathilda’s displays of grief at her “beloved” father’s death are not genuine, for she must force herself to perform sorrow and despair; luckily, she has proven to be adept as an actress. Through envisioning her father’s wished-for-death, Mathilda succeeds in asserting control over her narrative and over her father’s fate. By framing her desire in pretended weakness, passivity, and victimization, she employs Female Gothic elements in the construction of her narrative; she successfully destroys her unnamed father’s threatening male authority and establishes a new life with the potential for female liberty, free from patriarchal control.

After her father’s death, with a new life in front of her, Mathilda momentarily reveals her determination for liberty and control. In her wish to “purchase freedom,” she feigns her own death and escapes with a small sum of her father’s money:

Alas! I even now look back with disgust at my artifices and contrivances by which, after many painful struggles, I effected my retreat. I might enter into a long detail of the means I used [...]but I will not. I even now blush at the falsehoods I uttered; my heart sickens: I will leave this complication of what I hope I may in a manner call innocent deceit to be imagined by the reader. The remembrance haunts me like a crime—I know that if I were to endeavour to relate it my tale would at length remain unfinished [...]they tried to bind me with fetters that they thought silken, yet which weighed on me like iron, although I broke them more easily than a girth formed of single straw and fled to freedom. (218)

Mathilda’s ability to construct stories proves as unspeakable as any horror. She attempts to hide her complicity in composing her incriminating narrative, calling it “innocent deceit,” and “blush[ing]” at the remembrance of her “falsehoods”; she announces that she would be unable to finish her novella, if she revealed her capacity to lie, dissemble, and

create. In essence, she would be unable to write, were she to admit to her desire to gain liberty and confess to her role in constructing her narrative. Thus, at least part of Mathilda's horror comes not from incest, but from the fear that her use of pretended and staged weakness could be used against her; a shrewd patriarch might see through her self-constructed victimization, and her initially liberating narrative could lead to her own confinement. Her fear signals not only a literal fear of imprisonment (if she is exposed, Mathilda will be kept in London), but also of a figurative confinement. If Mathilda, as author and aggressor, reveals what she has created—that is, her fiction—she will end her role as victim and her novella's efforts at female liberation. Mathilda successfully internalizes the Female Gothic heroine's desire for liberty and control, using the dramatic and Female Gothic elements inherent in the philosophy of victimization feminism in order to break the “silken” fetters that constrain her.

Although Mathilda effectively gains control over her narrative upon her escape, she no longer possesses an audience. She takes charge, but there is no one present to appreciate her performative ability. The lack of an audience inspires Mathilda's fourth wish, to have a friend. This desire, another instance in which Mathilda's fiction becomes fact, once again shows evidence of her narrative control: “I wished for one friend to love me [...] I wished for one heart in which I could pour unrestrained my complaints[...] I lamented not more bitterly the best gift of heaven--a friend. The name of my friend was Woodville' ” (223). Mathilda's desire, present in her imagination and in her wishes, is fulfilled. She yearns for a friend and *immediately* Woodville appears.

Even though Mathilda calls the character of Woodville into existence, he soon presents a threat to her narrative. Diane Long Hoeveler cites Woodville as the threat posed by the traditional feminized hero of the Gothic: “Woodville is yet another example of the feminized Gothic hero who has been wounded by life, making no emotional or

sexual demands on the heroine” (179). He serves as a potential suitor to Mathilda, and ultimately their friendship will lead to a heteronormative union. Thus, Mathilda’s Female Gothic anxiety regarding Woodville originates in the sexual danger he presents. Hoeveler’s reading of Woodville as a feminized Female Gothic hero overlooks Mathilda’s fear regarding his potential to seize control of her narrative. When another character is introduced into her dramatic monologue, the threat exists that he may undermine her agency. He may demand greater accountability and objectivity on the part of Mathilda, who reflects:

I am a thought, a tragedy; a character that he comes to see act: now and then he gives me my cue that I may make a speech more to his purpose; perhaps he is already planning a poem in which I am to figure. I am a farce and a play to him, but to me this is all dreary reality: he takes all the profit and I bear all the burthen. (233)

Mathilda’s anxiety regarding Woodville’s potential to control her narrative proves especially pressing, for Woodville is a fellow writer. Tension arises when Mathilda realizes that he may force her to “make a speech more to his purpose”; therefore, she will lose the ability to invent her own script. Her attempts at personal liberty and narrative control may be undermined by the presence of a rival male creator.

Fearing Woodville’s narrative power, she tries to regain control over her story, and in her most important dramatic performance, she orchestrates a suicide for her and for Woodville. Mathilda’s construction of the tragic suicide employs the language of the dramatic. She plans, decorates, and scripts the scene (235-236). Diane Long Hoeveler notes the presence of the dramatic at this juncture in Mathilda’s narrative, but she concludes that Mathilda “considers herself as nothing more than the literary embodiment of a melodramatic cliché,” ignoring Mathilda’s desire for performance and for the sense of power it offers her (179). Her answer to Woodville, in this struggle for mastery, is to

make Woodville an actor in *her* Female Gothic drama. Her need to dominate masculinity results in another male suicide scenario, and her treatment of Woodville echoes that of her father. However, Woodville resists Mathilda; he will not be a character in her Female Gothic drama, and he instead departs. Mathilda, in turn, resists marriage to him, not solely because he serves as a Female Gothic sexual threat, but because he threatens the integrity of her own Female Gothic dramatic narrative.

Mathilda's conclusion not only breaks from the traditional Female Gothic ending in marriage, but it also provides the novella's most convincing statement regarding Mathilda's independence in constructing her narrative. She notes, "This was the drama of my life which I have now depicted upon paper [...] I close my work; the last that I shall perform" (245). Mathilda admits to the conscious power she has exercised in peopling the landscape with her imaginings, addressing Nature: "Universal Mother [...] I have loved thee; and in my days both in happiness and sorrow I have peopled your solitudes with wild fancies of my own creation" (243). She concludes, saying, "Farewell, Woodville, the turf will soon be green on my grave; and the violets will bloom on it. There is my hope and my expectation; your's [sic] are in this world; may they be fulfilled" (246). Diane Long Hoeveler argues, "According to Mary Shelley, the Gothic feminist can only find herself in the peculiarly passive position of playacting in a life whose greatest crisis centers on the oedipal drama" (181). But Mathilda does not start "playacting" at the novella's conclusion, as Hoeveler suggests; instead, she has been dramatizing from the very beginning of her story. Nor does Mathilda's playacting leave her in a passive condition; rather, it allows her to exert power and control. While it may appear that Mathilda admits her complicity in the construction of her narrative in the novella's closing passages, in actuality, she continues her Female Gothic playacting game, stating that her expectations cannot be fulfilled in this world. Yet her expectations

have been fulfilled. Mathilda tricks readers into believing that she play acts only at the end of the novella; however, she has shaped her own Female Gothic narrative throughout, orchestrating events according to a dramatic Female Gothic script. Ultimately, she exercises a covert mastery through staged passivity. The consummate actress and storyteller, Mathilda attempts to veil her own agency in her narrative's construction, to hide her desire for female liberty and control behind a façade of feminine weakness and victimization.

If critics read *Mathilda* not merely as a drama, but specifically as a Female Gothic text with dramatic elements, such a reading lends itself to a discussion of Shelley's relationship to the Female Gothic genre. Shelley's works have been identified with the Female Gothic since the inception of the genre. Frequently critics such as Hoeveler cite her as a Female Gothic writer whose novels offer the bleakest depictions of female oppression and subjugation, sites where the deepest and most disturbing feminine fears are realized (183).³³ Yet by considering Shelley's works in relation to victimization feminism, and to the possible agency found in self-created, staged weakness, readers may see Shelley as a Female Gothic writer who not only skillfully plays with Female Gothic form, but does so in an attempt to give her heroines increased autonomy and control. Shelley allows her heroine to utilize Female Gothic elements in the construction of her narrative, thus self-consciously drawing attention to the genre's tropes. She may use such self-conscious allusions as a means of exposing the rhetoric of the Female Gothic and devaluing it, but this seems unlikely. Shelley read Female Gothic writers, such as

³³ Hoeveler writes, "[Shelley] could laud the bourgeois family, she could valorize community, and what we now label 'family values,' but ultimately she could not escape the mortality that gives the lie to everything she sought to praise. She inhabited the female body; she bled and caused bleeding in others, and those unfortunate facts defined for her and her fiction the Gothic feminist nightmare in its starkest terms" (183).

Radcliffe, and often chose the Female Gothic mode for her own work. Critics should consider Shelley's use of Female Gothic tropes as a means of exposing and encouraging the desire for female liberty and control inherent in the Female Gothic genre.

Ann Radcliffe is frequently cited as the "mother" of the Female Gothic genre. However, both Jane Austen and Mary Shelley offer influential re-envisionings of the Female Gothic narrative. Austen's and Shelley's rewriting of the "Radcliffe-ian" formula speaks to their own status as female creators working in a culture resistant to female artistic endeavor. Their heroines' status as performing artists who (re)script their lives according to Gothic tropes establishes the first in a series of female-authored nineteenth-century Gothic narratives by that demonstrating that the presence of the artistic heroine is the genre's true defining feature and that the issue of women's art is its much-contested focus.

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Chapter 3

GHOSTLY STORIES, GHASTLY STORYTELLERS: WOMEN'S NARRATIVE ARTISTRY IN EMILY BRONTË'S *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* AND ELIZABETH GASKELL'S SHORT STORIES

By the 1830s, women writers dominated the literary marketplace in a number of genres.¹ However, these female authors still struggled to gain acceptance in a profession and in a literary tradition still associated primarily with masculine achievement. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's Gothic short stories—including “The Grey Woman,” “The Old Nurse's Story,” and “The Poor Clare”—feature fictional characters (such as Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights*), whose art is the narrating of a novel, as well as those (such as the female narrators in Gaskell's Gothic tales) whose art is oral storytelling, these works suggest that, although many women writers experienced pressure not to write for a living, or felt the need to use a pseudonym if they did publish and sell their fiction, the opposition they faced was not uniform or absolute. And despite patriarchal demands and expectations, many women wrote nonetheless and continued to occupy prominent roles in the literary marketplace. These women pushed back against social resistance to their choice of career by writing novels and also by re-imagining and foregrounding women artist-figures in their own texts, particularly those in the Gothic mode.

While interart critics have tended to read these artist figures characters as solely self-reflexive narrative moments (Losano 8), I deviate from much current

¹ See Linda H. Peterson's *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (2009).

scholarship by suggesting that Brontë and Gaskell did not use their texts' women artist-figures as simple analogs for the woman writer, or as mere historical reflections. Instead, I favor Antonia Losano's analysis of female visual artists found in *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature* (2008) which states that, "fictional woman artists appear to be composite creatures, cobbled together out of known public figures, the author's acquaintances and her fantasy ideal of a woman painter" (8). However, I extend Losano's claims, not only to the figure of female visual artists in nineteenth-century narratives, but to a variety of female artist-figures in women's Gothic of the nineteenth century—performers, painters, domestic artists, *and* writers—to suggest that *all* these representations participated in this larger project of genre and gender.

"*She wouldn't have borne [it] quietly*": Defiant Narrative Acts, Female Gothic Discourse, and the Woman Artist-Figure in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

In their 1992 film adaptation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) the screenwriter Anne Devlin and the director Peter Kosminsky insert an opening frame narrative in which an actress, presumably playing Brontë herself, arrives at an abandoned house on the moors and imagines the Gothic romance of Heathcliff and Cathy. As the novel already features a complicated series of interlocking frame narratives, why provide viewers with this additional opening frame? Why, in other words, add a further layer of complexity, in order to dramatize the female artist-figure as the author herself, hovering on the margins of the text?

Elsewhere, I will argue that contemporary filmmakers, such as Devlin and Kosminsky, include an idealized representation of the woman artist-figure for readers and viewers—especially for women—who might not expressly identify themselves as

feminist, but who still like and expect to see feminist “role models,” particularly antecedents who are long past and who appear to be “romantic” characters, as opposed to living or more recent feminist figures. And while many twentieth-and twenty-first century constructions of Victorian Gothic narratives include a prominent female artist-figure, Devlin and Kosminky’s choice to dramatize the female artist-figure as *author* in *Wuthering Heights* seems particularly important as it reinforces Brontë’s own interest in such figures. For I contend that the central metaphor of Brontë’s novel focuses on women’s acts of creation. There are many representative acts throughout the novel, but writing is one of the most potent forms of female self-assertion and artistry found in the text.² The film’s additional opening frame illuminates Brontë’s role as woman author, while simultaneously drawing attention to the presence of other female narrative acts in the novel.

² Maggie Berg’s *Wuthering Heights: Writing in the Margins* (1996) illuminates one of these female representative acts—in lieu of her mother’s diary, Cathy creates a flower garden. I too see Cathy as a kind of domestic artist. In recent decades feminist critical discussions of the female artist have begun to expand the notions of female artistry to include the domestic sphere. Bettina Aptheker in *Tapestries of Life: Women’s Work, Women’s Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience* (1998) posits that by examining the “dailiness” of women’s lives, we can “suggest a way of knowing from the meanings women give to their labors. The search for dailiness is a method of work that allows us to take the patterns women create and the meanings women invent and learn from them.” (39). Much like a modern-day Martha Stewart, Cathy attempts to better the home-space through domestic arts: “retiring to a stool by the window, where she began to carve figures of birds and beats out of the turnip parings in her lap” (273). Cathy uses the refuse and detritus of domesticity in order to create art. Her artistic impulses are used to better the lives of the inhabitants of the Heights through her manipulation of domestic objects: “my little mistress was beguiling an idle hour with drawing pictures on the window panes, varying her amusement by smothered bursts of songs” (285). In fact, once she and Hareton begin to share an affinity through the act of her teaching him how to read, she begins to add small domestic touches to his meals, such as sticking primroses in his plate of porridge (290). These small acts made through interactions with domestic objects establish a more loving, more comfortable, and more companionable home-space and rectify the improper domestic sphere that has long existed at the Heights.

A handful of scholars, most notably, David Musselwhite, Beth Newman, and Maggie Berg, have already begun the work of establishing an intersection between gender and narration in *Wuthering Heights* and considering its possible relationship to the historical and biographical situation of author herself. Musselwhite's "*Wuthering Heights: The Unacceptable Text*" (1977) suggests that the novel addresses the fundamental problems of reading and writing; specifically, it considers the way we read and its relationship to the way we treat and view others (155). In an extension of Musselwhite's argument, in *Wuthering Heights: The Writing in the Margin* (1996) Berg argues persuasively for the correlation between Brontë's own literary practice claiming that both authors are "secretive, miniscule, and marginal [and] like Catherine's, Brontë's writing was clearly both powerful and liberating" (4). "Although race, class, and gender conflicts are all important matters in the novel, Berg's excellent reading suggests that the central problem of *Wuthering Heights* is patriarchy (6) and she posits that the "writing in the margin" inscribed in Catherine's diary entries is a powerful subversive force. Berg also contends that

Emily Brontë employs a Gothic motif [in *Wuthering Heights*] for ideological purposes [...] Thus Brontë's renowned fascination with the supernatural, whether derived from the Gothic, or Methodism, or traditional ballads (another popular, and predominately [sic] form), is consistent with what I perceive as her interest in marginality, whether social, existential, or literary. (7)

Although Berg makes a strong case for the marginality of Catherine's writing, the scope of her argument does not include the full range of other acts of narrative artistry employed by the novel's female characters nor does it consider the potential of these acts to express feminist resistance against patriarchal control.

My essay expands on the work begun by Berg in the following ways—1) by suggesting other women in the novel besides Catherine engage in both marginal writing

activities and narrative acts; and, 2) by explicating the relationship between the novel's Gothic form and its feminist ideology. Specifically, my argument demonstrates the connection between the Gothic and Female Gothic genres and the broader concerns and anxieties circulating around the figure of the nineteenth-century female artist. For example, when Berg is briefly discussing Nelly Dean's narrative acts, she claims that Nelly displays a "phallogentric" attitude to texts and storytelling, using scripture and her own oral storytelling to "shame people into conformity" (52). On the contrary, I contend that the female protagonists in *Wuthering Heights* are engaged in marginal writing activities similar to those of Catherine Earnshaw; their narrative acts are subversive, powerful and liberating. In addition to Catherine, and much like their creator—Emily Brontë—Catherine, Nelly, Isabella, and Cathy explore modes of telling stories and claim narrative voices for themselves. In the case of Catherine, this manifests in her writing in the margins of the books she reads. Both Isabella and Cathy, moreover, use letter writing as a way to authorize the self, to assert their right to achieve a voice and to shape a story, even in the face of patriarchal authority. At the same time, Nelly crafts an oral narrative—embellishing events that took place in the past, events over which, arguably, she has had little control because of gender *and* her class.

Many nineteenth-century women writers, such as Brontë, who learned to position themselves in the male-dominated literary tradition and marketplace, engaged in narrative projects that forced them to fit within the contours of male-defined literary texts. Yet they ultimately alter those texts by inserting themselves into the margins. For Catherine, this means writing her own stories and interpretations, making a space for her own voice, into the pages of male literary space. For Isabella and for Cathy, masculine authority comes in the guise of the men who try to prevent them from writing letters, or who censor the contents. In Nelly's case, her attempts to adjust her discourse to the

contours of masculine narrative stem from her need to authorize a tale, to give it shape, to determine its meanings, and to interpret it on her own terms for an audience. As Berg suggests, the central problem of *Wuthering Heights* is patriarchy, [add comma] and the novel responds to this dilemma with a range of female voices that attempt to speak out against and to break through such control by the means of defiant narrative acts. Through her female protagonists, Brontë engages in a discourse that is both self-referential and socially interventionist, as she negotiates the problems of femininity, authorship, and agency. Here, she suggests that the woman writer can resist patriarchal pressures through her art, especially through the championing of the female artist-figure in her Gothic texts. It is particularly significant that Emily Brontë chose to use the Gothic form, in order to do this activist work, as Gothic narratives were traditionally associated with the representation of women as mere victims and with the pleasure of seeing female characters as the helpless prey of monstrous masculinity.

Emily Brontë and the Situation of the Woman Writer in Nineteenth-Century Britain

Although middle-class women participated actively in the nineteenth-century literary marketplace, Brontë, and many others, still faced numerous cultural pressures that encouraged them not to publish and sell their work or to define themselves as professional authors. In *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (2010), Linda H. Peterson illuminates how professional women of letters “emerged, as a group simultaneously with their male counterparts during the nineteenth century” (3). Peterson contends that both men and women writers of the nineteenth-century struggled to negotiate a sense of authorial identity at a time when the vocation of professional authorship was only just being established. In the early

nineteenth century “it was not clear that financial remuneration for literary work was substantial or stable enough to warrant the claim that authorship qualified as a ‘profession’” (1). And for those writers who could make a living from their pen, they often feared being tainted with the belief that they wrote only to sell a commodity to a publisher, not to share knowledge with a readership (2). Thus, both men and women were caught in a complex web of linguistic, social, and intellectual distinctions surrounding the figure of the man, or woman, of letters. Peterson suggests that women writers navigated this new literary marketplace by creating “myths,” or “articulated desires about what it means to be an author” (11), that enabled them to negotiate the concerns that all authors, male and female alike, faced in the Victorian literary field (4); namely, varying models of authorship; copyrights, royalties, and other material aspects of authorship; and the conflict between writing as a high-minded ideal of literary labor or a source of economic success (6). Peterson notes that while Victorian women writers handled these concerns individually, and with varying levels of success, access to the new field of professional authorship offered many opportunities to women writers, as well as to male authors.

Yet despite these new opportunities at inclusion, the nineteenth-century female artist-figure still faced some gendered barriers. According to Mary Poovey in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1998), while eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences may have felt that women were well-suited to writing didactic, moral, and sentimental fiction, professional authorship was still not a wholly respectable option, particularly for ladies. To write for a living meant to counter traditional and popular notions of female propriety. The writing profession catapulted women into the public arena, endangering female modesty, for it put women explicitly into competition with men and also encouraged a very unfeminine hunger for recognition and fame, and the need for recognition through publication

(Poovey 35). In fact, many women felt they could only pursue the profession of authorship safely if they did so under the cover of masculine pseudonym, the justification of supporting their families during extreme financial peril, or the mission of writing moral tracts for spiritual uplift. To write merely for profit, self-expression, or public notice was dangerous for the middle-class woman writer. Furthermore, Poovey argues that marriage was “virtually the only respectable ‘occupation’ for women (and both learning and writing were frequently seen as threats to domestic duty)” (35). Thus, the marriage market took precedence over the literary market; the Victorian ideology of separate spheres and a single-minded emphasis on female duty made the pursuit of professional authorship a difficult, though by no means impossible, proposition. For example, authors such as Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell embraced what Peterson terms the notion of “parallel streams,” a model that separated the woman from the author, the private, domestic self from the public persona and literary creator. In this way, women authors created certain myths that “preserved the category of artistic genius for women’s authorship, even while demonstrating that literary women could fulfill (and would not abandon) the duties of domestic life” (7).

Contrary to the opinion of scholars such as Inga-Stina Ewbank, who suggests in *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early-Victorian Female Novelists* (1966) that sex was not the central problem of Emily Brontë’s art (86), I posit that Brontë was no stranger to the cultural pressures surrounding the Victorian female novelist and that concerns about her gender, and its relationship to her art profoundly shaped her development as a writer. In order to demonstrate Brontë’s “absolute acceptance” (87) of her role as industrious housekeeper, Ewbank cites Emily’s birthday note of 1845 written in her journal:

I am quite contented for myself—not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty and having learnt not to make the most of the present and hope for the future with less fidget[i]ness that I cannot do all I wish—seldom or ever troubled with nothing to [do] and merely desiring that every body could be as comfortable as myself and as undesponding and then we should have a very tolerable world of it. (qtd in Barker 131)³

Although Brontë might appear, in this section, to have reconciled herself to so-called womanly duties, the rest of the birthday note does not suggest that she was solely occupied with household chores.

She concludes her note by saying, “I must hurry off now to my turning and ironing I have plenty of work on hands and *writing* and am altogether full of business with best wishes for the whole House till 1848” (qtd. in Barker 132, italics mine).

Ewbank locates the source of Brontë’s contentment in her immersion in household industry. I would emphasize instead that Brontë includes *writing* among the pleasant tasks that occupy her, for Brontë never abandoned her artistic ambitions.

Moreover, Ewbank’s claim that Brontë’s “sex”⁴ was not a problem for the female author does not help to explain Brontë’s ambivalence about publication, nor her decision to assume a masculine pen name. There seems to be more to Brontë’s hesitation about seeing her work in print than a mere preference for the domestic sphere over the public one. Her rage over Charlotte’s discovery of her poems has long been part of her biographical lore and Emily, who desired an independent life with little interference from others seemed loath to share her private dream[hyphen]world imaginings with a potentially hostile audience. Secrecy served as protection for her creation of exotic

³ I have chosen to excerpt the letter from Juliet Barker’s *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (1997) rather than Ewbank’s book, due to fewer distracting editorial emendations.

⁴ Most likely due to its publication in 1966, prior to [add “most”] feminist and gender studies debates regarding gendered terminology, Ewbank consistently conflates the terms “sex” and “gender.”

locales and characters and passionate themes. Also, both Emily and Anne urged Charlotte to adopt pseudonyms for the volume that collected all three sisters' poems; they would publish only if they could remain anonymous (Barker, *The Brontës* 479). Thus, Emily was more than merely shy or eccentric; instead, she appeared to be aware of the cultural debates and social proscriptions around the figure of the woman writer and the problems that might ensue if she were identified as a professional author, as well as familiar with the strategies that women writers could use to deflect negative attention identified with pursuing the profession. Problems of gender, or "sex," did impact her authorship and they served as a central focus for her art. They shaped her art by influencing the kinds of themes and subjects she treated in her 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights*. Furthermore, they made their presence felt in her representations of the women artists in her novels. As we see her female protagonists struggling to have their voices heard and understood and to locate productive, fulfilling outlets for their creative impulses.

Abandoning the Exotic: Imagination, Imitation, and Female Artistic Accomplishment

Even before the Brontë sisters published either their poetry or prose, the issue of their identities as female artists came under discussion. The incident of involving Charlotte writing to Robert Southey and his discouraging (sexist) reply is well known. In 1837, Branwell and Charlotte sent letters to the poets William Wordsworth and Robert Southey, respectively. Southey, the Poet Laureate, responded to Charlotte's letter by praising the quality of her work, while pointing out the dangers inherent in "allowing herself to become absorbed in an imaginary world which was more attractive than the one in which she was compelled to live" (Barker, *Letters* 46). Southey wrote,

But it is not with a view to distinction that you sh[oul]d cultivate this talent, if you consult your own happiness [...] The daydreams in wh[ich] you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind, & in proportion as all the ‘ordinary uses of the world’ seem to you ‘flat & unprofitable’, you will be unfitted for them, without becoming fitted for anything else. Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life: & it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment & recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, & when you are you will be less eager for celebrity. (47-48)

Southey’s attitude toward women writers was consistent with that of most middle-class men and women alike; in fact “it was just what Patrick Brontë” had always advised his daughter, urging her to content herself with fulfilling her duty and not to allow her seemingly unattainable ambitions to sour her daily life” (Barker, *The Brontës* 262).⁵ Both Southey and Charlotte’s clergyman father insisted that the “occupation” of a woman’s life was marriage, not writing.⁶

Although Southey’s letter was not addressed to Emily, it is highly likely that the sisters, who shared much with each other, would have discussed its implications for their futures. In addition, we may assume that the advice Reverend Patrick Brontë gave to

⁵ Even though Southey offered Charlotte Brontë only discouraging comments, a few years after he wrote to her, he encouraged and helped Caroline Bowles to publish her poetry. In fact, he even offered to co-write poetry with Bowles. Here readers can see the complexity of Victorian gender ideologies, as they produced a tangle of inconsistent, inconsistent and potentially changeable views.

⁶ In Charlotte’s response to Southey, she claimed to agree with him: “I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print—if the wish should rise I’ll look at Southey’s autograph and suppress it: It is honour enough for me that I have written to him and received an answer” (Barker, *Letters* 49). However, the letter may be read in more than one way. Charlotte may have been genuinely pleased by Southey’s response, yet she may also have been writing with such humility as a careful political move, praising a well-known author in the hopes that he might help her in the future. Furthermore, although Charlotte said that she would never feel the desire to seek publication, she clearly went against this assertion. Eventually, she sought an audience for her writing, albeit under a pseudonym. Though Southey’s words may have made her feel the need to disguise her identity, they did not quash her ambition.

his eldest daughter would have also been echoed in the guidance he administered to the younger ones. While Southey and Patrick may have cautioned Charlotte against living in a dream world, a world that would spoil her for her duties as a wife and mother, biographers report that it was *Emily*, more than the other Brontë sisters, who most avidly clung to her fantasies, especially the dream world of Gondal.⁷ Thus, Emily, would have had the most to lose, if she had assumed the duties of a traditional middle-class nineteenth-century woman and abandoned the imaginative creations that gave her much joy and that then found outlet and expression in her writing.

Another discussion in the Brontë home that illuminates nineteenth-century ideology regarding the contested position of the woman writer occurs in a letter from Branwell to Charlotte, regarding the latter's writing: "I will never believe that our minds can be so well awakened by the poetry of distant and unknown images as by that of things we have long been used to know [...] I would doubt the genius of that writer who loved more to dwell upon Indian Palm Groves or Genii palaces than on the wooded manors and cloudy skies of England" (qtd. in Neufeldt 3:186). Here, much like Southey and their father, Branwell encourages Charlotte (and perhaps by extension his other literary sisters, both actual and metaphorical) to abandon her "Angrian" fantasies and imaginative escapes in order to develop a new aesthetic of pictorial realism.

Branwell's views on literature corresponded to governing theories of female artistic accomplishment in the visual arts during the nineteenth century, standards which, as Jane Kromm reports, urged the amateur lady artist to confine herself to producing "an image without any trace or mark of [...her...] own style or individuality" (qtd. in Dunn 38). Hence, if women had to write, or engage in artistic activity at all, they were to work

⁷ See Juliet Barker *The Brontës* (1997).

only in those genres that that involved copying from real-life, rather than those that fostered subjective an exercise of unfettered imagination. We may assume that Emily received the same advice from Branwell that Charlotte did and grew up with the same cultural proscriptions about female imagination that Kromm describes.⁷ Moreover, since the sisters were educated in art practices of the nineteenth-century, Emily would have been exposed to dominant views, such as those described by Kromm, concerning woman's artistry.⁸

Although middle-class women were expected to have some form of artistic accomplishment, these skills were not supposed to develop into the pursuit of an artistic career that led to paid work. The same rigid proscriptions governing narrative artistry (women should only write in certain genres with particular moral, didactic messages) also governed the discourse surrounding other forms of female artistic endeavor, such as painting. Describing the system of art practice and accomplishment the Brontë sisters would have experienced, and citing F. Edward Hulme's *Art Instruction in England* (1882), Christine Alexander compares the fictional and historical worlds of Jane Austen to those of the Brontës: "Emma and Miss Rattle would have been taught to copy not only from manuals but also 'from nature,' but by the time Charlotte studied art the system of art education had ossified into 'the blind copying of drawings, often themselves faulty, but in any case as mechanical and senseless an operation as can be imagined'" (17).

⁸ Like many other women of their class, the Bronte sisters were educated in the arts—painting and music. Meg Harris Williams writes, "Emily Bronte was possibly the most talented and certainly the most determined musician in a family where music was greatly appreciated and encouraged. She was not simply musical, but a serious student of music, in a way that (as some writers have suggested) influenced her artistic development" (81). Emily also had exposure to painting, though she did not have the same passion for it as her sister Charlotte. Christine Alexander, Richard Dunn, and Antonia Losano all note Charlotte's frustrated ambitions as visual artist (see *The Brontës in the World of the Arts* [2008]).

How, then, did women artists who were determined to engage in more than mere copying express their unique creative visions? To what discourse did writers such as Emily Brontë turn in order to express their passionate, fervid imagination? Much like Berg, I posit that Brontë turned to the discourse of the Gothic, a genre that resists imitative realism and instead privileges individual subjective psychological experience and exploration of the supernatural.⁹ Among other things, the Gothic allowed women to break free of Victorian standards of copying as the only marker of female artistic achievement.¹⁰ With the inclusion of female-artist figures, women writers not only resisted the call to copy and imitate, but they fundamentally changed Gothic discourse during this period by redefining their “female” Gothic as a narrative that charts the development of a woman artist-figure as heroine.

The Potentialities of Gothic Discourse: Women Artists Re-imagining Culture through Female Gothic Narrative

Maggie Berg speculates that Emily Brontë relied on the Gothic genre to express her feelings of marginalization and to articulate her anomalous position—in other words, she used the Gothic to record and to protest her own marginality in literary history (7). With so much scholarly attention now focused on Brontë, I would contest Berg’s

⁹ See Elizabeth MacAndrews’s *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (1979), Eugenia DeLamotte’s *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (1990), Anne Williams’s *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), and David Punter’s *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Vol. 2 The Modern Gothic* (1996). These scholars all suggest that the Gothic privileges individual psychologized experience and the exotic/supernatural.

¹⁰ Here it seems worth noting that the Gothic’s privileging of individual artistic expression has its origins in Romantic antecedents. For a further discussion, see Anne Williams’s *Art of Darkness: The Poetics of the Gothic* (1995) which suggests that Gothic fiction grows out of the Romantic poetic tradition. Thus, both the Gothic project, and the Female Gothic project, as undertaken by nineteenth-century women writers, have roots in Romantic ideologies and values.

claim that she remains on the outskirts of literary history; since the advent of feminist criticism, critical examinations of *Wuthering Heights* and of its author have multiplied rapidly. Nonetheless, I find Berg's assertion that Brontë consciously chooses the Gothic to express her own and other women's marginalization compelling. Rather than suggesting that her choice of genre further points to Emily's anomalous position in the nineteenth-century marketplace, I would hypothesize instead that it indicates her participation in a larger female discourse, with Brontë as one of many women during the nineteenth-century writing in the Gothic mode who include female artist-figures as heroines in their texts.

The notion of the nineteenth-century artist being in a social anomalous position matches the description of many artist figures in Victorian narratives. Bo Jeffares in *The Artist in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1979) and Mack Smith in *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition* (1995) argue that nineteenth-century texts proliferated the image of the painter-hero in English and Continental fiction. In "The Necessity of a Name': Portrayals and Betrayals of Victorian Women Artists" (1992), Susan Casteras notes that these artist-hero figures often partook of the Romantic ideal of the outsider, as these novels "establish recognizable traits of an idealized romantic artist who was bohemian, flamboyant, tormented or struggling, moody or soulful, and often imbued with a Promethean spirit that allied with him the alleged divinity of genius" (209). Antonia Losano contends that Victorian women novelists utilized this mythos too as they "are represented as being in diverse ways outside the scope of traditional bourgeois culture" (7). However, as Losano notes these female artist-figures, and their creators, are not just indulging in expressions of artistic angst, but rather their expressions of marginality are "materially and socially instantiated, rather than emotionally depicted as it is with the male artist-heroes of the period" (7).

This feeling of female marginality, or being in an anomalous position, echoes the language of the Gothic, particularly in its concept of “otherness,” a term also central to most feminist and postcolonial studies. Ruth Bienstock Anolik’s *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination* (2004), in addition to her more recent, *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature* (2010) examine the role of “otherness” in Gothic fiction and mark it as the locus of the Gothic: “the shadowy, mysterious and unknowable space inhabited by the inhumanly unknowable Other—supernatural or human” (*Demons* 2). Bienstock Anolik elaborates, ‘Thus in its consideration of the human Other of the Enlightenment—inhuman, unknowable, dangerous, uncontrollable—the Gothic presents human difference as monstrous, and then, paradoxically subverts the categories of exclusion to argue for the humanity of the monster’ (2). Hence, the depictions of isolated male painter-heroes in nineteenth-century narratives shift to more complicated “othered” representations of inspiring, and sometimes fearsome, female artist-figures in the Gothic works of women writers.

Just as the women of *Wuthering Heights* write in the margins, seeking alternative forms through which in which to express their opposition to masculine authority, Brontë and other contemporary female novelists, deployed the Gothic genre for similar purposes. Nineteenth-century women writers relied on the discourse of the Gothic as a genre that provided a context in which assertions of female subjectivity and agency were possible for individual, subjective expression; through the Gothic, women writers challenged literary texts by men redefining what it meant to create Gothic, or “female” Gothic, texts. In particular, their texts re-imagined the figure of the woman artist as a source of empowerment, liberation, and resistance to patriarchal oppression.

Hence, in *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë participates in this larger project. Her choice of the Gothic does not merely speak to her anomalous position as a middle-class woman writing and publishing for pay, but to her determination to change the social landscape. Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) illuminates the complicated relationship between the categories of "women," "fiction," and "ideology."¹¹ Armstrong argues that scholars cannot understand the development of the English novel without taking into account its relationship to the construction of gender, for gender does not transcend history, but rather is shaped, created, and recreated by it (8). The novel re-imagines a way of life that is "antecedent" to the status quo and, consequently, it envisions and dramatizes a new and better way of life to come. By deploying Gothic discourse, and by representing women artist figures who were themselves engaged in writing within a Gothic horror context, women such as Brontë imagined new possibilities for women artists. As female authors kept returning throughout the nineteenth century to this genre and to the female artist as fictional character appropriating, reconceiving, and refining this image, they developed a new ideology of opportunity for themselves through the figuration of the woman artist as heroine.

Wuthering Heights: Rewriting and Revising Male Authority through Female Narrative Acts

Brontë illuminates the situation of the nineteenth-century woman writer through the use of female artist-figures such as Catherine, Nelly, Isabella, and Cathy,

¹¹ Armstrong makes clear that not all eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women wrote the same way, for the same audiences, or for the same purposes. A range of differences—class, region, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, access to publishers, and education—vary the experiences of these women writers.

who all are interested in modes of telling stories and of claiming narrative voices for themselves. She praises subjective artistic practice throughout the novel, in Catherine's marginalia, in Isabella's letter, and most especially through the figure of Nelly Dean who, as an oral storyteller, counters patriarchal demands and succeeds in authorizing her own tale, changing the dynamics of her immediate world, and gaining a receptive audience. At the same time, narratives those found in Cathy's letters also demonstrate the possible dangers of creating art that is purely self-expressive or self-interested.¹² In this way, Gothic discourse mediates Brontë's own fears and anxieties about her role as woman writer.

The first female artist-figure that readers encounter in *Wuthering Heights* is Catherine Earnshaw. Maggie Berg cites Catherine's diary as the most important marginal space in the narrative: "[it] is an embodiment of Catherine's ghost: the spirit of female resistance which will not be extinguished" (24). In *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (2001) H.J. Jackson suggests that in *Wuthering Heights* marginalia "[introduces] a new voice in a particularly direct and personal way, a means for securing interest for Catherine through the reaction of the narrator, and a means for obliquely indicating the distance between them [...] they are a credible reflection of reality as well as a useful narrative technique" (21). Instances of marginalia similar to those in Catherine's diary permeate the text; Nelly's storytelling and Cathy and Isabella's letters serve both to

¹² Here I am greatly indebted to the work of Antonia Losano's "Anne Brontë's Aesthetics: Painting in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" from *The Brontës in the World of the Arts* (2008) which examines the relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Tenant* in order to argue that *Tenant* "rigorously critiques art that is self-expressive or personally motivated [...]and finally offers an alternative aesthetic, particularly for the woman artist" (47) while *Jane Eyre* offers readers a "fantasy" of female art whose self-expressive nature positively contributes to the heroine's development and her courtship narrative. I am greatly indebted to Losano's argument concerning both texts.

illuminate their own perceptions of the real and to act as narrative devices that further Brontë's larger political project to give women voice.

The bumbling visitor to the Heights and initial narrator of the novel, Mr. Lockwood, comes across Catherine's library whose "state of dilapidation" suggests that it was used "not altogether for a legitimate purpose" (17). Catherine, who remains discontented with merely reading the words of others, attempts to inscribe her own thoughts and feelings onto the text: "scarcely one chapter had escaped a pen-and-ink commentary—at least, the appearance of one—covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left" (17). Lockwood finds and reads one of Catherine's journal entries, which uncovers the anger, violence, and gender inequality of the Heights and Catherine's attempts at protest against them. After the rigid and tyrannical Joseph catches Catherine and Heathcliff tearing apart their prayer-books, Hindley punishes them for their apparent blasphemy. Catherine turns to her journal for comfort and release, putting into words the frustrations over hypocrisy that she dare not express to Hindley or other members of the household. By writing in the margins of her book, she actively asserts and positions herself within the text—as a voice that overwrites, that has the final word, and thus creates its own authority within textual space.

