

The Gothic Fantasy of History: Fear and Loss in the British Long Eighteenth Century

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**Abstract**

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This dissertation joins the ongoing scholarly debate about the form and function of gender in literary studies of the gothic. I reclaim the term “female gothic” to form an argument about historical representation in literary texts of the latter part of the British long eighteenth century. Based upon a combined sense of fear and loss that pervades the historical present, the female gothic generates its own model of history, what I call the “gothic fantasy of history.” Fear and loss in the present incites a retroactive fantasy of a lost historical past, which is ambivalently constructed as both an idyllic paradise and a barbarous monstrosity. At the same time, however, the writers of the female gothic exploit the work of fantasy that imagines a lost historical past to cast into relief the equally fantastic work that constructs the historical present as an enlightened age of reason and progress. In what I demonstrate is a prototypically gothic move, the twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan provides the key to unlocking the relations between gender, history, and fantasy. In the same way, the gothic provides the analytical tools necessary to deconstruct the haunting and daunting structure known as Lacanian psychoanalysis.

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## Introduction

When Laura, the gothic heroine of *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey* (1797), finds herself a prisoner in the eponymous abbey, which is rumored by the local villagers to be haunted, she acquires the fortitude to explore her ominous surroundings. As she walks along a moonlit gallery, “she contemplated her own shadow as she walked; but, how was she astonished, and how did she stand aghast, when she saw another shadow besides her own, which appeared larger, and to be that of a man! Her fortitude at once forsook her.”<sup>1</sup> Laura’s first impulse is to attribute this mysterious shadow to a supernatural phenomenon. However, she “considered that, by some oblique reflection of the moon, two figures might be reflected from one...and she easily fancied that her fears had magnified the figure, and likewise given it the resemblance of a man” (59). The author of this novel, known only as Mrs. Carver, here takes up the tactics of the supernatural explained, most famously attributed to Ann Radcliffe. This explanation for the supernatural is, however, just as unreasonable as the supernatural itself; it makes no logical sense. When Laura returns to the gallery the next night and attempts to recreate the double shadow, she looks as foolish as the stock gothic character of the superstitious servant who attributes any and all inexplicable events to ghosts and demons.

However, “as to ghosts, [Laura] believed no such thing; it was not the dead from whom she had any apprehensions” (48). Indeed, Lord Oakendale is a living, breathing human who presents a very real threat to Laura’s bodily integrity, and this threat is perhaps more frightening than any seemingly supernatural phenomenon. In fact, in the narrative’s retroactive explanation of the supernatural we learn that the shadow *was* of a man, of one of the grave robbers who

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<sup>1</sup> Carver, *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey*, ed. Curt Herr (Crestline: Zittaw Press, 2006), p. 58. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

inhabit the castle and who employ scare tactics meant to incite terror in the abbey's visitors. The narrator calls these grave robbers "unfeeling monsters of society," drawing a distinct line between feeling human and unfeeling monster. And yet, what appears to be monstrous and inhuman is not supernatural at all; the grave robbers are as human as Laura. Though the novel may explain the supernatural, it cannot account for the horror of reality.

I open the present study with this scene and its retroactive explanation to illustrate the exemplary concerns of the category of gothic fiction known as the "female gothic."<sup>2</sup> Diane Long Hoeveler claims that *Oakendale Abbey's* "value can be found, not in any skillful presentation of plot, characters or tropes, but in its peculiar presentation of a clear anti-modern, anti-scientific ideology at its core."<sup>3</sup> However, the female gothic is very much concerned with the "modern." While critics are sometimes hesitant or resistant to adopt this term, I make use of the gendered category to make an argument about the form and function of historical representation in the latter part of the long eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The present study is one about gender, about women writers and women's lives in history reimagined in gothic scenes of terror. I see no reason to shy away from gendered language because the gothic mode I explore *is* gendered.<sup>5</sup> Based upon a combined sense of fear and loss that pervades the historical present, the female gothic generates

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen Moers coined this term in *Literary Women* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976). Since then critics such as Anne Williams and E.J. Clery have taken up and revised the term in opposition to the "male gothic," known for its more overt depictions of horror and unexplained supernatural phenomena.

<sup>3</sup> Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction, 1780-1880* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p. 240.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Wallace, for example, uses the term "Gothic historical fiction" instead of the female gothic. *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Following Ruth Anolik's lead, I refer to the gothic as a "mode," rather than a "genre." See Anolik, *Property and Power in English Gothic Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2015). This term allows for a more capacious understanding of the gothic, which can include a variety of texts ranging from Lacanian psychoanalysis to eighteenth-century historiographical writing.

its own model of history, what I will call the “gothic fantasy of history.” Fear and loss in the present incites a retroactive fantasy of a lost historical past, which is ambivalently constructed as both an idyllic paradise and a barbarous monstrosity. Carver’s heroine, Laura, embodies the specific fears and losses taken up by female gothic writers of the long eighteenth century in her encounter with the mysteriously doubled male shadow. Women’s untenable positions in eighteenth-century life are dramatized in the female gothic by heroines who face a series of seemingly supernatural threats only to find that these threats are posed not by ghosts but by men in positions of power.

These inescapable threats to the heroine’s personhood turn female subjectivity into a shadowy substance. Indeed, Laura’s terror upon encountering the doubled shadow is twofold: she is obviously terrified that she is in the presence of a supernatural being, but, more powerfully, she is horrified by the confrontation with this spectral subjectivity in the form of an immaterial object, a shadow. The gothic fantasy of history as articulated in the female gothic is, then, an attempt to escape and evacuate the present, filled as it was with fear and loss, terror and horror. At the same time, however, the writers of the female gothic *know* that their presentations of the historical past are fantasy constructions, some more obviously than others. They exploit the work of fantasy that imagines a lost historical past to cast into relief the equally fantastic work that constructs the historical present as an enlightened age of reason and progress. The female gothic thus turns both historical past and present into objects of fantasy. This project is, then, as much about the specific category of the female gothic as it is about, in Dan Edelstein’s words, critiquing “how the narrative of ‘the Enlightenment’ emerged as a self-reflexive understanding of the historical importance and specificity of eighteenth-century Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 2.