Before she has completely finished her entry, however Heathcliff interrupts her writing. This interruption serves as one example when the masculine figures of the novel attempt to exert control over female artistic creation. Heathcliff does not understand the import of Catherine's diary and so impatiently insists that she accompany him to the moors. Similarly, as she experiences mental and physical decline after Edgar Linton denies her any form of audience or human contact; instead he withdraws to his library with the works and words of others, rather than those of his wife, as he retreats into the safety of books by men. Catherine asks despairingly, "What in the name of all

that feels, has he to do with *books* when I am dying?’ ” (111). Unlike the freedom of expression found in her own library, the margins of Edgar’s books do not invite Catherine’s commentary; instead, Edgar’s library bespeaks of masculine authority and female exclusion, a place in which the female pen is not welcome: “ ‘I don’t want you, Edgar: I’m past wanting you. Return to your books. I’m glad you possess a consolation, for all you had in me is gone’ ” (117). Much like her relationship with Heathcliff, Catherine’s marriage to Edgar affords her neither a creative outlet nor a receptive audience.

If we conceive of writing as dependent upon an exchange among writer, text, and reader, then Catherine’s original marginalia is lacking an audience to complete the artistic “transaction.”¹³ Eventually, Lockwood will find and read her diary, but during her lifetime, Catherine is the only one “listening” to the voice of her writing. She may be engaging in defiant narrative acts, but no one knows about them or cares to read them. As she matures, readers receive no indication that she continues to be a writer; in fact, it seems that her canvas for expression, books written by others, has been denied her. We no longer see Catherine writing her own stories or interpellations within masculine literary space interpretations. On the contrary, she learns to deny her artistic impulses and desire for expressive freedom and tries to become a “model” nineteenth-century wife, rather than a “girl [...] half savage and hardy, and free...and laughing at injuries instead of maddening under them!” (115). Perhaps because her pen has been stilled, Catherine resorts to other kinds of artistry, such as performance. Numerous times in the text, Nelly references Catherine’s illness as a performative action: “I should not have spoken so, if I

¹³ For a further discussion of the “communication circuit” of a text see Robert Darnton’s “What Is the History of Books?” (originally published in 1982) in *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (1989).

had known her true condition, but I could not get rid of the notion that she acted a part of her disorder” (110).¹⁴ Catherine’s other creative act during this period of wifedom, one deemed acceptable by nineteenth-century society, is the birth of her daughter, Cathy Linton (later Cathy Heathcliff).

Despite its lack of an audience, Catherine’s early marginal writing is still an extremely powerful and subversive act. In many ways, it echoes the dilemma of nineteenth-century women writers such as Brontë herself, who struggled to decide whether they should make their subjective impressions public—writers who engaged in subversive narrative acts, but who were unsure as to how or even whether the literary marketplace and the masculine literary establishment would publish, read, and interpret their works. Brontë, who published under a pseudonym, must have, at least on some level, wanted her public and professional writings dissociated from her private self. Catherine Earnshaw thus embodies the dilemma of the nineteenth-century middle-class British woman writer, unsure whether she should combat marginalization or embrace it for its subversive potentialities. Furthermore, through her creations of Catherine and Cathy, Brontë reveals her anxiety about writing, including her own use of the Gothic genre, as a suitable aesthetic mode for women.

Maggie Berg argues for similarities between the mother’s and daughter’s modes of creation in *Wuthering Heights*, and their potentialities for symbolic self-expression: “Catherine’s diary creates a feminine space, visually and intellectually, in a masculine domain. Cathy’s version of this subversive activity is to make a different space [...] Cathy creates a flower garden” (107). Berg suggests that both Catherine’s diary and

¹⁴ For a further discussion of performance and the Female Gothic, including a chapter on *Wuthering Heights*, see Diane Long Hoeveler’s *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (1998).

Cathy's garden endangers masculine control. Rather than view Cathy's garden as her most marginalized creative activity, I posit Cathy's letters as her version of a subversive artistic act. Cathy does not create her garden without the assistance of Hareton, whereas Catherine's writing in her books is a solitary activity and one that she both initiates and carries out on her own. In the creation of the garden, the focus shifts from individual artistic agency to communal creative effort. Unlike the creation of the garden, which is a domestic and social form of art practice, Cathy's letter-writing is a hidden, marginal, and subversive activity, and so better mirrors Catherine's marginalia. Yet while Catherine's diary does not have an audience until after her death, Cathy's letters reveal the dangers of having an audience, especially a masculine audience, reading the woman artist's subjective expressions.

Cathy enjoys her letter-writing, sharing her private thoughts with another, and it is through these written revelations of subjectivity that she puts herself in a dangerous position. She takes great pride in and derives excitement from her epistolary exchange with Linton. Unlike Linton, who says, "'You should have come, instead of writing. It tired me dreadfully, writing those long letters. I'd far rather have talked to you'" (218), Cathy feels comfortable using writing to advance her courtship with Linton, and it is through the exchange of letters that she grows to love Linton (209). Writing, exchange, and secrecy only seem to increase her romantic ardor. Like her mother, she keeps her writing hidden:

Weeks passed on, and Cathy recovered her tempter; though she grew wondrous fond of stealing off to corners by herself; and often, if I came near her suddenly while reading, she would start and bend over the book, evidently desirous to hide it; and I detected edges of loose paper sticking out beyond the leaves. (207)

Cathy knows that writing to Linton goes against her father's commands to distance herself from the members of the Wuthering Heights household, and so she "guiltily" slips out of Nelly's sight and begs Nelly not to tell her father (206). In addition to not wanting to receive punishment for her actions, Cathy does not wish her private thoughts to be exposed to an outsider.

Cathy recognizes her vulnerability in sharing her intimate thoughts and feelings with others, when Nelly finds her letters and threatens to burn them:

'what a] bundle of trash you study in your leisure hours, to be sure: why it's good enough to be printed! And what do you suppose the master will think, when I display it before him?' [...] She sprang at her precious epistles, but I held them above my head; and then she poured out further frantic entreaties that I would not burn them—do anything rather than show them. (208-209)

This scene suggests multiple interpretations that highlight the problems of writing and audience reception. For example, although Cathy may highly value her letters and the subjective experience they contain, Nelly views them as "trash." Here, Brontë illuminates how the woman writer's audience—even an audience composed of other women—may neither accurately read nor appreciate her artistic creation. In addition, the scene may suggest that Nelly burns the letters not because they are "trash" without any merit, but rather because she realizes the subversive power of Cathy's letters and feels that Cathy's articulation of subjective experience and female desire will only endanger the writer. Through this unhappy interaction with Nelly, Cathy learns the dangers of exposing her writing to a hostile audience—one that either devalues its content or views it as so explosive that it must be destroyed.

Unfortunately, the reader does not get to see Cathy's letters; Nelly is the only mediator who offers a glimpse of their contents and quality: "[I] perused Miss Cathy's affectionate composition. It was more simple and more eloquent than her cousin's: very

pretty and very silly” (208). As the above scene suggests, readers may have cause to distrust Nelly’s account of the letters—perhaps Nelly controls the release of reliable information regarding the letter’s merits, much as she manipulates other events in the story. Readers do, however, receive more information regarding the nature of Linton’s letters:

Though I could not but suspect, I was still surprised to discover that they were a mass of correspondence---daily, almost, it must have been—from Linton Heathcliff: answers to documents forwarded by her. The earlier dated were embarrassed and short; gradually, however, they expanded into copious love letters, foolish as the age of the writer rendered natural, yet with touches here and there, which I thought were borrowed from a more experienced source. Some of them struck me as singularly odd compounds of ardour and flatness; commencing in a strong feeling, and concluding in the affected, wordy way that a schoolboy might use to a fancied, incorporeal sweetheart. Whether they satisfied Cathy, I don’t know; but they seemed very worthless trash to me. (207)

The long quotation serves to suggest that it is Heathcliff, rather than Linton, who authors “Linton’s” letters. Or, at the very least, readers may assume that Heathcliff edits them, adding those portions which seem “borrowed from a more experienced source” (207). Heathcliff’s manipulation of Linton’s love letters illuminates his dangerous authorship of the romance plot between Cathy and Linton, by intercepting and revising the written word. Through narrative acts, Heathcliff attempts to assert patriarchal domination and control. Masculine authority controls printed books and libraries, as Catherine’s situation demonstrates, but also the daily written communications between the genders.

Thus, Cathy’s letters prove problematic for while they bespeak genuine if naïve, sentiment on Cathy’s part, at the same time they are part of an elaborate, sinister ruse meant to ensnare her. When Cathy attempts to authorize a self, she faces sinister manipulation through the competing masculine narrative acts of Heathcliff. Not only does Heathcliff help to author Linton’s letters, he also threatens to use her own writings as

leverage against her, to ensure that she marries his son. Heathcliff says, “ ‘Two or three months since, were you not in the habit of writing to Linton? making love in play, eh? You deserved, both of you, flogging for that! You especially, the elder, and less sensitive, as it turn out. I’ve got your letters, and if you give me any pertness I’ll send them to your father” (214). Cathy does not realize that, even as she writes her epistles of articulating genuine emotion, Heathcliff’s patriarchal control dictates the larger framework in which she does so. Her letters, and the feelings they contain, betray her, as they are used as leverage to blackmail Cathy into marrying Linton. Consequently, Cathy learns that for a woman to share her feelings through writing can be perilous; she cannot control how they will circulate or the larger circumstances in which they do so. Although she uses letter writing as a means to claim a voice and to express an autonomous desire, in opposition to patriarchal demands, masculine authority overrules her efforts.

On the other hand, Isabella, another female letter writer in the text, wants her letters to find an audience, despite their subversive content. Her letter to Nelly acts as a cry for help, and it speaks of the torture of the abused woman. Knowing any pleas to her brother will fall on deaf ears, she writes to Nelly, “Still, I must write to somebody, and the only choice left me is you” (124). Isabella knows that Nelly does not wield the same power and authority as her brother, yet she still writes to her, hoping to gain sympathy, to effect change in her situation, and to have her voice heard. Patriarchal authority fails Isabella, as we see in Heathcliff’s cruel treatment of her within the confines of marriage and in Edgar’s indifference to the plight of his disobedient sister and his failure to aid her, despite the abuse she suffers.

Significantly, Isabella shares her story with another woman, Nelly, who engages in narrative artistry as a means of asserting control. Each of these creative acts by women is intimately connected—one leads to another. When Nelly comes to the

Heights after receiving Isabella's letter, Isabella cries to Heathcliff, " 'If poor Catherine had trusted you, and assumed the ridiculous, contemptible, degrading title of Mrs. Heathcliff, she would soon have presented a similar picture! *She* wouldn't have borne your abominable behavior quietly: her detestation and disgust must have found voice'" (166). Like Catherine, Isabella challenges gender inequalities through narrative acts, by breaking through and claiming a subjective voice. Her letter illuminates the problems of patriarchal control and violence—problems that she may not be able to articulate inside the home. In her epistle to Nelly, her detestation and disgust find voice. Her weapon of resistance to Heathcliff's abuse is the written word. For instance, when Hindley shows her his pistol with a knife attached, a weapon he has often fantasized about using to kill Heathcliff, Isabella says, " 'I surveyed the weapon inquisitively; a hideous notion struck me: how powerful I should be possessing such an instrument! I took it from his hand and touched the blade' " (128-129). Isabella ultimately chooses the "might" of the pen rather than that of the sword. She uses her letter writing as a means to combat her oppression, rather than re-enact the violence and abuse inherent in the forms of combat favored by the men around her.

Sadly, though, while Isabella does try to claim a voice that opposes patriarchal demands, she also silences her own voice: "I do hate him—I am wretched—I have been a fool! Beware of uttering one breath of this to any one at the Grange. I shall expect you every day—don't disappoint me!" (133). She simultaneously seeks and refuses aid, much as Catherine and Cathy desire a productive balance between finding audience and remaining marginalized. By writing letters, a bold and subversive act, Isabella tries to speak out against the men who control her (particularly Heathcliff), but ultimately she realizes her powerlessness in changing her situation. If Catherine's story illustrates the dangers of not being able to express artistic vision, and Cathy's tale

expresses anxiety over sharing subjective experience, Isabella's story suggests that even when one has a receptive audience as she has with Nelly, this exchange may not engender the social change for which the woman writer hopes. In this Gothic milieu, the woman artist, though powerful, has limits.

While Isabella fails to alter her situation through narrative acts, Nelly breaks through masculine authority by crafting an oral narrative and embellishing events that took place in the past—events over which, arguably, she has had little control. Her attempts to adjust her discourse to the contours of masculine narrative stem from her efforts to authorize a tale, to give it shape, to determine its meanings, and to interpret it on her own terms for a male audience. Nelly crafts the narrative in multiple ways—both in telling her story to Lockwood and then in manipulating the content of the narrative as she experiences various situations. As readers of the novel, we see both narratives and observe that, instead of hiding her manipulations from us, Nelly remains aware of herself as a creator of narrative and draws attention to her narrative control by telling us how she has altered events. In essence, she tells two stories—one to Lockwood and one to the characters of the novel as events happen. In her moments embellishment, when readers see that Nelly controls the release of information, Nelly breaks through—authorizing a tale, changing the circumstances surrounding her for her own benefit, and gaining an audience.

Some critics argue that while Nelly's storytelling transmits knowledge to Lockwood, her storytelling is also more conservative, and less rebellious, than Catherine's. James Hafley goes so far as to say that Nelly is the villain of the text, whose control over the story illustrates a dangerous control over the character's lives. In a more tempered reading, N.M. Jacobs posits,

we approach a horrific private reality only after passing through and then discarding the perceptual structures of a narrator—significantly, a male narrator—who represents the public world that makes possible and tacitly approves the excesses behind the closed doors of these pre-Victorian homes. This structure, appropriated and modified from the familiar Gothic frame-tale, here serves several functions that are strongly gender-related: it exemplifies a process, necessary for both writer and reader, of passing through or going behind the official version of reality in order to approach a truth that the culture prefers to deny; it exemplifies the ways in which domestic reality is obscured by layers of conventional ideology; and it replicates the cultural split between male and female spheres that is shown to be at least one source of the tragedy at the centre of the fictional world. (74-75)¹⁵

Ultimately, he argues that despite Nelly's white lies, manipulations, and mistakes, she remains unsuccessful in changing her world. Similarly, Leilani Riehle suggests that Nelly continues as the tool of patriarchy, using her powers in the service of prescriptive behaviors. She narrates in order to turn the socially deviant into the explicable, the normal, the expected, and the ordinary (107). Both Jacobs's and Riehle's statements raise the following problems—if Nelly is a good storyteller, and she seems to be, then readers may not be fully aware of all her manipulations or of the extent to which she has changed or altered her world in its telling. Furthermore, in a text that denies the explicable, normal, expected and ordinary, it seems inaccurate to label Nelly as its sole arbiter. Regardless, many critics conclude that her story, much like Catherine Earnshaw's, is one of impotence and self-suppression.

Instead, I posit that Nelly's storytelling is an important, subversive narrative act—one that not only allows her expression, but also enables her to influence the course

¹⁵ Here Jacobs refers to the Gothic tradition of the frame tale. In addition, I posit that Nelly performs the Gothic role of the "garrulous servant." The garrulous servant is a tradition of Gothic literature; for example in the novels of Ann Radcliffe, the protagonists are often observed, unknowingly, by a servant who then "gossips," or tells stories about the protagonists' experiences to other characters.

of events around her and to exercise power and control, despite her inferior class and gendered position. Oddly, though Nelly is a servant, she has no dialect. Brontë goes to great lengths to portray Joseph's heavy Yorkshire dialect, but Nelly speaks like her cousins, Catherine and Hindley. She knows how to read, most likely learning basic reading skills and then having the good fortune to have access to a small library where she could improve her skills: " 'I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood. You could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into' " (56). By not giving Nelly a dialect, Brontë aligns her more closely with the other female storytellers of the novel in terms of class and sophistication. Readers are cued to respond to Nelly as someone whose intelligence and education position her above her class; although she has the potential to achieve "better things," her ambiguous position limits her possibilities and restricts the amount of control she has in shaping and determining her own life's course. Nelly uses narrative acts to regain some of the control that society her social role has denied her.

Thus, Nelly is an ambiguous figure, neither solely a family member nor solely a servant. Even as a young girl she is aware of the tenuous position she occupies. When Hindley assaults Heathcliff, she says, "I persuaded him easily to let me lay the blame of his bruises on the horse: he minded little what tale was told since he had what he wanted" (35). Already, readers see young Nelly crafting tales that alter the actual series of events, ones that help to protect her, and other subordinate individuals. She knows that if Heathcliff speaks out against Hindley he will be punished. Here Nelly does not protect the status quo, so much as she protects someone in her own vulnerable position. As she proves aware of her tenuous situation, she continues to identify with Heathcliff and treats him kindly. Quite compellingly, she says that if she were in Heathcliff's place—if she were not only marginalized, but if her origins were unknown—

she would“ “frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!”” (51). In Nelly’s capable hands, Heathcliff’s life is transformed through her ability to shape a story, to rewrite the narratives of birth and class that negatively frame Heathcliff’s experiences throughout the novel. And, by extension, readers may suppose that Nelly uses this philosophy in her own life, that when she engages in narrative acts, she does so to imagine herself and the world around her as different. Through her oral storytelling, she attempts to exert control of forces over which she has no other influence. Brontë uses Nelly, a servant who speaks out and embraces narrative authority, to endorse women’s potential in literature and in the world beyond. If a woman in Nelly’s lowly circumstance can exert such power, then presumably anyone can.

Nelly is the consummate storyteller; she tells Lockwood, “with your leave, I’ll proceed in my own fashion, if you think it will amuse you and not weary you” (83). Although Lockwood initially may view her as merely a source of entertainment, she says that she will tell the story in her “own fashion”; with this declaration, Nelly assumes artistic control over her narrative. Nelly’s inner frame serves as the core of the novel, offering a woman’s perspective that is supported by Lockwood’s perspective. Her perception of experience defines the novel. In repeating the story, Lockwood eventually assumes control over Nelly’s narrative: “I have now heard all my neighbour’s history, at different sittings, as the housekeeper could spare time from more important occupations. She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator, and I don’t think I could improve her style” (142). While one may read this appropriation as completely subsuming Nelly’s narrative voice, I would interpret this exchange instead as modeling how the audience is meant to respond to the voice of the female artist—i.e., by listening receptively, understanding, and circulating it. By educating Lockwood through her story, Nelly helps to spread her

subjective vision, her ideology, of female artistic potential. Likewise, as Brontë filters her novel's story through the perceptive and intelligent narration of Nelly, she educates readers about the unrecognized abilities of female storytellers, while diminishing the narrative authority of male speakers, specifically, as she contrasts Nelly's perceptiveness with Lockwood's dimness and stupidity. Similarly, the Female Gothic has often been perceived as a genre that a masculine readership might look upon merely as a source of entertainment, but that the Gothic narrative that Nelly offers proves to be much more than that.

Not only does Nelly control the narrative by relating the story to Lockwood, but she also re-creates and re-authors events as they happen. When Catherine comes into the kitchen to tell Nelly she has decided to marry Edgar, Nelly misleads Catherine and hides from her the fact that Heathcliff is within earshot, “ ‘Where's Heathcliff?’ she said, interrupting me. ‘About his work in the stable,’ was my answer. He did not contradict me; perhaps he had fallen into a doze” (69). Through Nelly's manipulation of events, Heathcliff is able to hear Catherine's declaration—her claim that it would degrade her to marry him. When Catherine seeks Heathcliff, after her momentous proclamation that, “*I am Heathcliff*” (74), Nelly then informs Catherine, “I whispered to Catherine that he had heard a good part of what she said, I was sure; and told how I saw him quiet the kitchen just as she complained of her brother's conduct regarding him” (75). While Catherine does not know that Nelly was aware of Heathcliff's presence all along, the reader does and thus sees Nelly controlling the narrative, even as it happens, altering what she presents to different characters at different times. She attempts to rewrite the story by inserting Heathcliff into a situation where he does not “belong” and alerting him to Catherine's plans to marry Edgar. From her socially marginal vantage point, Nelly cannot actually decide whom Catherine will marry, but through her oral storytelling and

manipulation of circumstance, she can help to guide the story and its outcomes. Through narrative acts, Nelly's seeming powerlessness becomes quite powerful.

Similarly, Nelly alters the information she tells Edgar when Catherine is ill. She does not reveal to him the full extent of Catherine's illness and, during the telling, she emphasizes Catherine's tendency to exaggerate and perform her fits of frenzy (108-109). Although Catherine has informed Nelly of her plan to starve herself and to make both Edgar and Heathcliff miserable by her illness, Nelly chooses to keep this plan secret so as not to "frighten" Edgar, as Catherine wishes. Nelly withholds information, despite feeling that the intelligence she has received from Catherine is delivered in "perfect sincerity" (107-108). Once again, as Nelly relates important events to the protagonists as they are occurring, she tells only a partial tale. When she does inform Linton of Catherine's decline, Linton pounces on her for not letting him know sooner. Nelly replies, " 'I didn't know that you wished to foster her fierce temper! I didn't know that, to humour her, I should wink at Mr. Heathcliff. I performed the duty of a faithful servant in telling you, and I have got a faithful servant's wages! Well, it will teach me to be careful next time. Next time you may gather intelligence for yourself!' " (118). Nelly acknowledges her tenuous position in the household as both confidante and informer; she has sensitive information from Catherine, and so she must decide when and whether to share it. At the same time, she realizes that, despite knowing this powerful information, she still has little control over whether she might be dismissed by her employers. Nelly's situation embodies the paradox of the woman writer, who is at once armed with important knowledge and subject to the whims of her audience. In particular, she articulates the experience of the woman who writes Gothic stories, one had little control over how her text will be received.

In one instance, Nelly seems to express her subjective views without an eye to profitable manipulation. Catherine's reaction to such openness once again reveals the fragile nature of Nelly's position. When Nelly sees Heathcliff using Isabella for his own nefarious purposes, she denounces him to Catherine, calling Heathcliff "worthless" and a "rascal" (101). But Catherine is not interested in Nelly's opinion: " 'To hear you, people might think you were the mistress [...] You want setting down in your right place!'" (102). Nelly attempts to "[give] some loose" to her indignation, but Catherine "angrily insist[s] on silence" and threatens Nelly, ordering her and her "insolent tongue" out of the kitchen (102). Thus, Nelly realizes that her personal feelings are not of interest to her employers so she codes them, revealing certain pieces of information and not others.

Ambiguity in the Gothic typically serves as a source of fear of terror because unstable boundaries may lead to exploitation, violence, or power imbalances in relationships. Hence, as someone in an ambiguous class position, Nelly's private thoughts and feelings must be given voice through the way she *constructs* her tale, rather than in tempestuous, impulsive angry declarations. In the way she twists the story, then, can she let her real feelings be known. Consequently, she goes to Edgar to relate the scene between Heathcliff and Isabella and in the process potentially indicts Catherine, the woman who has disrespected her feelings and viewpoint. Nelly claims, "I fancied it could not be very prejudicial to Mrs. Linton; unless she made it so afterwards, by assuming the defensive for her guest (104). Thus, Nelly manages to achieve her own way[unidiomatic; either "achieve her own ends" or "get her own way"], by merely relating a story, a scene, she has observed to Edgar, rather than by airing her views to Cathy. Ultimately, she effects more change by telling a story and manipulating events than by openly expressing her own opinion on Heathcliff and Isabella's relationship.

Thus, Nelly authorizes a story, manipulates events around her, and gains a receptive audience in both Lockwood and in the novel's other characters, who rely on her version of events as the narrative progresses. She uses her oral storytelling to assert control over events and to protect herself from the dangers inherent in her ambiguous class and gendered position. She, like Brontë, creates a narrative and shares it with an audience; some characters and readers understand the narrative, some misinterpret it, but all are caught up in these women writers' subjective experience. And in both cases, the storytellers' absorption in their stories works to illuminate their subversive viewpoints and foster their ideologies. Nelly shows the power of the Gothic female narrative artist whose creative expressions allow her to do more than merely relate her world or let it control her; instead Nelly alters and transforms her world, through narrative, even in situations where she has little social power. Despite the anxieties afflicting the woman writer shown in the characters of Catherine, Cathy, and Isabella such as problems of audience, reception, and engendering subjectivity through the written word, Nelly suggests that female narrative acts can be powerful and subversive, and that finding a voice is the first step in negotiating and alleviating those societal and private fears of female artistic creation. Brontë demonstrates the power of the Gothic woman writer through her re-imagining of the female artist-figure, Nelly.

In 1847, the same year that Emily released *Wuthering Heights*, her sister Charlotte published *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte's novel also tells the story of female artistic development. Throughout the novel, Jane is a narrative and visual artist. She uses the artistic talents already displayed in the course of the novel, along with the materials of Victorian domesticity, to make a personal narrative, a work of living art, as she (re)imagines life and landscape for the blinded Rochester at Ferndean. Jane succeeds in being both "domestic" and an "artist." And she is forced by circumstances to become the

storytelling artist that she wants to be, the one who will also go on to write her own narrative as *Jane Eyre*. On the other hand, Emily offers a more anxious depiction of the potential for women artists in the nineteenth century.

In *Wuthering Heights*, women do gain control through defiant, subversive narrative acts. They succeed in rewriting male texts and male authority by authorizing a voice through diaries, letters, and oral storytelling. At the same time, Brontë reveals in her self-referential and socially symbolic heroines her own culturally generated fears of sharing subjective, imaginative experience with a potentially hostile audience. During this cultural moment, Emily Brontë posits that female creators of narrative art have a marginal and contested place in nineteenth-century society. The female artist who most successfully breaks through patriarchal control with her narrative acts is an oral storyteller, rather than a writer. By using Gothic discourse, Brontë joins the voices of female writers articulating the fears and anxieties surrounding the female artist-figure in the nineteenth century. Her heroines offer a similar assortment of female voices, engaged in narrative acts, putting into words the problem of the woman storyteller and writer. In a world where “Emily” was forced to become “Ellis,” she has reason to doubt the ability of the Gothic female storyteller to be understood and accepted on her own terms.

Home, Hearth, and Horror: Elizabeth Gaskell’s Ghost Stories and the Subversion of Gender

Whereas Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* has cemented her status as a foundational figure in the development of the Female Gothic genre, Elizabeth Gaskell remains best known for her social problem novels, *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854). Although her industrial fiction has provided her with the most notoriety, Gaskell also had a successful career writing Gothic short stories, especially ghost stories,

contributing a majority of them to Charles Dickens's magazine *Household Words*.¹⁶

Miriam Allott has noted some similarities between the Gothic fiction of Brontë and Gaskell, writing in *Notes and Queries* that

The most immediately noticeable resemblance [in "The Old Nurses's Story"] to *Wuthering Heights* lies in the figure of the phantom child, exiled, wounded, and crying to be 'let in' [...] From this recurring group of elements in *Wuthering Heights*—fir-tree and tapping branch, ice-cold wind, sensations of pain, feelings of exile, savagery, and awe—Mrs. Gaskell's imagination makes its own selection. (102).

Here Allott cites some interesting surface connections between the two writers' Gothic works; however, I would extend Allott's claims to suggest that the resemblances between Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Gaskell's short fiction are much more than incidental atmospheric (Gothic) tropes. Instead, both women use the genre in order to participate in the nineteenth-century tradition of re-imagining female artists in women's Gothic. They express, through their Gothic fiction, a mutual concern with the role of female authorship and narrative authority. And more specifically, much like Brontë in *Wuthering Heights*, Gaskell, too, uses the figure of the female storyteller to upend notions of class and gender authority.

While Brontë has long been embraced as a feminist role model who encouraged the subversion of gender roles and strictures in *Wuthering Heights*, Gaskell has proven to be more a more difficult figure for critics who wish to locate her on a feminist continuum. Although scholars often viewed Gaskell as a traditionalist in form and a conservative in ideology, J. R. Watson and Maureen Reddy have begun to challenge the assumption that Gaskell's fiction promoted and upheld religion and domestic values as a simple mirror of her experience as the wife of a Unitarian minister

¹⁶ Much like Brontë, Gaskell published her Gothic fiction anonymously (Kranzler xii).

and mother to five children. In fact, scholars such as Laura Kranzler have suggested that the repetition of doubled female characters in Gaskell's Gothic fiction may illuminate the author's own feelings of a split, or fractured identity, as she negotiated the competing demands of writing and care-giving. However, her work is not merely self-reflexive, as it speaks to the complex historical and social realities.

Gaskell herself wrote in an 1850 letter to Eliza Fox that “ ‘*Women*, must give up living an artist's life, if home duties are to be paramount’ ” [italics in original]. She then goes on to stress emphasize in the same letter the need for a “refuge of the hidden world of Art,” in which women can “shelter themselves[....] when too much pressed upon by daily small Lilliputian arrows of piddling cares” (qtd. in Kranzler xiii). Kranzler writes,

There is a melancholic realization here, it seems, in Gaskell's recognition of the near-impossibility of compromise between women's responsibilities to others and to themselves and their talents; whereas men, according to Gaskell, are virtually interchangeable in the world of work, and therefore can step out of it at will to pursue their own interests, women, it seems, are inevitably bound to their domestic and social obligations. How, then, can a woman reconcile these with the necessity that she find time to write, though this writing must still be in the ‘service of others’? (xiii)

I suggest that Gaskell's Gothic fiction serves as a compromise among these competing impulses; she honored domestic and social obligations in her personal life, she exposed and protested patriarchal control in her professional endeavors. By using her female storytellers to speak out against masculine strictures, in fact, Gaskell *did* write in the “service of others,” providing her society with important feminist messages that revealed the disadvantaged and disenfranchised state of her female contemporaries.

According to Laura Kranzler, art became a refuge for Gaskell, one in which she could both preserve and prioritize the domestic arena and illuminate it as a place

where women are at their most vulnerable (xiii-xiv). Kranzler continues, “Her stories could thus be seen to explore the Gothic underside of female identity, domestic relations and the authority of the spoken and written word” (xxviii). The figures in Gaskell’s stories echo her own position as author. Her women protagonists are engaged, through their fiction, in truth-telling, attempting to create a community of service to others, with feminist goals. Just as the female protagonists of *Wuthering Heights*, especially Nelly Dean, act as a mouthpiece for Brontë’s own comments on female artistry, Gaskell’s heroines help her to articulate difficult truths and anxieties about women’s ability to resist patriarchal control.

The Victorian Ghost Story and Feminist Narrative Strategies

Scholars have often commented on the deployment of various feminist narrative strategies in Gaskell’s fiction. In *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (1996), Vanessa Dickerson examines Gaskell’s stories as “further evidence of Victorian women’s use of the supernatural to express and explore the social and cultural but especially the spiritual anxiety of the Victorian woman” (110). She writes,

The short ghost story was a form in which women more easily and readily indulged, no doubt because during the Victorian period the form was still strongly associated with the less threatening unprofessionalized storytelling, which, with its roots in the folk, had like ‘all folk arts’ grown out of the primal urge to give tongue to what has been seen, heard, experienced.’ The orality of folk and ghost stories made those tales a type of communal property not as valued by the literary establishment as were other written narratives. (111)

She suggests that, for Gaskell, the ghost story became a site through which the writer could articulate her views on womanhood—essentially, “there is not enough love [in the world], but especially where women are at odds. There can be no salvation, or affection,

or freedom where there is no sisterhood” (118). Gaskell’s tales underscore the “equivocal nature of women’s powers” (131). In addition to Gaskell’s use of the ghost story, Dickerson emphasizes the importance of orality in Gaskell’s fiction as a means of encouraging a feminine if not explicitly feminist) mode of truth-telling and communication. Like many of her contemporaries, including George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, Gaskell deployed orality in her written work in order to extend these female-centered authorial values into the nineteenth-century literary marketplace.

Alongside orality, another example of Gaskell’s feminist narrative technique, and accompanying social critique, comes through her deployment of the frame tale. As in *Wuthering Heights*, Gaskell makes frequent use of the frame tale as a narrative device. J. R. Watson writes,

frame draws attention to the storytelling itself, as any metafiction does, and ultimately to the linguistic basis of the literary fiction, and through that to Gaskell herself [...] to the prolific storyteller, but more importantly to the woman who was using every device at her command [...] to justify her position as a writer, and as a teller of truth through her fictions. (99)

Hence, the frames of Gaskell’s story draw attention to the writer, while simultaneously illuminating the other numerous female storytellers in her works. These female narrators not only re-imagine the artist figure internally, within the story, but they reassert and reassess Gaskell’s role as writer, outside of the narrative. In essence, these frames draw attention to the female characters’ own storytelling and role as writers, in order to justify Gaskell’s own position as a writer. As Gaskell, and her female storytellers, shape the Gothic tradition, they engage in a dual re-visioning of the genre, one that is self-referential and socially symbolic, here through the deployment of the frame tale and the treatment of the female artist. Laura Kranzler suggests that this use of multiple female narrators highlights the instability of narrative authority to suggest that a multiplicity of

female voices denies one source of origins (xxvii). Gaskell highlights the “uncontrollable power” of the word, both written and spoken.

One of the most compelling forms of feminist narrative strategy employed by Gaskell is identified by Maureen T. Reddy in “Gaskell’s ‘The Grey Woman’: A Feminist Palimpsest.” She argues that a story’s structure, as well as the process of narration, encourages the creation of feminist metaphorical texts that articulate women’s experience in marriage. Refuting scholars who have claimed that Gaskell’s short stories are confusing and poorly paced, Reddy reinterprets the introduction to Gaskell’s “The Grey Woman” through a feminist lens. Instead of suggesting that the introduction is “leisurely,” she asserts that it is a compression of the story’s main themes. Reddy writes,

First of all, this is a woman’s story: written by a woman, translated and introduced by two other women, told by a fourth woman, and addressed to a fifth woman [...] The female narrator of the introduction rescues Anna from the double enclosures of the portrait, the bureau drawer, and allows her to speak to a wide audience through the translation of her letter. This rescue is actually a joint enterprise: the narrator needs her friend to help with the translation. The sense of solidarity among women is underscored by the situation: the narrator and her friend in a woman’s private room, her ‘inner chamber,’ talking as the hostess carries out the traditionally feminine, domestic duty of knitting. (185-186)

Although Reddy persuasively concludes that “The Grey Woman” illustrates a community composed entirely of women, one that is their only hope to escape the destructive influences of patriarchal power (191), her analysis of narrative strategies and structures in Gaskell’s fiction does not go far enough. She neglects to link the technique found in “The Grey Woman” to the content and structure of Gaskell’s other works, and to other examples of contemporaneous Female Gothic fiction. Hence, Reddy fails to acknowledge Gaskell’s most feminist, albeit coded, statement about women’s artistry as a source of female empowerment—one that Gaskell makes through her continual reliance

on female narrators to establish plot, character, framing, and narrative structure. Moreover, Gaskell is not alone in this act of literary resistance to the masculine literary marketplace. By using the Gothic genre to write back against patriarchal demands Gaskell participates in larger feminist circles of female (Gothic) authorship, suggesting that Gaskell the writer *and* the characters in her fiction use storytelling and narrative artistry as a means of fighting back. By examining “The Old Nurse’s Story” and “The Poor Clare,” readers see how Gaskell’s fiction helped to create a “coded” feminist figure—the female artist heroine—in nineteenth-century women’s Gothic.

Orality, Education, and “The Old Nurse’s Story”

Gaskell’s “The Old Nurse’s Story” was first published in “A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire” in *Household Words*, for its “Extra Christmas Number”(December 1852). In the story, a nurse, Hester, is hired to take care of a young girl, Miss Rosamond, whose parents have died. Rosamond is taken to live in Westmoreland with an elderly female relation, Grace Furnival, in Northumberland. The story goes back in time, as the now elderly nurse relates a tale from “the days” when Rosamond, was young. In Hester’s story, Rosamond claims to see a child, standing outside the window, begging to come in from the cold. No one else can see the child, but the rest of the house does hear the sounds of a “ghostly” organ playing. Although no one can explain these mysterious, even supernatural interventions, the old nurse does reveal that when Grace Furnival was young, she lost her lover, a foreign music teacher, to her sister Maude. Maude was secretly married to the music teacher, who eventually deserted both her and their baby. Jealous, Grace betrayed Maude to her ruthless father, as an act of revenge. Maude and her child were cast out into the snow to die, after her father wreaked vengeance on the child with his crutch.

Hester, much like Nelly Dean, serves as a comfortable, prosaic, working-class figure who, as Laura Kranzler writes, is morally superior to the aristocratic men (xx). She demonstrates this superiority through her willingness to illuminate the injustices and errors of the family's past history through an oral narrative. Alysia Kolentsis writes,

This departure from the static lecture style of traditional narrative both involves the tradition of oral storytelling and points to a more egalitarian mode of communication, one which functions almost as a dialogue. Indeed, this type of personal conversation, relayed in a domestic setting, replicates a familiar and accessible type of communication for many women [...] Accordingly, the most crucial information in 'NS' is expressed through secretive, intra-female gossip. (69)

Even though the tale is called "The Old *Nurse's* Story," in reality, the story belongs to each one of the tellers, for it is a community of storytellers that relates the tale, rather than a single agent.

Hester's intra-female gossip is not the only narration in the story; there are multiple female storytellers in this tale, namely, Hester, Dorothy, and Agnes (though Rosamond, too, is accused of "telling stories").¹⁷ It is Dorothy, another servant, who first tells Hester the story about the Furnivalls: "She said she had heard the tale from old neighbours that were alive when she was first married; when folks used to come to the hall sometimes, before it had got such a bad name on the country side: it might not be true, or it might, what she had been told" (25). Through her use of multiple narrators, Gaskell suggests that these women have come to rely on an egalitarian mode of communication and on truth-telling as a means of fighting back against the powerful patriarchal decrees of the Furnivall household. The father's autocratic, domineering, and

¹⁷ Hester chastises Rosamond for telling stories about seeing the ghost child: " 'Now you are a naughty girl, and telling stories [...] What would your good mamma, that is in heaven, and never told a story in her life, say to her little Rosamond if she heard her—and I daresay she does—telling stories!' " (22).

abusive personality allows for no free and easy communication among the members of the household; in fact, his daughter's "disappearance" has been kept secret for many years. It is through intra-female gossip that important knowledge is passed—knowledge that illuminates the dangerous characters of the aristocrats, knowledge that may help to save Rosamond's life, which is endangered by the ghost child.

Not only is the mode of communication in these stories egalitarian, but the storytelling is used to upset various hierarchies. While trying to elicit information that will help to save the life of her ward, Hester says of Agnes,

I coaxed and asked her who it was that played the organ; for I knew that it was the organ and not the wind well enough, for all I had to keep silence before James. But Dorothy had her lesson, I'll warrant, and never a word could I get from her. So then I tried Agnes, though I had always held my head rather above her, as I was evened to James and Dorothy, and she was a little better than the servants. So she said I must never, never tell; and if I ever told, I was never to say *she* had told me; but it was a very strange noise, and she had heard it many a time, but most of all on winter nights. (18).

Much like Mr. Lockwood's reliance on Nelly Dean, Hester's decision to receive her information from Agnes, a mere servant, upsets class boundaries; it even disrupts those prejudices held by Hester herself. Through Agnes's tale, Hester learns of her master's and mistress's cruelty, and begins to see them as morally inferior, rather than superior, beings. Agnes's revelation exposes both Mr. Furnivall's and Grace's violent, abusive, and even criminal behaviors and prompts Hester's disdain. Hester no longer admires her "betters" in class (Grace) or gender (Mr. Furnivall). Thus, through Agnes's oral storytelling, and through her revelation about this amoral and corrupt family, she undermines outmoded inappropriate notions of respect for class and gender distinctions.

Of the story's conclusion, Alysia Kolenstis argues, "While there is no thematic redemption, the ultimate effect of the story is not entirely bleak; the agency

inherent in the nurse's recounting of the tale suggests that women must work to educate one another, and acknowledge the unspoken rules governing their lives. If partial redemption is possible, it is found by interrogating the dynamics of domestic power" (72). First, Dorothy and Agnes share the story with Hester; later, Hester recounts the tale to the next generation of children. Passing along this ghost story illuminates the dangers of hearth and home and serves as a form of female education, a "service" to others. Although "The Old Nurse's Story" does not eradicate nineteenth-century hierarchies of gender and class, it shows women's storytelling as a means of fighting back against these power imbalances. Female artistry serves as a powerful tool of resistance.

"The Poor Clare": The Thrill and Threat of Female Language

While the power of female articulation plays an important educative and socially rectifying role in "The Old Nurse's Story," "The Poor Clare" illuminates the possible threats of female language and voice.¹⁸ As Gaskell uses orality and female "gossip" in "The Old Nurse's Story" to upset class and gender authority, so she storytells to disrupt gender hierarchies and stereotypes in "The Poor Clare." According to Maureen Reddy in "Female Sexuality in 'The Poor Clare': The Demon in the House" (1984), Gaskell draws upon the stereotype of the "virgin-whore" dichotomy of female sexuality in order to articulate anxieties about the desiring female body in a "culture that enforces

¹⁸ As Laura Kranzler notes, in stories like "Lois the Witch" and "The Poor Clare": "Female language can endanger the very people it seeks to protect" (xxviii). For example, in "Lois the Witch," both Lois and the slave Nattee are cultural others to the town of Salem and both are storytellers. In each case, their imaginative and linguistic capacities mark them as "other" and dangerous and eventually lead to their being accused of witchcraft.

sexual repression” (259). Reddy identifies this trope as central to the Female Gothic genre.¹⁹

“The Poor Clare” “follows a complicated and rather confusing trajectory. The story is retold in 1747 by a man who identifies himself as elderly; however, the main action of the story is set during the period of 1700-1720. Bridget Fitzgerald and her daughter, Mary, are serving women to an aristocratic family at the ancestral home, Starkey-Manor House in Lancashire. Mary, a strikingly beautiful young woman, loves her mother dearly; however, she wishes to see more of the world and so goes abroad as a servant to a wealthy family. The family at Starkey-Manor dies and Bridget, unable to read or write, loses track of Mary, after hearing rumors that she has made a great marriage. Bridget is distraught, wondering what has happened to Mary, and she sets out to find her, with only Mary’s little dog as companion. Unsuccessful in her quest, Bridget returns to Lancashire, where she becomes increasingly witch-like. She is greatly feared by the locals, but their reasoning is sound: readers learn later that Bridge *has* dabbled in witchcraft.

A Mr. Gisborne arrives at Starkey-Manor House. He has been hunting and is angry because he has not shot anything all day. Unfortunately, Gisborne alleviates his anger by shooting Bridget’s beloved dog (which once belonged to Mary). Bridget, now totally alone in the world, curses Gisborne for his cruelty, telling him,

‘I’m alone in the world and helpless; the more do the saints in heaven hear my prayers [...] You shall live to see the creature you love best, and who alone loves you—ay, a human creature, but as innocent and fond as my poor, dead darling—you shall see this creature, for whom death would be

¹⁹ Female Gothic texts as diverse as Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* (1806), Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938) are commonly cited as deploying the Madonna/whore binary of female sexuality.

too happy, become a terror and a loathing to all, for this blood's sake.'
(59)

The narrative then shifts to the experience of the narrator, who at that time is a young lawyer searching for the heir of the Fitzgerald estate. Bridget's daughter, Mary, is the heir, so the narrator is led to Bridget, who he hopes can inform him of Mary's whereabouts. She cannot, but his visit gives her renewed hope. The narrator decides to take a holiday and meets a beautiful young girl, Lucy, who is staying with an older companion, Mrs. Clarke. The narrator falls in love with Lucy and wants to marry her. Although Lucy seems to return his affection, she mysteriously attempts to avoid him. Finally, the narrator is told that Lucy is cursed; she is haunted by a terrible double who looks much like Lucy, but is evil while she is good. Now, both threads of the narrative begin to intersect. The narrator becomes aware that Mary Fitzgerald eloped with Mr. Gisborne, who deceived her and made her so miserable that she died. Lucy, their eldest child and Bridget's grandchild, was cursed by her grandmother (when her grandfather shot her dog). When told of this connection, Bridget tries to lift the curse from Lucy, but cannot. To atone for her sins, she leaves and enters a convent. As a "Poor Clare," she takes the name Sister Magdalen and eventually dies of starvation after giving up her last morsel of food to her enemy, Gisborne, who has been wounded in a battle near the convent. Bridget's death removes curse from Lucy, or so readers may guess, and the story ends with Bridget's death.

Reddy tries to abbreviate the story even further by offering a telling: "As a young woman, Bridget was extraordinarily beautiful, in a 'wild and passionate' way. Her physical beauty led to marriage to 'one above her in rank' (333). For her beauty, which has an obvious erotic charge, Bridget is punished with an unhappy marriage, poverty, and later by her daughter's abandonment. Furthermore, her daughter dies; she

degenerates into a witch; she becomes a poor nun; and, eventually, she dies of starvation (261). Reddy continues, “In this story, female sexuality is completely demonic; Lucy’s sexual self comes to life because her grandmother calls up demons in a curse. And witchcraft, at least in this story, is a compact with the devil” (262).²⁰ Ultimately, for Reddy, “The Poor Clare” is a “terrifying and despairing tale about the position of women in society, a theme to which Gaskell returns again and again” (265).

While I agree with Reddy that the story presents some complicated and unsettling depictions of female sexuality, especially through its correlation to witchcraft and demons, these are not feminist narratives at all. On the other hand, I contend that problems of female authority and power are articulated in “The Poor Clare” through the issue of women’s relationship to language. In essence, “The Poor Clare” asks how women may be able to come into their own as full beings through the acquisition and deployment of language, voice, and storytelling. In particular, Bridget’s inability to communicate in written language, and her ability to control the spoken word, bring about the trouble of the curse. With the power of her words, she calls the curse into being. Although this may seem like a negative comment about women’s speech acts, on the other hand, Bridget’s story, and her decision to curse Gisborne, simultaneously expose patriarchal injustice and male cruelty. Much like Gaskell, who is writing the tale, Bridget uses language to expose inequality, even if such dangerous truth-telling is sometimes accompanied by a high price.

²⁰ Reddy writes, “Before Lucy can marry the narrator—a conventionally decent man who wants her angelic spirit, not her demonic sexuality—the demon must be exorcised. This exorcism can only be accomplished by her impassioned grandmother Bridget making herself into a nun (a ‘none’); doing penance in part for her exercise of power and in part for her sexual nature (why else take the name ‘Magdalen’?); and, finally, dying. Bridget dies, we might say, because all traces of female passion must be eradicated if Lucy is allowed to live in her society” (262).

When the original family living at Starkey-Manor House dies, Bridget loses all means of contact with Mary. Bridget has been reliant on the family to communicate for her, since she cannot write or read. This inability to give written expression to her own thoughts causes a significant disconnect from her daughter. Bridget only has an oral outlet for her expression: “Then came a long silence [...] [Bridget] could not write, and the Squire had managed her communication with her daughter” (56). Gaskell illuminates the precarious position of women, when they must have a man acting as an intermediary for their voices. Through Bridget’s illiteracy, Gaskell alludes to the dangers of a society in which women cannot hold the pen (a terrifying vision for a woman writer working in a hostile literary marketplace). In Bridget’s inability to write her desires, readers see the frustrated power of female articulation denied expression, and they witness the abusive power of the word when wielded exclusively by an amoral man. As such, Bridget’s plight mirrors that of the nineteenth-century female artist and writer of women’s Gothic fiction.

It is Bridget’s inability to read and write, yet her desire to remain connected to her daughter, that leads to her dabbling in witchcraft and to her using an exercise of her voice as a curse. Ultimately, Bridget’s speech carries great weight and power; her denied expression turns evil unbeknownst to her. For Bridget does not know the power of her own language, and she curses her granddaughter unawares: “The roots of the curse lie deeper than she knows: she unwittingly banned him for a deeper guilt than that killing of a dumb beast. The sins of the fathers are indeed visited upon the children” (82). Her words are unwittingly retributive, in so much as they pay Gisborne back for tricking and abandoning her daughter; however, they simultaneously damn the next generation.

A man’s resistance to serve as an adequate translator or audience for female speech and experience occurs in this next generation, when Lucy exposes the secret of

her evil *döppelgänger*. In spite of Mrs. Clarke's protests, Lucy tells her own story to the narrator. The narrator says,

All the time she had been speaking, I had been weighing her story in my mind. I had hitherto put cases of witchcraft on one side, as mere superstitions; and my uncle and I had had many arguments [...] yet this sounded like the tale of one bewitched; or was it merely the effect of a life of extreme seclusion telling on the nerves of a sensitive girl? (77-78).

The narrator hears Lucy's tale and doubts it. His masculine faith in rationality makes him unable to appreciate a woman's story, especially a fantastical Gothic tale such as this one. Here Gaskell illuminates a possible gendered divide for certain kinds of stories. Lucy's story is one of gendered horror and, as is also true of *Wuthering Heights*, Gaskell's story proves that even when women are able to tell their stories, they may not have a receptive or understanding audience. "The Poor Clare" does not conclude on a triumphant note. Bridget dies, and readers are unsure what will happen to Lucy and to the narrator after the curse is broken. Presumably, the narrator marries "poor Lucy" (49), despite his inability to understand fully, believe, and appreciate her experience. Thus, another woman is effectively silenced, even by "well-meaning" masculine control.

Both Emily Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell wrote Female Gothic narratives in the mid nineteenth-century that were socially conscious and feminist, articulating messages of female power and authority through the figure of the female artist as oral storyteller. These oral storytellers spoke directly to both authors' experience as women writers in a hostile mid nineteenth-century literary marketplace, and a society anxious about the power of middle-class women's language and about their entry into the professional sphere. *Wuthering Heights*, "The Old Nurse's Story," and "The Poor Clare" illustrate the ability of women writers and storytellers to use the written and spoken word as a form of resistance. However, Brontë and Gaskell's texts also illuminate a world in

which the “ghastly” female storytellers who articulate these tales may have been, for some readers, every bit as terrifying as the spine-tingling ghostly stories they shared.

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Chapter 4

SWAPPING SMOCKS FOR APRONS: WOMEN PAINTERS AND THE VISUALIZATION OF A DOMESTIC ARTISTRY IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE* AND DINAH CRAIK'S *OLIVE*

Three years after the publication of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Dinah Maria Mulock's *Olive* (1850) appeared in print. "Ms. Craik" as she was called after her 1865 marriage, may be little known today; yet she was one of the most popular and prolific mid-nineteenth-century women novelists, often compared to Brontë and George Eliot (Kaplan ix). Craik shrewdly followed her acclaimed first novel, *The Ogilvies* (1849), with a second novel, *Olive*, that featured a narrative with resemblances to *Jane Eyre* and that capitalized on *JE*'s success. In *Olive*, the eponymous heroine, Olive Rothesay, struggles to overcome her physical impairment, a curvature of the spine, and not only combats society's hostility toward deformity, but wins its affection. Eventually, she achieves a successful career as a painter and a happy and economically fortunate marriage to her suitor, Harold Gwynne. Despite selling well during Craik's lifetime (in both expensive and cheap editions), *Olive* declined in popularity and dropped out of the literary canon. Recently, however, scholars working in gender, race, and disability studies have rediscovered the novel and begun to read it as a revision of *Jane Eyre* with a heightened concern for these discourses.

The similarities in plot between *Jane Eyre* and *Olive* have been noted by scholars such as Sally Mitchell, Cora Kaplan, and Antonia Losano.¹ Comparing the two novels, Sally Mitchell writes,

The emotional power of *Olive* is the power of *Jane Eyre* twisted one degree higher. Jane Eyre is small and plain; Olive is small, plain, and deformed. Jane is rejected by her relatives; Olive is rejected by her father and mother. Jane loves unsought a man who has at least amorous potential; Olive's love is fixed on a man that she believes is incapable of loving a woman ever again. The book works on the reader's emotions because it gives voice to the universal feelings of rejection and difference, to the hurt of being left out, to everywoman's sense that her body is imperfect, to the buried infantile memories that make it impossible ever to be loved enough. (30-31)

Building on Mitchell, I contend that both novels articulate their stories of female difference and imperfection through Gothic narratives involving female visual and domestic artistry. Already, Antonia Losano has linked the two works through the figure of the female painter; her analysis, though, concentrates more on areas of dissimilarity than common ground: "But where Charlotte Brontë made painting a hobby (albeit a significant one) for her heroine, Craik puts the profession of painting center stage" (185). In contrast, I see *both* novels giving the role of painting center stage, as Jane and Olive negotiate the complex associations with and significance of the female visual artist for nineteenth-century audiences. Their status as artistic creators has a key relationship to the Gothic content of each novel. Jane's and Olive's assertive acts of artistry rewrite the "traditional" Female Gothic narrative of the passive heroine. Furthermore, I find their

¹ Losano claims, "Both novels feature a 'plain' heroine who must transform her physical imperfections into an asset; both heroines are forced to make a living without family support; in both novels an explosive rakish man (Rochester; Olive's father) introduces a considerably more explosive West Indian woman (Bertha; Celia Manners) into a supposedly sacrosanct English society; both novels contain a tightly wound icy minister (St. John; Harold Gwynne); and both novels are strongly concerned with the highly charged issues of female independence and racial otherness" (185).

narratives following similar trajectories, as both heroines eventually swap their painters' smocks for housewives' aprons, transitioning from a visual to a domestic artistry, while still retaining their identities as female artist-figures. Art plays a crucial role in both heroines' relationship to other female characters, in their respective novels, as well as in their courtship narratives.

According to Pamela Gerrish Nunn in *Victorian Women Artists* (1987), female visual artists (painters, sculptors, and designers) of the nineteenth century challenged "western beliefs about the nature and status of art.² At the same time, [they were] to challenge women's relationship to society and culture" (1-2). Women who pursued the arts, especially as paid professionals, questioned the "very bases of Victorian society" (Nunn 4). Some forms of women's art were encouraged as signs of female accomplishment—for example, copying from painting, sketching or playing the pianoforte. In *A Struggle for Fame: Victorian Women Artists and Authors* (1994)³ Susan Casteras and Linda H. Peterson claim,

Artistic creativity was not flatly denied about women, but rather redirected or rechanneled into forms of art that emphasized the separate spheres of the sexes—e.g., glorifying to women the innocent pleasures and entertainment value of drawing over the value of producing high art or pursuing a professional vocation. Art for ladies was meant to instill a knowledge of what was beautiful in the world, thereby inculcating a refinement of taste that enhanced social skills appropriate to the activities of the parlor but not the rigors of the art market. (10-11)

² Although Nunn's work focuses solely on visual artists, she acknowledges that many sorts of women in the arts—including female writers—came to the fore in the nineteenth century and encountered similar prejudices.

³ The title of Casteras and Peterson's work and the scope of their project is provocative, for it gestures toward the relationship between the art efforts in both visual media and narrative genres of Victorian women such as Brontë and Craik, though without fully exploring the connection.

However, when women attempted to engage in professional artistry, or demonstrated originality in skill, their art practices became very frightening to Victorian audiences. Dennis Denisoff asserts, “The predominant conviction that men were both naturally and culturally better suited than women to artistic professions led society to configure a woman who attempted to infiltrate the hegemony as a sexually deviant, masculine threat” (18-19). Denisoff’s reference to “artistic professions” indicates those artistic endeavors that placed women in the marketplace.

Artists, such as Brontë and Craik, struggling for acceptance and validation of their talent, experienced anxiety, as did a culture confronting a fearsome and terrifying “other” that had the potential to disrupt gender ideology and social hierarchy. Thus, as these nineteenth-century female authors commented on fictional women artists, they also spoke to their own situations as female authors in a hostile artistic environment and, by speaking through their characters, they linked many forms of female art practice in an interart, gendered discourse. *Jane Eyre* and *Olive* respond to, and question, the cultural anxiety surrounding the contested figure of the female artist by demonstrating that women skilled in the visual arts need not completely upset the foundations of Victorian society, particularly those gender hierarchies expressed through the doctrine of separate spheres.⁴ Of course, women were not barred completely from all aspects of art. Artistic

⁴ Despite their authors’ status as women writers, Brontë’s and Craik’s novels comment on the experience of women painters, suggesting the importance of female commonality and community in artistic experience. Women’s networks were especially crucial to women’s visual arts movements:

The campaigns for women’s education, employment, property rights, and women’s suffrage were promoted in the 1850s by the ‘Langham Place’ circle which included several women artists such as Barbara Bodichon. This group organised a petition in 1859 for the admission of women students to the Royal Academy Schools; it was signed by feminists and artists including Anna Jameson, Eliza Fox, Barbara Bodichon, Margaret Gillies and Emily Osborn. Out of this

“accomplishment,” or a lady’s having some limited skill in drawing or music, was desirable. However, professional aspirations for Victorian women artists were unacceptable and inappropriate. Thus, not all forms of art were incendiary for Victorian women, rather there were degrees of “monstrous” or offensive artistry—a proper Victorian woman should have some knowledge of miniature painting, but she should not aspire to exhibit or sell her own paintings.

The Victorian doctrine of separate spheres dictated that men engaged in the public world of work, commerce, and political life, while women kept within the private or domestic sphere of home and family. Clarissa Campbell Orr writes, “[Women’s] special feminine virtues of sympathy and moral insight would enable them to make the home into a sanctuary from the countervailing influences in the world of work, which would otherwise dehumanise the male head of the household” (3). Famously referred to as the “Angel of the House,” a term taken from Coventry Patmore’s 1854 poem of the same name which lauded his wife as the perfect Victorian model of piety, submission, and domesticity, this model positioned women as guardians of family morality. Consequently, the middle-class Victorian stay-at-home woman was not expected to be idle and self-indulgent; rather, she was responsible for early, home-based stages of the children’s education, and in “exercising a charitable, uplifting influence in the neighbourhood” (Orr 3). In “Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists” (1987) Deborah Cherry posits,

circle came the *English Woman’s Journal*, the Society for the Promotion of Employment of Women, the Victoria Printing Press, and the Society of Female Artists formed in 1856. The Society of Female Artists gave women artists a sense of identity and solidarity, its annual exhibitions provided exhibiting space and the possibility of sales. (Cherry “Painting Women” 8)

Feminist goals and female artistry aligned in order to create powerful organizations of women artists.

According to the middle-class ideology of separate spheres of women and men, femininity was defined as dependent, subordinate, respectable, and pure, protected in the 'private' sphere of the home. Patriarchal control of middle class women was therefore organised in the family, in the regulation of their labour, their identity, their sexuality [...] Femininity was structured around marriage, domestic and social duties, a life organised for men and children. It was in conflict with masculine definitions of the artist formed around independence, individual competition, and public visibility. (1)

Recent scholarship on the middle-class Victorian family, such as that undertaken by June Purvis⁵ and Amanda Vickery, has suggested that the doctrine of separate spheres may have been solely a class-based code of behavior, rather than a universal one. Yet as many working-class individuals aspired to emulate the conduct of the middle and upper classes, Vickery posits that the doctrine still had "some interpretive value" in the nineteenth century, though it may have been a "far less restrictive doctrine than historians have assumed" (qtd. in Orr 4). Nevertheless, historians and literary scholars may learn a great deal by examining how women "accepted, negotiated, contested, or simply ignored" advice on their proper behavior in the domestic and public spheres (Orr 4). *Jane Eyre* and *Olive* do not radically abandon the domestic sphere as a female domain; however, the texts do demonstrate a preoccupation with how to negotiate the differing expectations of the separate spheres of home and the artistic professions.

One way in which the texts suggest that women artists can manage the doctrine of separate spheres is through advocating for domestic artistry. As these are novels that seem to privilege the domestic sphere over that of the professional art world, at least for women, it is necessary to consider the presence of the domestic artist in Victorian women's fiction as a very important trope, although it is often ignored. Hence,

⁵ See Purvis's *Hard Lessons: The Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth-Century England*.

I take a revisionist approach to these texts by illustrating how and why, nonetheless, they also foreground women's creativity and creative expression through the presence of female domestic artist-figures. Professional opportunities for nineteenth-century women artists were limited; hence, one must consider women's self-identification as artists and their aesthetic inner lives as evidence of their identity as artist-figures, rather than public exhibitions of their work or records of their sales. In *Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience* (1989), Bettina Aptheker asks readers to expand their notions of female artistry and to take the everyday artistry of women seriously. She writes,

To map women's consciousness, to give examples of women's cultures, to look at women's poems, stories, paintings, gardens, and quilts *from this point of view* [emphasis in original] is to make women's actions and beliefs intelligible on their own terms. It is to show connections, to form patterns [...] It is to recognize women's strategies for coping, surviving, shaping, and changing the parameters of their existence on their own terms. (14)⁶

Aptheker posits that by examining the "dailiness" of women's lives, we can reclaim the work of female artists that has long been ignored or devalued. As Aptheker's title suggests, women's art arises from their ability to weave "tapestries of life"; any creative attempt, whether it be a piece of pottery or a well-decorated supper table, that represents women's knowledge or interpretation of her surroundings participates in this female artistry (15). Thus, while the nineteenth-century British middle-class often feared that

⁶ Aptheker argues that the artistry of women's lives has been "fragmented, uprooted, interrupted" (74) for a multitude of reasons, such as imbalances in gender relationships, racial hierarchies, and class status (60). Women's lives and their daily art have been devalued and/or ignored. Yet "Women's stories evoke distinct meanings, distinct special and temporal arrangements. They have been crafted in or out of the artifacts of daily life, beckoning us to see. These stories reveal that women have not been exclusively or primarily victims, crushed by circumstances, but survivors and creators, their artifacts of beauty arising as it were from nothing" (45).

with the artistic woman's potential for increased economic freedom (and concerns beyond the care of family), she would neglect or, worse yet, abandon her home, both Brontë and Craik offer readers female protagonists whose art *restores* rather than destroys the home. In fact, women's artistic endeavors, even professional ones, recuperate a domestic sphere that has been corrupted by misogynistic and racist Victorian beliefs and practices.⁷

The Horror of the Female Artist-Figure: Jane Eyre and Olive as Female Gothic

Elizabeth MacAndrew, Julia Kristeva, and Eugenia deLamotte suggest that a significant source of Gothic terror is anxiety over boundaries. DeLamotte posits that Gothic "has its primary source in an anxiety about boundaries and that Gothic romance offers a symbolic language congenial to the expression of psychological, epistemological, religious, and social anxieties that resolve themselves most fundamentally into a concern about the boundaries of the self" (13-14). By considering the Gothic's emphasis on fear, terror, and the transgression of boundaries, we can see, historically situated, the cultural anxieties expressed in these texts through the figure of the female artist who contested gender hierarchies.

Although no scholarly attention has been paid to the Gothic narrative of female artistry in *Jane Eyre* and *Olive*, both works have been placed in the Gothic and/or Female Gothic traditions. Though Ellen Moers does not consider *Jane Eyre* in her inaugural discussion of the Female Gothic in *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (1977),

⁷ With the growing tide of industry and factory work, scholars such as John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle grew concerned about the possible demise of hand-made work and artwork which was perceived to be vanishing amidst the mass-produced, uniform, and soul-less output from the factories. Non-professional artistry, which bore the individual stamp of hand-work rather than mass produced objects created by machines, was highly valued.

the novel has been identified since as the Female Gothic “ur-text.” Discussions of *Jane Eyre* appear in a host of pivotal studies of the genre, including *The Female Gothic* (1982), *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (1990), *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* (1992), *Gothic (Re)Visions: Writing Women as Readers* (1993), and *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (1998). According to Diane Long Hoeveler, “*Jane Eyre* has become the canonical Female Gothic text, reproduced over and over again in films, an archetypal dream of the little woman finding love and a home with a fatherly beast, ritualistically tamed and shorn of his aristocratic lust and pride” (203).⁸ Even though scholars often identify *Jane Eyre* with the advent of psychological realism, the novel has numerous Gothic episodes including the isolation, alienation, and entrapment present in the Red Room incident; the supernatural quality of Edward Rochester’s call across the moors, which Jane inexplicably hears; and the secret of the “madwoman in the attic,” Rochester’s first wife Bertha Mason, and her ambiguous racial heritage.⁹

While *Olive* has received no critical attention for its Female Gothic content, it has been identified, albeit briefly, with the Gothic tradition. Dennis Denisoff argues, “In

⁸ Hoeveler contends that “the canonical status of *Jane Eyre* as the paradigmatic ‘woman’s text’ was insured and institutionalized when it was reprinted in full—the the consternation of many critics—in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds. (New York: Norton, 1985)” (203, fn 14).

⁹ Scholars also suggest that *Jane Eyre* participates in the melodramatic and sensational genres. While these traditions share many similarities, it is important to note their significant differences. Nineteenth-century Gothic looks back to the works of writers such as Ann Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis; the texts rely on a Gothic fear or terror originating in some kind of supernatural source. On the other hand, sensation fiction more closely aligns itself with a realist tradition. Its horrors, such as adultery, bigamy, and crime, are taken not from supernatural sources, but rather from “modern life.” The genre is often identified with the 1860s and the anxieties occurring during that decade, especially those fears related to The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857.

accord not only with the tradition of the Gothic and melodrama in which an innocent heroine's morality and faith are challenged and ultimately rewarded through the consummation of heteronormative ideals, Craik's heroine does eventually marry and discard her artistic career, having earlier concluded that, when she is not painting, she feels 'less of an artist, and more of a woman' " (49). Although I take issue with Denisoff regarding the nature and significance of Female Gothic closure—not all Female Gothic narratives end with heteronormative closure, nor do they all suggest the abandonment of artistry¹⁰—his suggestion to place *Olive* in a Gothic tradition proves valuable.

As it rewrites *Jane Eyre*, *Olive* features many of its Gothic elements. For example, when Olive's beloved nurse Elspie dies, her death scene echoes Jane's formative experience in the Red Room.¹¹ According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the Red Room marks Jane's maturation from child into adolescent, as she confronts the terror of her own womanhood and the horrors of a patriarchal society. Jane's fears over menstruation (the "red" of the room) and her changing body relate to her anxiety over Mr. Reed's ghost haunting and controlling the room. Similarly, Olive fears entering Elspie's death chamber: "Olive longed for morning, and yet when the dusk of daybreak came, the very curtains took ghastly shapes, and her own white dress, hanging behind the door, looked like a shroud, within which—" (41). As she ventures to visit the dying Elspie, Olive's fears overtake her: "Half-way through, she touched the cold handle of a door, and could scarce repress a scream. Her fears took no positive shape, but she felt surrounding her Things before and Things behind. No human courage could give her

¹⁰ See the Female Gothic narratives of Daphne DuMaurier, such as *Rebecca* (1938).

¹¹ Olive's kindly caretaker, Elspie, functions much like Jane's Bessie; namely, as a sympathetic figure who offers some emotional sustenance to an orphaned and neglected child. Although Olive is not literally orphaned, as Jane is, her parents reject her due to their disgust over her deformity.

strength to resist such terrors” (42). When Elspie dies and Olive sees her corpse, she lets out “a shriek so wild and piercing that it rang through the house. [She] sprang to the door, fled through the passage, at the end of which she sank in convulsions” (46). Olive’s terror, communing with ghostly shapes, and eventual fainting, echo Jane’s experience in the Red Room. Furthermore, much like Jane’s, Olive’s confrontation with death leads to her maturity: as she watches her childhood nurse die, she prepares to assume greater responsibility over her own care. As an attendant to Elspie’s death bed, Olive realizes the “vivid horror of her own mortality” (41).

In addition, towards the novel’s end, Olive’s suitor Harold Gwynne calls to Olive, who is asleep, to warn her that her house is on fire. Of course, the call coupled with the burning house functions as an echo of Rochester’s famous call to Jane after Thornfield Hall burns. The scene is also reminiscent of when Jane wakes to smoke and pours water over Rochester’s burning bed. Craik writes,

From her first sleep [Olive] started, filled with the vague terror of one who has been suddenly awakened. There was a great noise—knocking—crashing—a sound of mingled voice—and, above all, her name called. Anywhere, waking or sleeping, she would have known *that* voice, for it was Harold Gwynne’s. At first, she thought she must still be dreaming some horrible dream; but consciousness came quick, as it often does at such a time. Before the next outcry was raised, she had guessed its meaning. Upon her had come that most awful waking—the waking in a house on fire. (307)

Although Harold is physically nearer in proximity to Olive than Rochester is to Jane, and there is no otherworldly explanation for how and why his cry may be heard, his call still shares some supernatural qualities. As it exists for Olive somewhere between a noise heard in a dream and one heard in reality, Harold’s cry occupies a liminal space; it disrupts boundaries between sleep and wakefulness, knowledge and ignorance. As it

transgresses boundaries it operates in the same kind of Gothic space as the presence of the supernatural.

Though these scenes deploy Gothic tropes, *Olive*'s most Gothic elements revolve around the unspeakable nature of her deformity and the secrets that surround her father's infidelity and her half-sister Christal's identity. Disability, which has long been a subject of discussion in medicine and sociology, recently has become an important topic in literary criticism. The interdisciplinary approach to Disability Studies found in works such as Mary Klages's *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (1999) and Martha Stoddard Holmes's *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (2004) suggest that Victorian writers used physical disability as a fictional strategy in specific ways. For example, Stoddard Holmes suggests that physical disability was a way to heighten pathos in a story (4), or when the character was female, and of "marriageable" age, it was a means to encourage her self-knowledge and to provide her with safe haven from which to view and judge the romances of other characters (15). *Olive*'s deformity functions as part of both of these generic traditions, but it also acts as a source of difference, horror, and discomfort for those around her. Much like the Victorians' cultural fascination with freak shows, the text exhibits *Olive*'s disability as a kind of scientific and social grotesque.¹²

The narrator calls the young *Olive* "uncanny" (27) and relates her appearance through otherworldly language:

¹² Antonia Losano cites the Victorian prevalence of exhibitions featuring " 'oddities' such as hunchbacks [...] dwarfs, cripples, 'monstrosities,' and perfectly normal individuals of foreign extractions (Aborigines, Hottentots, Fakris, etc)" (182). Richard Altick demonstrates this cultural fascination with physical deformity in *The Shows of London* (1978).

Her head was well-shaped, and from it fell a quantity of amber-coloured hair—pale ‘lint-white locks’, which, with the almost colourless transparency of her complexion, gave a spectral air to her whole appearance. She looked less like a child than a woman, dwarfed into childhood; the sort of being renowned in elfin legends, as springing up on a lonely moor, or appearing by a cradle-side; supernatural, yet fraught with a nameless beauty. (23)¹³

Her deformity is termed as “not a humpback, not yet a twisted spine; it was an elevation of the shoulders, shortening of the neck, and giving the appearance of a perpetual stoop” (23); unlike a simple curvature of the spine, Olive’s aberrant form seems to exist beyond language.

In *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980) Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies “the unspeakable,” that which is too horrible, too unnatural or too supernatural to name, as a central motif in Gothic fictions (97-139). Though oftentimes linked to deviant sexual or homosexual desires, the anxiety of the unspeakable, as Anne Williams suggests, “permeate[s] Gothic at all levels. Gothic narrative conventions (frame and embedded tales, ‘found’ or ‘translated’ manuscripts, many narrators) dramatize both the materiality of writing and its implicit inadequacies: its discontinuities, ambiguities, unreliabilities, silences” (67). When the doctor announces that Olive is “deformed—born so—and will remain so for life” (6), Elspie cries, “ ‘Ye lee, ye ugly creeping Englisher! [...] How daur ye say that my master’s bairn will be a ---. Wae’s me! *I canna speak the word*’ ” (italics mine 6). Olive’s mother, Sybilla Rothesay, faints in horror upon hearing the news of Olive’s disability (14). And later, Sybilla refuses to name Olive’s condition in a letter to her husband; instead, she uses silence to hide and deny her daughter’s

¹³ Olive’s deformity heightens the sprite-like, or elfin, qualities attributed to Jane Eyre. When Rochester first meets Jane he refers to “your people [...] the men in green” (104). Later, he creates a fairytale about an elf-sprite from fairyland (228).

deformity. This collective inability to utter the nature of Olive's bodily state further links the text with the Gothic tradition.

In addition to the "the unspeakable," another popular Gothic motif is the "secret." Anne Williams argues, "The imposing house with a terrible secret is surely one—possibly *the*—'central' characteristic of the category 'Gothic' in its early years. Eino Railo's *The Haunted Castle* (1927) points to this fact. In *The Gothic Quest* (1938) Montague Summers exclaimed that the castles were the real protagonists of the early Gothics (pp. 410-411), while more recently Maurice Levy has emphasized the definitive function of the castle in Gothic" (39). *Jane Eyre*'s Thornfield Hall serves as one example of an ancestral mansion that hides terrible secrets—namely, the existence of Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife, the impediment to his being able to marry Jane. Bertha's captivity signals larger social problems; similar to those in *Jane Eyre*, *Olive*'s Gothic secrets deal with infidelity, adultery, and bigotry that imply broader inequalities of gender and race throughout Britain and its empire.

While Angus Rothesay and Sybilla are newlyweds, he journeys to Jamaica, "whence was derived his wife's little fortune, their whole fortune now, for he had quitted the army on his marriage" (17). As in *Jane Eyre*, the money that sustains the English great house comes from foreign lands exploited and appropriated by the British empire. Years later, when Angus dies, Olive finds a sealed letter, which dictates that she must not open it until "she is quite alone in the world." He has hidden the letter in a drawer "with a spring rusty from long disuse" (270). The epistle warrants such secrecy, as it tells Olive of Angus's Jamaican mistress, Celia Manners: "there was one who loved me, in vain,—mark you, I said *in vain*—but with the vehemence of her southern blood. She was a Quadroon lady—one of that miserable race, the children of planters and slaves, whose beauty is their curse, whose passion knows no law except blind fidelity. And, God

forgive me! that poor wretch was faithful to me!” (272). When Angus returned to England, the devoted Celia followed him. Citing his wife’s coldness and dishonesty (for example, Sybilla having kept Olive’s deformity a secret during his five-year stay in Jamaica), in extenuation of his conduct he admits to having had an affair with Celia, a liaison which produced a child, Christal.

Angus’s remorse over his affair is apparent in the letter’s closing paragraphs:

Remember, [Christal] is of your own blood—*she*, at least, never wronged you. In showing mercy to her, you do so to me, your father; who, when you read this, will have been for many years among the dead, though the evil that he caused may still remain unexpiated. Oh! think that this is his voice crying out from the dust, beseeching you to absolve his memory from guilt. Save me from the horrible thought, now haunting me evermore, that being who owes me life may one day heap curses on her father’s name! (273)

However, what proves even more evident in the letter is Angus’s overriding terror, not only in regards to his infidelity, but also in regards to his daughter’s mixed race. His assurance that Christal is “of [Olive’s] own blood” attempts to counter the horror of miscegenation present in Angus and Celia’s union. The novel itself proves Angus’s fears justified, for Christal grows up to be wild and, worse yet, violent. When she learns of her father’s identity, she tries to kill Olive. Eventually, after a suicide attempt, Christal spends the rest of her days in a nunnery, in isolation. Although she loves an English gentleman, Lyle Derwent, the narrative frustrates her desires, denying her the opportunity to marry and potentially to “taint” any more English offspring. Similar to Bertha, who sets fire to Thornfield Hall and perishes in its flames on its flames, *Olive’s* Christal, the woman of mixed and ambiguous racial origins is sacrificed so that the unambiguously

white heroine, Olive,¹⁴ can flourish. Although neither *Jane Eyre* nor *Olive* offers the most progressive visions of racial politics, the novels do gesture towards more modern feminist ideals of gender politics. Both texts manage to recuperate the fearsome and contested figure of the woman artist, albeit at the expense of other social landscapes. Namely, the writers must “other” women of different races to mark a contrast in social position and values, in order to de-Gothicize the white, middle-class female artist. Their Gothic narratives illustrate the white middle-class female visual artist’s ability to use her talents to restore the corrupted domestic sphere and to provide more fulfilling, more unified romantic partnership and home life.

“Well that is beautiful, Miss Jane!”: Jane Eyre and the Creation of the Female Artist

In March 1837, Charlotte Brontë and Robert Southey engaged in an exchange of correspondence. Brontë sought Southey’s advice regarding the quality of her writing and her ability to sustain a literary career. His reply to her letter is infamous: “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life: & it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment & a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, & when you are you will be less eager for celebrity” (Barker, *Letters* 47-48). Brontë’s reply ends

¹⁴ Although Olive is British, Cora Kaplan has noted that Olive comes from a “mixed” union. Her mother is English, but her father is Scottish: “Through her narration of the troubled marriage of Sybilla and Angus and their initially horrified responses to the physical ‘imperfection’ of their only child, Craik joins an animated and divided dialogue about cultural and racial differences within Britain, a debate that had both direct social and political referents, such as the causes and effects of the Irish famine of 1848 and the class conflict symbolized by Chartist agitation” (xiv). Furthermore, the people of Britain were not only divided by race and ethnicity, but by class. Disraeli’s claim that England had “two nations” divided British citizens into wealthy and poor (xiv). Nonetheless, Olive is still white.

by assuring Southey that she is not neglecting any of her own domestic duties, but writing her poetry only after, and on top of, fulfilling all her responsibilities in the sphere of the home. We see in her novel *Jane Eyre* that the anxiety that informs this letter regarding the division between domestic duty and artistic inclination carries into the writing of her novels. In effect, *Jane Eyre* proves that it is possible to answer Southey's claims with a concrete, if fictional, example as Jane succeeds in being both domestic *and* an artist.

Though the character of St. John Rivers in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* may be a patriarchal, oppressively pious, romantically unsuitable suitor for the novel's eponymous heroine, he proves instrumental to one of the narrative's most pivotal scenes. Through a single action, using a stolen portion of Jane Eyre's sketchbook to track down her real name, Rivers redeems himself from literary quasi-"villainy":

And the pocket-book was again deliberately produced, opened, sought through;

from one of its compartments was extracted a shabby slip of paper, hastily torn off: I recognised in its texture [...] the ravished margin of the portrait-cover. He got up, held it close to my eyes: and I read, traced in Indian ink, in my own handwriting, the words 'Jane Eyre'—the work doubtless of some moment of abstraction. (325)

By expressing an interest in Jane's painting, Rivers unwittingly discovers the key to Jane's true identity and restores "Jane Eyre" to herself. While Jane's name may exist on the "ravished margin of the portrait-cover," her art, and its relationship to her identity construction, resides at the core of the text. Although Jane claims to write her name during "some moment of abstraction," inscribing her actual name on her artwork—a name she has carefully kept hidden while living under an assumed name with the Rivers family—demonstrates how integral her artistry remains to her sense of self. To be "Jane Eyre" is to be an artist.