The shadowy substance of female subjectivity in the gothic cannot be thought apart from the world of objects and, furthermore, history cannot be thought apart from fantasy. Fantasy is, then, the intermediary between subjectivity and history. In the female gothic, any conception of the human as separate from the object world, and of history as separate from the present, is a fantasy. In what I will demonstrate is a prototypically gothic move, the twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan provides a key to unlocking the relation between female gothic subjects and objects, between history and fantasy. In the same way, the gothic provides the analytical tools necessary to deconstruct that haunting and daunting structure known as Lacanian psychoanalysis. This methodological move is gothic because it enacts the retroactive function of fantasy in conceptualizing history as imagined by the female gothic. To read gothic literature of the long eighteenth century through a psychoanalytic lens is of course to retroactively revise that literature, to imagine it apart from its historical present, to fantastically project a set of concepts into a time and place that they do not belong. And yet, the gothic fantasy of history and the Lacanian model of the subject's entrance into the social order of the symbolic, the order of language and of subjective alienation, both depend upon the retroactive work of fantasy. While the female gothic imagines a lost historical past that is in some way distinct from the fear and loss that define the historical present, the Lacanian subject, who is always and only ever a symbolic subject, imagines a lost past free from the alienated and alienating effects of language, a pre-linguistic state of *jouissance*, of excessive (yet unattainable) pleasure. But because the subject becomes a subject only in and through the symbolic, that state of *jouissance* is a retroactive fantasy produced from within the symbolic order structured by fear and loss. Loss is a defining feature of both Lacanian psychoanalysis and the female gothic, but it is always the articulation of a loss that has never actually been lost. Though loss is a function of

retroactive fantasy, female gothic and Lacanian subjects nevertheless register this sense of loss as real and powerful.

My understanding of “objects” is contradictory; it relies both on empiricist models of materiality and the psychoanalytic understanding of objects as psychic symbols, which do not necessarily have any referent in the material world of reality. In the female gothic and in Lacan, material and immaterial objects mediate and structure subjectivity, history, and fantasy. The female gothic’s preoccupation with objects reflects the newly emergent commodity culture of the eighteenth century. Recent literary studies of the eighteenth century have focused on a mode of fiction known as the “it-narrative,” which takes animals or inanimate objects as its central characters. As Christina Lupton has put it, these novels reinvigorate the concept of “objectification,” which “finds new life in the current discourse around things and materiality rather than being the means by which critics or individuals transcend it.”<sup>7</sup> Mark Blackwell’s edited collection, *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (2007), has perhaps been the most influential contribution to the recuperation of it-narratives as objects of literary study, which had previously “languished in critical purgatory.”<sup>8</sup>

This scholarly focus has opened up the space to discuss the circulation of objects in an increasingly commercial society, what Neil McKendrick calls the “consumer revolution,”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lupton, “The Knowing Book: Authors, It-Narratives, and Objectification in the Eighteenth Century,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 39.3 (2006): 402-420, p. 405.

<sup>8</sup> Blackwell, *The Secret Life of Things* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), p. 11. More recently, Ileana Popa Baird and Christina Ionescu have shifted the focus on eighteenth-century objects and thing theory to a transnational context, including Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Oceania. See *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 9.

providing keen insight into important cultural and economic trends. These studies of it-narratives have informed my understanding of gothic objects, which pose a complicated tension between the animate and inanimate. In the female gothic, the self, the subject, cannot be understood without the other, the object; and this exchange between subject and object occasions an elaborate series of fantasies about individual interiority and the individual's relation to the social. This exchange between subject and object, internal and external, reveals moreover that, in the female gothic, the "self" is an unstable category, a fantasy construction. The fantasy is that there is a stable self set apart from the other, when in fact the self is always set apart from, other than, itself.

In my exploration of the gothic fantasy of history, I look specifically at the shocks and fissures felt within the eighteenth-century family to better understand women's lives, and the representations of those lives, in the long eighteenth century. Ruth Perry focuses specifically on the changing structure of the family arguing that the "sexual fear and horror of blood relations gone wrong in the gothic novel" is a displacement of contemporary anxieties surrounding the new form and function of the eighteenth-century family.<sup>10</sup> Focusing primarily on the trope of incest that pervades the gothic, Perry is largely concerned with the sexualized and sexualizing role of the family. While any discussion of the gothic's representation of the family would be incomplete without attention to incest, I am more interested in developing Perry's claim that the resolution of family conflict in the gothic "must be read in part as a literary wish-fulfillment in response to fragmenting kin ties and the pulling apart of consanguineal bonds due to accelerating geographical and class mobility" (399). The gothic family becomes a marker of the historical past in the eighteenth century, and as such the family serves as a locus around which fantasies of

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<sup>10</sup> Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 399.

the past and present play out. In the gothic's fantasy construction of the past, the fragmented and fragmenting family is replaced by a version of family that, in the end, reconciles all conflict; the past forms a unified whole from the fragments of the present. But, I argue, while these compensatory narratives quell the fears of the present, there is almost always an element of mystery that never quite gets solved in their conclusions. The holes in these narratives reveal the idealized portrait of the family as a fantasy of the past, and, furthermore, signal the fear that casts a shadow over the present. Like the ambivalent sense of the historical past and present in the gothic fantasy of history, the gothic family reflects the dilemma of the eighteenth-century family in Britain. The family is site of anxiety and fear precisely because it is unfamiliar in its changing configuration, though, uncannily, the family is (or is supposed to be) that which is most familiar. In my focus on the fear and loss that constitute female subjectivity in the gothic, I pay particular attention to the role of mothers. The gothic mother has been read as variously as a homoerotic object of incestuous love<sup>11</sup> and as a mythical figuration of the "nurse, goddess, witch, or demon."<sup>12</sup> I argue instead that mothers in the female gothic dramatize the powerlessness felt by married women in the long eighteenth century. Without recourse to the law or to property, gothic mothers are forced to bequeath trauma and loss to their daughters in what I call a "maternal inheritance of loss."

Critical studies of the gothic and romanticism have always shown interest in the psychological – the conscious and unconscious – elements of these bodies of work. In the past, gothic studies focused particularly on Freudian interpretations, typically invoking the theory of

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<sup>11</sup> See Susan Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), pp. 57-71 and George Haggerty, "Mothers and Other Lovers: Gothic Fiction and the Erotics of Loss," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 16 (2004): 157-72.

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Hillard, *Ritual Violence and the Maternal in the British Novel, 1740-1820* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010), p. 130.

the uncanny as an explanatory model for the haunting phenomena that occur and recur across the mode.<sup>13</sup> Recently, psychoanalytic studies of both the gothic and romanticism have shifted focus from Freud to Lacan. With a greater sensitivity to historicism, these studies all provide rationales for their applications of psychoanalytic theories that postdate the long eighteenth century by another century. David Sigler has argued that “psychoanalysis can be recognized as such even when it has developed within other intellectual traditions and under other names;” Joel Faflak suggests that Romanticism is a form of psychoanalysis before Freud.<sup>14</sup> And yet, like the female gothic’s retroactive explanation of the supernatural, these rationales always seem unsatisfying in one way or another. Yes, psychoanalysis is a school of thought that emerges from the same set of historical and intellectual trends that provided the conditions for the gothic to flourish. As Dale Townshend, reading the gothic through both Lacan and Foucault, puts it, the gothic and psychoanalysis inhabit “the same modern epistemic space.”<sup>15</sup> I contend that the female gothic and Lacanian psychoanalysis are bodies of work that are structured on precisely the same formulations of subjectivity, history, and fantasy. My goals, then, are to show how female gothic writing of the long eighteenth century and Lacanian psychoanalysis are similar and why it is useful to put these two bodies of work in conversation with one another.