Jane employs an alias while residing at Moor House—i.e., "Jane Elliott"—that retains her initials, but significantly she does not write "JE" on her artwork; instead

she writes her full name, Jane Eyre. Much as Jane either consciously or subconsciously declares ownership of her artwork by signing it, so Charlotte Brontë's own pseudonym "Currer Bell" (with its shared initials CB), simultaneously worked both to conceal and reveal her identity during the time of publication of *JE*. Despite these attempts at concealment, neither Jane nor Charlotte can deny her work for long; both female artists are eventually unmasked, and their true identities are revealed. For Brontë, assuming ownership of her work brought her fame, artistic fulfillment, and an enduring reputation as one of the world's great novelists. Thus, both *JE*'s publication history and the narrative developments surrounding Jane's identity suggest that acknowledging and embracing female artistry proves economically and socially liberating for women. Despite Juliette Wells's assertion that Jane's artistic development is not a key component of her search for identity or self-recognition beyond its role in the novel's courtship plot, the discovery of Jane's true identity, occurs *through* her artistry, and it not only reveals her life's history to St. John, but it also gives her the family and the financial independence for which she has longed (79). And, by coming back to herself, no longer denying her time at Thornfield, she is able to pursue her courtship with Rochester and her future marital happiness.

Not coincidentally, readers turn again and again with delight to Jane's story; it remains one of the most beloved Victorian novels. I contend that a significant reason for *Jane Eyre*'s lasting popularity rests in the heroine's development as a female artist. Critics such as Lisa Sternlieb and Patsy Stoneman note the power of Jane's storytelling, but fewer scholars acknowledge her talents as a painter and how her artistic skill and temperament ultimately lead to her triumphant role as an empowered domestic artist.¹⁵

¹⁵ See "Jane Eyre in Later Lives: Intertextual Strategies in Women's Self-Definition," in *Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre: A Casebook* (2006). Stoneman writes, "Although readers

Recent scholarship, namely Sandra Hagan and Juliette Wells's ground-breaking collection *The Brontës in the World of the Arts* (2008), has begun to offer more critical analyses of Jane's development as a visual artist. Hagan and Wells's collection examines previously unexplored aspects of the Brontës' own involvement with the arts, placing

may not consciously register the importance of Jane's status as author of her own story, the control of narrative plays a crucial part in the process of self-definition" (181). Stoneman argues that the process of self-narration not only impacts Jane's psychosocial development, but it also encourages identification and increased attempts at self-definition in (female) readers. In regards to Jane's visual art, earlier considerations include the extensive work undertaken by Christine Alexander, who has written extensively on the subject of Jane's art. In *Charlotte Brontë's Paintings: Victorian Women and the Visual Arts I*, The Inaugural Hancock Lecture for the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Lecture Series No. 1 (1993), Alexander writes, "Jane Eyre's experience, for example, documents Charlotte Brontë's gradual growth towards her perception of artistic truth: Jane's childhood response to Bewick's woodcuts, her picturesque copies at Lowood school, her prescient images examined at Thornfield, and her final 'views from nature', all chart Jane Eyre's state of mind at crucial stages of her life and mark her gradual rejection of social conventions" (27). Alexander examines Jane's artistic development as it mirrors that of her creator. She contends, through Jane, Charlotte realizes the inadequacy of her own skill as visual artist; she acknowledges she is merely a copyist, not a painter. Her artistic skill lies in her ability as a writer. While such an assessment may apply to Brontë, I do not believe it applies to her heroine, Jane Eyre. In addition to Alexander, Erich Newmann, Bettina Knapp, and Robin St. John Conover (in "Jane Eyre's Triptych and Milton's *Paradise Lost*: An Artistic Vision of Revisionist Mythmaking," in *Victorian Review*, 22 (1996), pp. 171-189) have addressed Jane's talents as visual artist. Newmann and Knapp favor a psychological approach to reading Jane's art, arguing that her art "solidifies her two warring selves: the fiery side which she keeps sublimated for most of her childhood, and the conciliatory and submissive side demanded of children at that time [...] the creative process thus permits Jane to coalesce these warring selves with little or no conscious effort, the act becoming an instinctive form of self-therapy, and a means of self-empowerment" (qtd. in Conover 175). Conover's claims extend the work done by Newmann and Knapp, positing that the three pictures Jane shows to Rochester, "Jane's triptych," offer readers an 'outline of the plot yet to unfold in the novel itself" (qtd. in Conover 174). In addition, the triptych suggests a feminist rewriting of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. While all of these readings prove compelling, they do not explain the presence of other female artist figures in the text, nor do they comment on Jane's domestic artistry as another facet of her aesthetic production.

literary studies in conversation with the visual, alongside music, theater, dress, and material culture studies. In this book, the problem of Jane's (and Brontë's) artistic development is taken up by a number of scholars: Christine Alexander, Richard J. Dunn, Antonia Losano, and Juliette Wells.

Wells's " 'Some of Your Accomplishments Are Not Ordinary': The Limits of Artistry in *Jane Eyre*" addresses nineteenth-century debates over definitions of female artistic accomplishment versus amateur artistry in conjunction with Jane's visual art practice. Such debates help to complicate classifications of the female artist-figures in Brontë's novel. Wells's argument builds on Christine Alexander's research, which suggests that *Jane Eyre* is a version of Brontë's own frustrated artistic training and ambitions. But Wells argues that, unlike Brontë, Jane "neither cherishes professional ambition nor, in the process of attempting to realize that ambition, confronts the limits of her skill or training" (67). Hence, *Jane Eyre* raises issues of professional artistry, alongside the notions of "accomplishment," and "domestic" artistry.

According to nineteenth-century definitions, Jane occupies an ambiguous position between accomplished woman and artist. Her artistic trajectory reveals oppositions between the two terms and Wells posits that Jane's ambiguous artistic status offers the possibility of determining the significance of her work outside the confines of the accomplished woman/artist debate. Despite suggesting that *Jane Eyre* leaves a space for exploration in determining the significance of Jane's art beyond nineteenth-century debates, Wells's own argument seems largely informed by, and limited by, these definitions, and she does not consider Jane's non-professional artistic pursuits, such as her "word painting," valuable alternative modes of expression that further work to complicate and situate the text beyond the amateur/artist question. Thus Wells concludes that "*Jane Eyre* is neither a conventional *Künstlerroman* nor a straightforward courtship

narrative, though Charlotte makes use of both subgenres; Jane Eyre is ultimately neither artist nor accomplished woman, but suspended between two identities” (69).

For nineteenth-century audiences, an ‘accomplished’ woman signified one whose visual art would be seen as primarily a social, rather than an artistic, achievement. According to Ann Bermingham,

‘An accomplished woman [...] receives definition only in contrast to the professionalism of the male artist...[She] was understood to be artistic but not an artist. She was not an artist because she was neither original nor a paid professional...unlike the artist, a creator and producer of culture, she was a consumer and reproducer of culture.’ (qtd. in Wells 68)

Building on Bermingham’s work, Wells suggests that “Artists, amateurs, and accomplished women in this era occupied points on a continuum, differentiated—and often not straightforwardly so—by such factors as skill, training, circumstances of display, and economic motives” (69). Although Wells’s analysis of the continuum of artistic accomplishment versus professional endeavor is quite compelling, my own considerations of what it may have meant to be ‘female’ and ‘artist’ in the nineteenth century align more closely with the work of scholars such as Julie Codell and Kim Sloan.

Codell and Sloan take issue with the nineteenth-century artistic continuum, claiming that we cannot simply conceptualize artists, amateurs, and accomplished women as in opposition to one another. They contend that a nineteenth-century definitional framework proves unstable, because women artists did not have the same economic purpose or outlets as their male counterparts, (factors which would have defined them as “artists”), nor did they lack artistic skill (a factor which would have rendered them “amateurs”) (Wells 69). Instead, scholars must reconsider nineteenth-century definitions of accomplishment, amateur, and artist not only to understand better how a (defunct) historic paradigm generated, but also to better understand how twenty-first century

readers and viewers may come to understand and classify artistic production undertaken by women during the nineteenth century.

The situation of women artists in the nineteenth century is a complicated issue. According to Pamela Gerrish Nunn, in a discussion of female visual artists of the nineteenth century, even if women managed to enter the artistic marketplace, supposedly putting them on the same “artistic” level as their male peers, art critics and viewers did not see women’s painting and sculpture as equal to the art that was being created by men. Could there be a woman’s art, one to accommodate women who were not merely reproducers, but producers?¹⁶

For a woman to name herself an artist in the nineteenth century meant different things, much as it might today. Nunn’s book asks—was a woman an artist when she sold her work? Did she become an artist when she exhibited in public? Or did she consider herself an artist because of her ambitions? As so much anxiety swirled around the development of woman’s art practice in the nineteenth century, perhaps we can suggest only that a female character became/becomes an artist-figure when the character, or the author, suggests that her artistic creations possess *meaning*. As Nunn writes, “Much effort went into assuring middle-class women of the meaningless of their own creative work over and above its contribution to their essential task of being a lady. In fact, the *only* meaning which their writing, their painting, their sewing, or their conversation could have was to identify their author as a true woman” (7-8).

Throughout *Jane Eyre*, Jane, Rochester, and a host of female characters suggest that women’s art may hold a variety of meanings beyond the cultivation of ‘true

¹⁶ Here the word ‘reproducers’ seems bound not only to associations with the popular sign of female accomplishment---painting artistic miniature reproductions—but also to the mode of creation deemed normative and acceptable for women—sexual reproduction.

womanhood' and female accomplishment. For example, it holds the possibility for self-expression, psychic development, rebellion, solace, and identification. By refusing to restrict our conception of Jane as artist-figure to rigorous and unstable nineteenth-century definitions, we are able to view a familiar text in a new light, one which suggests possible meanings that nineteenth-century readers may have seen in Jane's artistry, but also one which acknowledges how contemporary readers might have identified Jane as having artistic skill and talent that prove formative to her narrative, economic, social, and romantic development.

Although references to female artistry may appear to reside in the margins of the text, much like Jane's name on the portrait-cover, they actually serve an integral purpose in the construction of Jane's identity and in the courtship with Edward Rochester that drives the novel's romance plot. By examining Jane's development as a female artist, we can refute claims such as those of Diane Long Hoeveler, who suggests that

Jane Eyre presents in a dramatic and powerful manner the melodrama of gender and ideology that has animated the Female Gothic project. An orphan, friendless, misunderstood, and underappreciated by all her peers, wins her vindication and bests the patriarchy at its own game. And best of all, she gives every indication of having done nothing much at all. The passive-aggressive behavior that lies at the heart of the Gothic feminist is in this text writ most plainly for all to see. (222)

Hoeveler argues that the Female Gothic genre is defined by a project of "victim feminism." Defining victim feminism as a form of "Gothic feminism," a cultivated pose of professional femininity relying on a masquerade of docility, passivity, wise passiveness, and tightly controlled emotions, she sees victim feminism as propaganda for a new bourgeois morality, emphasizing the Christian doctrines of submission and passivity (Hoeveler 7). Hoeveler reads "pretended" weakness as indicative of real female weakness and an inability to assert power in the patriarchal paradigm. I contend that such

an assertion proves untrue. Jane's artistry is not a "passive-aggressive" act; instead, her art serves as an act of self-assertion, even an aggressive one. Female artistry promotes a feminist agenda of gender equality in Brontë's text. The Female Gothic novel and the Female Gothic "project" need not be defined by passivity and female submission, but rather by female agency and self-actualization.

Throughout the narrative, a majority of the female characters whom Jane encounters have some relationship to artistry. These female models are either artists themselves and/or appreciators of art (Bessie, Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Miss Fairfax, Blanche Ingram, and Adèle) or women who prove hostile to art and/or to the artistic temperament (Miss Reed and many of the Lowood school women educators). The other female figures aligned with the production or consumption of art exist at the margins of the text, but they encourage Jane to negotiate her own relationship to art. Viewing Jane's practice of and attitudes towards artistry in light of the practices and attitudes she attributes to other characters reveals a complex range of models of various kinds of female art practice in Charlotte Brontë's novel.

Perhaps Jane's most pivotal relationship centered on art is her relationship with Edward Rochester, for Rochester's interest in Jane's painting facilitates their courtship. Through an admiration of Jane's art, Rochester establishes his romantic feeling early, and his interest in her artistic perception of the world serves as a precursor to his willingness to let her become the interpreter of his world once he is blinded. Jane's gifts as an artist, either as storyteller or painter, are neither lost in the text nor subsumed in her courtship with and marriage to Rochester; instead, these same talents become the basis of Jane's domestic artistry as she (re)imagines the domestic life and landscape of her

married life at Ferndean.¹⁷ Thus readers turn to Jane's story for a surprisingly contemporary feminist message about the value of female artistry, agency, and empowerment.

'Even for me life had its gleams of sunshine': Models of Female Art Practice

Although it seems that Jane's time at Gateshead would not be conducive to her artistic development, in actuality, her artistic journey begins here. And it is here that Jane first meets two of the many female characters who will help her to negotiate her own practice of and relationship to artistic production. At Gateshead, Jane spends her solitary hours reading, studying visual representations, and imagining: "I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures [...] Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting" (5-7). Jane peruses Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds*, not for the descriptive text, but rather for its illustrations. She responds to other artists' works not only as sources of delight, but also for the materials they provide for her own artistic imaginings. As she conjures new images to accompany Bewick's text, the seeds of her visual artistry are sown. In a hostile environment, illustration and imagination serve as inspiration, escape, and solace for the young Jane.

Jane's early artistic ability to describe and interpret her surrounding world marks her as both a narrative and a visual artist. As she describes Mrs. Reed, Jane

¹⁷ My essay 'Jane Eyre's Heir: An Intertextual (Re)reading of Charlotte Brontë and L. M. Montgomery's *Emily* Trilogy,' in *Hotel* (2005), examines Jane Eyre's painting in relationship to her artistic development. Yet the conclusions I draw regarding Jane and Rochester's courtship and its relationship to her female artistry are significantly different from those proposed here. I have reconsidered my assessment of Jane's visual artistry and how it relates to her romance with Rochester and her domestic art. In this chapter, I am amending aspects of my earlier reading.

demonstrates her knowledge of physiognomy: “her brow was low, her chin large and prominent, mouth and nose sufficiently regular [...] she was an exact, clever manager, her household and tenantry were thoroughly under her control; her children, only, at times defied her authority, and laughed it to scorn” (29). The young Jane not only comments on Mrs. Reed’s physical appearance, but she assigns it meaning. Like a fledgling novelist, she ascribes meaning regarding power relations and proper social conduct to her sketch of Mrs. Reed’s face. Jane’s word painting is in keeping with her Victorian audience’s appreciation of visual description. In *Charlotte Brontë’s Paintings: Victorian Women and the Visual Arts* (1993), Christine Alexander reports that

They [Victorian audiences] liked to *see* their fiction [...] [Charlotte] Brontë’s novels, like those of her early mentor Scott, cater to a prevailing taste for pictorialism. Her literary portraits, with their emphasis on description of physical appearances, betray her bias towards a physiognomical reading of character which was clearly fostered by her detailed pencil studies of eyes, noses and heads. Furthermore, [Charlotte] uses her “wordpainting” to reinforce her views about art, knowing that she is addressing an audience familiar with a painterly vocabulary and language. (33)¹⁸

Alexander once again draws a comparison between Jane and her creator in “‘The Burning Clime:’ Charlotte Brontë and John Martin” (1995). In this essay, she argues for a direct relationship between the work of painter John Martin and Brontë’s fiction.

Alexander suggests that while Brontë was fascinated by Martin’s grandiose, apocalyptic paintings, she had no intention of imitating his style in her own visual work; instead, she tried to become a miniaturist, studying her surroundings in order to paint them in minute detail. Alexander attributes Brontë’s success as a writer to her attention to detail and her

¹⁸ There was enormous interest in Victorian times in physiognomy and phrenology, and much has been written on the subject; see, for example, Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (2001).

skill in translating pictures: “it was through pictorial media that she first conceived of her own imaginary world” (“Burning Clime” 300). Like Brontë, Jane Eyre shares an interest in painting and visual representation; her own ability to “wordpaint” contributes to her success as a storyteller. Her talent, moreover, as a visual artist directly influences her success as a domestic artist at the end of the novel.

While Mrs. Reed may not understand the artistic temperament and consequently punishes Jane for her passion to read, to imagine, and to articulate her perceptions, other female figures who are either artists themselves or are friendly to art do reside at Gateshead. The Reed children’s nurse, Bessie, shares an artistic affinity with Jane: “In the evening Bessie told me some of her most enchanting stories, and sang me some of her sweetest songs” (33). For British society, Brontë’s suggestion that a working-class woman, a ‘mere’ domestic servant, would have artistic tastes and talents is quite radical.¹⁹ Bessie proves just as capable as Mr. Rochester of recognizing good art. More than anyone else at Gateshead, Bessie understands and sympathizes with Jane; perhaps this is because she too shares Jane’s fondness for storytelling. Bessie is the first person to show kindness to the love-starved orphaned. Jane, therefore, associates female artistry with happiness and comfort; listening to Bessie sing prompts her to say, “Even for me life had its gleams of sunshine” (33). When meeting Jane again years later, Bessie says to Jane about her artistic attainments: “ ‘Well that is beautiful, Miss Jane! It is as fine a picture as any Miss Reed’s drawing-master could paint, let alone the young ladies

¹⁹ Although Bessie’s possession of artistic talents and appreciation of art can be read as a radical declaration on Brontë’s part, it could also speak to her father, Reverend Patrick, who came from a society in Ireland where the oral traditions of story-telling and singing were part of the culture for all classes, and not confined to the middle classes. Perhaps Patrick told stories in a family setting as part of his cultural tradition. In addition, Brontë was attuned to Romantic sensibilities. Romantic poetry, such as that by William Wordsworth, often demonstrates the artistic nature of working-class people.

themselves, who could not come near it [...] Oh, you are quite a lady, Miss Jane!’ ” (78). She notes Jane’s artistic ‘achievements,’ because they represent a particular class-based set of skills that now define Jane as a ‘lady.’ Christine Alexander notes, “Drawing and painting, like needlework, playing a keyboard instrument and learning French, were among the accomplishments expected of middle-class women of the period” (“Educating” 2). Bessie, a no-nonsense sort of individual, understands the practical application of such talents, but she also enquires about these skills because she appreciates their charm. Thus, Bessie’s choice of the word “beautiful” to define Jane’s art is significant, for this demonstrates that she recognizes and responds to its aesthetic value. Although she is a servant, her aesthetic perception and judgment places her in the same position as Jane’s master, Rochester. In her interactions with Bessie, Jane sees the potential for art to create a spiritual communion; mutual interest in artistic endeavor signals emotional and mental affinity. Jane will use this knowledge later, when she encounters the Misses Reed for the second time (199) and when she meets her other cousins, Diana and Mary Rivers (299). In both cases, she draws her female cousins, teaches them to draw, and/or critiques their art. Through visual art, she establishes a bond with these other female figures.

Bessie functions as Jane’s first companion in art; her second, Helen Burns, resides at Lowood, the next geographical “way station” in Jane’s artistic journey. While Bessie demonstrates her domestic artistry through storytelling and singing, Helen serves as the epitome of the artist as ‘dreamer,’ as one who cannot be domesticated. Such a figure is disconnected from reality, “blind” to what is around her; Jane notes, “She wished no longer to talk to me, but rather to converse with her own thoughts” (50). Helen’s immersion in her dream-world, however, turns her into both a negative and a positive exemplar. Her single-minded devotion to imaginative artistry gets her into

trouble with uncomprehending teachers, such as Miss Scatcherd: “ ‘Then learn from me, not to judge by appearances: I am, as Miss Scatcherd said, slatternly; I seldom put, and never keep, things in order; I am careless; I forget rules; I read when I should learn my lessons; I have no method; and sometimes I say, like you, I cannot *bear* to be subjected to systematic arrangements. This is all very provoking to Miss Scatcherd, who is naturally neat, punctual and particular’ ” (47). Miss Scatcherd may fear that Helen’s artistic imaginings will move her farther away from being a “genteel” worker, neglecting her social duties to pursue her art. For a Lowood girl to have an imagination is to set herself above her supposed station.

Her artistry also offers her benefits—it consoles her and allows her to escape into visions of a lost landscape. Like the artistic imaginings of the young Jane, Helen’s art provides solace in a hostile world. When talking of her aesthetic passions with Miss Temple, Helen Burns acquires “a beauty neither of fine colour nor long eyelash, nor penciled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance. Then her soul sat on her lips, and language flowed” (62). Miss Temple proves sympathetic to the female artistic temperament; she promises to teach Jane to draw (58), and she talks to Helen Burns of her daydreams: “of nations and times past; of countries far away: of secrets of nature discovered or guessed at” (62). Yet, despite Miss Temple’s best efforts, both Helen and her artistry prove too ethereal to survive in a world of Miss Scatcherds. Helen dies, consumed by a burning artistic passion never fully realized. She doubts, moreover, her own artistic talent; on some level, she believes that Miss Scatcherd is right in correcting her and that her imagination needs disciplining. Helen shows Jane that when a female artist-figure lacks confidence in her own ability, her visions will be ephemeral and ultimately wasted. The artist-dreamer must give form to her imaginings or perish. Jane succeeds where Helen fails, because she never questions her own abilities or the notion

that “Nature” has given her these gifts; thus, she means to exercise them. She also finds a way to do so within the framework of the social and domestic order, disciplining her impulses so that they will not compete with “rules” and “lessons.” Jane only excoriates herself when she fears that she has not produced work that lives up to what she has imagined (108).

Although Helen may offer Jane a model of stifled female creativity, Jane herself does experience artistic development at Lowood:

That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk, with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings: I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark; all the work of my own hands: freely penciled houses and trees, picturesque rocks and ruins, Cuyp-like groups of cattle, sweet paintings of butterflies hovering over unblown roses, of birds picking at tupe cherries, of wrens’ nests enclosing pearl-like eggs, wreathed about with young ivy sprays. (63)

Despite severe physical deprivation, Jane manages to sustain herself, in some sense, psychically and emotionally by means of her art. Critics have noted the recurrence of the theme of consumption in Charlotte Brontë’s fiction, citing instances of female hunger and starvation in *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853); but in this case, the young artistic heroine finds sustenance in her artistic imagination. She figuratively “eats” her words. Jane consumes her mental pictures, her visual artistry, while Helen’s questioning of the value of her art consumes her.

With a burgeoning sense of her role as artist-figure, Jane leaves Lowood and arrives at Thornfield Hall. It is here, in her relationships with Adèle and Mrs Fairfax, that she proves most critical of the various sorts of female artistry allowed and encouraged in the existing social order. One significant reason for Jane’s rejection of Adèle and Mrs Fairfax as artistic models may speak to discourses of race and class that permeate the

novel. A popular reading of Jane's progress narrative views the heroine as journeying towards an identity that makes her increasingly more accepted in conventional white, upper-middle-class English society. In other words, as Jane transitions from being an impoverished orphan, one who is an "interloper not of [Mrs. Reed's] race" (13), to a "proper" English woman, she may reject foreign and class "others" who impede the development of her distinctly bourgeois English progress narrative.

Discussions of race have been considered repeatedly in *Jane Eyre* criticism, beginning with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism."²⁰ Blanche Ingram and Bertha Rochester are the two main characters that Jane identifies as "dark" or "impure." In particular, the novel's descriptions of Bertha Rochester's racial difference are especially charged, comparing her to grizzled, snarling beasts, while simultaneously linking her to the monstrous or supernatural through the image of the vampire. Carol Margaret Davison even goes so far as to suggest that the primary Gothic narrative of *Jane Eyre* is one of revolution and revelation in relationship to colonial and postcolonial racial tensions. Although I agree that the Gothic figure of the racial other is a powerful one, I am most interested in another deviant Gothic figure made prominent in the text, that of the female artist. And while Jane's experience may be sensitive to various narratives of women's artistic creation, it is still impacted by some racial and class prejudices.

By no coincidence, Jane's rejection of different models of female artistic identity occurs as she comes into a sense of her own power as an artist and, especially, as her ability as a painter and portraitist gains importance in her narrative. At Thornfield, she achieves prominence at last: Edward Rochester becomes intrigued by her art, and

²⁰ For example, see Susan Meyer's "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*" (1990) and Patricia McKee's "Racial Strategies in *Jane Eyre*" (2009).

Jane enjoys the special attention. Jane assures readers of the very pedestrian artistry of Adèle, the allegedly ungifted child who is uncreative and who merely copies adult women's popular entertainment, singing, dancing, and reciting. She believes that Adèle has been schooled by her mother, the French opera dancer Céline Varens, and she expresses moral distaste at the sight of a child supposedly displaying the corruption of her innocence through sexually suggestive words and gestures.

Yet Adèle's artistic temperament extends beyond her ability to parrot an adult woman's words and actions. While dressing, she says, "May I take just one of these magnificent flowers? Just to add the finishing touch to my outfit" (145); she possesses a natural artistic eye for pleasing arrangement and design. Present in her question regarding flowers and dress are the signs of the nascent visual artist; however, Jane seems reluctant to grant Adèle her status as an artist: "I was now in the schoolroom. Adèle was drawing. I bent over her and directed her pencil. She looked up with a sort of start" (133). Instead of allowing her pupil to express herself independently, Jane attempts to control Adèle's 'foreign' artistry, to make her drawings in keeping with Jane's own taste and skill.²¹ Despite Jane's criticism and its potentially negative import for Adèle, through her interactions with her ward, Jane learns to evaluate and critique other female art.

One reason for Jane's hostility to Adèle's art may be its relationship to the "feminine" art of "pleasing." While discussing Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness*, in "Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman," Adrienne Rich writes, "women

²¹ Jane's control over her pupil's drawing is in keeping with Victorian standards of artistic instruction for women. In "'Educating 'The Artist's Eye': Charlotte Brontë and the Pictorial Image," Christine Alexander reports that Victorian women were instructed in the arts not in order to encourage their individuality and originality, but to promote the ability to copy accurately others' work, in particular engraved plates (8). Women were not trained as professional artists, but rather as passive imitators of another's—i.e. a man's—genius (9).

have had neither power nor wealth to hand on to their daughters; they have been dependent on men as children are on women; and the most they can do is teach their daughters the tricks of surviving in the patriarchy by pleasing men” (470). Thus, historically, pleasing signals a tradition of female oppression and powerlessness. For Jane, the kinds of art practiced by Adèle, such as performance and costuming, prove dangerous, because they suggest that the female artist works to please others, rather than herself. Jane does not engage in visual, narrative, or domestic artistry in order to earn the praise of others or to revel in display and/or applause. In fact, when Rochester encourages Jane to wear new clothes after their engagement, to create an image that is more pleasing and traditionally feminine, Jane refuses to be dressed like a doll (229). In this scene, unlike Adèle, who also controls the artistic representation of her body through dress, Jane refuses to participate in constructing an artificial feminine creation that she finds personally degrading. While Adèle seeks the admiration and approval of Rochester, Jane does not put her art forward in order to please anyone. For example, she never shows Rochester her watercolors; he is the one who demands to see them. She has created them for her own use and pleasure. In the contrast between Adèle and Jane’s art, Brontë makes the strong statement that a true artist does not labor to “attract” either attention or masculine interest.

Jane’s belittling of Adèle’s attempts at artistry bespeak a level of xenophobic arrogance, similarly, Jane seems to dismiss Mrs. Fairfax’s artistry on the basis of class, “There are people who seem to have no notion of sketching a character, or observing and describing salient points, either in persons or things: the good lady evidently belonged to this class” (89). However, Brontë’s text is critical of patriarchal standards that diminished women’s artistic accomplishments, based on gender and class. Jane makes the above pronouncement after asking Mrs. Fairfax for an account of Rochester. According to Jane,

Mrs. Fairfax proves unable to say much about Rochester other than that he is a good master. But when Jane enquires after details about Blanche Ingram, Mrs. Fairfax provides the following report:

‘ Tall, fine bust, sloping shoulders, long, graceful neck; olive complexion, dark and clear; noble features; eyes rather like Mr. Rochester’s, large and black, and as brilliant as jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair, raven-black, and so becomingly arranged; a crown of thick plaits behind, and in front the longest, the glossiest curls I ever saw. She was dressed in pure white, an amber-coloured scarf was passed over her shoulder and across her breast, tied at the side, and descending in long, fringed ends below her knee. She wore an amber-coloured flower, too, in her hair: it contrasted well with the jetty mass of her curls [...] She was one of the ladies who sang; a gentleman accompanied her on the piano. She and Mr. Rochester sang a duet [...] She sang delightfully—it was a treat to listen to her; and she played afterwards.’ (135-136)

The length and descriptive quality of Mrs. Fairfax’s recollection of Blanche Ingram is astounding, especially when one considers nearly seven or eight years have elapsed since Mrs. Fairfax has witnessed the scene she relates.

Mrs. Fairfax, who has proven unable to “sketch” Rochester’s character, becomes a master wordsmith when providing a verbal portrait of Blanche. With the skill of a police artist, Mrs. Fairfax provides the most minute description of Blanche’s physical beauty, dress, and artistic accomplishment. She even remembers a compliment Rochester pays Blanche concerning her singing (136). Perhaps Mrs Fairfax’s newly acquired skill of description is nothing more than an error on the part of Brontë—either she has forgotten her earlier statement regarding Mrs. Fairfax’s lack of artistic ability, or she has chosen consciously to disregard it, in order to further her plot. Yet if the lengthy description is not a fault in the text, then what import should readers assign to it? One possible explanation may exist in Mrs. Fairfax’s loyalty to Rochester; she does not provide a thorough description in order to protect his secret. Emma Tennant’s fictional

adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, *Adèle* (2003), makes much of a similar suggestion; in the novel, she shows Mrs Fairfax invested in protecting Rochester's secret, because she loves him. While this reading may be provocative, it seems largely divorced from the content of Brontë's novel.

Instead, I posit that Mrs. Fairfax's artistic verbal representation of Blanche serves much the same purpose as Jane's later artistic visual description—that is, her drawing—of Blanche. Mrs. Fairfax's account prompts Jane to draw two portraits, one of a plain governess (Jane) and one of a beautiful woman (Blanche). She uses her drawings to define herself in contrast to Blanche, and she finds herself lacking (137). In this case, Jane turns to her artistry to remind herself of her physical and social inferiority, to prevent herself from letting a secret love for her employer continue to kindle (136). As Mrs. Fairfax and Jane both occupy ambiguous social positions in Thornfield Hall, neither woman feels comfortable among the 'fine, fashionable' aristocratic or upper-middle-class friends of Rochester. Mrs. Fairfax works as housekeeper; despite being the widow of a cousin of Rochester's she is a salaried dependent. Rochester employs Jane in the position of governess; while not of the domestic servant class, she is also not an equal.²² Thus, both women use their artistic representations of the aristocratic Blanche as a means of vicarious identification and as a class-based measurement of themselves. Mrs. Fairfax seems to find this vicarious identification pleasurable, but Jane finds it painful. Most likely, Jane's pain originates in her romantic desire for Rochester and her fear that a rival, one she feels is more conventionally beautiful and accomplished than herself, will win Rochester's favor.

²² For further discussion of the ambiguous position of the governess in Victorian society see Kathryn Hughes's *The Victorian Governess* (1993).

While readers do not know how Mrs. Fairfax views herself in relation to Blanche, they do see Jane's sense of inferiority regarding Blanche decrease. Later in the narrative, Jane pronounces Blanche's "meretricious arts" (159) unsuccessful in wooing Rochester; at the same time, she suggests that her type of courtship would succeed where Blanche's has failed (159). Blanche's "art" of ladylike singing accomplishments and feigned airs—" 'she was not original': she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, any opinion of her own" (158)—only offer her audience, Rochester, a bland and vapid performance. Here, Jane's inspired artistry, especially her painting, serves as a counterpoint to Blanche's contrived attempts to use feigned and studied 'arts' on the marriage market. Jane's capacity to critique other forms of female artistry, honed during her interactions with Adèle, eventually enables her to judge accurately Blanche Ingram's deficiencies and to fear no longer the beautiful woman's supposed superiority.

"One of the Keenest Pleasures I Have Ever Known": Jane Eyre's Artistic and Romantic Development

While Jane's relationship to other female artists proves essential in encouraging her own artistic development, her growth as a visual and later as a domestic artist occurs in large part through her contact with Rochester. It is this relationship between Jane's artistic growth and the development of the courtship plot that serves as one of Juliette Wells's main points regarding female artistry in Brontë's novel. Wells suggests,

The artworks whose production Jane narrates may demonstrate her unusual level of artistic skill and imagination, but their function in the novel as a whole is primarily to advance Charlotte's romance plot. In adapting her own experience as an artist into *Jane Eyre*, then, Charlotte

replaces professional aspirations with social and personal ones, and substitutes gratified desire for gratified ambition. (80)

Here Wells contends that the art plot is subjugated to the romance plot; by the novel's end, Jane paints *only* word pictures for Rochester and, although she narrates her story, she does not offer any commentary on the writing process or any indication of the pleasure she may take in literary composition, to say nothing of any ambitions regarding publication (78). Thus, for Wells, Jane does not succeed as a wholly fulfilled woman who has unproblematically transferred her artistry from the visual realm to that of the narrative.

Although *Jane Eyre* may appear to privilege the domestic sphere over that of the professional art world, at least for women, I take a revisionist approach to the text by illustrating how and why, nonetheless, the novel also foreground women's creativity and creative expression through the presence of female domestic artist-figures.

While I acknowledge Wells's claim that readers are not given much information about Jane and Rochester's life at Ferndean in conjunction with Jane's feelings about her art, each snapshot of life that we do receive from Ferndean features Jane as an active creator, who transforms her and the blinded Rochester's world into one with meaning. In addition, as Wells notes, the entire trajectory of Jane and Rochester's courtship suggests that Rochester views Jane as a talented artist and would further encourage her artistic development.²³ Their courtship also indicates that Rochester possesses some similar artistic skill, and this shared relationship to artistry is a significant marker of their mutual enjoyment of each other.

²³ Wells says, "It is Rochester, not Jane, who asserts most explicitly, though not without qualification, that her drawings deserve to be considered as art, and that she deserves to be thought of as an artist" (79).

Ultimately, though, and perhaps most significantly, I contend that if Jane's new verbal artistry provides her with freedom, joy, and self-expression, then there is nothing wrong with painting *only* word pictures, as opposed to canvasses for sale. Although Jane's art is not a professional artistry designed for profit, her education and skill in the domestic arts provide her, and those around her, with useful, enriching, and entertaining artistry. Not only does it seem limiting to expect all narratives of 'successful' female artistic development to follow one trajectory—professionalism as the ultimate goal of creative expression—but it seems unfair to impose this ahistoric reading as a marker of success in a time when limited professional opportunities were available to middle-class women in general, let alone female artist-figures. Many women found fulfilled ambition in artistic production and modes of self-expression outside the marketplace: it is important to value these narratives as well.

In other words, we should not fault Charlotte Brontë for “failing” to write her sister, Anne's novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). Antonia Losano has said, “The kind of painter Brontë makes Helen—not a fantastical, imaginative, self-expressive imagist like Jane Eyre, but a professional realist, financially motivated landscape artist—draws *Tenant* farther from the realm of familiar Brontëan romance and nearer to the social problem novels of the mid nineteenth century” (46). Losano suggests that, by dealing with a realistic narrative of female artistic development, Anne Brontë, rather than Charlotte, considers the “troubled relationship between women and [professional] art” (46). Instead, I view Charlotte Brontë as providing readers with an alternative aesthetic in *Jane Eyre*, one that allows art to be a mode for female self-fulfillment, even if that expression does not result in professional artistry. In addition, Charlotte Brontë “solves” the problem of female expressive art explored by her sister: if art may incite masculine desire to “control, to possess, or simply to interpret as the male chooses” then Jane's

ability to control Rochester's sight at Ferndean through her artistic vision, her word painting, is a powerful and aggressive declaration of a woman's right to artistic representation (Losano 64). In *Jane Eyre*, male viewing does not interrupt female artistic endeavor; rather, the masculine inability to see rightly encourages female art practice. Jane and Rochester's relationship ends with her in control as artist and Rochester as appreciative "viewer."

In Jane and Rochester's first meeting at Thornfield, Rochester demands access to Jane's portfolio, from which he selects three watercolors. All of her works portray a vast, intimidating, sublime landscape coupled with incompletely realized, even deformed, figures. Readers hear Jane describe the figures in her artwork: a "a fair arm [...] the only limb clearly visible"; an expanse of sky with "a woman's shape to the bust [...] the eyes shone dark and wild; the hair streamed shadowy, like a beamless cloud torn by storm or by electric travail"; and an iceberg with a colossal head, and two hands joined under the forehead with an "eye hollow and fixed, blank of meaning but for the glassiness of despair" (107). Jane's art depicts terrifying natural scenes in which an overwhelming landscape subsumes the female form. Jane's anxieties regarding female power and patriarchal oppression manifest themselves in her art. As she attempts to negotiate these psychic anxieties, they take form in her visual work. The dismembered female forms in the paintings are representative of Jane's artwork. Later, too, all of Jane's art will be left at the stage of a preliminary study or sketch; for example, her portraits are of unfinished figures, such as heads alone. Jane is unable to achieve 'wholeness' in the form of visual art; she only succeeds in finishing her artistic creation when it assumes the shape of narrative. Yet much like the dismembered figures in her watercolors, the components of her visual art—the parts, if not quite the wholes—manifest themselves in her work as a domestic artist at the end of the novel. She relies on her wordpainting skill

and attention to detail to fashion for herself and for Rochester a living narrative at Ferndean.

Although Jane says that creating these pictures has been “one of the keenest pleasures [she] has ever known” (108), she admits that she is “tormented by the contrast between my idea and my handiwork: in each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realize” (108). Jane’s depictions of fragmented female bodies echo her own inability to realize the wholeness of her imaginative creation when she first attempts to map her mental terrain. In addition, her incapacity to realize the visions produced by her artistic imagination proves indicative of her dilemma as a female artist in nineteenth-century Britain, for the surrounding social order proves hostile to the female imagination. Significantly, Jane’s drawings are original, they are not copies, as we learn when Rochester queries her as to the origins of her paintings. As Christine Alexander notes, the typical Victorian woman would have been instructed in copying the works of others, not in creating her own. Even though Jane may feel she has not fully captured her artistic vision in her watercolors, she has created a unique truth and has not merely copied a male artist’s perception of the world. In breaking free from the ideal of the Victorian woman as artistic copyist, Jane begins to develop her identity as an autonomous artist-figure.

Despite Jane’s own reservations about the quality of her art and about her ability to articulate her vision, Rochester says, “ ‘You have secured the shadow of your thought: but no more, probably. You had not enough of the artist’s skill and science to give it full being: yet the drawings are for a schoolgirl peculiar’ ” (108). Although Rochester tempers his praise, his admiration for Jane’s art is evident; Jane writes, “One day he had company to dinner, and had sent for my portfolio, in order, doubtless, to exhibit its contents” (110). Rochester’s admiration for Jane’s art signals his romantic

interest; his respect for her painting elevates Jane beyond the role of mere governess and acknowledges her status as a figure of artistic sensibility and taste, much like himself.

In examining her art, Rochester also realizes that he and Jane share similar perceptions: “‘Where did you see Latmos? For that is Latmos’ ” (108). Jane and Rochester both envision the mythological mountain in the same way. When Rochester finds his own imaginative landscape mirrored in Jane’s art, readers see the early signs of a potentially egalitarian, companionate union. Establishing similarity between the way that Rochester views the world and the way that Jane does proves essential if, upon their marriage, Jane is to be the eyes to the blinded Rochester. To believe in their future happiness, readers must first accept that theirs is a shared perception of the world and an aesthetic affinity.

When Jane arrives at Gateshead to visit the dying Mrs Reed, she continues to use her painting for both “occupation” and “amusement” (198). Despite her vow to draw an unknown face, she finds herself sketching the head of Rochester. Although otherwise pleased with her handiwork, she stumbles in drawing his eyes: “I had left them to the last, because they required the most careful working. I drew them large; I shaped them well: the eyelashes I traced long and somber [...] Good! but not quite the thing” (199). Jane’s anxiety over accurately capturing the quality of Rochester’s eyes, their “force and spirit,” anticipates the responsibility she will assume at Ferndean, when she will relate her vision of the surrounding world to Rochester, who is now blind. As a visual artist, she appreciates the importance of the eye and of sight, and to know Rochester, she must apprehend his eyes clearly. Her sketch of Rochester further suggests her romantic attachment to him: “There, I had a friend’s face under my gaze; and what did it signify that those young ladies turned their backs on me?” (p. 199). Through her art, Jane recognizes that if she has Rochester, she will be content. Given the relative isolation of

their future home, Ferndean, this proves an important realization. In the solitude of Ferndean, the companionship of Rochester alone—at least until the birth of their children—will provide her happiness, and she will experience none of the ‘restlessness’ that famously plagues her at Thornfield in the days before their first meeting.

Establishing Jane and Rochester’s “likeness” is crucial in overcoming the Victorian audience’s doubts about and objections to the romantic union of governess and employer. Not only does Brontë establish their oneness through Rochester’s admiration of her watercolors, but also through Rochester’s own abilities as artist. Although Rochester seems to engage in artistic endeavors, such as singing or playing charades, only as social amusements, in his masquerade as the gypsy fortuneteller and in his creation of a fairytale about Jane he demonstrates his own talents as a visual, performing, and narrative artist. As Jane approaches Rochester’s old gypsy woman, he asks, “ ‘Why don’t you consult my art’ ” (167). Presumably, the gypsy woman’s “art” will be fortune-telling; but in reality, Rochester’s art proves to be in his ability to “read,” and thus to assign meaning to, human physiognomy. As we have seen Jane do throughout the narrative, Rochester scrutinizes facial features and offers us a description of her character: in Jane, he observes a brow that shows self-respect, a forehead that declares reason, and a mouth that “delights at times in laughter” and is “disposed to impart all that the brain conceives” (171). His success in correctly assessing Jane’s temperament shows that Rochester shares her talent not only for wordpainting but also for rightly “reading” others. As Jane herself acknowledges, “Mr. Rochester had sometimes read my unspoken thoughts with an acumen to me incomprehensible” (209).

While Rochester demonstrates his skill as a visual artist in the gypsy scene, he reveals his talent as a narrative artist through a fairytale he creates about Jane. After their engagement, Jane happens upon Rochester, who is sitting outdoors with a book and

pencil in hand, evidently writing (208). He later tells Jane and Adèle that he is writing “ ‘about a misfortune that befell me long ago and a wish I had for happy days to come’ ” (228)—suggesting that he is, like Jane, a memoirist. He then offers his audience a fantastic story he has created about his first meeting with Jane: “ ‘I never spoke to it, and it never spoke to me, in words: but I read its eyes, and it read mine; and our speechless colloquy was to this effect:--It was a fairy, and come from Elf-land; it said, and its errand was to make me happy’ ” (228). He continues with the story, which ends when the fairy gives him a gold ring so they can fly to the moon together to make their “own heaven yonder” (228). This is not the first time Rochester has suggested that Jane comes from “Elf-land” or from faery-folk, but his story imaginatively expands on this idea and recasts their courtship as a poetic fairy tale. Not only does Rochester’s storytelling reveal his artistic imagination, but it suggests, once again, his gifts as a reader. He and Jane read each other without words and, in their shared vision, they understand their likeness.

Jane, on the other hand, does not share such affinities with her second suitor, St. John. Although St. John sees her engage in portraiture while at Moor House, his proposal of marriage and of all-consuming missionary work make it clear that she would not be able to continue such artistic pursuits as his wife. While Rosamond Oliver joyfully exclaims over the high quality of Jane’s work, St. John remains emotionally unresponsive to it. When Jane asks for his opinion of her portrait of Rosamond, he replies, “ ‘A well-executed picture [...] very soft, clear colouring; very graceful and correct drawing’ ” (316). Unlike Rochester, who responds passionately to Jane’s art, St. John offers a tempered critique: “ ‘I watch your career with interest, because I consider you a specimen of diligent, orderly, energetic womanhood; not because I deeply compassionate what you have gone through, or what you still suffer’ ” (320). He holds himself in check, when confronted with the beauty of art, the physical charms of Rosamond, or the power of

human love. Both art and love merely produce in him a sensation of conflict between duty and feeling, as well as self-repression and renunciation. When Jane offers to share her art, to paint a portrait of Rosamond for St. John, he declines. Unlike Rochester, he does not acknowledge that in sharing her art, Jane is also sharing herself.

In his proposal, St. John makes it plain that he wants Jane as help-meet merely for her docility, diligence, disinterestedness, faithfulness, constancy, and courage (344). While these are important qualities that Jane does possess, he places no value upon her equally important qualities, such as imagination, artistic spirit, and passion. Jane may eventually regard herself as St. John's equal (346), but they are not cast in each other's likeness:

There would be recesses of my mind which would be only mine, to which he never came; and sentiments growing there fresh and sheltered, which his austerity could never blight, nor his measured warrior-watch trample down: but as his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—*this* would be unendurable. (347)

Thus, as marriage to St. John would require the suppression of her artistic nature, her “flame,” it presents a danger to her very sense of self; the life of a missionary would kill her, because it would give her no scope for the aesthetic expression of her passions. She must resist his proposal or be “imprisoned” in body and spirit. St. John refuses to connect the talent that Jane shows in her portrait painting to her core identity; although his eyes are ‘bright and deep, and searching,’ he cannot see or read Jane accurately, whereas Rochester's physical blindness never stops him from perceiving her true nature.

Despite Brontë's positive depiction of Jane and Rochester's marriage—“All my confidence is bestowed on him; all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely

suited in character—perfect concord is the result” (384)—the egalitarian romance, or “happy ending,” of *Jane Eyre* has long been contested by critics.²⁴ Lisa Sternlieb argues,

After Bertha blinds Rochester, Jane can perpetrate a more damaging and permanent form of revenge. She does not submit to anything, least of all mutual limitation; nor does she easily equate domestic bliss with the sharing of confidences. What Jane makes clear in these last pages is that there is little that is mutual or shared in this marriage. She has won the confidence game. Beginning her days at Thornfield as the silent listener to a great storyteller, she begins her marriage by [putting] [...] Rochester in a position of helpless dependence. His perception of their marriage cannot be hers; it is derived from what she deigns to tell him. (514-515)²⁵

Sternlieb suggests that Jane’s role as Rochester’s ‘eyes’ serves as a form of revenge upon Rochester’s patriarchal power. By controlling Rochester’s vision, Jane does not signal equality in marriage, but rather Rochester’s submission.

Yet Jane’s ability to interpret the world for the blinded Rochester becomes far less sinister when seen as an extension of the role her art has already played in promoting and facilitating their courtship. In “Jane Eyre’s Triptych and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: An Artistic Vision of Revisionist Mythmaking” (1996) Robin St. John Conover suggests that “the novel’s final scenes offer up the missing fourth portrait in [Jane’s] portfolio—Paradise Regained [...] We [understand] why Jane professes to be happy while in the act of creating these paintings. Unbeknownst to her, she has illustrated a corrective reading to the creation myth, which she will live out” (185). Thus, Conover

²⁴ Hoeveler writes, “The ‘castration’ of Rochester is a hotly debated topic in the critical history of the novel. Richard Chase originally defined the issue in ‘The Brontës: or, Myth Domesticated,’ [...] Adrienne Rich takes up the issue in a seminal essay on the subject, ‘Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman’” (221, fn. 24).

²⁵ Although the intent of Sternlieb’s argument is clear, she awards Bertha undue power in relation to Rochester’s eventual blindness. Bertha does not blind Rochester, but rather Fate does, in the form of the choice that Rochester makes to try and save his wife from the fire.

portrays both Jane and Brontë as women writers who create their own genesis. Jane's art, whether storytelling or painting, is not lost in the text or subsumed by her courtship with and marriage to Rochester; instead, her talents influence Jane's domestic artistry as she (re)imagines the domestic life and landscape of their life at Ferndean. She says, " 'I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you' " (370). She continues,

[For] I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature—he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather round us—and impressing by sound on his ear what light no longer stamped on his eye. (384)

Although Jane no longer paints these scenes of landscape, she now sketches word pictures for Rochester. She (re)imagines nature and books for her husband; she creates and narrates their world at Ferndean. Her new artistry may not have the permanence of works on paper, but it exists nonetheless, and her domestic situation gives it value, dignity, and an appreciative audience. Now, she has been encouraged by circumstances to become the storytelling artist that she wants to be, the one who will also go on to write her own narrative as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*.

By serving as Rochester's vision, Jane now functions as storyteller, visual artist, and domestic artist. She uses the artistic talents already displayed in the course of the novel, along with the materials of Victorian domesticity, to make a personal narrative, a work of living art, from her domestic life with Rochester. Successfully negotiating these seemingly irreconcilable demands by fulfilling competing duties, she manages to be both an artist *and* an "Angel in the House". The fulfillment of these antithetical roles mirrors Brontë's own dilemma, as expressed in the early letter she wrote to Robert

Southey. Brontë uses Jane to live out the fantasy of, in effect, “having it all.” Jane experiences great fulfillment in her new role, for her earlier anxiety concerning her inability to realize her imagination in her painting does not seem to plague her in her position as domestic artist: “There was a pleasure in my services, most full, most exquisite, even though sad [...] He loved me so truly that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance: he felt I loved him so fondly that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes” (384). In becoming a wife and mother, Jane does not sacrifice her art, but rather reconfigures her means of artistic expression. Thus, readers encounter a story of female artistry, agency, and empowerment; they respond to Jane as an artist-figure who miraculously overcomes the prohibitions against the Victorian woman artist.

Although some critics of the novel suggest that the married Jane is stifled and subsumed by the heteronormative marriage plot, she instead succeeds as an assertive, even aggressive, female artist, who uses her artistry to encourage, in her audience, psychic identity development and female equality.²⁶ Unfortunately, Charlotte Brontë, who married but died not long afterwards, never had the opportunity to see whether she could live out the fantasy she had already imagined in *Jane Eyre* of being both “domestic” and an “artist.”

The ending of *Jane Eyre*’s narrative of domestic artistry draws particular attention to issues of physical disability, for Jane casts Rochester’s crippled body and blindness as loveable features, rather than as Gothic horrors. Ultimately, Jane’s artistic vision finds beauty in deformity. Dinah Craik’s Female Gothic novel *Olive* (1850)

²⁶ See Terry Eagleton, *The Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (1975) and Shirley Foster, “Female Januses: Ambiguity and Ambivalence Towards Marriage in Mid-Victorian Women’s Fiction.”

develops *Jane Eyre*'s themes of dis/ability, beauty, and artistry, as the text's eponymous heroine uses her talents as a visual artist to transform the way others view her own bodily difference.

“Meekly at her own hearth”: Olive and the Triumph of Female Domestic Artistry

The narrator of Dinah Craik's novel *Olive* claims, “But her [the woman painter's] sphere is, and ever must be, bounded; because, however lofty her genius may be, it always dwells in a woman's breast. Nature, which gave to man the dominion of the intellect, gave to her that of the heart and affections [...] But scarce ever lived a woman who would not rather sit meekly by her own hearth, with her husband at her side, and her children at her knee, than be crowned Corinne of the Capitol” (126). Although the narrator seems to suggest that the female artist can never attain genius or professional success, because she remains bound by her desire for home and family, the novel's heroine, Olive, proves that the affection in a “woman's breast” and her domestic inclinations, coexist nicely with artistic impulse and talent. While *Jane Eyre* charts female subjectivity through art, *Olive* shows artistry as having less impact on the heroine's mental states than on the values and beliefs of those around her, as it reinforces domestic ideals in a world where home spaces have been corrupted through rigid social hierarchies of race and gender.

Like Charlotte Brontë, Craik struggled, as a middle-class Victorian woman, to reconcile her role in the domestic sphere with her writing profession. Unlike Brontë's writing, however, Craik's artistic work grew out of domestic necessity, and so was not only allowed by society, but encouraged. Craik initially took up writing as a means to provide financial security for her family, which was reduced to penury due to the actions

of her disreputable, drunken, and often absent, father, Thomas Mulock.²⁷ In her fiction, Craik promoted domesticity, but also art; her pen sustained her family; thus she understood the supportive role of female artistry in domestic life. Sally Mitchell notes that by the time Craik adopted a writing career, her brothers would have already been of working age and, once her mother died, Craik could have gone to live with relatives or taken up a situation as a governess. Instead, Craik *chose* a career of self-expression, one in which she could compete with men “on level ground...and even beat them in their own field” (Craik qtd. in Mitchell 8).

While Craik’s writing provided her financial and personal fulfillment, she too struggled with the life expected of the proper Victorian woman—one of marriage and motherhood. Both Brontë and Craik married later in life; Brontë wed the Reverend Arthur Bell Nichols at age thirty-eight, while Craik was married at thirty-nine. The strange story surrounding Craik’s marriage to George Lillie Craik echoes the trajectory of many mid-Victorian women’s novels, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Olive*. The handsome young George Lillie Craik was injured in a railway accident near London. Accounts of the story vary, but ultimately Craik was taken to Wildwood, Dinah Mulock’s home, to convalesce. While there, the two fell in love and, after several weeks, one of the pair proposed (Mitchell 14). Mitchell writes,

It is an extraordinary case of life imitating art that features of this story should so closely coincide with the model of sexual relationships that is an almost archetypal feature of the women’s novels of the 1860s [...] The implications of its literary use (the achievement of equality between the sexes by the illness or disability of the male, the expression of love as a

²⁷ Sally Mitchell writes, “The stories of entry into the profession, as Elaine Showalter points out in *A Literature of Their Own*, are almost a distinct genre in the history of nineteenth-century feminine writers. Either financial necessity or high moral purpose were virtually prerequisites: the desire for self-expression was not consonant with true womanhood”(8).

function of the maternal instinct, the exercise of woman's power through the caritative womanly virtues). (14)²⁸

Although Brontë would never have the opportunity to see whether she could “have it all,” Craik's life reads much like the endings to *Jane Eyre* and *Olive*. Eventually, Craik adopted a child, Dorothy, and this final act secured her position as a proper Victorian matron. Presciently, *Olive* would offer a very similar resolution to being both “domestic” and an “artist” as the one Craik would achieve later in real life. Craik ultimately proved more fortunate than Charlotte Brontë at achieving a real-life answer, not a fictional one, to Robert Southey's troubling question regarding women's ability to fulfill the duties required by both family and career.

Gender and the Endangered Domestic Sphere

The greatest threat to domestic happiness in *Olive* originates in the unspeakable horror of Olive's deformity. If not for her hunchback, then her parents could continue their families' long legacies of almost superhuman physical beauty, and the young couple could be content. And while Olive's father, Angus Rothsay, claims that it is his wife's decision to keep Olive's deformity a secret from him that leads to the break-up of his marriage, other deep-rooted problems contribute more significantly to their domestic unhappiness than does Olive's deformity. In fact, it seems that, in this novel, domestic unity is disrupted, in two significant cases, not by physical deformity, but by female beauty.

²⁸ In *Olive*, Harold Gwynne says, “‘I have no strength at all [...] I cannot take her to my heart—my darling—my wife! So worn-out am I—so weak’” (314). After surviving a house fire, a weakened Harold confesses his love for Olive. As in *Jane Eyre*, the heroine possesses more physical strength than the hero, for the hero has suffered some kind of physical impairment.

One case where this disruption occurs is in the marriage of Olive's parents, where attraction soon fades in the absence of mental and emotional compatibility. Another example is the relationship between Harold Gwynne (Olive's suitor later in the novel) and Sara Derwent (a childhood friend of Olive's); the frivolous Sara quickly earns Harold's distrust and destroys his faith in humanity and religion, when he discovers that she has been unfaithful, in thought if not in action, with a former lover. Both couples are drawn together through physical passion and lust. And, in *Olive*, relationships based solely on sexual desire prove to be a dangerous foundation on which to build a marriage. In the text, the ability to create art is generative, but female beauty, and the male desire for that beauty, proves destructive. Antonia Losano posits, "Disability becomes not just a freedom *from* (the marriage plot) but a freedom *to*: to create, express, and word for profit [...] Craik reject[s] the normative ideology which insists that women themselves be beautiful objects; rather, in [her text] the disabled (and hence not traditionally beautiful) woman herself creates beautiful objects, and in the process becomes the subject rather than object" (182). Olive must practice a different "art," one other than that of calculated beauty through pleasant dress and manner, like Blanche Ingram's "meretricious arts," in order to rehabilitate the novel's damaged domestic spheres and romantic partnerships.²⁹ The corrupted domestic sphere can only be righted through Olive's professional, visual

²⁹ Cora Kaplan suggests that Craik's narrative choices in *Olive* are located in Craik's interpretation of her own personal history and in topical issues of the 1840s (xii). Particularly, Kaplan argues that Craik is concerned with "alternative types" of the masculine, those which echo the flawed men in her own life. Not only do these flawed male figures translate into the two competing male figures of *Jane Eyre* but also they negotiate the literal and symbolic questions of paternity that impacted Craik's own relationship with the "seedier and less domesticated figure of [her father] Thomas Mulock" (xiii).

artistic endeavors.³⁰ By validating the artistic efforts of the internal artist of the text, Olive, the novel's external artist, Craik, and her profession as writer, are like-wise validated through an inter-art discourse.

At the age of five, Olive first demonstrates artistic impulses. Her father notices

Olive, who sat in her little chair at the far end of the room, quiet, silent, and demure. She had beside her some purple plums, which she did not attempt to eat, but was playing with them, arranging them with green leaves in a thousand graceful ways, and smiling to herself when the afternoon sunlight, creeping through the dim window, rested upon them, and made their rich colour richer still. (32)

Much like Jane Eyre, who seeks sympathy and community of feeling through her reading and Bessie's storytelling, Olive combats her own alienation with imaginative artistic creation. Employing her aesthetic skill offers the young Olive pleasure and contentment in a troubled household, where ties have been strained by physical distance, emotional and mental incompatibility, and deception. Significantly, Olive's father observes her in the act of creation, as he and his wife decide whether to create an alternative fictional world of their own—to deny the existence of their child, and to avoid their parental duties, by keeping the deformed Olive in another part of the household under the sole care of a nurse. In particular, Olive's mother, advocates for this arrangement, believing that she and her husband can start life afresh and heal their damaged marriage, without the burden of their daughter's "taint." While Olive's parents may deliberate over whether

³⁰ According to Cora Kaplan, the father's gambling habit, which leads to his family's financial ruin, begins because of his domestic unhappiness; for Kaplan, he is "an unforgiving husband, an abusive drunk, and a secret adulterer whose rash speculations leave his heirs so reduced in fortune that young Olive, seeking to supplement the family income takes up an artistic career" (xiii).

they can keep their daughter's *disability* a secret, the incident of the plums demonstrates that, they cannot hide, or erase, Olive's *artistic* identity.³¹

Readers see Olive, a child, attempting to repair the domestic sphere through her art. In the evenings, Olive's father enjoys reading aloud to his family, while her mother resents the time he spends with texts she perceives as boring; instead she wants him to converse with her. To appease her mother, Olive says,

'Papa is tired, and may like to be quiet. Suppose we talk to one another, mamma?' whispered Olive, as she put aside her own work—idle, but graceful designings with pencil and paper—and, drawing near to her mother, began to converse in a low tone. She discussed all questions as to whether the rose should be red or white, and what coloured wool would form the striped tulip, just as though they had been the most interesting topics in the world. Only once her eyes wandered wistfully to the deserted "Sabrina," which, half sketched, lay within the leaves of her "Comus."
(49)³²

In this case, it is not Olive's art that salvages domestic ties, but rather her engagement with her mother's handicrafts. In fact, Olive has to neglect her own visual art in order to

³¹ Losano argues that Olive's deformity and her profession as visual artist are made structurally similar in the text, indicating anxieties about the female body as always, and already, disabled (185). In *Olive* "the disabled [character] becomes [a window] through which the reader can view the ideological problems of being a woman and a woman artist in Victorian England" (182).

³² John Milton's poem, *Comus*, has many elements of what was to become the Female Gothic, and scholars of the Female Gothic have noted Milton's influence on Female Gothic novelists. In *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, Maggie Kilgour identifies Milton's poetry as an integral influence on the novels of Ann Radcliffe: "The plot of [Milton's] *Comus*, a poem echoed or quoted in a number of significant passages by Radcliffe, provides one obvious model for her narrative. Like Milton's text, Radcliffe's tells of a young woman, separated from her family, who is threatened by sinister forces, but who is returned safely home" (138). Kilgour's discussion of Female Gothic and *Comus* focuses mainly on issues of class and class conflict in Milton and Radcliffe, showing how both writers subvert the status quo by using an aristocratic form (the mask, in the case of Milton) or aristocratic characters (in the case of Radcliffe), in order to "celebrate antithetical bourgeois values."

aid her mother in her needlecraft work, offering aesthetic suggestions of color and design arrangement for winter dresses. Even though Olive appears bored with her mother's domestic arts, she uses the language and activity of female domestic art practice to encourage companionship and to combat the alienation fostered by her father's selfish self-absorption in his choice of reading and her mother's resentment of it.

Lest it seem that the novel advocates sacrificing female visual art in order to achieve domestic harmony, the text later shows Olive's deep disappointment at being unable to complete and exhibit her first painting, because she has been too busy caring for her mother. Meliora Vanbrugh, the sycophantically devoted sister of Olive's artistic mentor, Michael Vanbrugh, says, " 'But never mind, love! You have been a good, attentive daughter, and it will end all for the best'" (136). Although Meliora consistently puts her brother's desires before her own and suffers his verbal and emotional abuse, Olive does not follow this degrading model of female familial self-sacrifice.³³ Regardless of Meliora's attempts to placate Olive, Olive still struggles with bitterness over the situation; she is not content with having to put her artistic pursuits on hold. She says she must be "patient and submit," for if her picture had been a work of genius, she would have finished it in time, yet she bemoans the possibility of quitting painting, especially when "her work had become the chief aim and joy of her life" (137). Immediately after Olive comes to this realization, Meliora informs her that her work has

³³ Unlike Jane Eyre, who is surrounded by many women art appreciators and practitioners, Olive does not experience much female camaraderie in her artistic endeavors. Her nurse, Elspie, does sing and tell stories. Meliora begins her career as an artist too, but does so only to please her brother, whom she perceives as the real artist of the family. However, early in their relationship, Meliora does function as a sort of artistic fairy godmother for Olive: " 'Michael, I have found out a new genius! Look here, and say if Olive Rothesay will not make an artist!'" (121). Without Meliora's encouragement and her introduction to Michael, Olive might never have confronted the intimidating masculine artist-figure with her request to learn painting.

sold, despite not being exhibited, and readers see female ambition, hard work, and talent rewarded.

Domestic issues may sometimes distract Olive from her work, but, perhaps unexpectedly, they more often serve to complement and enhance it. In fact, her first painting sells because of its ties to the domestic. As Olive informs her mother, “ ‘Would you believe, darling, she told Miss Vanbrugh that she did so because the background was like a view in their park, and the two little children resembled the two young Masters Fludyer—a fortunate likeness for me!’ ” (141). Later, the patron who purchases the painting asks Olive to add the family horse and greyhounds to the allegorical image (141). Olive’s work sells because it reminds people of their home and family life. On this subject, Antonia Losano writes, “Olive is not moving in the high art circles but caters instead to a wealthy public—the same public that began in the 1850s (*Olive* was published in 1850) to flood the art market, making the fortunes of artists [...] Olive’s paintings were considered not untouchable masterpieces, but works that could be altered with impunity on the whim of the purchaser” (193-194). Although Losano’s claims seem to diminish Olive’s painting, she concludes, “But nevertheless, in contrast to the cold and unpopular High Art of Michael, Olive’s paintings are celebrated for their sentimental appeal, their moral value (with titles like ‘Charity’), and their intelligibility” (194). Olive’s art may be “feminine” in its subject matter and process, for she paints to please clients and earn money, not to document her own supposed “genius,” as Michael does; however, it is the very femininity of her art which makes it appealing to both male and female viewers and allows it to unite moral and social values of the domestic sphere with female professional visual aesthetics.

Perhaps the most significant connection between Olive’s artistry and the domestic realm occurs in her courtship by Harold Gwynne. As in *Jane Eyre*, the

relationship between female visual art and romance proves essential to the “happy ending” that resolves the plot. Harold’s disappointment with women becomes clear in his analysis of Michael’s painting, *Alcestis*:

‘[Harold] looked at Alcestis,—the “Alcestis” I have painted,—sitting on her golden throne, her head on her husband’s breast, waiting for death to call her from her kingdom and her lord: waiting solemnly, yet without fear. “See,” said Lord Arundale to his friend, “how love makes this feeble woman stronger than a hero! See how fearlessly a noble wife can die!”—“A wife who loves her husband,” was the answer, given so bitterly, that I turned to look at him.’ (146)

Harold’s resentment and cynicism are apparent in this comment, as is his desire for domestic harmony and his wishful longing for a devoted wife. His relationship with Sara has led only to romantic disenchantment, disillusionment and unhappiness. While Lord Arundale views the painting as a beautiful testament to female strength in love, Harold sees it as little more than a reminder of his failed domestic arrangements. Through his relationship to and interpretation of a painting, Olive begins to understand better Harold’s romantic history, his detached affect, and his attitude toward his ex-wife.

Olive’s relationship with Harold does not happen effortlessly; she waits a long time to achieve domestic and artistic happiness. Harold and Olive come into contact before ever meeting each other, as Olive’s father has borrowed money from Harold and his mother, Alison Gwynne. Upon her father’s death, after a nasty summons from Harold, Olive begins to repay the debt. She views Harold as cold, rude, and disrespectful of her father’s memory. However, once Olive and Harold meet in person and begin to develop a friendship, Olive soon feels not only sympathy for Harold but romantic desire. She becomes his spiritual counselor, as the two exchange a series of highly personal letters, discussing their views on faith, religious observance, and spirituality. In contrast to Harold and Sara’s relationship, Olive and Harold’s affection grows out of dialogue; it is

based on intellectual, emotional, and moral compatibility that evidences corresponding values. Despite her burgeoning attraction to Harold, however, it seems initially that Olive may only achieve artistic, not romantic, fulfillment:

Gradually, when she saw how mean was the general standard of perfection, how ineffably beneath her own ideal—the man she could have worshipped—she ceased to regret that loneliness which on earth was, she deemed, her perpetual lot. She saw her companions wedded to men who from herself would never have won a single thought. So she gathered up all her passionate love-impulses into her virgin soul, and married herself unto her Art. (148)

On some level, the text suggests that Olive uses her artistry as a romantic substitute until she finds a suitor worthy of her. Yet Olive's commitment to "perfection" may also signal her desire to have an independent identity and occupation before marriage.

Craik's narrator, though, declares that women cannot be happy with art alone: Often and often in the world's history had been noted that of brave men who rose from the wreck of some bitter love, and found happiness in their genius and their fame. But Olive had yet to learn that, with women, it is rarely so. She felt more than ever the mournful change which had come over her, when it happened that great success was won by one her later pictures—a picture unconsciously created from the inspiration of that sweet love-dream. When the news came—tidings which a year ago would have thrilled her with pleasure—Olive only smiled faintly, and a few minutes after went into her chamber, hid her face, and wept. (234)

The home space of the Rothesays and Gwynnes has been destroyed by valuing women merely for their physical beauty and not their talents. Olive, however, will never have the opportunity to create a new, improved domestic model of her own, if she chooses the beauty of her art over the attractiveness of a successful companionate partnership and marriage. Olive's task is to unite the home with artistic life.

Readers see Olive further "domesticate" her art as her desire for Harold increases: "After a season of rest, she began earnestly to consider her future, especially with respect to her Art [...] Half-smiling, she began to call her pictures her children, and

to think of the time when they, a goodly race, would live, and tell no tale of their creator's woe. This Art-life—all the life she had, and all that she would leave behind—must not be sacrificed by any miserable contest with an utterly hopeless human love” (263). Much as earlier Olive was married to her art, now her lengthy relationship with her partner, Art, has begun to result in the production of “children.” Olive’s artistry becomes re-configured through the maternal language of wifedom and motherhood, as the text fosters a way of discussing her professional ambitions through the rhetoric of Victorian discourses of femininity and appropriate women’s roles. Even when romantic union seems unlikely, art fuels domestic happiness, and domestic happiness encourages artistic expression.

At the end of *Olive*, Harold and Olive declare their love and marry. Whereas Dennis Dennisoff states that “Craik’s heroine does eventually marry and discard her artistic career, having earlier concluded that, when she is not painting, she feels ‘less of an artist, and more of a woman’” (49), I do not believe that the text supports such a clear reading of Olive’s relationship to her former profession. In fact, when Harold proposes and then informs her that he will have to go abroad before they can marry, Olive says, “ ‘They [Harold’s mother and his daughter with Sara Derwent, Ailie Gwynne, shall stay and comfort me. Nay,’ she said, trying to veil her loving intents, ‘you will not forbid it. How could I go on with my painting, living all alone?’” (321). Olive has every intention of continuing her painting, but now endorses the notion that good art cannot be created in solitude.

Thus, I contend that the novel’s conclusion advocates a balance between the female protagonist’s roles as “artist” and as “woman.” Olive’s ability to synthesize her artistic talents with the domestic, as well as her skill in using one pursuit to foster the other, has been evident throughout the novel. Hence, there is no reason why, as she

begins to build her home with Harold—a home that will restore the corrupted social hierarchies of gender and race present in the text’s other home spaces—that it will not embrace the values associated throughout with female artistry.³⁴ Craik writes, “[Olive] stood by the window for a minute or two, her artist-soul drinking in all that was beautiful in the scene; then she went about her little household duties, already grown so sweet” (325). Even after her marriage, Olive’s artist soul remains, nicely “coupled” with her domestic chores. Olive’s aesthetic response to domestic beauty further enhances the joy she experiences in her home life; for Olive, art and romance are a good marriage. The closing lines position Harold “just then in the mood when a great man needs no human intervention—not even a wife’s—between him and the aspirations which fulfill his soul.” He cries, “ ‘ I think [...] that there is a full, rich life before me yet. I will go forth and rejoice therein; and if misfortune come, I will it—thus!—’.” Olive responds, “ ‘ And I [...] thus’.” Although Harold attempts to place himself apart from “human intervention,” even that of his wife, Olive inserts herself into his visions for the future; furthermore, she suggests with her phrase “And I thus” that she, too, will hold ambitions of her own: “So they stood, true man and woman, husband and wife, ready to go through the world without fear, trusting in each other, and looking up to Heaven to guide their way” (331). In the final paragraph, Harold, who wishes to pursue a career in the sciences, and Olive, who is a professional visual artist, are united in their desires and ambitions. The home space has been re-envisioned through a conversion narrative that not only reconciles Harold to Christian doctrine, but that weds science to art. *Olive*, Craik’s novel,

³⁴ In terms of its financial backing, Olive’s new home will be built, most definitely, on the fruits of her artistic labors. Although her money will become Harold’s when she marries, their union will allow her to reclaim the money she has sent Harold over the years in order to clear her father’s debt.

successfully marries a host of Victorian anxieties in a safe, domestic sphere that lovingly encompasses all.

Although *Olive* does reconcile many of its core tensions, its Gothic elements do not entirely disappear. For example, the novel's heightened racial discourses are not as easily reconciled. Both Cora Kaplan and Sally Mitchell have observed that *Olive*'s progress narrative, much like *Jane Eyre*'s, only precedes at the expense of a racial other. Jane's racial double, Bertha, commits suicide, while *Olive*'s racially ambiguous half-sister, Christal Manners, lives a life of religious seclusion after her *own* suicide attempt following a romantic disappointment (327). The text does not allow Christal to court or marry her potential suitor Lyle Derwent (who, instead, has an infatuation with Olive).³⁵ While the body of the racial other remains corporeally deviant, the white body of the disabled female artist is recuperated through community acceptance, professional success, and romantic fulfillment. Perhaps some readers may feel that this Gothic "othering" of race is a marker of the genre; however, the trope does not appear broadly enough across the genre to make such a claim. Instead, only a few practitioners of the genre, such as Brontë and Craik, rely on de-Gothicizing the woman artist, and in Craik's case, rendering her protagonist's physical disabilities invisible, by reinforcing other women's "otherness."

Craik writes, "[Olive] became an artist—not in a week, a month, a year—Art exacts of its votaries no less service than a lifetime. But in her girl's soul the right chord had been touched, which began to vibrate unto noble music—the true seed had been sown, which day by day grew into a goodly plant" (126). The trajectory of female artistic

³⁵ Both Christal's and Olive's "deviant" bodies are marked as non-procreative. Olive serves as an adopted mother to Harold's daughter, but the text does not suggest that she has her own children.

development is a personal and life-long process. Both Brontë and Craik share in their heroines' journeys as women and artists, and their texts utilize the figure of the woman painter as a means of interart discourse to discuss shared experiences of female artistic endeavor in the nineteenth-century. Their novels, moreover, foreground women's creativity and creative expression through the presence of female domestic artist-figures. Ultimately, the narratives about Jane Eyre and Olive Rothesay demonstrate how the coverings that adorn the female body, whether painters' smocks or housewives' aprons, can both be symbols of female artistic creation.

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Chapter 5

THE PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A MODERN WOMAN: THE FEMALE ARTIST-FIGURE AS FEMINIST ROLE MODEL IN SANDRA GOLDBACHER'S *THE GOVERNESS*

In the last frame of Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess* (1998), the camera closes in on a photographic portrait of Charles Cavendish, former employer and lover of the protagonist, Rosina da Silva. Years after their passionate professional and romantic relationship has ended, Rosina chooses to save only Charles's portrait. Such an artifact may seem an unsatisfying memento of their affair, but Rosina asserts earlier in the film that photographs serve as a form of memory, a way to keep "lost" people from one's past. Significantly, though, the film does not end with Charles's portrait alone; just prior to the last frame, Rosina has taken her own photographic portrait. Until this point, she has shown no interest in seeing herself through the camera's lens; instead, she has relied on Charles's gaze to capture her image. The process of composing and producing portraits, especially her own, helps to mark Rosina's journey from Cavendish's hired governess and laboratory assistant to an independent, successful professional photographer. Rosina's portrait captures the artist as "modern" woman, suggesting a journey of self-knowledge as she comes to use the camera lens to see herself, and others, rightly and authentically. Moreover, Rosina learns to see *artistically*, as she privileges her aesthetic vision of people and experience, the "beauty" of her people, instead of Charles's scientific viewpoint.

The metaphor of the portrait seems apt in relationship to the film's status as neo-Victorian, neo-Gothic adaptation, as these adaptations offer viewers "portraits," or representations, of the past. Much like Rosina's assessment of a photographic portrait, these films work to keep the memories of lost, or no longer familiar, peoples and events alive for the contemporary age and to make them beautiful. As screenwriters and directors create and adapt Victorian narratives, they act not merely as memory-keepers, but as active producers for viewers of new memories, new histories, and new alternatives for a people, "the Victorians," whom, as twenty-first-century audiences, we have never known directly enough to have "lost," but whom we have somehow "found" through exercises of artistic imagination. Hence, the Victorians are no longer the "shadows of ghosts," as Charles's maid calls his photographs; they walk amongst us. In the movement from the image of the Victorian to the neo-Victorian film, adapters echo the transition experienced by Rosina in her progress from laboratory assistant to successful photographer. As Rosina "develops," much like the photographs she helps create, she no longer solely sees herself in relation to Charles, through his eyes; but rather, she views herself independently through the self-actualization of her own gaze.¹ Similarly, neo-Victorian re-envisionings may attempt to see relationally, by trying to appropriate an "authentic" Victorian gaze, but they cannot help filtering the nineteenth century through the lens of their twentieth-and twenty-first-century origins. Like Rosina, neo-Victorian films gain autonomy from their original inspirations; they exist in dialogue with their past influences, but they are not limited by them.

Contemporary viewers may look to these neo-Victorian cinematic portraits to explain, justify, and promote current ways of being, just as one may look at pictures of

¹ I use the term "gaze" in conjunction with the theories posited by Laura Mulvey in her classic essay, "Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975).

ancestors in order to see traits common to oneself. The inclusion of a prominent female artist-figure as a feminist antecedent is a popular trope in many twentieth and twenty-first-century filmic constructions of Victorian Gothic narratives, such as *Angels and Insects* (Philip Haas, 1995), *Mary Reilly* (Stephen Frears, 1996), and *Fingersmith* (Aisling Walsh 2005). The eponymous heroine of *Mary Reilly* not only writes her account of the events in Dr. Jekyll's house, but she also engages in the domestic arts, such as gardening. Mathilda, in *Angels and Insects*, works as a governess, but she has a rich interior life as an artist, writing and illustrating books. *Fingersmith*'s Maud Lilly, too, becomes a writer. In fact, even *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Karel Reisz, 1981), which does not participate fully in the neo-Gothic tradition, possesses moments of Gothic intrusion in which the film depicts the female protagonist, Sarah Woodruff, as a female visual artist.² In each of these examples, the film adaptations are all from previously published novels or novellas. By contrast, Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess* is an original interpretation or creation of Victorian culture. Instead of adapting a particular novel, Goldbacher's film offers a postmodern pastiche of a variety of nineteenth-century texts. Namely, it adapts and intersects the discourses of the Gothic

² Namely, a significant Gothic intrusion occurs when Sarah sketches a self-portrait. The scene's music, lighting, and setting suggest a Gothic mood, and the scene draws not only on nineteenth-century Gothic texts but also gestures toward the figure of the "madwoman in the attic," a phrase popularized by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's pivotal feminist literary critical text (1979). The film links the figure of the Victorian female artist to fear, anxiety, and feminist concerns. Furthermore, the film not only positions Sarah as a visual artist, but Harold Pinter's screenplay adds an additional frame to John Fowles's novel that highlights female artistic endeavor, through a film-within-the-film. The novelistic and filmic narratives parallel each other. Thus, Meryl Streep's performance of the actress Anna playing Sarah frames and highlights Sarah's slightly more muted narrative of female artistic development.

genre; the *Jane Eyre*, or “governess” narrative; and the figures and stories of Jewish literary culture, such as the crypto-Jew, a Jewish character pretending to be Anglo.