At the same time, however, I want to begin by making this potentially uncomfortable admission: I cannot fully explain why the eighteenth-century female gothic and psychoanalytic

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<sup>13</sup> Terry Castle’s account of the “spectralization of the other” in Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as an uncanny return of the repressed has proved an invaluable contribution to studies of the female gothic and of psychoanalytic studies of the gothic more broadly. See Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 122-39.

<sup>14</sup> Sigler, *Sexual Enjoyment in British Romanticism: Gender and Psychoanalysis, 1753-1835* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), p. 6; Faflak, *Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of the Mystery* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Townshend, *The Orders of the Gothic: Foucault, Lacan, and the Subject of Gothic Writing, 1764-1820* (New York: AMS Press, 2007), p. 10.

theory are so uncannily alike. My hunch is that I am not alone in this dilemma. Daniela Garofalo concludes her meditation on the turn to Lacan in gothic and romantic scholarship with a series of questions: “are the features of the Lacanian subject...eternal features of the human psyche? Do these features, on the other hand, come into existence only in a particular historical moment? Or do certain historical developments such as the rise of capitalism and the development of Enlightenment philosophy make these eternal features more visible?”<sup>16</sup> For Garofalo, such questions might be answered by “Lacanian scholars working in different literary periods [to] bring their investigations of subjectivity into conversation with each other.” While this study does not attempt to answer any of these questions, and indeed introduces further questions that scholars of the long eighteenth century may or may not be able to answer, it enacts the anachronism that troubles both the female gothic and Lacanian accounts of history and fantasy. Without claiming that psychoanalysis, Lacanian or otherwise, or the gothic are eternal structures that explain literary history, I am suggesting that we might make productive use of anachronism rather than avoiding it as fundamentally ahistorical. In the gothic fantasy of history, in fact, understanding, documenting, and being in history are all fundamentally anachronistic. The gothic, and the female gothic particularly, is notorious for its anachronistic use of historical time and geographical space. As I argue, this anachronism is reflective of the work of fantasy that imagines a lost time and space, which are wholly products of the present. My methodology, retroactively reading the female gothic as psychoanalytic and projecting the gothic onto Lacanian psychoanalysis, reflects my argument. My contention is that this methodology offers new possibilities and opportunities for exploring and understanding the female gothic and its accounts of subjectivity and history, which historicist or psychoanalytic reading practices cannot provide

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<sup>16</sup> Garofalo, “The Uses of Lacan in Recent British Romantic Studies,” *Literature Compass* 10.7 (2013): 559-69, p. 569.

in isolation.<sup>17</sup> Like Garofalo, I have many more questions than answers. Thus, my contribution to literary studies of the long eighteenth century is to generate a new set of questions around gothic and Lacanian fantasy and history, which I hope will expand our understanding of the female gothic not just as a mode of fiction but also as a salient form of historical inquiry. This is not to diminish “fiction” as inferior to history. Instead, in my exploration of the intersections between history and fantasy, between fact and fiction, I demonstrate how and why the female gothic is at once a window into a specific historical moment and a model of that moment’s preoccupation with its own historicity.

In the way that my methodology is reflective of my larger argument, the structure of this study enacts the female gothic’s and Lacan’s preoccupations with material objects and immaterial objects of fantasy. Each of the following chapters takes up a particular object that recurs in significant ways across a set of female gothic texts. With the exception of Chapter Three, which deploys the figure of the mirror as a symbol rather than an object, each chapter is organized around a particular object. Chapter One examines veils, Chapter Two portraits, and Chapter Four written documents. Further, each chapter reads a canonical and non-canonical female gothic novel with and against the other. Chapters One and Two pair Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) with Regina Maria Roche’s *Clermont* (1798). Chapter Three pairs Sophia Lee’s *The Recess* (1785) with Charlotte Smith’s *The Story of Henrietta* (1800) and Chapter Four returns to *The Recess* and to Mrs. Carver’s *Oakendale Abbey*.

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<sup>17</sup> The latest collection of works devoted specifically to the female gothic was some eight years ago. While this study broadens the category to include diverse texts in genre, historical time, and geographical place, I find there is still much work to be done in recuperating key contributors to the female gothic such as Roche and Carver. See *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). While Diana Wallace sticks to the female gothic canon in her work, her latest monograph, which I cite above, provides the most promising direction for future studies in its attention to historicity and subjectivity.

Chapter One takes up the gothic veil as both material object and symbolic figuration of the gothic heroine's path from childhood innocence to adult experience. When the figurative veil of innocence is lifted, we see that female maturation is not a progressive form of development but instead a decaying experience of fear and loss when the heroine is faced with the horrifying realities of female subjectivity, particularly when she learns that horror does not come from strangers but from the family. In Lacan's *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-60), he figures the Thing as a veiled object, which, like the ghost of the phallus, has never been lost because it only ever exists as a fantasy construction. When the veil of fantasy is lifted for the gothic heroine, she sees that fear in and of the present incites a sense of loss for a retroactively constructed lost past of childhood perfection, which had no existence in reality. The historiographical writings of Hugh Blair and William Duff serve as counterparts to Radcliffe's and Roche's novels, and demonstrate that, as in the mode of female gothic fiction, eighteenth-century historiography structures history as the lifting veil of innocence in the movement from the idyllic innocence of infancy to the dark maturity of enlightenment. And, as in the gothic fantasy of history, these works simultaneously reveal and conceal the work of fantasy that structures this conception of history.

Chapter Two figures the gothic portrait as an object of fantasy, which troubles the notion of a stable sense of subjectivity in the female gothic. Radcliffe's narrative of restoration and regeneration illustrates fears of the present and a longing for the past, while Roche's, set in the historical present, calls attention to the holes in the Enlightenment's fantasy of itself as an age of progress and perfectibility. In this way, portraits as objects of fantasy simultaneously reflect fear and loss constitutive of female subjectivity and of the historical past and present. I turn to Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) as a way of conceptualizing loss in the

female gothic as a form of melancholia. Lacan's "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*" (1959) and "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire" (1966) revise Freud's formulation of melancholia, introducing the element of retroactive fantasy which restructures our understanding of Freudian and gothic melancholia. In these works, Lacan constructs melancholia around a lost object that has never actually been lost: the "ghost" of the phallus. In *Udolpho* and *Clermont*, mothers become melancholic lost objects, objects of fantasy, thus revealing eighteenth-century anxieties surrounding the family. I introduce the concept of matrophobia, the fear and loss that entangle gothic mothers, that occurs across the novels I read throughout each chapter, which critiques eighteenth-century conceptions of motherhood and family life. Mothers and portraits, fantasy and history similarly structure my discussion of eighteenth-century debates around the writing of history and of romance. Turning to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, I argue that the romance narrative that creeps into the plot, which is supposed to be aligned with real life and manners, is indicative of a longing for a (fantastically) lost past reflected in romance.