These neo-Victorian texts of the 1980s and 1990s appear to be particularly invested in feminist content, offering more obvious examples of women’s art practices, perhaps because they do not trust the audience to be satisfied with what is already present in the original nineteenth-century Gothics. Or, these figures may be included for readers and viewers—especially women—who might not expressly identify themselves as feminist, but who still like and expect to see feminist “role models,” particularly antecedents who are long past and who appear to be “romantic” characters, as opposed to living or more recent feminist figures. In *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007) Cora Kaplan suggests that the proliferation of “Victoriana,” or texts that re-envision the Victorian past, is due not so much to nostalgia, as to a wish to rewrite “historical narratives to highlight the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and empire” (3). For Kaplan, contemporary authors and filmmakers illuminate more blatantly the ideas that Victorian writers introduced covertly. As I have tried to show in this dissertation the recurring tropes of women artists and female art practices presented in nineteenth-century Gothic texts were not “covert” inclusions at all. The fact of their prominence and repetition in these works suggests that Victorian writers (and readers) of Gothic literature were picking up on these seemingly muffled, or hidden, allusions more often than contemporary readers may think. In fact, what appears, to us, to be covert was a stylistic convention for Victorian writers.

In adaptations of the Victorian Gothic narrative for contemporary audiences, the form becomes associated with the mapping of the development of a female artist-

figure.³ The woman artist heroine functions as the significant marker of the “Female Gothic” genre needed to translate nineteenth-century narratives into contemporary ones. In *The Governess*, a re-telling of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) set in early 1840s, Goldbacher’s Jewish governess, Rosina da Silva, becomes a photographer. In her adaptation, Goldbacher builds on the story of Jane’s narrative, visual, and domestic artistic development; in other words, Jane’s artistic narrative, which some may perceive as marginal, proves central to Goldbacher’s re-working of the text. Antje Ascheid notes, “*The Governess* takes full and deliberate recourse to various literary blueprints referring to the Brontës and other Gothics. But, the film is also actively engaged in rewriting the Gothic heroine as an active seeker of both sexual and scientific knowledge” (6). Although Ascheid suggests that the heroines of nineteenth-century Gothics by women are passive rather than active seekers, we have already seen that the assertive, even aggressive, narrative of female artistry was always present in the nineteenth-century Female Gothic. Goldbacher’s film translates this genre marker of the Victorian Female Gothic.

While *The Governess* does not claim to be a direct adaptation of Brontë’s novel, it clearly participates in a *Jane Eyre* tradition. The film’s title—*The Governess*—conjures images of Brontë’s famous heroine in the popular imagination, as does the movie’s courtship plot between a younger female subordinate and her paternalistic older male employer. *The Governess Official Movie Site: Sony Pictures Classics* says, “Another interest to Goldbacher was to deal with the romantic cliché of the governess and the employer and rework it, making it contemporary.” Goldbacher notes, “I’m not interested in period or costume drama for its own sake, but the idea of the governess was a very potent figure in the 19th Century. It was the only way you could present a strong

³ Of course, not all neo-Victorian prose is feminist, many steam punk and graphic novels are even misogynistic.

central female character who could go out into the world. There was no other way women could—you were either a prostitute or a governess” (par. 15). In fact, explicitly making the connection between Brontë’s and Goldbacher’s governesses in a review in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, Ruthie Stein says, “In their most fertile imaginings, the Brontë sisters could not have conceived a governess as saucy and lusty as Rosina da Silva.” Interestingly, Stein equates not only Charlotte Brontë and Goldbacher, but she conflates each Brontë sister with Charlotte; the novels of Emily and Anne, other than *Agnes Grey*, do not deal primarily with the lives of governesses. The figure of Jane Eyre as governess, it seems, threatens to overshadow and define other Victorian narratives of female development.

Hence, if we are thinking about *The Governess* and its relationship to *Jane Eyre*, or to a Brontëan style, it proves important not to consider fidelity alone, letting *Jane Eyre*’s story take precedence over other narratives. Considerations of fidelity to the source text would ignore “the richness of discourses that come between a novel and its later film adaptation [...] Between a novel and its film version lie many years of history and cultural exchange that should not be ignored” (Brosh 6). As Robert Self suggests, “Cinematic adaptations of literature never merely adapt the ‘prior whole’ of the literary text but a wide array of other cultural texts as well” (qtd. in Brosh 6).⁴ *The Governess* makes no pretense of offering a faithful adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, but rather relies on the cultural capital of Brontë’s Female Gothic ur-text. Goldbacher’s heroine draws from “years of history and cultural exchange” in order to tell a different story, one of a Jewish woman’s journey towards becoming a successful professional photographer. The 150-

⁴ Self’s quotation is taken from Brosh’s *Screening Novel Women*; Brosh excerpts the quote from Self’s paper presentation titled, “A Canon at Century’s End,” presented at the annual Society for Cinema Studies Conference, Chicago, March 9-12, 2000.

plus years between *Jane Eyre* and *The Governess* have seen extensive changes in discourses of race and gender, including, the development of a feminist agenda. Drawing on these additional cultural texts, movements, and advances, Goldbacher's film plays with the language of photography creating for its audiences the "portrait" of a Victorian woman, who displays current sensibilities. Goldbacher tells a story Brontë could not—the story of an ethnically "other" woman who becomes a professional female artist in the mid-nineteenth century and who, as such, serves as a one possible feminist role model for today's viewers. Naturally, Rosina's trajectory of female development may not be viewed as inspiring for all viewers; yet, the film positions her as one model of feminist success, most specifically, through her narrative of powerful female artistry.

The narrative of artistic development in *The Governess* illuminates the film's engagement with the conditions of Victorian womanhood, while simultaneously addressing current questions in feminism. In examining Goldbacher's choices in adapting *Jane Eyre*'s narrative for contemporary audiences, this chapter will consider problems of professionalization; gender, race and ethnicity; and the uses of the characters' artistry in the development of the courtship narrative. My argument will focus on the role that modern feminist perspectives play in this neo-Victorian creation and examine how *The Governess* simultaneously reproduces some of the anxieties and concerns about gender of the Victorian period and reflects those involving women today. As Jeannette King suggests in *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (2005), "Gender is as politically charged an issue now as it was at the end of the nineteenth century, and continues to be debated in both the popular and academic press. If we are in the middle of another shift in what we know and think about gender, in the 'post-feminist' mood that prevails at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we need to know how our beliefs came about, and how much has been excluded or forgotten in what

we know” (6). Goldbacher’s film offers viewers a portrait of unresolved political, cultural, and commercial concerns in contemporary feminisms at the turn of the twenty-first century, while placing them in dialogue with their Victorian antecedents and with nineteenth-century answers to the “Woman Question.”

Goldbacher’s Gothic Governess: Translating Gender in *Jane Eyre*

Sandra Goldbacher’s *The Governess* (1998) charts the artistic development of Rosina Da Silva, who becomes a photographer, in the early 1840s. After her father is murdered, in order to obtain financial security, Rosina leaves her London home and her middle-class Jewish family; masquerades as a Gentile; and works as a governess for the Cavendish family, who possess an estate on the Isle of Skye. Although Rosina has little interest in her charge, Clementina, she develops a great fascination with the scientific pursuits of her employer, Charles Cavendish. She begins to assist him in his photographic endeavors and their work becomes collaborative. When, during a Seder ritual that she conducts in secret, Rosina accidentally discovers how to affix images to the photographic paper, she informs Charles, and soon their professional collaboration turns into an adulterous affair. Rosina attempts to encourage Charles to see photography not merely as a scientific pursuit, but as a means of aesthetically framing and capturing experience. But Charles’s rigidity, closed-mindedness, and lack of emotion cannot be overcome by Rosina’s passionate love and devotion. Ultimately, Charles rejects Rosina, after she creates a nude photographic portrait of him while he is sleeping. Broken-hearted, but defiant, Rosina “exposes” Charles to his family by showing his wife the portrait she has taken. She rejects the advances of Charles’s son’s, Henry Cavendish; and departs the Cavendish estate with boxes of photographic materials and chemicals. Although she returns home to find her community decimated by cholera, she helps to rebuild it and

then documents the lives of “her people” by becoming a successful recorder of Jewish culture and individuals through her art.

The Governess emerges out of Victorian Female Gothic narratives such as *Jane Eyre*. The lush and verdant Scottish scenery of the Isle of Skye, for example, turns gloomy, dark, and oppressive just as Rosina’s coach approaches. This foreboding ancestral home conjures up images of other famous literary Gothic mansions, such as Edward Rochester’s mysterious Thornfield Hall. Similarly, the coldness and darkness in the individual lives of the members of the Cavendish family echoes, atmospherically, in the surrounding scenery. As Rosina walks into the house, she is greeted with taxidermied animals imprisoned under glass and walls covered with mounted deer heads and antlers which, with their forked horns shadowing in the eerie candle lighting, make the rooms appear quite hellish and confining. Antje Ascheid suggests that “the motif of female entrapment clearly draws on conventions from the Victorian Gothic novel, which typically depicts the trials of a heroine who suffers anguish and abjection at the hands of a tyrannical patriarch, a theme many ‘women’s heritage films’ take up in a revisionist reworking of the Gothic” (par. 7). *The Governess* plays with the common Gothic motif of female entrapment. The disorienting and imposing hall tells a sinister history of male domination through its metaphors of hunting and violent containment, a history Rosina will rebel against through her relationship with Cavendish.

Rosina’s revolt against typical Female Gothic strictures may be a result of her familiarity with such narratives. Much like Catherine Morland in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Rosina seems already equipped for the horrors of a Gothic house, due to her reading practice. Early in the film, she reads to her mother and sister from what is most likely a Gothic novel: “With a rapidity and vehemence which seemed to have in it a touch of insanity, a sudden sense of the danger to which the child must

necessarily be exposed to in the charge of such a keeper influenced the lady's desire to keep him in the castle, if possible." Here, the lurid language, the breathless pacing of the prose, and the themes of insanity and entrapment all bespeak a Gothic text. Later, after Rosina learns that she will be serving as a governess to the Cavendish family, she prophetically reads from the same text: "With the same style of bitter irony, I know the wages of that service." The issues that also will impact upon Rosina—being "kept" and "keeping" her charge—are present in this fictional narrative. And she too will come to know the personal "wages" of her servitude. Unlike Catherine Morland, Rosina does not entirely script and perform the Gothic elements of her narrative, but she remains conscious of Gothic influences in her surroundings. For example, upon arriving at the Isle of Skye, she says, "The Isle of Skye sounds absurdly romantic, Gothic even." Both Rosina and Goldbacher toy with the romantic excess of the Gothic, mocking even while participating in the genre, in order to develop updated models for the narrative of female self-reliance.

Although *The Governess* operates in the same tradition as *Jane Eyre*, it is not Gothic in precisely the same way. In particular, *The Governess* alters *Jane Eyre*'s Gothic tradition with its handling of the discourses of sexuality and gender and it offers a feminist recuperation of Female Gothic elements. Cora Kaplan posits that such play with sexuality and gender often characterizes neo-Victorian adaptations; these versions "put the sex" back into Victorian narratives. Beginning with John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), these adaptations have turned what was once sexual subtext in the Victorian novel into sexual text in the neo-Victorian rewriting. By including alternative narratives of sex and gender, these adaptations do more than merely add "racy bits" to Victorian novels. In *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000) John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff contend that the purpose of

sexually explicit neo-Victorian adaptations is far more sophisticated: “our contemporary contemplation of Victorian sex as a dizzying hall of mirrors [...challenges us...] to decide whether Victorian sexuality lies behind us in the dust, or whether, in their passionate struggles with sexual repression, the Victorians were somehow the harbingers of sexual self-realization” (xix). Kucich and Sadoff argue that, through these adaptations, current audiences are better able to examine their own sexuality and notions of gender development in light of their antecedents.

Corresponding with the neo-Victorian interest in sexuality and gender, the Gothic genre has always been known for its preoccupation with (deviant) sexuality. Perhaps one of the most significant developments in current Gothic criticism is the exposure of queer narratives in Gothic texts. For example, in *Queer Gothic* (2006) George Haggerty urges critics to expand the current understanding of the Gothic to include a “wide range of writers, dispersed historically and culturally, [who] use ‘Gothic’ to evoke a queer world that attempts to transgress the binaries of sexual decorum” (2). Haggerty advocates that the Gothic genre’s privileging of queer sexuality illuminates shifting ideological concerns, fears, and anxieties. Like Haggerty, Paulina Palmer who also studies queer, especially lesbian, Gothic, considers the history of Gothic fiction in conjunction with contemporary Gothic works. She posits that while queer figures have been long associated with the Gothic genre, they have been used primarily for homophobic and misogynistic purposes. For example, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Christabel” (1816), Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) have all been reinterpreted as queer texts, though ones in which homosexual desire is monstrous. Palmer looks at these earlier examples of homosexual Gothic alongside contemporary lesbian Gothic and concludes that these later texts rework earlier homophobic and misogynistic motifs in order to

negate the earlier Gothic tradition and to explore further female lesbian subjectivity. She argues that tropes commonly used to define the Gothic—excess, doubling, female entrapment, witchcraft—have also been used to define the lesbian experience (*Gothic Studies* 118-119).⁵

While *The Governess* makes use of many of these Gothic elements, particularly the trope of female entrapment, it does not reproduce the trajectory of Palmer's "lesbian Gothic." The film does succeed in "queering" the Gothic in numerous ways, though. One example of "queering" the Gothic occurs during the sexual confidences that Rosina shares with her sister. The two girls occupy the same bedroom, and a bed. At night, they engage in sex talk discussing kissing, prostitution, and, most graphically, the taste and appearance of semen. Their conversations are reminiscent of Jane Eyre's and Helen Burns's discussions. Although, here Goldbacher looks back to *Jane Eyre* for discussions between (figurative) sisters, the religious allusions in Jane and Helen's talks do not transfer evenly to the Jewish sisters. Using a specifically Christian imaginary, Helen instructs Jane, who is hungry for human affection, to forego such earthly cares in favor of spiritual consolation: "'Hush, Jane! You think too much of the love of human beings, you are too impulsive, too vehement: the sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self, or than creatures as feeble as you'" (59). While the conversations between women in *Jane Eyre* contend that eventual spiritual union with the Creator will satisfy a woman's desire for passion and love, *The Governess* offers an eroticized relationship between sisters, one that "queers" the exchanges between women by sexualizing them

⁵ Authors such as Sarah Waters have been successful in yoking the neo-Victorian adaptation and the lesbian Gothic together in texts such as *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002).

and encouraging earthly physical desire. While the social and political concerns of the Christian and Jewish “sisters” vary, the trajectory of their relationships share some similarities. Both sets of sisters begin in alignment, but then are yoked apart. Jane and Helen are separated by Helen’s death and by Jane’s refusal to adopt fully Helen’s version of Christianity; Rosina and her sister are divided by Rosina’s departure for the Isle of Sky and by her sister’s eventual marriage to Rosina’s former suitor, Benjamin. In both cases, different models of femininity come into contrast as the female characters negotiate submission and duty versus rebellion.

The “queerest” relationship of the film is Rosina’s dalliance with Charles’s son, Henry Cavendish. This involves a sexual role reversal, along with a suggestion of sado-masochism. Her affair with Henry challenges typical heterosexual paradigms. At the same time, their relationship confronts racially and religiously homogenous unions, as a possible sexual union between Rosina and Henry calls to mind the popular nineteenth-century near-miscegenation trope, found in the works of Sir Walter Scott and George Eliot. Rosina calls Henry “a very strange young man.” “Strange” may refer to Henry’s erratic behavior, but it also carries the association of perverse and “queer,” as in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886).⁶ In his relationship with Rosina, Henry is feminized, while Rosina plays the dominatrix. He is clearly in poor health, and his paleness and thinness bespeak an illness that has diminished his vitality, his virility, and his capacity to engage in the (masculine) world of work. In addition, he demonstrates the curiosity typically associated with a female protagonist, as he searches Rosina’s room, in order to uncover the secret of her origins. Henry’s youth, long curls, lean limbs, pouty lips, and simpering postures are those of an androgyne. In “The

⁶ According to Elaine Showalter in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990), Stevenson’s novel has a strong homoerotic subtext.

Adolescent Boy: Fin-de-Siècle Femme Fatale?” Martha Vicinus claims that the figure of the adolescent boy, and the androgyne, was just as troubling for turn-of the century-artists as the predatory “New-Woman” (91). She writes,

Of indeterminate character [...] The boy personified a fleeting moment of liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence, making possible fantasies of total contingency and total annihilation. For men, the boy suggested freedom without committing them to action; for women, he represented their frustrated desire for action. But most of all, his presence in fin-de-siècle literature signified the coming of age of the modern gay and lesbian sensibility: his protean nature displayed a double desire—to love a boy and to be a boy. (91)

Although *The Governess* is set in the 1840s, rather than the 1890s, it is a Victorian pastiche, not a direct adaptation of a Victorian literary classic or a historically specific text. Thus the film takes some liberties when creating its version of the Victorian era. Much as, in Goldbacher’s screenplay, the character of Rosina borrows from fears and anxieties that swirled around the late-century figure of the sexually and professionally assertive New Woman, the film also reflects some late Victorian anxieties about gender and sexual roles.

While Vicinus claims that fin-de-siècle works such as George du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894) and Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé* (1894) indicate a high period of gynophobia during the period, she contends that the boy, too, became a powerful cultural image in which an author and a reader could “pour his or her anxieties, fantasies, and sexual desires” (91). Much like the writers of Gothic in the late 1890s, such as Vernon Lee, Goldbacher uses Henry as feminized androgyne to allow Rosina masculine control.⁷ In their relationship, Rosina can “be a boy” in large part due to Henry’s desire for her. It is

⁷ Vicinus asserts that Lee, a lesbian writer, cast herself in her Gothic fiction as a boy. Stories such as “A Wedding Chest” and “Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady” were her means of describing lesbian desire, through her effeminate heroes (107).

his erotic abjection that most feminizes him. Henry says that Rosina controls him, like a “dark angel.” He puts her in a position of power: “You told me to divert my mind from black thoughts with some exercise. See how I obey your every command. I would walk into the sea for you.” At this point, Rosina makes light of her dominant role, teasingly replying that a bath might do him more good. Henry further debases himself by saying that he would “bathe and scent” for her. And after Charles rejects her, Rosina herself, begins to explore the attractive potential of Henry’s infatuation and the domination over him that it offers her.

In their eventual sexual consummation, Rosina rises to her image as dominatrix. When Henry comes to her room, she commands him to remove his clothing, and he does so willingly. She tells him to “Lie down” and denies his request to let him look at her in return. Her declarations are brief and authoritative, and she makes them as she silently appraises his naked body. Like a young, inexperienced, stereotypically female virgin, he lies passively on the bed, as Rosina traces his naked form with her fingers. In this scene, Rosina attempts to reverse the control Charles Cavendish has had over her body during their early sexual encounters, when Rosina has lain passively waiting for penetration, her face covered by a veil. Eventually, Rosina decides that she does not want to reproduce sexual objectification and power dynamics that Charles has imposed on her, so the scene ends with a tearful Rosina apologizing and begging forgiveness.⁸ Here she demonstrates her identity as an artist; although she has controlled

⁸ In “Educating for a Jewish Gaze: The Close Doubling of Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Sandra Goldbacher’s *The Governess*” (2008), Helene Meyers argues that “In *The Governess*, erotic scripts and oedipal rivalries are the vehicles through which anti-Semitism and philosemitism are mobilized [...] Charles’s son, Henry, is in rebellion against his father’s masculine cult of cold rationality and thus fetishizes Rosina’s otherness; for Henry the ‘Jewess’ becomes a figure for his alienation from genteel/Gentile patriarchy, and he professes love for her. Charles and Rosina’s sexual

the gaze in her scene with Henry, she is a photographer who does not merely “reproduce,” in general, but who creates with her camera and devises new scenarios. Rosina’s gesture does not eradicate the suggestion for violence present in Henry’s conception of their relationship, though; it returns when Rosina leaves, and Henry destroys his father’s laboratory, then takes a self-punishing masochistic swim in the frigid surf.

The Governess’s “queering” of the Female Gothic plot also occurs in the film’s addition of a *Salomé* narrative, through Rosina’s “dress-up” for the camera. Salome, the Jewish princess whose incestuous dancing at the behest of her mother Herodias results in the beheading of John the Baptist, has come to represent an orientalized figure of the Jewess as desirable and destructive; as such, she is the nexus of misogynist, anti-Semitic, and philosemitic scripts” (Vicus 115). Audiences familiar with homosexual readings of *Salomé* may see *The Governess*, particularly the character of Rosina, in light of this queer vision. Most notably, Oscar Wilde’s version of *Salomé* has long invited queer readings. Not only has the play been read in light of the author’s own homosexuality, but its 1920s silent film adaptation has encouraged this interpretation. The longstanding rumor surrounding Alla Nazimova’s 1923 production of *Salomé* claims that the cast is composed entirely of gay and bisexual actors, as an homage to Oscar Wilde, and in accord with the wishes of its star and producer. While no one knows what percentage of the cast members were indeed gay, Nazimova herself was a lesbian, several of the female courtiers are men in drag, and the two guard characters are played as effeminate.

liaison proves to be overwhelming for the master of the house; once he learns that she is a Jewess and that his son is courting her, he rejects her and uses the work that they have shared as a means to humiliate her” (106-107).

Gail Finney's "The (Wo)Man in the Moon: Wilde's *Salomé*" argues that on a symbolic level, "[Salomé] is not a woman at all, but a man [...]" This role is borne out by the language she uses in praising [Jokanaan], by her part-by-part celebration of his anatomy [...] [which] shares much with the traditional male celebration of female anatomy" (62-63). As in Wilde's *Salomé*, Rosina reverses the fetishization of female anatomy by returning the (male) gaze. Finney suggests that Salomé's objectification of Jokanaan is a learned behavior—"this daughter's education is a veritable school of lust, where the principle of immediate gratification reigns, undermines the conventional notion of the femme fatale as a kind of natural force of virtually mythic proportions" (61). Throughout the course of the play, Salomé is looked at by the Syrian captain and, most famously, by her stepfather, Herod. However, the heroine takes on the gaze in her desire for Jokanaan. Similarly, her Jewish suitor Benjamin, Henry, and Charles all objectify Rosina's youth and beauty. Like Salomé, Rosina queers the gaze by returning the act of looking; in each case, either through her flirtatious dancing with Benjamin, her feminizing of Henry, or her photographing a naked, vulnerable, and passive Charles, she uses her gaze to take control over men.

Another significant way in which the film engages with contemporary discourses of queer Gothic is by offering a gender-reversed Gothic. It rewrites the *Jane Eyre* narrative, thereby altering discourses of gender and sexuality. The film may not make an "invert" of Rosina, but it inverts the Gothic plot. In this gender reversal, the film rewrites the notion of the Gothic secret, a trope central to the Gothic and Female Gothic genres. Critics often cite the concept of the Gothic secret as originating in Perrault's story of "Bluebeard" (1697). In "Bluebeard," a wealthy man with an unnaturally blue beard convinces a young woman to marry him. Bluebeard already has a sinister reputation, because he has been married many times before, and no one knows exactly what has

happened to his previous wives. After a month of marriage, Bluebeard leaves his wife at home with the injunction that she may enter any part of the castle, except one room. As added temptation, he gives her the keys to every room, and his wife soon sets out exploring the entire castle. She opens the forbidden door and finds the bodies of Bluebeard's murdered wives. When Bluebeard returns, he knows his wife has uncovered his hideous secret, for using that particular room key stains it with blood. Bluebeard attempts to murder his wife, but she convinces him to give her a few more moments of life, moments in which she fights him off until her brothers arrive to kill him. Ultimately, the wife inherits Bluebeard's sizeable fortune and uses it to arrange her sister's marriage, buy captains' commissions for her brothers, and marry a "worthy" gentleman who makes her forget about her time with Bluebeard.⁹

Here *The Governess* revisits the narrative of *Salomé*, which intersects with the "Bluebeard" trajectory. By equating Rosina with Salomé, the film suggests that *she*, not Charles, is the dangerous, murderous (traditionally male) figure, who, like Bluebeard, will take her lovers' heads. Of course, Rosina does not literally kill Charles, but she does "take" his head in the film's closing scenes, when she captures his portrait. In fact, Rosina chooses not to continue her relationship with Charles and thus figuratively cuts it off; then she keeps as the memento of their romance a photograph of his head.

In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995) Anne Williams posits that "Bluebeard" presents a formula that later establishes the principles of the Gothic story

⁹ Anne Williams argues, "The imposing house with a terrible secret is surely one—possibly *the*—'central' characteristic of the category 'Gothic' in its early years. Eino Railo's *The Haunted Castle* (1927) points to this fact. In *The Gothic Quest* (1938) Montague Summers exclaimed that the castles were the real protagonists of the early Gothics (pp. 410-411), while more recently Maurice Levy has emphasized the definitive function of the castle in Gothic" (39).

and setting. Perrault's tale provides a catalogue of conventions familiar to readers of the Gothic: "a vulnerable and curious heroine; a wealthy, arbitrary, and enigmatic hero/villain; and a grand mysterious dwelling concealing the violent, implicitly sexual secrets of this *homme fatal*. And the setting—Bluebeard's house with its secret room—seems the most important of these, the element that transmutes the others unmistakably into Gothic" (38-39).

Later Gothics employ these motifs of secrecy, gendered power imbalances, and the ancestral home setting. Williams concludes, "The tale of 'Bluebeard' thus suggests how a 'central term' of Gothic, the 'haunted castle,' may be read as a complex metaphor for the structures of cultural power(whether private or public, sexual, political, or religious) and for the gender arrangements such institutions both found and mirror"(47).¹⁰ For Williams, "Bluebeard" exposes the dangers of patriarchal Law and suggests that male privilege and power are cultural, rather than natural, manifestations of superiority. And because of this abusive, corrupt power dynamic, a young woman becomes increasingly vulnerable, as she never knows exactly what she will get in a marriage partner. In addition, the story illuminates how patriarchal culture punishes women for intellectual curiosity and the desire to know (42).

¹⁰ Williams claims, "Specific décor is not so important to the setting's power to evoke certain responses in the characters (and in the reader): claustrophobia, loneliness, a sense of antiquity, recognition that this is a place of secrets. Such a setting activates the 'Gothic' dynamic between image and affect, as well, presumably, as the use of particular kinds of plots, excites curiosity" (39-40). Hence, when reworking the Bluebeard myth, the setting of the new text does not have to be a haunted castle, but it should invoke the same feelings of alienation and disempowerment. For example, Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) reworks the story of Bluebeard, but the setting of this story is not an ancestral mansion; rather, it is a Gothicized New Zealand landscape that is claustrophobic in its very unfamiliarity and wildness.

Jane Eyre's Female Gothic narrative follows a "Bluebeard" trajectory, though it too rewrites the myth. Jane is a young, vulnerable, and curious heroine, who falls in love with the wealthy, paternalistic, and mysterious Edward Rochester. Rochester's ancestral mansion, Thornfield, harbors an unspeakable secret—his first marriage and the insane wife he has hidden away in his attic. The exposure of Bertha Mason Rochester reveals Rochester's sinister sexual past and his possible marital tyranny. In fact, Brontë self-consciously refers to the origin myth, as Jane thinks of Bluebeard while she explores Thornfield: "I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle" (91). Eventually, Jane's "Bluebeard" is rehabilitated; readers learn that Bertha is murderously violent, and so Rochester does not merely lock away his wives indiscriminately. Furthermore, the text punishes Rochester for his imprisonment of Bertha; the burning of Thornfield and Rochester's being maimed and blinded temper both his and the larger society's ability to exercise patriarchal power and privilege. In both "Bluebeard" and *Jane Eyre*, though, the heroines are rewarded for their curiosity through romantic-comic endings that result in marriages that appear to be financially and personally fulfilling.

Like *Jane Eyre*, *The Governess* also plays with the trope of the Gothic secret and the "Bluebeard" myth. Rosina knows that Charles Cavendish, her employer, busily works at scientific endeavors, but she is unsure of their exact nature. One evening, she decides to enter the chambers of the "Master of the House," to uncover the secret of the nature of his work. The night is dark, and the house is silent; the young, vulnerable heroine leaves the safety of her bedchamber all alone to wander into unknown and forbidden rooms. Rosina approaches Mr. Cavendish's laboratory, candle in hand. She

cracks open the door, climbs the winding stairs with the aid of her candle's dim light, and begins to explore. She comes across a series of strange specimens kept under glass, reminiscent of those in Frankenstein's laboratory, and eventually she encounters the strangest object of them all—a box covered with a black mantle. The intrepid heroine peers into the box's hole. She leaves, but not before taking with her a souvenir of her midnight wanderings: a photograph from Charles's studio.

This scene is typical of countless Gothic stories and recalls the kind of incident parodied in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Yet Rosina quickly uncovers the secret of Charles's studio; in fact, the next day he invites her there to take part in his work. Here the film once again plays with language, interweaving two vocabularies for Charles's studio is neither the photographic nor the Gothic "darkroom." The master's secret no longer remains in the dark; quite literally, it gains exposure to the light of day, as do the photographs on which he works. Charles Cavendish is no Bluebeard, or even an Edward Rochester—that is, a man with a hidden sexual past dangerous to women, as evidenced by his dead or imprisoned wives.¹¹ His work and his romantic history are open to public scrutiny. In fact, Cavendish's very prosaic wife is on full display in the only well-lit room in the dark estate, the parlor where she spends all her days.

¹¹ Helene Meyers suggests that Charles's secret is "the invisibility and hegemony of Charles's Christian masculine body," as it is revealed through his rage at his deconstructed and vulnerable identity evidenced in Rosina's nude photograph of him. While I find Meyers's analysis compelling, as she does not consider the film in light of Female Gothic narratives, she quickly diminishes the importance of Rosina's own secret(s) and the revelation of her Jewish identity.

In the case of Goldbacher's *The Governess* "the master" is not the one with the secret; it is the heroine.¹² Instead of being someone who must, like the standard protagonist, uncover the mystery of the house and its owner, Rosina is the one who proves mysterious, and she must conceal the truth about her past, as its revelation imperils her. *The Governess* offers an alternative voice to the "Bluebeard" myth that disturbs its secret-generating power. The film toys with the formula by presenting a situation in which the heroine holds a secret, while numerous characters, not only Rosina, evince intellectual curiosity. The film does not affirm a binary of sexual difference; rather it offers alternatives to one static representation of secret-generating power. Much like the process of photography, which reproduces a mirror image of the original, Goldbacher's adaptation of the Gothic plays with this notion of mirroring, both in the adaptation's content and its form. On the narrative level, her film charts the invention of photography. On the meta-level, her Victorian adaptation itself operates photographically, as it offers a mirror image of the Gothic and the relationship among genre, gender, and secrets. In essence, *The Governess* provides a "photograph" of the Gothic genre.

Rosina has a number of secrets that she hides during her time with the Cavendish family. Rosina hides her affair with Henry—keeping her relationship with Charles's son a secret from his father and vice versa. Also, she withholds information about the affairs from Henry's mother and Charles's wife. Furthermore masquerading as a Gentile governess, she must conceal her Jewish heritage in order to retain her employment in the Cavendish household. Here, Rosina is enacting the role of the crypto-Jew, Sephardic Jews who were forced to convert in Spain and Portugal. Many retained

¹² Here I am greatly indebted to Margaret Stetz, who first suggested this idea (and countless others) to me.

their Jewishness in secret, while outwardly appearing Christian or Catholic. This sign of the secret Jew---especially given Rosina's name and obvious Sephardic heritage---would support the idea that Rosina is participating in a long line of literary representations of the secret Jew, trying to pass, in need of being discovered. According to scholars such as Michael Galchinsky and Nadia Valman, crypto-Jews appeared in the work of Jewish women writers like Grace Aguilar. Rosina's pseudonym of Mary "Blackchurch" proves significant in light of the "Bluebeard" story, as her name suggests the same play of color and identity markers. Anne Williams speculates that the "blue" of Bluebeard's beard signals the unnaturalness of patriarchal control, as evidenced by the masculine trait of the beard and its peculiar color (41). Mary "Blackchurch" serves as an exaggeratedly British name, and the second part of it alludes ironically to Rosina's status as "black," as the Jewish dark "other" of the Christian church. The name also gestures towards the unnaturalness of Rosina, a Jew, masquerading as a Christian; it "blackens" whiteness, as if to suggest that the Jewess has infiltrated Anglo culture.

In addition, Rosina must conceal her intelligence and intellectual curiosity in order to remain attractive to Cavendish. Rosina's desire "to know" may link her to the wife of the "Bluebeard" myth, but unlike that of Bluebeard's wife, Rosina's curiosity has nothing to do with a feminine desire for property, as a way to subvert male control. What Rosina seeks is something closer to modern feminist visions of equal access to the sciences, to the arts, and to professional success and fame. Frequently, Rosina must credit her ideas as belonging to Cavendish; when she concludes that longer light exposure would help to fix the photographic images on paper, she says, "Could we not---could *you* not---section off a far larger area of the room and keep it out of darkness all the time?" She initially suggests that "we" could try to follow her plan, but quickly modifies it to "you." Rosina fears seeming "forward"---too interested in scientific matters, or too

confident in her ideas. Of course, she has reason to be nervous about “exposing” her intelligence to Cavendish, for he clearly worries that Rosina may overtake him intellectually in scenes such as when he names the photographic process that Rosina discovered the “Cavendish-Blackchurch Method” instead of giving Rosina’s name prominence. It is Rosina, not Cavendish, whose ideas result in all the significant developments in their photography, both aesthetic and scientific ones. In one scene, Rosina wears her spectacles as she and Charles work on the prints. He informs her that she looks more “foreign” than ever, wearing her spectacles, and Rosina immediately removes them. Rosina’s spectacles prove to be an accessory loaded with significance, for they carry associations of her “foreign” ethnicity, and they draw attention to the problem of the female gaze.¹³ Furthermore, they also hint at Rosina’s powers of intellect, as glasses typically serve as a marker of a bookish, intelligent heroine. It seems that Charles is a man who definitely will “not make passes at a girl who wears glasses”; moreover, he does not desire a romantic partner who is his intellectual equal or better.

In Goldbacher’s *The Governess*, many secrets dealing with female intellectual and artistic development are revealed through the science and art of photography. In a SPLICEDwire interview (1998), Goldbacher has claimed always to have been interested in the period before people could fix images: “These [photographic] pioneers were just working in the dark in connection to the search for this process, and it seemed to tie in interestingly to the idea (of an affair). How you actually keep yourself going day to day, not knowing if what you’re doing is a complete and utter waste of time, because you’re staking your whole life on something that might not work” (pars. 13-14).

¹³ Charles informs her she looks “foreign” in her spectacles; Rosina tells him she was once told she looked like a “foreign” Jewess. Charles concludes this resemblance is impossible, since Rosina is too beautiful to be a Jew.

Here Goldbacher hints at the relationship between the “exposure” of photography and exposure in the sexual sense. The language of photography, exposure, similarly lends itself nicely as an illuminating metaphor for the gender-reversed Gothic plot centering on female secrets. Rosina does all the “exposing” in the film—she uncovers her body, she uncovers Charles’s body, she reveals the secret of her affair by giving Mrs. Cavendish a photograph of Charles, and, of course, she reveals the secret of her own identity. Thus, a nice thematic play exists between the notion of a “threat of exposure” in terms of the religious and ethnic identity and the invention of the photographic process, which of course involves “exposure” of a different kind.

“You love a dark idea”: Female Gothic Film and British Heritage Cinema

When Rosina leaves the Cavendish household, Henry follows her, begging her to stay. Rosina assures him that in time he will understand her motivations for leaving and realize that he does not love her, but rather a “dark idea.” This concept of Rosina as embodying a “dark idea” nicely complements her status as Female Gothic heroine. *The Governess* participates in the literary tradition of the Female Gothic and its classic ur-text, *Jane Eyre*. Yet Goldbacher’s text is not a novel, but rather a film. In *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (2007) Helen Hanson undertakes the first extended examination of Female Gothic *film*. Hanson defines the genre by relying on literary definitions of the Female Gothic, such as those posited by Ellen Moers and Tania Modleski. She contends that these films which highlight female protagonists, foreground female victimization, and encourage textual pleasure and identification among female viewers “offer narrative trajector[ies], which can be understood precisely as a subjective journeys for [their] heroine.” In other words “the Female Gothic film cycle works through these difficult issues and presents an important,

and historically contextualised, negotiation of gendered identities and agency” (180). Hanson’s analysis of feminism and the Gothic is strong, as she cogently and convincingly links developments in “postfeminist” movements to Female Gothic films of the 1980s and 1990s. Looking at *Sleeping with the Enemy* (Joseph Ruben, 1991), *Dead Again* (Kenneth Branagh, 1991), and *What Lies Beneath* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000), she concludes that the heroines presented in such films are out of step with current trends in representation, as they lack feminist role models such as Sharon Stone’s neo-*femme fatale* in *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992), the “feisty feminine feminis[t]” action hero of Ripley in the *Alien* films, or the sexually and financially empowered “feminine feminis[t]” of Ally McBeal (182). Female Gothic heroines in films such as *Sleeping with the Enemy* are less-than-glamorous, fearful, victimized, and sexually and financially dependent on their husbands or lovers; Hanson posits, though, that “the fact that their heroines cannot be recuperated through the negotiations common to contemporary post-feminist inquiry is a key issue [...] they forcefully raise issues that were more commonly explored by second-wave feminism: domestic politics, violence and sexuality in a male controlled (patriarchal) environment that disempowers women” (183). Hence Hanson calls on earlier feminist movements and texts¹⁴ to explain the appeal of these films.

Despite Hanson’s return to earlier texts and theoretical frameworks to negotiate the troubling past/present dialogues of contemporary film and feminisms, she does not consider neo-Victorian films in her chapters on contemporary *film noir* and Female Gothic films. This seems even more perplexing, since Hanson favors Female Gothic literature in her analyses of earlier examples of Female Gothic film, such as

¹⁴ As Williams relies on the Female Gothic criticism of Moers and Modleski, she places these 1980s and 1990s Female Gothic films in dialogue with the novels of Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley.

Rebecca (Alfred Hitchcock, 1938) and *Jane Eyre* (Robert Stevenson 1944). Here Hanson seems to have a blind spot in her argument, as many feminist appropriations of the Gothic that occur in films of the 1980s and 1990s are aligned with a Female Gothic tradition, as they are in *Wuthering Heights* (Peter Kosminsky, 1992) and *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993).¹⁵ Much like the examples Hanson offers of contemporary Female Gothic films, these movies provide viewers with economically impoverished, sexually victimized heroines. In fact, they provide viewers with clear historical antecedents for contemporary women's issues, by setting their narratives in times when women had far fewer legal rights. Furthermore, these films put forward feminist recuperations of the past. These adaptations are engaged in a similar project to the one Hanson locates in contemporary Female Gothic films; they too offer culturally and historically situated discussions of gendered identities and agency by charting the development of a female protagonist's journey into subjectivity. Furthermore, filmic translations of Victorian Gothics such as *The Piano* and *Wuthering Heights* address issues of women's empowerment by simultaneously reproducing some of the anxieties and concerns about gender of the Victorian period and reflecting those involving women today, particularly those unresolved concerns of Second-Wave feminism.¹⁶

Though Hanson neglects to consider neo-Victorian films and Victorian adaptations in her study of feminism and Female Gothic film, there has been no shortage

¹⁵ *The Piano* may lie outside of the British heritage tradition, since the film's setting is New Zealand, rather than Britain; it is not a British production. Yet Higson argues that it is a film which, despite these factors, must be "kept in the frame" of British heritage cinema discussions (11).

¹⁶ Although I contend that both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Piano* are translations of Victorian Gothics, they operate in different traditions. *Wuthering Heights* represents one sort of "translation," as it is based on a single Victorian source text. On the other hand, *The Piano* is not an adaptation of a Victorian literary classic; instead, it is a pastiche.

of critical discussions of neo-Victorian and neo-Gothic cinema. In particular, those adaptations appearing in the mid-1980s through the late 1990s, such as *The Governess*, participated in the tradition of the British “heritage film,” an extremely popular filmic genre, commercially and critically, during those years. The British heritage film remains a contested category, as scholars debate which films qualify and what kinds of stories these movies should tell. Andrew Higson asserts that heritage films encompass “certain English costume dramas [...that...] seemed to articulate a nostalgic and conservative celebration of the values and lifestyles of the privileged class, and how in doing so an England that no longer existed seemed to have been reinvented as something fondly remembered and desirable” (12).

Both Antje Ascheid and Deitmar Böhne have discussed *The Governess* in relationship to heritage film and have shown how the film departs from the heritage tradition, as defined by scholars such as Higson. Böhnke claims that *The Governess*, and other adaptations that were not “straight” adaptations of (Victorian) literary classics gained prominence in the 1990s as a part of “post-heritage” movement that “balance[d] a necessarily commercialised and sometimes nostalgic version of history (as demanded by the American market in particular) with a certain revisionism and demythologising of history” (111). Films such as *Mrs. Brown* (John Madden, 1997), *The Governess*, and *Possession* (Neil LaBute, 2002) prove to be “anti-heritage,” in so much as they rely on careful period construction of costumes and landscapes, while employing many subversive narrative strategies such as stylistic experiments and self-reflexivity (112). In addition, they address issues of “deviant” Victorian sexualities, uncover the private lives of “celebrities,” “emphasize the emergence of modern (scientific and technical ideas),” and “bespeak an awareness of the variety of British cultural identities beyond the

(Southern) English upper middle classes” (110).¹⁷ Consequently, “they present an image of the Victorian age as one that is distinctly contemporary and certainly shares some of the anxieties and obsessions of ‘Blair’s Britain’” (110). According to Böhnke, problems of sexuality, class, and gender permeate these post-heritage films. While Böhnke’s claims are provocative, I tend to agree with the view of Claire Monk in “The British Heritage-Film Debate Revisited,” where she asserts that the divide between heritage and post-heritage films may be ideologically unsound and problematic, as both limited views encourage readings that overly simplify the films; hence, in an exclusively post-heritage reading one may see *The Governess* only through the lens of a political-ideological agenda and neglect discourses of national identity.¹⁸

In an attempt to illuminate further the themes of gender and sexuality in (post)heritage films, Antje Ascheid suggests that movies such as *The Governess*,

¹⁷ See *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Wilde (Brian Gilbert, 1997), *Tipping the Velvet* (Geoffrey Sax, 2002) and *Angels and Insects*, *Mrs. Brown*, *Topsy-Turvy* (Mike Leigh, 1999), *Victoria and Albert* (John Erman, 2001), *The Governess*, *Angels and Insects*, *Conceiving Ada* (Lynn Hershman-Leeson, 1997), and *The Piano*.

¹⁸ On *The Governess Official Movie Site: Sony Pictures Classics*, the filmmakers briefly discuss the film’s relationship to heritage cinema: “The filmmakers hope to overturn people’s expectations of British period film. ‘It isn’t picturesque,’ Minnie Driver (Rosina da Silva) declares, ‘because what’s going on isn’t picturesque. It’s a time observed as it was, but they haven’t been anal about making it beautiful and losing the reality. It’s as real as now.’” (par. 11). Goldbacher continues, “‘I wanted it to be quite strange and hard and odd [...] to create these two different worlds: the exotic, labyrinthine almost subterranean world of the Sephardic Jewish quarter that is almost underneath London, and the gentile world as Rosina first sees it, which is harsh and cold, bleak and disturbing. Hopefully all the visuals have emotional connections’” (par. 12). Thus, the world of Jewish culture is distinguished from typical heritage film scenes that focus on the beauty of English landscapes. Production designer Sarah Greenwood echoes Goldbacher’s comments, “‘We wanted it to look like life as it would have been, a reality that’s believable. I think sometimes we have a very sanitized vision of what a period looks like, very quaint, very pretty. This is not conventional period material where you do a thousand and one drawing rooms. It was one of the most visual scripts I’ve ever read, so evocative that what it should look like immediately came to mind’” (par. 13).

Mansfield Park (Patricia Rozema, 1999), and *Possession* belong to the genre of the “woman’s heritage film”—“a particular kind of heritage film that has emerged within the context of postfeminist chick flick/lit culture in the 1990s—[that] activates and seemingly reconciles often contradictory narrative trajectories within a pre-feminist historical setting to create postfeminist fantasies of romantic emancipation” (par. 2). Although I find Ascheid’s argument compelling, I disagree with its labeling of the late 1990s as “postfeminist.” And as she relates neo-historical texts and contemporary feminisms, she lumps a diverse range of films into the category of “women’s heritage cinema” while simultaneously corralling various so-called postfeminist positions into one monolithic stance that supposedly advocates for women’s emancipation from heterosexual romance. Ascheid’s analysis of postfeminist romance falters, if we look at the romantic possibilities for the heroine in *The Governess* and its comments on contemporary feminism, alongside those views expressed in Rozema’s version of *Mansfield Park*. The latter film successfully resolves any misunderstandings in the courtship narrative between Edmund and Fanny. In addition, Rozema’s screenplay lets Fanny “have it all” by giving her a career as a writer, alongside her romantically fulfilling union with Edmund.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ascheid argues, “Indeed, what seems to make these pictures so popular, especially for female audiences, is that they talk about a time before the first wave of feminism. They show us heroines who struggle for liberation *as* they are pursuing romance, wanting to ‘have it all.’ In other words, [they displace] the desire for gender equality and sexuality onto historical periods commonly associated with overt domination—rather than with today’s more complicated forms of gender relations” (par. 30.). While I agree that some displacement may occur while watching women’s heritage films, a movie such as *The Governess* does not merely complacently laud our own age; instead, in this text, modern feminisms collide with a Victorian-inspired story in order simultaneously to reproduce some of the anxieties and concerns about gender of the Victorian period and to reflect those involving women today.

Böhnke and Ascheid, Jeannette King, and Liora Brosch comment on the importance of gender in new texts that use Victorian settings. As King states, “By bringing a modern, feminist sensibility to the reconstruction of Victorian women’s lives, [...neo-Victorian novelists...] provide a bridge between past and present, making it easier for the reader to identify the ideological pressures at work on the experience of gender identity today. If that were not enough, they offer the stylistic and imaginative pleasures which are fiction’s unique gifts” (178). In *Screening Novel Women: British Domestic Fiction and Film* (2008) Brosch looks at the genre of the “domestic film.” What Brosch calls “domestic film” oftentimes coincides with what other scholars would label (post)heritage cinema. She suggests that “Repeatedly in the twentieth century, the cinema drew on the British nineteenth-century novel to create comforting films that stabilize gender identities, define marriage, and fix the parameters of the domestic sphere” (5).²⁰ Brosch continues, “Through the construction of consoling images of women and the home and the representation of these ideals as existing in the nineteenth-century novel, ideals of the moment are portrayed as timeless and unchanging. In this way, contemporary ideals of femininity are naturalized as they are projected into a literary heritage” (13). In *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) Nancy Armstrong posits that the nineteenth-century novel held an essential place in creating and codifying gender for Victorian audiences; Brosch claims that contemporary film adaptations of these works continue to play a central role in forming gender identities and expectations.

²⁰ For example, in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* the contemporary lovers Mike and Anna, cannot be reconciled, but the closing scenes of the film show the nineteenth-century lovers, Charles and Sarah, idyllically going off together, as Charles rows them away in a boat. In this ending, although the modern world cannot successfully accommodate a courtship plot, the nineteenth century exists as a safe space for romance.

In terms of the social background relevant to the “domestic film,” Brosh suggests that the late twentieth-century experienced many challenges to domestic stability—rising divorce rates, couples marrying later in life, women choosing to remain single, diverging feminist ideologies, and a burgeoning “men’s movement” (118-120)—challenges that are reflected in the narratives of the era’s movies. Responding to such change, feature films for mass audiences attempted to re-establish essentialist gender norms and stable heteronormative relationships. Like Ascheid, Brosh identifies a range of films from the late 1990s, such as *Pride and Prejudice* (Simon Langton, 1995), and *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee 1995) that “displac[ed] the political feminist themes that the novels explored, [...in order to...] rejuvenat[e] the marriage plot, represent[t] it as feminist, and sugges[t] that women could have it all” (141). Once again, Brosh’s assessments of these late-1990s “postfeminist” adaptations neglect to mention films such as *The Governess*, which express radically different sentiments regarding romance and courtship. The self-determination, self-fulfillment, and self-revelation that Aschied and Brosh see as defining the contemporary “feminist” marriage plot (152) in films like *Sense and Sensibility* are absent from *The Governess*. For Goldbacher’s Rosina, the trajectory of autonomy, fulfillment, and liberation exists independently from the conventional romantic ending.

Lior Brosh comes close to mirroring my own observations on *The Governess* in her analysis of *The Piano* (1993). For Brosh, *The Piano* stands out from other 1990s neo-Victorian creations; although it is not a direct adaptation, it still addresses the nineteenth-century domestic and marriage plot while resisting “conventional modes of adaptation” (143). For the sake of my own argument, I would emphasize her claim that

The film suggests that it is not in silence that women find their resistance but in art. The same culture that confines women and silences them also gives them keys to

self-expression [...] However, as art is rooted in a culture that constricts women, it extracts a heavy toll [...] Through art, women writers of the nineteenth century gave voice to the ways their society and culture silenced them—but, suggests Campion, at a price. (149)

Brosh's assertions about women artists in the nineteenth century is compelling, but she does not pick up this thread of argument elsewhere in *Screening Novel Women* nor does she contextualize it with research on Victorian female artist-figures.

In regard to feminist questions, and 1990s filmmaking, Brosh continues, "*The Piano* avoids the kind of feminist triumphalism that characterizes most 1990s adaptations, a triumphalism many feminist critics have erroneously read into the film. Unlike other adaptations made just before and after, *The Piano* does not represent a world in which women can have it all. Sex, love, art, and power collide and conflict painfully and destructively" (149). *The Piano* and *The Governess* alike do not merely exist "in step" with modern feminist discourses; they also self-consciously challenge and illuminate the debates, divides, and sources of fragmentation in contemporary feminisms. At the end of *The Piano*, the protagonist Ada marries; at the end of Goldbacher's film, Rosina does not. Ada does not achieve success as a professional artist; Rosina does. Brosh argues that, at the conclusion of Campion's film, Ada is both mute and mutilated and her romantic fulfillment becomes linked to her artistic death (152-153). Goldbacher's Rosina, on the contrary, may not have romantic fulfillment, but she experiences no death of her artistic impulses. In their feminist recuperation of Female Gothic plots, both films reveal some of the dangers that lurk in the traditional courtship narrative. Brosh seems to suggest, though, that ambivalence about the courtship narrative means that there can be no "feminist triumph" for the heroine. Rosina may not have romantic union, but I contend

she does have a great deal at the film's close—independence, financial freedom, and a fulfilling career.

On the one hand, current scholarship in feminism and Female Gothic film has not, so far, fully accounted for the implications of the Neo-Victorian Gothic; on the other hand, scholarly investigations of the heritage film have not adequately addressed the influence of feminism or of feminist appropriations of the Gothic in late-twentieth-century cinema. Each field of critical exploration has suffered from blind spots, due to their isolation from one another. By examining films such as *The Governess* that come out of the strong literary tradition of the Female Gothic, specifically the *Jane Eyre* tradition, we can begin to bridge this divide between neo-Gothic and heritage film.

Recuperating the Female Gothic Narrative for a Modern Audience: *The Governess's* Negotiation of Contemporary Feminisms and Feminist Film

The Governess's recuperation of Female Gothic narratives and tropes occurs through its feminist re-reading of Female Gothic texts, such as *Jane Eyre*. The film's engagement with feminist discourse is socially symbolic. I contend that the political, cultural, and commercial considerations that went into shaping *The Governess* cannot be isolated from issues of contemporary feminism. Specifically, the movie illuminates the tensions between and within second and third wave feminisms, as it raises issues of concern to both feminist movements. At the same time, it addresses concerns relevant to "identity politics" movements, which also arose in the decades of the 1970s through the 1990s. Goldbacher's film suggests that, although identity politics remain crucial to understanding female experience in a wider sense and to creating a modern feminist role model, the problems articulated by second wave feminism have not been fully eradicated,

and the second wave cannot simply be replaced by identity politics and third wave feminism.

Discussing domestic politics, violence, and sexuality in a male-controlled environment, Hanson writes, “The fact these concerns [...] are being re-articulated in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s presents a powerful picture of the continued currency of such issues in the face of a picture of ‘feminist’ progress,’ as well as forcing us to recognise that there are key continuities in feminist debate which are as important as generational difference” (183). Hanson says that many issues of second wave feminism are re-articulated in these movies. Thus, critics who claim that we have moved beyond feminism—that we now are “postfeminist”—are incorrect; they have allowed generational difference to blind them to ongoing unresolved gender inequalities. Hanson gestures toward some thorny questions: what does feminist progress mean for twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminists? For the feminist film? For such films’ viewers? In fact, what exactly characterizes a “feminist” film, in an era when the definition of feminism sometimes seems murky? In effect, how can we define feminist films or feminist role models, when feminism has become increasingly plural and pluralistic?²¹

E. Ann Kaplan and other have noted that feminist film may not follow a particular agenda regarding women’s rights, but may instead adopt certain strategies and techniques to reaffirm these rights indirectly. In addition, viewers can, and often do, impose feminist readings on cinematic works that do not themselves explicitly acknowledge such an agenda. This approach allows for a variety of films to be considered under the rubric of feminist film, but it also side steps the conflicts in

²¹ Social activists such as bell hooks maintain that feminism need not be monolithic. hooks has spoken deliberately about feminist movements and feminism, since the early 1990s.

contemporary feminisms, and says little about films that do not purport to have feminist viewpoints, or that resonate specifically with self-defined feminist viewers. According to Kaplan, feminist film scholarship accomplishes the following ends: “film pushes feminist studies to develop new theories, or to challenge accepted male theories of aesthetics and entertainment [...] creating art or entertainment with feminist perspectives may help to change entrenched stances towards women that can be found in commercial or avant-garde entertainment and art” (2). In her own discussion of the film in *Screening Novel Women*, Liora Brosch, echoing Kaplan’s argument, posits that the domestic films she examines may not fit neatly into a particular feminist paradigm; rather, as with *The Governess*, they reflect a world in which feminist ideals have become multifarious (117).

The aims and identities of feminism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been hotly debated, as the second wave feminist project of the 1960s and 1970s opened to discussions of “identity politics.” According to Susan Gubar in *Critical Conditions: Feminism at the Turn of the Century* (2000) the unified political agenda of second wave feminism, which looked for access and equal opportunity for women, was deemed “essentialist” by African American, gay and lesbian, and postcolonial activists, who asserted that not all female experience could be represented through the lens of upper-middle class white women and, furthermore, that gender identity itself was not binary (10).²² In this period, academic projects related to race and to sexual identity came to the fore, such as Heidi Safia Mirza’s *Black British Feminism* (1997). Yet just as second wave feminism faced charges of “essentialism,” Nancy K. Miller has argued, identity politics scholars have sometimes encouraged an “equally problematic *representativity*” (qtd. in Gubar 23). Like identity politics, third wave

²² Toril Moi’s *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) famously took second wave feminist critics, such as Elaine Showalter, to task for what Moi viewed as essentialism.

feminism of the late 1980s and 1990s adopted a poststructuralist notion of identity, but also encouraged its adherents to incorporate their own individual identities and belief systems into their feminism. The charge usually lobbed against third wave feminism was that it lacked either a *unified* feminist agenda or an emphasis on political action; critics argued that third wave feminists who had grown up enjoying the benefits of feminism did not understand the fight for equality. Nonetheless, Sandra Goldbacher's film certainly aligns itself more with third wave, than with second wave perspectives. Although it may reflect poststructuralist identity politics, *The Governess* does not abandon earlier feminist concerns nor does it lack political purpose.

Even as *The Governess* comments on the Victorian period, it simultaneously grows out of a divisive cultural moment in social and political matters of the 1990s, when the British electorate rejected two decades of Thatcherite policies in favor of the Labor Party. According to Simon Joyce in *The Victorians in the Rear View Mirror* (2007), Margaret Thatcher's government, and its deliberate deployment of so-called "Victorian values," had justified and enforced a conservative agenda that "was inseparable from contemporary efforts to reform welfare" (113-114). Peter Clarke asserts that these attempts had established, in Britain, a distinction between "the deserving and the undeserving poor" (379-380) that revived nineteenth-century categories. Furthermore, Sheila Rowbotham claims that the punitive values of Thatcherism had led to increased poverty and inequality, resulting in a "pervasive sense of social disintegration and decay [...] there was a powerful inclination to blame the poor rather than to challenge the distribution of economic and social resources" (552).

The Governess comes at the end of this long period of Conservative political rule that, as Margaret Stetz writes, "had demonized and disadvantaged the poor, especially Britons of color and immigrant populations" (222-223). Such prejudice echoed

nineteenth-century sentiments regarding the poor in London's East End, particularly the Jewish minority.²³ According to William J. Fishman, Jewish immigrants became the scapegoats for all the ills of the East End, a region reputed for its poverty, filth, disease, crime and violence (144).²⁴ Although *The Governess* is set in the 1840s, and Fishman centers his discussion of the East End in the late 1800s, as early as 1838, the year of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838), the East End already had come to be associated with the figure of the covetous and criminal Jew, as embodied in Fagin. In *Modern British Jewry* (1992), Geoffrey Alderman reports that the problem of the Jewish poor heightened after the passage by Parliament of the Poor Law Amendment in 1834. The Jewish community "had made it a point of honour" never to rely on the state to care for its poor, so they created a number of charitable institutions to provide for members. Namely, Jewish citizens were helped by Jewish subscription charities and by individual

²³ Defining the boundaries of the East End proves problematic. Geoffrey Alderman writes that by the 1880s "the geographical limits to which [the East End] was applied had expanded to include 'the Tower Hamlets' of Aldgate, Whitechapel, Spitalfields, Ratcliff, Shadwell, Wapping, Mile End, and Limehouse—areas, in short, which were grouped within the Borough of Stepney created in 1899. These areas all became, to a greater or lesser extent, places of distinct Jewish settlement, as did the boroughs of Bethnal Green to the north and Poplar still further east; in time the 'East End' was redefined in the public mind, so that it embraced such places too" (4).

²⁴ Naming the opening location of the *The Governess* as the East End is probably anachronistic. Geoffrey Alderman suggests that the term "East End" did not come into being until the 1850s (4), while the film is set in the 1840s. Furthermore, William J. Fishman argues that the East End did not acquire its pejorative meaning until later in the century (2). Gareth Steman Jones notes, "By 1888 the constituents of Tower Hamlets shared a common socio-economic definition: 'a strong continuing tradition of small workshops industrially important in the aggregate, sited in deteriorating slum property, largely dependent on the traditional skilled labour of local families' [...but...] Overall for the layman, the East End conjured up a 'nursery of destitute poverty and thriftless, demoralised pauperism, in a community cast adrift from the salutary presence and leadership of men of wealth and culture, and ...a political threat to the riches and civilisation of London and the Empire'" (qtd. in Fishman 2).

synagogues. Regardless of the Jewish community's commitment to self-reliance and hard work, it was perceived as shiftless and thieving. In *The Governess*, even the Christian prostitutes taunt Rosina, calling her "Jew girl" and disrespecting her by asking when she will join in their trade.²⁵

Goldbacher's film suggests that Thatcher's self-serving misinterpretation of "Victorian values" yoked the Victorian and the contemporary worlds through its perpetuation of the racist and sexist ideologies that plagued the nineteenth century. The film's opening scenes bring to life a Victorian England without a social safety net (also a significant concern of the late 1990s for British citizens in the wake of Thatcher's dismantling of the welfare state). As women, and as Jews, Rosina and her sister occupy a doubly precarious social position. Though initially they live in an opulent home full of food, fine clothing, and entertainment, when their father is murdered, the girls quickly learn they must fend for themselves or descend into abject poverty. Rosina's father's murder occurs as a result of a business transaction. Thus the family's vulnerability seems to be tied also to longstanding associations of Jews, money, and the East End. Furthermore, viewers see the da Silvas' way of life challenged by the cholera epidemic that occurs toward the end of the film. When Rosina returns to her home, after leaving the Cavendish household, she finds her Sephardic community decimated by illness. Her remaining relatives hide in an upstairs room of their house, which has been stripped of its furniture and belongings. As Rosina enters the room where they are concealed, a terrified Benjamin almost shoots her; it is clear that threats of violence and thievery permeate the desolated community and its abandoned people. The vibrant Sephardic world depicted in

²⁵ Judith Lewin offers a compelling reading of Jewish women, London prostitutes, and actresses in "Semen, Semolina and Salt Water: The Erotic Jewess in Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess*" (2008). In her essay, she examines the relationship between Jewish identity and sexual desire in Goldbacher's film.

the film's opening scenes—a population with an abundance of food, music, and dancing—has suffered near-decimation and disappearance.

At the beginning of the film, the depiction of Rosina's family home is not in keeping with most Neo-Victorian portrayals of the East End which are set in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Films such as *The Elephant Man* (David Lynch, 1990) and *From Hell* (the Hughes Brothers, 2001) configure the landscape as gritty, urban, and dangerous—the playground of “Jack the Ripper.” Yet Paul Newland states that the idea and “ideas” of the East End have developed in new ways at different historical moments and that each manifestation of the landscape speaks to new anxieties concerning Englishness (272). Thus, Goldbacher's depiction of the East End, set in an earlier decade of the Victorian period, highlights problems of gender, ethnicity, and religious difference. *The Governess* posits that the ravages of disease and death among the British poor are not limited to the nineteenth century; coming shortly after the repudiation of Thatcherite policies in the 1997 elections, the film illustrates the disintegration of a society that lacks social programs to ensure the welfare of its minority and immigrant populations, as well as one that fails to provide sanitation and healthcare for all.²⁶

²⁶ Despite experiencing a history of class-based and race-based prejudice and suspicion, Anglo-Jews were particularly receptive to Thatcher's Conservative ideologies (*Modern British Jewry* 343). Thatcher genuinely admired the Jewish people and held them up as prime examples of “entrepreneurship, self-help, and a spirit of independence” (347). In fact, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations, Immanuel Jakobovits, supported Thatcher's condemnation of the welfare state and “faithfully reflected the feeling of antipathy towards the aspirations of Britain's Black communities that is undoubtedly widespread within British Jewry” (349). In its depiction of nineteenth-century anti-Semitism, *The Governess* demonstrates the complicated trajectory, and status, of Jewish culture in Britain.

The Historical Position of Jewish Peoples in Britain and The Dance of Salomé

Jane Eyre has already been examined by scholars interested in identity politics, especially in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's pivotal essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," which suggests that Jane's narrative of white-middle-class progress denies the subjectivity and success of the racial "other," Bertha Mason. In fiction, both Jane's and Bertha's stories have been re-envisioned through the lens of race in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Simi Bedford's *Yoruba Girl Dancing* (1992), and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005).²⁷ *The Governess* extends such considerations by focusing on the racial and ethnic experience of a Jewish governess. Instead of telling the story through Bertha's eyes, Goldbacher's film presents a *Jane Eyre*-like narrative as told from the perspective of a Jew. It rewrites a dominant text of feminism from the standpoint of difference with an outsider heroine and also shows the gaps in this text for those whose identities as "English" were under fire from the 1980s through the late 1990s. Looking at *The Governess*, we see a blend of second wave feminism and third wave identity politics. Furthermore, viewers encounter the traces of an entire spectrum of criticism and fiction engaged in feminist discourse. The film engages with the problems of race, class, and gender often neglected by feminists of the 1970s, but it does so while addressing the very real patriarchal concerns that were present in the Victorian period and that still impact women today. Thus, Goldbacher puts diverse women into dialogue, forcing them to consider their own gendered and racialized states and the equally gendered and racialized existences of their antecedents.

Rosina da Silva comes from a Sephardic Jewish community, as indicated by her Spanish-Portuguese name and the Near-and/or Mid-Eastern identification on the part

²⁷ I am indebted, once again, to Margaret Stetz, who proposed the resemblances among these texts.

of her character, especially in Goldbacher's deployment of an Orientalist discourse in her alignment of Rosina with Salomé.²⁸ The film simultaneously addresses the Sephardic experience of the nineteenth century, while commenting on the lives of Jewish Britains in the late twentieth century. Jews were expelled from England in 1290, but had been formally re-admitted in 1656. By the Victorian period, the Jewish British community was divided, and increasingly polarized, between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, the latter arriving chiefly from Poland and Russia. The Sephardim and Ashkenazim had very different cultures and religious practices and remained separate until they began to work together for reform in the nineteenth century.²⁹

According to Geoffrey Alderman, "*Sephardim* continued to emigrate to Britain, and specifically to London, both from the West Indies, the Iberian peninsula, and Holland and from North Africa, Gibraltar, and Italy, throughout the eighteenth century. But, partly on account of a high rate of assimilation into Gentile society, their numbers remained small; in 1800 the Sephardim of London did not total more than about 2,000"

²⁸ "The members of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation were collectively known as *Sephardim*. "They followed a ritual and mode of Hebrew pronunciation that was and has remained distinct from that of the German-and Yiddish-speaking *Ashkenazim* of central and eastern Europe" (Alderman 5).

²⁹ The fight for reform centered on the campaign for Jewish emancipation. In *Jewish Society in Victorian England*, Israel Finestein writes, "The Protestant Dissenters were relieved of long-standing legal discrimination by an Act of 1828. That statute expressly retained the Jewish disabilities, and not only as objectionable and unenforced technicalities subject to regular Indemnity Acts as had been the case with most of the Protestant Dissenters. Professing Jews were excluded from municipal office and from Parliament. Once the Roman Catholics were freed from their disabilities in those fields in 1829, the Jewish campaign began" (132-133). Initially, British citizens thought that Jewish and Christian Dissenters both would have benefitted from the repeal of the Test Acts. Yet, when the Amendment was repealed, the declaration had the phrase "on the true faith of a Christian" added to it. This oath, required before one could take public office, made it nearly impossible for Jews, Unitarians and atheists to enter politics (Alderman 53).

(6). Both Todd M. Endelman in *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History, 1656-1945* (1990) and Alderman note the decline of Sephardim in Victorian England: “By 1830 the *Sephardim* community of London was past its prime, having suffered from a very high rate of intermarriage, migration to America, and the marriage of its womenfolk to members of the *Ashkenazi* communities, by which it was no overwhelmingly outnumbered” (Alderman 34). *The Governess* follows Rosina’s masquerade as a Gentile and her affair with a Christian man, Charles. Her journey from her insular Sephardic community to her feigned identity as an Anglican charts the dangers of assimilation and abandoning one’s heritage. These issues were current once again in Britain of the 1990s, when Sephardim were just under three percent of the British population (366). In light of concerns about the decreasing, nearly disappearing, Sephardic community in both Victorian England and contemporary London, Rosina’s decision not only to maintain her Jewish culture, but also to capture the heritage of “her father’s people” through her photography, becomes all the more poignant and important.

Goldbacher’s deployment of an Orientalist discourse, in her alignment of Rosina with Salomé, is another way in which the film visualizes late-century Jewish experience. Goldbacher collapses Jewish representations from various points in the nineteenth century. As Goldbacher rewrites the Salomé narrative, she draws less from the Biblical story and more from Oscar Wilde’s French-language play, *Salomé* (1893), as well as from other nineteenth-century depictions of the figure of the Jewess. Goldbacher’s Rosina offers an ahistoric representation, having little to do with Jewish female figures of the 1840s; instead, Goldbacher’s creation is a Neo-Victorian pastiche of many Jewish narratives, mentioned earlier in the chapter, such as the crypto-Jew, the sexually dangerous Jew whose desirability threatens inter-racial and inter-religious marriage, and the covetous Jewish criminal. However, in *The Governess*, Rosina is no

more an “oriental” than *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha Rochester is a Creole. The character of Rosina as Salomé is produced from and filtered through a Western, Orientalist discourse that was a projection of nineteenth-century English desires and interests to define itself in a particular way. In essence, Goldbacher’s depiction of race, religion, ethnicity collapses Brontë’s Jane and Bertha—the governess and the madwoman become one.

The film plays with traditional Western depictions of the Jewess, as defined by Nadia Valman in *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (2007), as either a dangerous sexual figure or a devoutly spiritual “fair” Jewess (1). Goldbacher uses this figure to challenge assumptions about how the discourse of the Jewess works together with, and hence complicates and adapts the tradition of the figure of the female artist in the Gothic genre. Much as Valman suggests that nineteenth-century women writers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, used the discourse of the Jewess to reframe their literary endeavors and to create new opportunities, so Goldbacher adapts the tradition of the Jew(ess) in the Gothic. According to Judith Halberstam the Gothic genre is anti-semitic as it “unites and therefore produces the threats of capital and revolution, criminality and impotence, sexual power and gender ambiguity, money and mind within an identifiable form, the body of the Jew” (95). Critics such as Halberstam, Carol Margaret Davison, and H.L. Machow illuminate anti-semitism in pivotal Gothic works such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), suggesting that the figure of Dracula, with his blood sacrifice, associations with blackness, self-mutilation, and cannibalism, becomes synonymous with stereotypes related to Jewish peoples. In particular, Dracula bespeaks the threat of sexual and social pollution associated with the Jew, particularly the Jewish female temptress.

The figure of Wilde’s Salomé, as she kisses the mouth of Jokanaan’s severed head, illuminates the subversive and perverse sexuality believed to be embodied by

nineteenth-century Jewish women. As Rosina initiates sex with Charles and, even as a virgin, manages to know about sexual practices that he does not, her character does seem to participate in the tradition of the dangerously carnal Jewess. Furthermore, the series of photographs that she stages and controls, though taken by Charles, feature her eroticized body. However, despite these efforts to orientalize Rosina through her sexuality, she is never merely a temptress figure, for audiences see both her vulnerability and her creativity. When Charles rejects her, she declares that she will be “Whatever [he] want[s] her to be.” Such a statement does not suggest a woman who has preternatural sexual power over men. The unexpected power that she does possess, however, involves the art of photography.

Indeed, the most significant way in which Goldbacher rewrites Jewish stereotypes in *The Governess*, most particularly the legend of Salomé, is by making her heroine a Jewish female artist-figure. In “Salomé: The Jewish Princess Was a New Woman” (1988) Jane Marcus argues that Salomé is an artist, a sex object who is thwarted in her expression and forced to kill the man she loves, when “The Baptist, as a principled autonomous creative artist, evoke[s] [...] the same fury and jealousy in [Salomé], the prisoner of a socially determined sex role” (12).³⁰ The conflation of Salomé’s “art” with sexuality is interesting as it not only falls into the cliché of the performer as prostituting her body, but it also connects to Rosina’s conflation of photography and desire. Marcus continues, “let us accept the image that Oscar Wilde has given us of Salomé the New Woman, the frustrated artist, who kills the thing she loves in order to bring into being a new and healthy culture” (14). But, no frustrated romantic desire can thwart Rosina’s creative efforts, nor does she exist in her culture solely as a sex object. While each

³⁰ According to Marcus, Salomé finds artistic expression in “the dance with its historical connection to prostitution, [and it] is Salomé’s only art form” (12).

heroine may sacrifice “the thing she loves,” Rosina, unlike Salomé, lives in order to create again, to bring about “a new and healthy culture” through her self-designed, self-referential art aesthetic, using the photographic medium.

Thus Goldbacher’s text offers a revision of Salomé as Jewish woman artist, one that intersects with discourses of the nineteenth-century Female Gothic. Rosina’s photography is akin to Salome’s dance, as Rosina’s control over Charles’s body becomes significant through its associations with her development as an artist. Her manipulation of the gaze, and her appropriation of Charles’s vulnerable naked form in her photograph, allows her to articulate desire through aesthetics and the photographic medium. Hence, by adapting a number of discourses centering on the figure of the Jewess, Goldbacher revises Jewish women’s presence in the nineteenth-century Gothic narrative. Rosina’s function is not solely about illuminating religious purity, or demonstrating dangerous promiscuity; instead her trajectory relates her Jewish identity to her development as a female artist, one whose character promotes professional success and independence. Instead of simply making Rosina the monstrous Jewish figure of many nineteenth-century Gothic works, like Salomé, *The Governess*’s progress narrative of self-discovery through artistic endeavor places Rosina in yet another nineteenth-century Gothic tradition; specifically, Female Gothic texts in which women artists figure as central protagonists. Hence, Rosina may still be a “monstrous creator,” but like the Anglo Jane Eyre or Catherine Earnshaw, her threat rests as much in her status as artist as in her Jewish faith.

Female Religious Difference in *The Governess*: The Intersections of Two Faiths

One significant area of division among women in the film originates in religious difference, or at the very least, the visual markers of ethnicity. The difference

between Gentile and Jewish women in *The Governess* largely is emphasized through Rosina's interactions with Mrs. Cavendish and Clementina. In the film, Clementina tells Rosina, "Mama says you look like a black beetle." She repeats her mother's cruel words in order to illustrate why Rosina may not have a husband, despite her success at acquiring "drawing room skills"; further reflecting her mother's prejudices, Clementina concludes that gentlemen prefer blondes. Towards the end of the film, as Rosina rides back to her family's house, following Charles's rejection of her love, she sits across from a young girl, who proudly combs her long golden hair. As Rosina watches, her expression bespeaks an acknowledgement that she will never embody this Gentile model of beauty and femininity. The film suggests, much as the movement of "identity politics" does, that the experience of women fragments based on class, ethnicity, race, and religion.

Rosina does not fit the Gentile standards of beauty or behavior, because of her Jewish heritage, which is embodied in her dark, "foreign" looks and further echoed in her attitudes and practices. For Goldbacher, Rosina's feelings of marginalization are auto-biographical: "Rosina's subterfuge and the clashing cultures she experiences have modern parallels, and the emotional journey she takes is resonant. 'Some of it is based on anti-Semitism that I've encountered myself [...] at my primary school the only two other Jewish girls and I felt completely alien, and that was only 20 years ago'" (*The Governess Official Movie Site: Sony Pictures Classics*, par. 3). Goldbacher combines faith and feminism in order to offer a Jewish feminist meditation upon *Jane Eyre*. Helene Meyers asserts "Goldbacher's historically overdetermined film *The Governess* performs such cultural work as it brings the conceptual Jew and an empirical Jew into the same field of vision; indeed, by constructing a Jewish gaze that exceeds the limits of philosemitism created by and dependent upon antisemitism, Goldbacher makes space for embodied Jewishness in representation" (106). Significantly, Jewishness gains representation in

this film due to Rosina's artistry. It is Rosina's intellectual curiosity that allows her to further the development of photography and her aesthetic skill that elevates the photographic process to art. Rosina's trajectory as an artist, which illuminates one of the most significant feminist recuperations of the Female Gothic in this text, coincides with her active embrace of her racial and ethnic identity.

Furthermore, Rosina uses Jewish subjects, such as Salome and Esther, for her Biblical modeling session, as she sits for the portraits that she encourages Charles to take. Meyers argues that when Rosina returns to London she directs her Jewish gaze to remembering "the beauty of [her] father's people." Meyers notes that "this line not only refers to Rosina's intratextual work as a photographer but also to Goldbacher's calling as a director: in *The Governess* Goldbacher seeks not only to represent visually the Sephardic Jews of nineteenth-century London but also to memorialize indirectly the Padua Jewish community in which her father grew up, a community that was deported to and murdered in Auschwitz" (Meyer 115). Thus, Goldbacher engages in the long tradition of Jewish women participating in feminist projects that are self-referential and socially symbolic. Both Rosina's and Goldbacher's development as artists, links them, personally and professionally, to a rich appreciation of their cultural and religious heritages; in Goldbacher's life and work the importance of identity politics intersects with a feminist narrative of artistry and ambition. In *The Governess* the narrative of female artistry seen throughout nineteenth-century women's Gothic becomes yoked to a contemporary narrative dealing with the construction of a feminist identity, for both creator and heroine.

The film, however, does not imply that Jewish culture simply offers an antidote to nineteenth-century Gentile restrictive notions of gender, femininity, and women's roles; here, the Jewish community too proves problematic for women who may

anticipate twentieth or twenty-first century feminist impulses. Rosina has as little intellectual, professional, and sexual freedom in the Jewish community as women do in the Gentile community. She and her sister are curious but ill-informed about sexual practices, and her limited, respectable option to support her family upon her father's death is marriage, not a career. In the Orthodox world, the women remain segregated from the men in the temple, and Mrs. da Silva proves as ignorant of her husband's business affairs as Mrs. Cavendish is of her husband's work and his sexual affair. While sitting shiva for Mr. da Silva, a friend of Rosina's mother hauntingly says, "You never know a man's true nature." According to the rhetoric of the film, this gender-based truth transcends religious boundaries. The dictates of proper feminine behavior unite the two households, of the da Silvas and Cavendishes. Early in the film, at the da Silva's party, Rosina's mother reminds her to appear smaller and more delicate, and she continually bemoans her daughter's "difficult" (i.e. rebellious and unfeminine) ways. It is only when Rosina assumes her performative Gentile identity—her actress identity which "cares not for convention"—that she begins to escalate the experiment with her desire; what starts with a kiss with her Jewish suitor, Benjamin, becomes a full-blown affair with Cavendish. If Rosina exercises more freedom in the Cavendish household than she would at home, this may be because she is not a true member of the Gentile community and does not feel bound by its codes of behavior.