Chapter Three shifts focus from the prototypically gothic scenes of France and Italy to the Caribbean, to colonial Jamaica as imagined by the British writers of the female gothic. While Chapters One and Two focus primarily on the sense of loss in the historical present that incites a retroactively constructed fantasy of a lost past, Chapter Three's examination of colonialism and slavery takes fear as its primary affect. Smith's colonial gothic work and Lee's Jamaican episode of *The Recess* both articulate the gothic's fascination with the so-called barbarity of Britain's own historical past and projects this supposed barbarity onto the colonial present. Colonial Jamaica is, then, a mirror of the British past; it is seen as barbarous, infantile, and frightening in contrast to the present age of reason, progress, and maturity. Fantasy operates on two levels in

this chapter: in the British imagination of its own historical past and the projection of that fantastic past onto the colonial present. Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage provides a rubric for understanding the British gothic heroine's encounters with colonial others, imagined as objects to fear and loathe and against which the heroine defines her subjectivity. Further, the logical fiction that is the mirror stage casts into relief the fantastic relation between nature and culture in the colonial gothic. The retroactively reconstructed mirror stage demonstrates that the evolution of the human subject's maturation is not a natural progression of insufficient infancy (nature) to masterful maturity (culture). Nature does not become unnatural through the alienating process of cultural intervention; the natural is always a product of cultural intervention, which produces a fantasy of an instinctual nature with which the alienated subject must part. The mirrored relation between British female subject and colonial object reflects nature as a fantasy of culture. In other words, the historical past, imaginatively conflated with nature, is a fantasy of the historical present, imaginatively conflated with culture.

Chapter Four concludes the study by returning to Lee's *The Recess* and Carver's *Oakendale Abbey* and looks specifically at written documents. The presence of and preoccupation with written documents in both novels call attention not only to the textual nature of history, but also to the imbrication of history, fantasy, and material objects in the female gothic. More than any of the novels I discuss previously, Lee and Carver's works are the most self-conscious about their deployment of fantasy in the construction of history. Lee's drama of history reveals that, in the female gothic, any conception of the past is necessarily built upon the retroactive work of fantasy. By turning the novel into a found manuscript unearthed by a contemporary editor, Lee simultaneously longs for and rejects the notion that history can be understood apart from fantasy. While many gothic scholars point to the French Revolution as the

defining event that defines the literary gothic, *Oakendale Abbey* is one of the few contemporary novels that directly takes up these events. By shrouding these horrifying events within layers of written documents, Carver ultimately objectifies the work of fantasy that constructs the historical present as an age of natural rights and reason. This final chapter returns to the figure of the gothic mother and looks specifically at her legal inability to bequeath property to her daughters. With no other recourse, both mother and daughter are trapped in a cycle of a maternal inheritance of loss: the painful lessons of and in history that the mother bequeaths to the daughter must be retold and retaught when the daughter becomes a mother herself. What gets lost in both Lee and Carver's work, then, is the comfort provided by the fantasy of a lost past that was in some way distinct from the present; they force their (female) readers to face the repetitive nature of history, which incites an anticipatory fear of and loss in the future.

## Chapter One Veils of Fantasy

The gothic veil is particularly noteworthy in its ability to simultaneously conceal and reveal; it plays tricks on our perceptions of fantasy and reality. As a ghost, the gothic veil is formed of a fantastic materiality, a spectral substance that is both material and immaterial; and, like a ghost, the veil blurs the line between subject and object, between the living and the dead. In parsing out the strange materiality of the veil Emily St. Aubert encounters with servant Dorothée in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), we see enacted the gothic fantasy of history, which is based on a conjoined sense of fear and loss: fear of and in the present incites a retroactive fantasy of a lost past that is simultaneously barbaric and idyllic. This gothic fantasy of history, figured in the veil, blurs the line between subject and object and between the historical past and present, particularly in eighteenth-century perceptions of the aristocracy and the newly emerging middle classes. Lacan's reformulation of Freud's *das Ding* in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* provides a key theoretical framework for understanding the gothic veil's relation to the female gothic's fantasy of history as mediated by material objects.

The veil is not only a material object, but also a figure for the female gothic heroine's harrowing experiences on the path from childhood innocence to adult experience, which is imagined as a lifting veil of innocence in Radcliffe's *Udolpho* and Regina Maria Roche's lesser-known work *Clermont* (1798). The female gothic heroine's maturation process is simultaneously regressive and progressive. The more she learns about the world outside the safe space of her childhood home, her sense of self become less and less secure. Though both Emily and Roche's protagonist Madeline are rewarded for their trials with a happily-ever-after, what they find on the path from innocence to experience is not the promised bloom of female maturation, but instead a

sense of fear and loss, of decay, when they confront the realities of female subjectivity. This decay that comes with maturity is an enactment of the gothic fantasy of history as experienced at the level of the individual, and points to the holes in the enlightenment narrative of progress and reason. Like the Thing, the female gothic's retroactively constructed lost past of childhood perfection, occasioned by the horrifying realities of female maturation, is formed from the substance of fantasy. In this way, the gothic heroine's horrifying experiences along the path from innocence to experience reflect anxiety about the "progress" of history as itself a form of decay, which then requires the fantasy construction of a lost past to cope with the pain of the present.

In addition to these female gothic novels, I also look at historiographical writing by Hugh Blair and William Duff, which structure history as the lifting veil of innocence in the movement from the idyllic innocence of infancy to the dark maturity of enlightenment. Like the female gothic heroine's experience of individual development, both Blair and Duff fantastically revise the historical past as a lost ideal in stark contrast to the fear and loss that pervade the historical present. The movement of history is figured in the form of a veil, which is subject to tear and fall apart with age. By conveying a sense of fear and loss that the movement of history is not a form of progress but of decay, they simultaneously veil and unveil the work of fantasy that structures the female gothic's presentation of history. In this way, Blair and Duff's texts mediate between the domains of fiction and history and highlight the female gothic's intervention in both. When we consider the operation of gothic fantasy, we see that there is indeed no clear demarcation between "fiction" and "history" at all.

Though *Clermont* is known for its inclusion in Jane Austen's list of "horrid novels" in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), the novel has been almost completely absent from gothic scholarship.

Recent studies have begun to explore Roche's immensely popular *Children of the Abbey* (1796), and to reclaim Roche as a key figure in the formation of the Irish gothic tradition, but *Clermont* is only ever mentioned as a brief footnote to Roche's more successful work.<sup>18</sup> This seems a curious omission, considering, along with Lisa Kroger, that *Clermont* "is arguably the definitive text of the Gothic novel craze during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."<sup>19</sup> Roche's and Radcliffe's novels follow almost the exact same plotline. Both Emily and Madeline must abruptly leave their childhood homes and experience a series of seemingly supernatural terrors as well as the real threats of sexual violence from lecherous aristocrats. Both come from uncertain family origins. Madeline grows up in seclusion with her father, the eponymous Clermont, and knows that his past is filled with secrets, though she knows not the source of his grief. When the mystery behind these secrets begins to unravel, however, Madeline faces the horrifying possibility that Clermont is a fratricide, and that she must marry the odious D'Alembert in order to save her father. Emily is haunted by her father's mysterious behavior before his death, which seem to indicate that her family, and mother, are not what she once believed. Imprisoned in the decaying castle of Udolpho, Emily is subject to the merciless whims of Montoni, her uncle by marriage, who she believes has murdered her aunt and leads a group of lawless banditti. And yet, Radcliffe's is the novel that has endured. Natalie Schroeder has argued that this is because

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<sup>18</sup> See Julia M. Wright, *Ireland, India and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 81-83; Begona Lasa Alvarez, "Regina Maria Roche, An Eighteenth-Century Irish Writer on the Continent and Overseas" in *Glocal Ireland: Current Perspectives on Literature and the Visual Arts*, eds. Marisol Morales and Juan Francisco Elices Agudo (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), pp. 51-58; Diane Long Hoeveler, "Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey*: Contesting the Catholic Presence in Female Gothic Fiction," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 31 (2012), 137-158.

<sup>19</sup> Lisa Kroger, "Haunted Narratives: Women Writing the Ghostly in Early Gothic Fiction" in *The Ghostly and the Ghosted in Literature and Film: Spectral Identities*, ed. Melanie R. Anderson (University of Delaware Press, 2013), p. 3. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

Roche's novel is an unsuccessful attempt at imitating *Udolpho*, which came four years prior to *Clermont*.<sup>20</sup> As she notes, "genuine horror in Madeline's experience is not simply an accidental feature," but a constant presence throughout the novel (185). This "genuine horror" is in fact a key component of both Madeline and Emily's experiences on the path from innocence to experience, and this emphasis on the genuine horror of reality rather than of the supernatural makes *Clermont* a necessary inclusion in a consideration of the female gothic's presentation of maturation, which occurs within a fantastic temporal framework based on a conjoined sense of fear and loss.

Gary Farnell has recently called for a critical exploration of Lacan's Thing as "a new theory of the Gothic," which will expand the field of gothic inquiry beyond its historically limited focus on the unconscious and the uncanny.<sup>21</sup> The Thing, he argues, helps us "to grasp such externalities as haunted spaces and decaying properties with absences at their hearts, and the other being's *or* the immediate subject's deepest and most imperceptible subjectivity, all of these familiar *topoi* of countless Gothic fictions" (113-14). Dale Townshend has also paired the Lacanian theory of the Thing with gothic literature in his influential *The Orders of the Gothic* (2007), though this work focuses primarily on the incest taboo which surrounds the Thing and the gothic alike.<sup>22</sup> My conception of the Thing focuses on its status as a veiled object of fantasy, which tells us something about the work of fantasy in the gothic heroine's traumatic maturation process. Like the veiled Thing, this maturation process is experienced as a lifting of the veil of

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<sup>20</sup> Natalie Schroeder, "The Mysteries of *Udolpho* and *Clermont*: Radcliffean Encroachment on the Art of Regina Maria Roche," *Studies in the Novel* 12.2 (1990), 131-143.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Farnell, "Gothic and the Thing," *Gothic Studies* 11.1 (2009): 113-136, p. 113. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>22</sup> See Dale Townshend, *The Orders of the Gothic: Foucault, Lacan, and the Subject of Gothic Writing, 1764-1820* (New York: AMS Press, 2007), p. 177.

innocence, which does not reveal a blooming heroine of maturity but instead reveals the horrifying remains of reality.

### **Veiled Memorials**

Though the better-known veil in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is the one that covers the mysterious waxed figure, one which she mistakes for an actual body, Emily encounters another veil in the novel that is equally mysterious, and ultimately horrifying. This veil is introduced as Emily hunts for more clues about the Marchioness de Villeroi's untimely death with the servant Dorothee, and figures the female gothic's fantasy of history as mediated by material objects. The "memorials of the departed Marchioness," articles of dress scattered throughout her apartment "as if they had just been thrown off," set the scene for the enactment of the gothic fantasy of history and, further, blur the line between subject and object, between the living and the dead.<sup>23</sup> The most striking object the Marchioness has left behind is a black veil "dropping to pieces with age," which Emily examines, but, "shuddering, immediately laid it down again" (533). This seems a curious reaction to such an object; shuddering, after all, is in the female gothic typically a response to the terror of supernatural phenomena. Without explanation, Dorothee "then, taking up the veil, threw it suddenly over Emily, who shuddered to find it wrapped round her, descending even to her feet" (534). Not only is the sight of the veil terrifying enough to make Emily shudder, she cannot bear the touch of the crumbling veil, which Emily immediately casts aside. That Dorothee "threw [the veil] suddenly" implies a kind of violence, of force without consent, which perhaps explains Emily's shuddering. But the veil

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<sup>23</sup> Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobree (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 534. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

itself, not the sudden throwing, is inexplicably infused with supernatural terror, which wreaks havoc on Emily's mind through her sensory perceptions, sight and touch.

Dorothee seems to misrecognize the veil as a metonymy for the Marchioness, who she attempts to bring back to life in the "memorial" she has left behind. But the veil is in the process of fragmenting into bits and pieces; it is in danger of disintegrating completely, of vanishing along with the Marchioness, signaling the impossibility of bringing the lost past back into the present. It would seem, however, that Dorothee cannot accept the death of that past, and so she attempts to reanimate it in the present as she covers Emily from head to foot by the veil, who then vanishes entirely. The veil is not a "memorial" of the dead Marchioness, but now of Emily; it transforms the living into the dead and the dead into the living. In this way, the crumbling veil objectifies at once a sense of longing for a lost past, the impossibility of the past coexisting with the present, and, ultimately, the female gothic's contention that the past exists always and only as a fantasy constructed within the present. At the same time, the memorialized veil is so troubling for Emily because it erases her own sense of autonomous subjectivity. That Emily can so easily be covered, displaced, and replaced by an object, which itself figures a dead woman, forces her to face the instability of subjectivity as imagined in the female gothic. The crumbling veil as memorial, and thus as figuration of the gothic fantasy of history, takes on added significance when we consider the eighteenth-century penchant for architectural ruins, monuments, and memorials. As Paul Westover puts it in his study of literary tourism of the long eighteenth century, "in the haunted activities of reading, writing, and traveling to meet the dead, Romantic-era pilgrims explored the liminal spaces between the imaginary and the empirical."<sup>24</sup> The Marchioness' veil not only traverses the boundary between imaginary and empirical, between

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<sup>24</sup> Westover, *Necromanticism: Traveling to Meet the Dead, 1750-1860* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 28.

fantasy and reality, between past and present, its figural force comes from its existence as an unequivocally female object. And scaled down in size as the veil is, its placement in the interior space of the home, in the intimate private chambers of the Marchioness, signals the work of gothic fantasy occurring within the female domain of the domestic. This seemingly mundane object has as much significance as the faraway ruins of Greece in its ability to convey the long eighteenth century's fascination with memorialization, with restaging the past within the present. The crumbling veil is neither a public monument nor great ruin, but it nevertheless "speak[s] of history not as a living presence nor yet as an irrecoverable absence, but as inevitably involved in specific modes of ghostly persistence."<sup>25</sup>