The dichotomies established by Clementina Cavendish and her mother—between light and dark, blonde and brunette, feminine and unfeminine, Gentile and Jew—extend far beyond the discourse of religion. Every reader of childhood fairytales knows that the good princess is fair, while the evil queen is dark. *The Governess* plays with these binaries, suggesting that they are all part of the same corrupted system of social hierarchy involving race and gender. This film presents a variety of female models

for the viewer, a range of women in the historical narrative as diverse as the kinds of women found in contemporary feminist texts. Goldbacher's women may desire different goals and outcomes, and at times they may be in conflict, but there is also much commonality in their female experience, and these similarities become more apparent as the film puts them in dialogue with one another.

The insipid Mrs. Cavendish could easily be a caricature of a nineteenth-century woman of leisure; yet Goldbacher gives her pathos and humanity and a plight corresponding to that of the film's heroine. She is not merely a woman who speaks in "cold riddles" and who has a lemon "up her posterior," as Rosina initially defines her. Audiences increasingly feel sympathy with Mrs. Cavendish as they realize she is clearly unhappy and trapped in both her house and her marriage. She asks Rosina, "Do you think it is possible to die of boredom and disappointment?" Although she seems merely to be snobbish, Mrs. Cavendish puts on airs because she feels unimportant in her own household and frustrated; she desires more out of her life but remains unsure how to escape her domestic entrapment.

The few times when Mrs. Cavendish genuinely shows some personality or passion are those when she is discussing art and beauty. In her initial interview with Rosina, she informs the new governess that she has fond memories of her father's house, a place full of artists. Like Rosina, she is linked to nostalgia for a past identified with paternal influence and aesthetic experience. She does not ask Rosina many questions during her interview, but significantly she asks her for the latest news about the ballet, theater, or opera in London. Later, at dinner, as Rosina, Charles, and Mrs. Cavendish talk about the nature of Charles's work, Mrs. Cavendish asks, "Where is the creativity? The nourishment for the soul?" Unlike the more imaginative and innovative Rosina, who will recognize the potential for beauty and expression in Charles's photography, Mrs.

Cavendish does not see Charles's scientific endeavors as aesthetically valuable, and so she has no interest in them. The one moment when Mrs. Cavendish seems to be most completely engaged and enjoying herself, occurs as she and her son play jubilantly and frantically on the piano.

Eventually, Rosina learns Mrs. Cavendish's "secret"—despite her references to London, she has never been to the cultural and artistic "center" of Britain, and her tales from that place are all fabricated. She has created an imaginary past that justifies and feeds her appreciation for the arts. Clearly, Mrs. Cavendish craves artistic experience and an outlet for her creative energies; her stifled urges have taken the form of a rich fantasy life in which she has been to London and has had contact with art and artists. Her lies become her form of artistry, in their imaginative dynamism. Despite how different the two women initially appear, an artistic spirit and a hunger for art link Mrs. Cavendish and Rosina, although Rosina's identity as an artist becomes far more developed than Mrs. Cavendish's. Regardless of their religious, racial, and class differences, both women resist stifling gender expectations by exercising their imaginations.

Like her mother, Clementina proves full of unhappiness and repressed passion that she releases through aggression. Clementina finds an outlet in sadistic, morbid visions. For example, she views the educative value of her brother's school solely through the amount of violence it allows: "He went to a very important school where you could thrash people." Similarly, she asks Rosina for lessons about "people who murder people." She is morbidly fascinated by death—her own, and of things in nature, such as fish. In her playtime with her dolls, viewers see Clementina imposing the same rigid codes of propriety and manners on her dolls that she experiences. When they disobey the rules, Clementina chastises and abuses them, demonstrating her resentment of these repressive codes, but also her internalization of them. Although the character of

Clementina does not experience much development throughout the film, audiences watch her begin to connect with Rosina due to the latter's unconventional teaching methods. Instead of instructing Clementina to embrace conduct book codes, such as "Humility is the cornerstone of femininity,"³¹ she allows Clementina to run on the beach and to roll in piles of dead leaves. As she discovers other kinds of outlets for her aggression, namely physical activity, Clementina begins to experience happiness and to connect with Rosina as an alternative model of womanhood.

Although the three women share some experiences, viewers know that Rosina escapes the Cavendish household and pursues a life beyond conventional nineteenth-century codes of womanhood. They do not know what the future holds for either Mrs. Cavendish or Clementina, though. Yet Rosina leaves both Clementina and Mrs. Cavendish with legacies that can make them stronger women. Her actions as a feminist role model are not only meant for viewers, but for the female characters in the text. In the case of Clementina, she gives the child her red shawl. The red shawl not only signifies Rosina's religious and ethnic identity, but it also serves as an objective correlative for Rosina's passion, a reminder for Clementina that her willful spirit should not be tamped down, but channeled into outlets other than self-destructive violence. In addition, the color red typically suggests romantic passion, desire, or love.

The gift of the red shawl indicates a tradition of female sexual aggression and passion, akin to what leads Rosina to pursue her affair with Charles. Thus, this present serves to counteract conventional Victorian discourses that advocate female passivity and passionlessness. As embodied in the red shawl, sexuality becomes a part of the new

³¹ When Rosina prepares to advertise as a Gentile governess, her sister reads aloud conduct books to educate Rosina. The phrase "Humility is the cornerstone of femininity" comes from one of these books.

definition of femininity and feminism put forward by the film. Victorian attempts to desexualize the female body are countered by an enormous red shawl, as vivid as menstrual blood.³² Perhaps this bold red shawl also will represent for Clementina the emotion missing from the Cavendish household. Rosina's gift reverses Clementina's initial "present" of the mice in Rosina's bed; whereas Clementina's mice signify hostility and division, Rosina's shawl blankets two generations of women under shared experience and gives hope for the future.

Rosina's legacy to Mrs. Cavendish proves more problematic. Lynette Felber sees Rosina's final act of handing Mrs. Cavendish the photograph of Charles naked after sex as a mutually hurtful and destructive gesture, sparked by Charles's cruelty to Rosina:

Charles summons Rosina to the laboratory when Hewlett, a representative from the Royal Society whom Charles has invited, comes to visit, only for her to witness his public attribution of *her* discovery of the sodium chloride fixing agent to a 'happy accident,' completely denying her agency in the achievement. Similarly retaliative, Rosina seduces his young son and uses her intimate portrait as a weapon, exposing Charles's infidelity by presenting the nude portrait to his wife at the dinner table upon her departure. (33)

I do not believe that Felber's interpretation tells the entire story. Although Rosina's parting words may be cutting, "With your love of fine art, I know that you'll treasure this forever," they are also bearers of truth. Mrs. Cavendish does have an appreciation for art that distinguishes her from her husband, who does not share the artistic impulses she has been forced to stifle. Thus, Rosina gives Mrs. Cavendish a new means for understanding

³² Jeannette King argues that Victorian discussions that attempted to sanitize the female body and discourage expressions of female sexuality have recurred in twentieth and twenty-first century society, as science has categorized women as "victims" of their bodies and their hormones. In addition, new forms of contraception and abortion have caused childbirth and pregnancy to become increasingly subject to medical intervention (176-177).

both her husband and herself. The photograph provides Mrs. Cavendish with the opportunity to see her husband's "true nature," something that film suggests earlier that women can never comprehend about men. Furthermore, she places the power of the gaze in Mrs. Cavendish's hands as the photograph "exposes" her husband to her, freeing him from his hypocrisy and domination. Revealed as an adulterer, Charles is no longer his wife's master. Relying on the language of photography, "exposure" proves essential to the rhetoric of this film and indicates for each character an important, if painful, process of encountering truth, revelation, and growth through visual means. By exposing them to new ways of being, Rosina has left Mrs. Cavendish and Clementina with new possibilities for freedom, the feminist value of the film's contemporary audiences. Although some viewers do not know if circumstances improve in the Cavendish household, after Rosina's departure, the film does suggest that the knowledge Rosina has given, both to Mrs. Cavendish and to Clementina, may allow them to help combat Cavendish's patriarchal control.

The Governess as a Feminist Recuperation of Female Gothic Narratives

Sandra Goldbacher's *The Governess* engages with the political, commercial, and cultural concerns of the late 1990s in order to rewrite Victorian narratives of female artistic development and to create a modern, contemporary feminist role model. When Henry Cavendish reveals to his father, Charles, his intention to marry Rosina, he also "exposes" Rosina's secret Jewish heritage. A composed, but clearly angry, Charles responds that Henry cannot marry Rosina, for "She comes from nowhere. She's practically a demimondaine. That singing. She's obviously an adventuress." While Charles means his comment as a stinging insult, insinuating that Rosina has only been interested in Henry for his money, he also touches on some positive truth. Charles is

correct; Rosina *is* an adventuress, leaving behind the life she has known, pursuing knowledge, creating works of art, and seeking a better understanding of herself. Her journey towards professional and personal realization is an adventure, an ongoing process of risk-taking. The narrative of female professional artistic development best embodies the idea of adventure both within and outside the text. Not only is the heroine of the film an adventuress, but the women involved in the process of making this movie are adventuresses, as well. Making cinema by and for women has long been considered a box office gamble; yet *The Governess* relied upon an almost exclusively female moviemaking team, and what resulted was a film geared towards female audiences.³³

In *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980*, Andrew Higson offers a table titled “The Contribution of Women to the Writing, Producing or Directing of ‘British’ Costume Dramas of the 1980s and 1990s” (268-270). The table attempts to document the high levels of female involvement in the making of heritage cinema films by looking at the gender of the films’ directors, author of source novels, screenwriters, and producers/executive producers. In the case of *The Governess*, the film was written, directed, and produced by an all- female team (Higson 268). And although Higson’s table suggests that typically women do participate in the creation of heritage cinema, Goldbacher’s film stands apart from many of the fifty-two other feature films included in the chart. For if we include Goldbacher as the original author of the source text, then *The Governess* is one of only three films on Higson’s list to be created by an

³³ Traditionally, big box office successes are movies that target a male audience. Critics and box office analysts were shocked when the movie adaptation of *Sex and the City* premiered in 2008 and women came to the theaters in record numbers. The movie grossed \$55.7 million in its opening weekend, far exceeding Hollywood’s box office expectations (“Sex and the City Breaks Box Office Record,” par. 7). A majority of these top five films catered to a male, rather than a female, audience.

all-female team.³⁴ The plot of Goldbacher's film speaks eloquently to the issues of female creativity and female professional artistry that were echoed in the circumstances of film's creation.³⁵

The film not only charts the development of Rosina's artistry, but it evidences the artistic, professional growth of Goldbacher and illuminates the feminist creative impulses behind the text. In an interview with SPLICEDwire, Goldbacher has said that the idea for *The Governess* came from tapping into her own ancestry, when she started a fictional diary from the point-of-view of a young Jewish girl in nineteenth-century England (par. 7).³⁶ She chose the format of the diary because she thought "it would be an interesting in to the character, to let [her] take (me) over. I wanted to have that feeling of seeing things through her eyes" (par. 8). Furthermore, the decision to focus on Jewish identity in the nineteenth century grew out of Goldbacher's desire to reclaim the kinds of stories that could not have been, or at least were not, told in Victorian novels: "There are all kinds of interesting gaps in the literature of that period that we just don't know about [...] I mean, I love the novels of Brontë sisters, but there are certain parts of the story that you just don't see" (par. 6).

³⁴ It seems fitting to count the author of the source novel as female. Although *The Governess* does not have a true source novel, the film comes from a *Jane Eyre* tradition, and the screenplay was based on a fictional diary Goldbacher was keeping. Two other recent heritage films on Higson's list created by all-female production teams were *Mansfield Park* (Patricia Rozema, 1999) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (Marleen Gorris, 1997).

³⁵ The all-female production team included: Sandra Goldbacher (writer/director), Sarah Curtis (producer), Sally Hibbin (executive producer), Ashley Rowe (director of photography), Sarah Greenwood (production design), and Caroline Harris (costumer designer). The only male name in the opening credits, other than those of the actors, belonged to the music director, Edward Shearmur.

³⁶ The diary is not unfounded in fact, however; Goldbacher's mother grew up on the Isle of Skye, and her father is an Italian Jew (*The Boston Phoenix*, par. 4).

In another interview with the *Boston Phoenix*, Goldbacher says, “I grew up on the novels of the Brontë sisters [...] I just loved these strong, passionate heroines at the center of them [...] who [...] ended up either being punished and dying horrible deaths [...] or getting married [...] and you never knew more about the problems of the marriage or the sexuality of it [...] And that prompted me to start writing this diary. I always knew I was going to develop it into a screenplay” (par. 4). Goldbacher suggests that contemporary women artists, such as Jane Campion, are telling these neo-Victorian stories now, through cinematic means, because their predecessors were not allowed to do so in earlier fiction: “I think there were a lot of unsung women. There were all those novels about strong female characters written by women, but they weren't allowed to let them develop because of the forms of the time” (par. 5).³⁷ Thus, Goldbacher engages in a feminism that seeks to tell the stories of racial, ethnic, gender, and class differences that would have been muffled or silenced in Victorian narratives. In *The Governess*, Goldbacher self-consciously offers a revisionist feminist Victorian history, using the Gothic as her narrative frame and photography as both her medium and her subject.

While the notion of adding voices to Victorian narratives may reflect postmodern and poststructuralist influence, the film’s attempt to recover the work of forgotten female artists seems also to link the text to second wave feminist endeavors. Some critics have suggested that *The Governess* reclaims the story of early female photographers, most notably the work of Julia Margaret Cameron. According to Deitmar Böhnke, “the fact that Rosina at the end of the film starts a project of ‘capturing the beauty of her people’ (i.e. the London Jewish community) in portraits, and the look of

³⁷ Goldbacher’s comment is somewhat naïve, as there are a number of excellent feminist explorations written during the nineteenth century. She may be unfamiliar with the period’s New Woman fiction, or writers such as Olive Schreiner and George Egerton.

these portraits, strongly suggest Cameron's work" (114).³⁸ Examining *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs* does not reveal any direct recreations of specific images by Cameron, in *The Governess*, though Cameron did use the subject of Esther in one of her series of religious photographs. What the character of Rosina does share with a real-life Victorian counterpart, such as Cameron, is a vexed relationship with the issue of the photographer's gaze, especially when the sitter is a man. As Judy Dater claims, "[Cameron's] in control of the women, too, but if you're a woman I think it's harder to be in control of men when you're photographing them. When I look at these pictures, it really seems like the men are doing what she is telling them to do. She has a real vision of who they are, and they are playing to her vision (*In Focus* 123).

The female photographer's difficulty in making the male subject conform to her vision of his masculine identity is one of the central problems in *The Governess*. Since Laura Mulvey published her classic essay, "Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), the issues of the camera's gaze, gender, and viewer pleasure have been essential to film theory discussions, particularly those of feminist and queer film theorists who contest and refine Mulvey's claims. Although she has revised her notions in subsequent discussions, Mulvey first argued that "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (2186).

Lynette Felber sees *The Governess* as preoccupied with the gendered gaze: "In the first

³⁸ He asserts that though there might be a correlation between Cameron's work and Rosina's work he has "been unable to ascertain whether the photographs used in the film might have been reproductions of Cameron's works. To be historically precise, Cameron did not, in fact, start taking photographs until the 1860—but this would be part of the film's 'creative anachronism'" (114). Although Rosina's photographs may not be recreations of Cameron's work, they do appear to be pastiches, in the style of Cameron's photos.

sequence Charles's view would seem to 'determine' Rosina as his object, though much of the 'fantasy' is supplied by her imagination. The second sequence reverses the binary, gendered associations, however, challenging Mulvey's generalizations" (31). She continues, "By combining static photos with the movement of the film, however, Goldbacher emulates the gaze, that admittedly intangible figure" (32). Thus, the film replicates the male gaze, as originally defined by Mulvey, but then complicates it.

Even though Rosina tells Charles, "I want to know how you see me," she problematizes the viewer/object relationship. At first, Charles takes photographs of Rosina, but she is the one who controls and stages how she sits for these portraits—"the camera vacillates between Rosina's poses and Charles's eye as it appears through the camera eyepiece, visually mimicking the gaze by oscillating between object and perceiver" (31). Both Charles *and* Rosina participate in initiating and receiving the gaze. The problem of the gaze also occurs outside the realm of photography. In the scene in which Charles and Rosina make love for the first time, Rosina, at his urging, wears a veil, so that her eyes do not "devour" Charles. Later, Felber states that "Rosina enacts her own secret fetishistic desire [...] The pose in which she places him is both erotic, a reclining male 'centerfold,' and vulnerable, with his arms raised above his head [...] Rosina appropriates the power of the conventionally masculine photographer-voyeur, contesting 'the determining male gaze' and substituting her own. (32) When she quits her post as governess in the Cavendish household, Rosina leaves one photograph behind, a haunting one of her eyes. She positions the image in Charles's laboratory, so her eyes will always look back at him—a reminder of her gaze and the woman he has lost. Later, she will return the gaze once again by taking a final photograph of Charles. Rosina gains subjectivity through her ability to assume control over the camera and to return the gaze.

Both the narrative of the film and the way in which the film itself is shot participate in politicized discussions of the gendered gaze.

The concept of the gaze also highlights contemporary feminism's concern with body image and female standards of beauty. As discussions of eating disorders and other evidences of negative body image rise, some feminists despair creating strong women confident in their own bodies.³⁹ The casting of Minnie Driver as Rosina does not challenge typical Hollywood casting decisions, for Driver is thin, tall, and conventionally attractive. Further sexualizing Driver's lithe body is the costume designer's choice of tight, revealing, and almost deliberately anachronistic attire for Rosina. In one scene, for instance, she wears a shiny black coat in an unidentifiable mourning material. Nonetheless, the material, which resembles patent leather, recalls that of the more famous black coats worn in *The Matrix*, a film featuring a heroine, Trinity, who was a feisty feminist role model. While *The Governess* may participate in some stereotypical representations of the female body, it does work to renegotiate gendered images other ways.

According to Liora Brosh, the use of heterosexual male pornographic perspective in films of the 1990s escalated as porn entered the mainstream: "from

³⁹ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar cited the novels of the Brontës, particularly *Shirley* (1849), as a text in which food becomes repellent and the characters enact their rage and frustration against societal gender norms and proper codes of femininity through a failure to eat. In essence, the heroines of Brontë novels suffer from anorexia. See Julianna Giobbi's "The Anorexics of *Wuthering Heights*" (1999) and Sheryl Craig's "'My Inward Cravings': Anorexia Nervosa in *Jane Eyre*" (1997). Although I would not say that Rosina engages in the kind of "hunger artistry" that scholars suggest Jane and Catherine Earnshaw indulge in, the film does posit a distinct difference in food quality and desirability based on religion. For example, the opening feast at the Da Silva household is full of fresh, vibrantly colored fruits while the Cavendish dinner consists of an inedible entre and semolina, a dish which earlier in the text has been compared to male ejaculate.

Victoria's Secret catalogs to the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, which by the end of the 1990s included no articles about sports, pornographic imagery had become increasingly legitimate in mainstream culture and pervaded American advertising, magazines, popular music, and film" (109). A variety of feminist critiques suggest that women's increasing economic achievements directly correlated to this burgeoning array of sexualized media representations of them, as a means of disempowerment (110). *The Governess*, as it deals with the photographing of bodies, eroticized or otherwise, seems to take up concerns over depictions of the female form and power.

Although Charles is concerned purely with scientific pursuits, Rosina's primary interest in photography is in the taking of images of bodies. She fashions and eroticizes her own body in a series of portraits that she urges Charles to take, but the photographs do not merely participate in male heterosexual representations of female sexuality; for in Goldbacher's film the male body is often more explicitly nude and eroticized. In so much as *The Governess* deemphasizes the female body and emphasizes male nudity, it participates in a group of heritage films from the 1990s that "Depart[ed] radically from contemporary representations of male heterosexual desire, [by] construct[ing] an alternative female heterosexual gaze" (120). According to Liora Brosh, such films included *Pride and Prejudice* (Simon Langton, 1995) and *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1999). *Pride and Prejudice* provided a "Darcy-centric" interpretation of the text that sexualized the male protagonist, as in one scene in which he emerged from a swim in a pond wearing see-through undergarments and another in which he took a bath. *The Piano*, too, featured full-frontal nudity of one of the film's male stars, Harvey Keitel.

The Governess similarly plays with exposing the male body and makes this "exposure" more explicit through its relationship to the development of Rosina's art. A critic for the *Boston Phoenix* noted, "The film also resembles *The Piano* in that its

sexuality, seen through a woman's gaze, and displays a lot more male nudity than in most movies.” The male lead of the film, Tom Wilkinson, remarked, "There's a similar clothes-off theme, isn't there," commenting on his own nudity and that of Jonathan Rhys Meyers, who plays his son, Henry. When Rosina finally takes a photograph of Charles, she undresses her sleeping lover and poses and photographs him in the nude. The recumbent form of Charles does echo some pornographic poses, as does the explicit view of his genitals.⁴⁰ Yet the portrait also exists as a loving creation by Rosina, who gives it to Charles with a note about letting him see her soul as she has seen his. Thus, it is not meant as an exploitative sexual image, though Charles does feel vulnerable and exposed. In fact, he goes so far as to “Gothicize” the photograph—to make it “othered” and apart from himself, rather than embrace its potential for intimacy. Here, both the female protagonist and the filmmaker alike negotiate the complicated issues of body image, gender and pornography that were impacting late 1990s culture.

The Artist's Portrait: Female Artistic Development and *The Governess*

Not only does the development of female artistry relate to issues of body image and the filmmaker's agenda, but the trajectory of Rosina's artistry has significant bearing on the film's narrative closure. Rosina engages in other kinds of female artistry throughout the film, in addition to photography. From the start of the film, she evidences great aesthetic skill and artistic spirit. In the opening scenes, Rosina sees a sign on her way home from the synagogue advertising, “Rachel La Grande: Tragedienne.” The sign catches her attention, until she is interrupted by some other Victorian “actresses,” a group

⁴⁰ The pose also seems to suggest the crucifix that Rosina removes from her wall, as Charles lies with both arms akimbo over his head.

of prostitutes.⁴¹ Later that night, in the safety of her and her sister's bedroom, she too imagines herself acting as a tragedian and expresses her wish to go on the stage. She pantomimes "Tragedy. Joy. Rapture" and says she will be an actress. When she kisses Benjamin, and her sister chides her for being improper, she says, "Actresses care not for such convention."⁴² Lynette Felber suggests that, "Through posing as Mary Blackchurch, Rosina acquires professional skills that lead to her independence and eventually to her identity as an acclaimed photographer" (32). Rosina's performative activities continue throughout the film, from her self-conscious dance with Benjamin—later echoed in her dance with Henry Cavendish on the beach—to her humming and singing, and to her attention to dress. As she helps Charles set up his photographs, for example, she decoratively arranges fruit around a dead bird's wing; she begins to transition from a performing artist to a visual artist.

Another significant trajectory for Rosina's artistic development occurs when she abandons her role as model and photographic assistant to become an independent photographer. In her relationship to photography, Rosina moves from model to artist. The photographs that Charles takes of her—various shots of her body, her face, and her eyes—are reminiscent of Christina Rossetti's descriptions of modeling in the poem "In An Artist's Studio" (1896). Rosina perhaps has more control than did Rossetti's models, as she helps to orchestrate the photographs, rather than merely passively posing for them. However the images of her fragmented body in the portraits recalls the lines, "One face

⁴¹ Victorian actresses were likened to prostitutes; in fact, Rosina's mother tells her that if she goes to Scotland to masquerade (act) as a Gentile, she will end up "on the streets," as a prostitute.

⁴² In this scene, viewers learn early on that marriage and performative artistry are not compatible, as Rosina's Aunt Sofka was an actress who never married. Despite her aunt's unmarried status, Rosina respects Aunt Sofka, and she becomes the model of female strength and intelligence that Rosina's mother is not.

looks out from all its canvasses,/One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans” (lines 1-2). Rosina transitions from being the “selfsame figure” that “fills [Charles’s] dreams” to an independent photographer who captures the images of a variety of people, rather than posing as one static female form over and over again. Ironically, by getting beyond the image of her own body, Rosina “captures” her own identity.

In the final scenes of the film, Rosina finally takes her self-portrait. Lynette Felber remarks that the closing frames combine mixed media and voice-over to represent female subjectivity (34): “Rosina frees herself from her previous need to see herself through Charles’s (patriarchy’s) gaze. Yet her act of self-photography is ambiguous—ultimately autonomous but also narcissistic, denying the relationship perspective she previously advocated” (35). Although Felber claims that Rosina’s earlier art efforts were contingent on her collaboration with a man, in fact, they were not. Rosina always had to decoy her ideas as belonging to Charles; in the photographs she took, he viewed her as nothing more than the object of his gaze, despite her assistance in creating them. Even when Felber suggests they were partners, or posits that Rosina would have liked to believe they were partners, no equality existed in the relationship; rather they lived in a state of gendered struggle. For example, when Rosina suggested that they call the method of fixing prints “The Blackchurch Cavendish method,” which seemed only right, when *she* was the one who had created it, Charles replied, “Are you trying to overtake me, Miss?” Clearly, Charles did not view their art as mutual and Rosina’s perception of it as collaborative was inaccurate. Yet Felber’s analysis of Rosina’s self-portrait and of her ability finally to assume control over her own image and artistry does raise a host of interesting questions. For instance, how does one read this text’s ambivalent and ambiguous ending in relationship to contemporary feminist discourses about visual culture?

At the end of the film Rosina reveals the secret of her identity, appropriates photographic materials from the Cavendish laboratory, and leaves behind a picture of her eyes. She returns to her family with nothing but two boxes of photography equipment to find that a cholera outbreak has decimated her community. The action jumps ahead an unknown amount of time to find Rosina photographing two Jewish sisters, who seem to echo her and her sister at the film's beginning. Rosina is now a successful photographer with her own studio, and her sister has married Rosina's old suitor, Benjamin, and works as Rosina's protégée. One day Charles comes to her studio to sit for his portrait, telling her, "I'm in your hands, Miss da Silva. Do with me what you will." The two share a long, meaningful look at one another as Charles poses for the camera. He asks her, "Are we done?" to which Rosina replies, "Yes, yes. I think so. Quite done." The scene does not offer any romantic reconciliation, which Charles clearly seeks, but it does provide Rosina with some closure to her experiences at the Cavendish house—as they hold each other's gaze, it is evident that their romantic and also artistic relationship was meaningful to both parties, for it shaped their identities and informed their futures. As he seeks out Rosina, we see that Charles too shares in her effort to preserve or "fix" the memories of otherwise "lost" people.

After Charles leaves, Rosina takes her own portrait and says,

I think of Scotland hardly ever at all now. My images are much admired and I am even to give a lecture at the Royal Society. They say I have captured the beauty of my father's people and I am glad. My Mary Blackchurch days seem long gone now. I hardly ever think about what might have been or why he came to find me or why it is you love most those who always seem to be turning away from you. Work is a wonderful restorative. I hardly ever think of those days at all. No. I hardly ever think of them at all.

As she utters these words, the camera zooms in on her eyes, framing them in the same way that they appear in the photograph she had left for Charles to find. She looks directly back at the audience, just as she has continued to gaze at Charles in the photograph she in his studio. Felber argues, “by specializing in portraiture, she has created a ‘feminine’ variant on her male mentor’s impersonal perspective [...] her self-portraiture may be viewed, not pejoratively, as narcissism, but as an essential self-knowledge prerequisite to an egalitarian relationship. (35) The final frame focuses on Rosina’s photograph of Charles alongside a photograph of an unidentified Jewish girl. Some readers might feel that Rosina’s assertion that she never thinks of “those days” in Scotland may be the words of a less than self-knowing subject, whose repetition of this phrase serves merely as a way to try and convince *herself* that she has healed from her relationship with Cavendish when, in actuality, she has not. However, the close up of Rosina’s eyes and the juxtaposition of the photographic of the young Jewish girl, alongside Cavendish, suggests that Rosina has matured and that she is no longer the object of Charles’s gaze; instead, she sees the world through her own eyes, while still acknowledging his contribution to the development of her artistic identity.

Unlike *Jane Eyre*, which ends on a triumphant note, *The Governess* seems less convinced that women can “have it all.” Perhaps some viewers may even feel that the film’s final secret is its revelation of the dysfunctional and corrupt nature of all heterosexual relationships. Goldbacher’s film explores what might have happened, if Jane Eyre’s courtship plot did not materialize, and it suggests alternative endings outside of the typical marriage as the climax of female narrative. It asks, furthermore, what might be possible in a society when professional artistry really *is* an option for women, as it was not for Jane Eyre. The movie differs from Victorian novels such as *Jane Eyre*, for it explicitly addresses the idea of female professionalism and depicts a set of circumstances

that impact the modern woman more than the Victorian. The film addresses the kinds of sacrifices that might occur, if a woman decides to have a career in the arts.

By the film's end Rosina is a successful working woman, one who has her own studio, and one who undertakes racially/ethnically important work. She has achieved Charles's goal of success with the Royal Society, and she claims her work is a "wonderful restorative." Her words bring to mind those of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's heroine, Aurora Leigh, who says, "Get leave to work/In this world- 'tis the best you get at all;/for God, in cursing, gives us better gifts/Than men in benediction" (3.161-164). Of course, Browning's text famously tells the story of a Victorian woman artist, and details the conflicts she experiences between her professional and her romantic life. Hence Rosina's claim about the restorative power of work seems to echo the half-fulfilled sentiments of Aurora Leigh, a woman who feels great satisfaction from her work but seems somewhat hesitant to ask more from life. Goldbacher shows audiences that while work and career are fulfilling, doubt about one's choices may exist too. The identity of a modern woman is complicated, as she faces a host of competing and conflicting expectations. Although viewers may initially suspect that Rosina's thrice-repeated assertion that she "hardly ever thinks of those days" alludes merely to her being haunted by her time with Charles, the memory of that relationship has also left her with increased independence and a new sense of self, achieved only through her development as an artist.

The Governess and its Legacies

When Charles meets Rosina on the beach, she tells him of the beauty of a dead bird's wing. Charles responds, "You find beauty in strange places, Miss Blackchurch." One could lob the same charge at Sandra Goldbacher, whose film, while

visually stunning and evocatively written, did not translate to major commercial success; audiences failed to appreciate its strange beauty. Commercially speaking, *The Governess* was not one of the more profitable products of the hey-day of heritage cinema in the 1980s and 1990s. Goldbacher's film was partially funded through money—genuine production funding, providing capital upfront not just simply pre-selling the rights to broadcast the film—provided by the BBC (Higson 114). The British Screen Council also helped support the film, so it had cross-over appeal with money also coming from Sony Classics (Higson 115). The film also had the draw of Minnie Driver who was just beginning to gain fame through roles in films such as *Good Will Hunting* (Gus Van Sant, 1997). Yet on its summer release, *The Governess* only earned \$57,799 in its United States opening weekend and appeared on only 6 screens (Imdb.com). American seemed certain that audiences would find the slow-moving film claustrophobic and oppressive ("The Governess," *Variety*).

Despite critical apprehension about the film's appeal to audiences, the movie did garner many good reviews and interest swirled around the film's young, female creator. In SPLICEDwire's interview with Sandra Goldbacher, Rob Blackwelder tells the audience, "A diminutive, ashen woman in her mid-30s, Goldbacher doesn't look the type to be the force behind a high-brow bodice-ripper [...] Extremely soft-spoken, with a tight but amiable smile, she does, however, seem like she might have more than a passing interest in the sciences, which she uses as a springboard for the more torrid parts of the story." Interestingly, Blackwelder portrays Goldbacher as a woman in the mold of Charlotte Brontë, a female artist whom Victorian journalists liked to characterize as small, diminutive, and dark.⁴³ Blackwelder also quotes Goldbacher as saying, "I've had

⁴³ See Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857).

a few disastrous love affairs.” In order to film romance and courtship, Goldbacher must prove her status as a sexually knowledgeable woman. The curiosity surrounding Goldbacher’s “qualifications” for writing romance brings to mind the equivalent interest that once centered on Brontë’s love life, specifically her relationship with M. Constantin Héger as a possible model for Edward Rochester, or for M. Paul Emmanuel in *Villette* (1853). The same biographical topos used to diminish female artists’ accomplishments recurs across time—the way reviewers frame Goldbacher’s artistic and personal lives echoes constructs deployed in Brontë’s biography. Similarly, the same tensions expressed in Victorian Gothic novels featuring female artist-figures and in Goldbacher’s neo-Victorian, neo-Gothic construction of these texts reappear in these author biographies, which are both self-referential and socially symbolic. Blackwelder’s interview suggests that responses to female artistic experience link the nineteenth-century and the present, bringing together contemporary female artist-figures and their antecedents, while simultaneously echoing anxieties and concerns about gender of the Victorian period and reflecting those involving women today.

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CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, I have suggested that it is the presence of the artist-heroine in nineteenth-century Gothic texts written by women, rather than the gender of the author or the reader, that ought to serve as the true marker of the genre known as “the Female Gothic.” Although many critics have approached Female Gothic texts as psychoanalytic fiction that rehearses the fears and guilt attendant on sexual maturation, my project has shown these works in a different light. Historicizing and redefining Female Gothic discourse, I have attempted to prove that the Victorians’ preoccupation with the figure of the female artist—whether her mode of art was theatrical, narrative, domestic, or visual—coincided with the rise of feminism and with anxieties about the growing social and economic independence of middle-class women.

By analyzing distinctions among nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty first-century figurations of the female artist in Gothic texts by women across a variety of media—from Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, to Sandra Goldbacher’s Neo-Victorian film, *The Governess*—I have tried to address how and why, at different moments in time, concerns raised by women’s unstable economic and social status; by shifting gender norms; by issues of sexual, ethnic, and racial difference; by attitudes toward physical disability; and by contentions over questions of representation have all been filtered through a Gothic lens.

Moreover, my work posits that contemporary art, in various media, continues to frame current cultural anxieties using Gothic narrative, Gothic imagery, or other Gothic elements, though it increasingly makes explicit the sorts of issues that Victorian writers introduced more covertly. Many of these Gothic-inspired works seem heavily invested in feminist content, offering more obvious examples of women's art practices than did the nineteenth-century originals, perhaps because they do not trust today's audiences to be satisfied with the subtler representations found in the precursor texts. Debates and controversies over feminist texts and subtexts, however, still go on.

A clear instance of a recent work in which the figure of the woman artist marks the Female Gothic genre is the 2011 cinematic adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, directed by Cary Fukunaga. Surprisingly, this film has also occasioned a widely disseminated response—"There is no Eyre of feminism about this modern Jane," by David Cox, writing in the *Guardian* (U.K.)—that praises Fukunaga for not positioning Jane as a feminist role model and for being true to the supposed anti-feminist spirit of Charlotte Brontë herself. Cox alleges that Jane's story has been read mistakenly as "the first major feminist novel"; (par. 1) according to Cox, Brontë's novel shows no interest in challenging patriarchal oppression and neither does Fukunaga's adaptation: "For feminists, this film is therefore a rebuke rather than a rallying cry. So, it reminds us, is the text on which it's based. Nonetheless, perhaps [screenwriter Moira] Buffini and Fukunaga have performed at least one act of female liberation. They may have helped free one of the most memorable of all fictional women from a misplaced and deceptive construal" (par. 10). Obviously, Cox chooses to ignore the numerous feminist values and principles that Brontë's novel

endorses. More interesting, from my perspective, is that he also fails to recognize one of the most fundamental feminist elements in Brontë's narrative, one that Fukunaga's film goes to great lengths to privilege—the insistence upon Jane's identity as artist.

Fukunaga's adaptation features scenes of Jane sketching at several points, as well as contemplating works of art by others. Unlike other adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, in which references to her own artworks occur only when Rochester demands to see her portfolio, Fukunaga's version suggests that Jane's identity as an artist is integral throughout the narrative. Here Jane's story is not merely, as Cox suggests, about a young woman's journey toward love; rather, it is a *künstlerroman*, which traces, through Gothic complications, the development of a woman's artistic talent and consciousness. At a time when Victorian ladies were encouraged merely to copy pictures by men, as a demonstration of their "accomplishments," Jane's art is, in this cinematic adaptation, an assertive, independent, and even aggressive act that enables the expression of otherwise tabooed emotion and that fosters psychological growth.

In addition, as in Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre* both expands the borders of her imagination and makes pragmatic sense of the social order in which she is trapped by studying visual works—whether the engravings in Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds* or the contrasting representations of social privilege in the sketch of Blanche Ingram and in her own self-portrait. Thus in Fukunaga's version, too, Jane looks often at paintings (in this case, on the walls at Thornfield), and the camera watches her think through their significance at key moments. Learning to be an astute interpreter of visual information, of course, helps to prepare Jane for the important role of helpmeet to the

blinded Rochester. Unfortunately, Fukunaga's adaptation concludes with Jane's return to Rochester at Ferndean and, therefore, does not carry the viewer into Jane's future as a narrative artist, becoming both Rochester's "eyes" and the author of her own autobiography. Yet this film still proves a radical departure from earlier cinematic reimaginings of the novel, most especially in its decision to foreground Jane's identity as an artist—as a creator of visual works and a critical reader of them.

As in Brontë's novel, Jane's art becomes the vehicle, in Fukunaga's film, to pair the narrative's Gothic elements with feminist issues of creativity, autonomy, power, and transgression. In one scene, for example, Jane cradles a frightened Adèle in her lap, while telling a story about the "spirit of the North," a beast with red eyes and claws that attacks unfortunate travelers. Viewers see Jane creating this story, basing her tale on a painting that she is examining. In the following scene, Adèle mimics Jane's storytelling, offering Jane a terrifying tale of a "vampire" woman who stalks the halls of Thornfield Hall. In another instance, Jane roams the deserted halls of Thornfield by night, studying paintings by candlelight. As she looks intently at the sensuous image of a reclining female nude, she hears strange noises—noises that she does not yet know will signal the presence of her Gothic Other, the "vampire" madwoman, Bertha Rochester. In both cases, female artistry, whether creative or interpretive, illuminates the existence and the plight of Bertha Rochester, a nineteenth-century woman who embodies gendered oppression (and rebellion against oppression) in legal, political, racial, sexual, or social terms.

In Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre*, when St. John Rivers warns Jane that, in taking on the humble position of a country schoolteacher, she will have no outlet for her "fine

accomplishments,” she responds curtly, “I will save them until they’re wanted. They will keep.” These lines of dialogue are Moira Buffini’s invention and do not appear in Brontë’s novel. Nonetheless, they seem particularly pertinent to my discussion of the female artist figure in women’s Gothic, for contemporary constructions of Victorian Gothic narratives (such as in this film adaptation) make plain that women’s stories of artistic struggle, ambition, and achievement are still relevant. They are, to put it bluntly, “wanted” as much as ever. Moreover, these feminist tales of accomplishments have been “save[d]” for and by generations of readers and artists, old and new, who have continued to be fascinated by and to reinterpret that marker of the Gothic genre, the so-called monstrous female creator. By any measure, hers is a legacy that will keep.