Lacan describes the Thing as something "fundamentally veiled...it always presents itself as a veiled entity,"<sup>26</sup> telling us something about Emily's terrified reaction to the sight and touch of the crumbling veil. The Thing, Lacan explains, is "the prehistoric, unforgettable Other, that later no one will ever reach," though the subject "aims for the experience of satisfaction to reproduce the initial state, to find *das Ding*, the object, again" (54). Though the Thing is unforgettable, it is also prehistoric, prior to our perception of time and ability to form memories. What is unforgettable, then, is the *absence* of this initial state of perfection. This absence, however, is too traumatic to register consciously, and so a veil of fantasy must cover the absent Thing. The Thing, then, is a noumenal concept without time or place, without any content. The veil creates an illusion of a presence behind it, which supports the fantasy of an initial state which has subsequently been lost. When the veil of fantasy is lifted, however, we are reminded

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<sup>25</sup> David Punter, "Scottish and Irish Gothic," *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 118. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

of the absence behind the veil, that the initial state has no existence other than as a retroactive fantasy constructed from within the confines of the symbolic. The veiled Thing is a memorial for that which never was.

The crumbling veil is so terrifying for Emily because it objectifies the instability of female gothic subjectivity; it reveals that human subjects are in fact objects that are interchangeable for one another. If the distinction between subject and object is not so clear as the fantasy represents, Emily as female gothic subject is left with a sense of loss, though it is a fantastic loss. To cope with this loss, the female gothic subject constructs a fantasy of a lost past in which subject and object were not one, but two, when there was a clear demarcation between self and other. From a Lacanian perspective, however, this fantasy is further complicated when we consider that, for the Lacanian subject of the symbolic, part of the fantasy is the loss of a time and place in which subject and object were not two, but one. So the female gothic subject's fantasy is an ambivalent construction, one that both longs for and fears the fusing of subject and object.

Lacan also refers to the Thing as a "lost object," which "indeed has never been lost" (58). It is curious that Lacan refers to the Thing as an object, endowing it with substance and materiality when, in fact, it is a signifier with no referent; its signified has no existence apart from its fantasy construction. The affect of loss is very real, though the actual loss of an object is a fantasy. In fact, not only is the loss a fantasy, so too is the existence of any object in the first place. The sense of loss has no point of origin partly because the presence of a lost object is a fantasy, and at the same time, the lost object has no point of origin because the loss itself is a fantasy. Loss and fantasy are inextricably linked, though the subject has no sense of what has

been lost, other than an unnamable and unidentifiable something, a something that should be present, but is inexplicably absent.

And, indeed, this loss is compounded by a sense of fear. Fear that, if this loss is only a fantasy, without the support of this fantasy, there is nothing to sustain symbolic existence. According to Slavoj Žižek, we are made to see “reality as an ‘irreal’ nightmarish universe...[which] is not ‘pure fantasy’ but, on the contrary, *that which remains of reality after reality is deprived of its support in fantasy.*”<sup>27</sup> So when the veil of fantasy is lifted, the remains of reality are indeed more frightening than any supernatural phenomenon conceived by the gothic. These phenomena are either explained away in the female gothic’s deployment of the supernatural explained or are safely contained in the world of fiction in the unexplained supernatural of the male gothic; the terror of reality, on the other hand, is inescapable, a necessary part of being in the world, which has no real explanation. If we consider the Marchioness’ veil as a representation of the illusive veil of fantasy, it would seem that these necessary fantasies are also in danger of decaying, of disappearing altogether. The veil’s materiality, or lack thereof, reveals the gap between fantasy and reality. Dorothee’s perceptions of the veil are indeed indicative of the desire to return to a lost state of perfection, to a time and place free from the darkness that comes with enlightenment. But we see the holes in the veil of fantasy when we consider that the Marchioness is dead long before the events of the novel take place. She has no real existence in the fictional world of *Udolpho* except as she is remembered and reimagined by others who knew her.

As a working class servant, Dorothee seemingly lacks the sympathetic sentiment to realize that replacing Emily with the Marchioness by covering her with the veil may be

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<sup>27</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 66.

emotionally troubling for Emily. After all, bourgeois identity is conceptualized around the uniqueness of the individual, the belief that one experiences, feels, and knows slightly differently from others.<sup>28</sup> Dorothée does not respect the sanctity of the individual when she makes one (Emily) interchangeable with another (the Marchioness), who is in fact dead. Though Dorothée's supposed simplicity is of course based on the problematic perception of the lower classes (associated with the historical past) as rude and uncivilized, her desire to bring the past back into the present in fact reflects the eighteenth century's ambivalence about the rise of the middle class,<sup>29</sup> which, according to the Enlightenment narrative, is morally superior to the corrupt and extravagant aristocracy.<sup>30</sup>

Emily, who represents the historical present, also represents the middle class by extension, while the Marchioness would seem to represent the historical past and the aristocracy. Though she is a figurehead of an aristocratic system, the Marchioness is actually an ambivalent figure of class and history. Unlike the morally bankrupt aristocratic figures in the novel, the Marchioness is portrayed as benevolent and emotionally complex, rather more like the sentimental subject of enlightenment. She is, then, a kind of outlier of the aristocracy, one who

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Goring, for example, locates the eighteenth-century cultural transformations around sensibility and individuality in the "partially unformed quality of bourgeois identity which accompanies political and economic change." See Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Watt's influentially reads the rise of the novel proper as a reflection of middle-class values and the rise of bourgeois culture, though, for him, the gothic novel "had little intrinsic merit." See Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 290.

<sup>30</sup> As Michael McKeon points out, the term "aristocracy" was one "of no great antiquity," one which "needed to announce the emergence of a new social organization." Though McKeon would certainly not interpret this fact in the same way, the newness of the term further supports the gothic fantasy of history's conception of class. The aristocracy is not necessarily indicative of an historically accurate model of wealth and class that existed in the past, but is primarily a fantasy construction of the past within the present. See McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 169.

falls prey to the machinations of the Marquis and Laurentini, who are both consumed, though ultimately doomed, by their sexual depravity. The Marchioness' story highlights the evils of the aristocracy, which threaten the existence of the emerging middle class in the historical present, but she also reveals the work of fantasy in the construction of the historical past. As the outlier of and in the aristocracy, the Marchioness, like Emily, is a stand-in for eighteenth-century middle class values; she is the piece that does not fit in the vilification of the aristocracy, a reminder that the historical past cannot be imagined except from a position in the historical present.

Emily is uncertain of her financial position throughout most of the novel, which ensures she is educated in middle class values of trial and tribulation, but by the novel's conclusion she and Valencourt are granted material wealth and social position. Kamilla Elliot calls this familiar gothic phenomenon the "bourgeois aristocracy," wrapping up the gothic narrative with "marriages [which] lay the basis for future lineal inheritance, forging a genealogical happily-ever-after...figuring worthy aristocrats as always already middle class."<sup>31</sup> Though the Marchioness and Emily are both figures of the "bourgeois aristocracy," they further reveal the holes in the narrative of historical progress through middle class values. While Emily is rewarded for her trials and tribulations with a bourgeois happily-ever-after, the Marchioness is not so lucky. Her murderers are eventually punished for their immorality, but the Marchioness is a kind of sacrificial figure; she cannot survive within an aristocratic system, which eventually wins over her, and by extension, the middle class. Though Emily's narrative would seem to compensate for the aristocracy's victory over the Marchioness, this compensation is further complicated by the fact that, in this conclusion, bourgeois and aristocratic values are impossible to disentangle. In this gothic fantasy of history, the lines demarcating order seem to be falling

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<sup>31</sup> Elliot, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 69.

apart: if the distinctions between subject and object, between fantasy and reality, are so tenuous, so too are the lines between classes. Not only is the middle class susceptible to provocation by the working class servant, Dorothée, the middle class is not all that different from the aristocracy, which it feels so strongly about distancing itself from.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Veil of Innocence**

As in the better-known *Udolpho*, *Clermont* stages a series of tests to the heroine Madeline's enlightened reason, which serve to gradually lift the veil of innocence throughout the narrative; and what is revealed when this veil is lifted leaves both Madeline and Emily with a similar sense of fear and loss.<sup>33</sup> Madeline's and Emily's experiences of the movement from the ignorance of infancy to the maturity of adulthood, figured in the lifting veil of innocence, reveals that female maturation is not a form of progress, but instead of decay. In this way, the gothic heroine's horrifying experiences along the path from innocence to experience reflect anxiety about the "progress" of history as itself a form of decay, which then requires the fantasy construction of a lost past to cope with the pain of the present. Though Ed Cameron has argued that the eighteenth century's interest in the medieval and barbarous is based on the gothic romance's "ability to recall archaic images and feelings from childhood...[which] led to a desire for more imaginative literature and for a desire on the part of the Gothic romancers to return to

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<sup>32</sup> Among the many contributions Kate Ferguson Ellis's work makes to gothic scholarship and gender is her claim that the gothic expresses anxiety about eighteenth-century class realignment among the aristocracy, middle and lower classes. See Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. xi.

<sup>33</sup> Margarita Georgieva claims, on the contrary, that "growing up in the Radcliffean context is depicted in a positive light." See Georgieva, *The Gothic Child* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 104.

an earlier age,” Radcliffe and Roche’s dark depictions of childhood reveal that this desire is based upon a fantasy version of childhood and history alike.<sup>34</sup>

From the moment Madeline leaves the seemingly idyllic paradise of her childhood home, to be educated by her father’s mysterious friend the Countess de Bouville, the veil of innocence begins to slip away, and she must confront the horror of the reality of female subjectivity. When Madeline expresses interest in the prototypical man of sentiment, Monsieur de Sevignie, the Countess warns her of the dangers men pose to innocent young women. In response to this first lesson in female education, Madeline “was shocked to hear of the depravity of mankind; and shuddered least she should find de Sevignie one of the worthless characters the Countess had described to her,” and then in a state of “dejection” attempts to “dispel the horror such an idea gave rise to.”<sup>35</sup> Madeline reacts to the depravity of mankind as she would to a supernatural phenomenon: she shudders. But this shuddering indicates the simultaneous fear and loss that comes with the lifting veil of innocence (Madeline is filled with both “dejection” and “horror”), not the superstitious fantasies associated with the supernatural. And when this veil is lifted she learns what it is to fear and what it is to feel loss, loss of innocence with the knowledge of the fearful threats that men, including possibly de Sevignie, pose to that innocence, which is already slipping away.

The accumulation of these horrifying lessons takes its toll on Madeline’s body and mind. Unlike the blooming heroine of romance who grows into her beauty as she progresses through trials and errors, when Madeline returns to her father’s home after narrowly escaping the clutches of D’Alembert, “the alteration in her looks seemed to strike him to the very heart: the

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<sup>34</sup> Ed Cameron, *The Psychopathology of the Gothic Romance: Perversion, Neuroses and Psychosis in Early Works of the Genre* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2010), p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Regina Maria Roche, *Clermont*, ed. Natalie Schroeder (Chicago: Valencourt Books, 2006), p. 57. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

rose that had bloomed upon her cheek when they parted, – the lustre that had brightened her eye was fled, and sadness had taken entire possession of her” (211). The “fair promise of maturity seemed now utterly at an end” (212) as Madeline appears “sinking beneath a grief which seems bending her gentle head to swift decay” (213). Though she has experienced nothing but terror in her time at the Chateau de Valdore, it is not a pervading sense of anxiety, or *fear*, that overwhelms Madeline, but instead of grief, or *loss*. The series of painful lessons in the horrifying reality of female subjectivity that Madeline experiences certainly incites a sense of fear of and for the future, but also a sense of loss for the past, for a time and space of innocence and safety in which the veil of innocence was still intact. She thus begins her path to maturity with a premature ending: maturity is no longer a fair promise, but a curse that seems to doom Madeline’s future before it has properly begun. Madeline has lost what she never had: the bloom and lustre of childhood indicated an equally promising maturity, which becomes a lost promise once the lifting veil of innocence reveals the horrors of reality.

Radcliffe similarly constructs Emily St. Aubert’s “progress” as a form of internal decay in *Udolpho*, calling attention to the horrors attached to the lifting veil of innocence and their traumatic effect on the gothic heroine’s maturation. While Madeline’s progressive decay is manifest both in body and mind, Emily’s is almost entirely internal, threatening her senses and reason. Not only are her senses “dead” to the landscape, cutting her off from the fortifying moral lessons in sublimity, “her mind became haunted by the most dismal images, such as her long anxiety...suggested” (329). Emily’s mind has turned into a supernatural scene of horror from which she cannot escape. She is imprisoned in the moldering gothic walls of Udolpho, which contain threats from both the supernatural world and real sexual violence, but her mind, too, becomes a crumbling prison that threatens its own destruction as she internalizes the horrifying

realities the lifting veil of innocence reveals. One peculiar effect of the lifting veil of innocence is Emily's increased propensity for superstition. Indeed, "long suffering had made her spirits peculiarly sensible to terror, and liable to be affected by the illusions of superstition" (330). Further, with her "faculties overstrained by suffering...[the] influence of superstition now gained on the weakness of her long-harassed mind" (355). The effect of long suffering is not a matured sense of moral fortitude, but instead a "regressive" sense of the fantastic.<sup>36</sup> Faced with very real threats of sexual violence, fear of the supernatural is perhaps less threatening for Emily. Reality is so terrifying for her that Emily displaces her real fears onto the supernatural. In some ways, it is easier to attribute danger to supernatural forces, to fantasy, when the alternative, the reality, is that true violence and horror comes from humans themselves. Even though superstition is inimical to Emily's enlightened sensibility, it is more palatable than fully acknowledging the horrors of reality.<sup>37</sup> Like Madeline, Emily, in her escapist fantasies of superstition, would rather cling to the veil of innocence than face the realities it reveals once lifted.

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<sup>36</sup> This regressive sense of superstition is doubly "infantile;" it signals both the infancy of society, figured in the Catholic feudal past, and the infancy of the individual. For a Žižekian account of the Catholic superstition of the historical past see Robert Miles, 'Abjection, Nationalism, and the Gothic,' *The Gothic*, ed. Fred Botting (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2001), pp. 56-59. For the (anxious) associations of childhood with superstition see Ann Wierda Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 172-74. Alternatively, Terry Castle makes the argument that Emily's sense of the fantastic is not, as I have argued, indicative of a form of regression, but is instead a marker of her refined sensibility, which is reflective of the larger romantic tendency to populate the mind with the supernatural ghosts of those people and places that have been lost. See Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 122-139.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Miles has called attention to the "perverse pleasures of superstition" as a kind of transgression against Enlightenment skepticism, and indeed the superstitious world of fantasy is one of comfort and relative security as opposed to the danger and horror of Emily's reality. See Miles, "Popular Romanticism and the Problem of Belief: *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism, and the Gothic*, eds. Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 128.

Both Madeline's and Emily's "progress" is an anticipation of bodily and mental decay, which are not the natural effects of age, but the forced effects of trauma in what is supposed to be the bloom of young adulthood.<sup>38</sup> The return to her father's home, to the space that represents her childhood, is on the other hand a kind of regression in the stages of her development. The heroine is not supposed to return to her childhood home until she has overcome adversity and married her love interest, when she is properly equipped to instruct future generations on the domestic rewards that come from adversity. But Madeline's return home is premature. Indeed, Madeline would rather confine herself to this safe space as she "shrink[s] from the idea of fulfilling the claims of society" (216), and longs to absent herself from "a world where [she] experienced little else than distress and danger" (215). She clings to what remains of the veil of innocence, unable to face the possibility of encountering further distress and danger. Her childhood home serves the function of a religious order, which the gothic heroine both fears and longs for; both are spaces of protection but also of arrested development. As with the religious veil, the heroine cannot fulfill the claims of society while the veil of innocence is still intact, even if it has been torn to shreds.

In fact, the perfection of childhood is revealed to be a retroactive fantasy when we realize that it is filled with the secrets of the past. The veil of innocence is itself retroactively constructed through the work of fantasy as a means of coping with the horror Madeline faces in the present.<sup>39</sup> Madeline spends her childhood witnessing her father's dejection, attempting to

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<sup>38</sup> As Diane Long Hoeveler notes, "adolescents in the gothic novel cannot simply separate from their parents and childhood home. The separation instead is charged with all the trauma, all the turmoil that traditionally is associated with life or death situations." See Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> In his study of competing conceptions of romantic childhood, Alan Richardson, citing Jacqueline Rose, argues that 'the fiction of childhood innocence [is] a function of "adult desire,"'

soothe his pain, while she has no sense of where this pain originates. Innocence is not a state of blissful ignorance, but is instead haunted by secrets of the past; it is a state of anxious unknowing. So the narrative not only lifts the veil of innocence, but also the veil of fantasy, which retroactively constructs Madeline's childhood as a lost state of innocent perfection. In this way, the veil figures both innocence and fantasy, ultimately the fantasy of innocence. In the narrative's first page we learn that Madeline "never received any satisfactory answer" when she asks her father why "they had no relatives, no friends, in that great world from which they were secluded" (3). From the narrative's introduction, then, Madeline is aware that there is something missing from her life: she knows that others have relatives and friends, though she does not, that there is a world outside of the secluded space of her childhood home. Moreover, that outside world from which she is excluded is "great," which implies that it is not only vast and unknown but also that it is enticing, that there is at least a part of Madeline that longs to be part of that great world. When Clermont responds to Madeline's inquiries with "agitation," her fears are confirmed that her father's past is a painful one. And though this confirmation "redoubled her attention, trusting that, if she could not obliterate, she might at least soften their remembrance," the narrator laments that "to do so in reality, was, alas! beyond her power" (4). Madeline is set up to fail from the beginning. She takes on a task for which she is not equipped, and so she must face not only her father's sadness, not only her own mysterious family origin, but also the disappointment that, no matter how hard she tries, she cannot do anything to relieve Clermont's suffering. As a dutiful, sentimental daughter, she is both a blessing and a curse to Clermont,

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which provides an imaginary space for the enactment of our own anxieties. This act of turning adult anxieties into fantasies of childhood is an articulation of the gothic fantasy of history. See Richardson, "Romanticism and the End of Childhood," *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuities, Postmodern Contestations*, ed. James Holt McGavran, Jr. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), p. 37.

whose dejection “sometimes so far overcame him, as to render him unable to bear even the society of his daughter, his only earthly comfort” (4). Madeline’s efforts are not only ineffectual, they at times compound Clermont’s suffering and make her presence unbearable. This childhood, haunted by secrets, laden with palpable sorrow, strung together by a series of disappointed efforts, is not one of simplicity and innocence but is instead a burden, a weight Madeline must carry before she ever experiences the horrors of that “great world” she once imagined.

Yet, when Madeline returns to her childhood home, and she is faced with her impending return to the outside world, she extols its peace and tranquility: “ ‘Oh! Scenes dear and congenial to my soul, had I never left you I had never known the reality of falsehood, never been truly unhappy’ ” (216). Madeline is clearly revising the reality of her burdensome childhood, fantasizing that falsehoods and unhappiness exist only in the outside world. She constructs her childhood as a lost past, a safe time and space in which she was sheltered from the horrifying realities of the world. Fantasy goes to work on the past, weaving a veil that covers the reality that her childhood was in fact defined by falsehoods and unhappiness. Though Madeline’s retroactive construction of a lost past of innocence is a fantasy, like the veiled Thing, it is “not nothing, but literally is not” (63). Her fantasy has no material reality, no point of reference, but nevertheless has a spectral substance in its immateriality. Indeed, that fantasy of her childhood past, like the fantasy of the Thing, is something strange to but at the heart of Madeline; it is strange because it is not “real,” but at Madeline’s heart *because* it is not real, because the fantasy of its reality makes the horror of the present, and anticipation of the future, tolerable.<sup>40</sup> Madeline

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<sup>40</sup> Lacan explains that the Thing’s existence in fantasy, or fantastic existence, is “something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me” (71). There is something uncanny about the Thing, which is both familiar and alien.

was never protected by a veil of innocence, but she nevertheless experiences the traumas she faces in the great world outside her childhood home as the lifting veil of innocence.

In contrast to those she has experienced in her childhood home, the horrors of that great world are perhaps less horrifying. And yet, this reality is itself horrifying. It is certainly unsettling to learn that strangers are capable of manipulation and violence, but this is more palatable than the lesson that horror and sorrow are contained within and perpetuated by the family itself. Madeline retroactively revises her childhood as a lost state of innocent perfection because she cannot bear the reality that horror is part of, that it in fact constitutes, the reality of female subjectivity. Covered by the veil of fantasy, her childhood becomes, like the Thing, a lost object, an object formed of fantasy's spectral material. Though it has never been lost, when Madeline returns to her father's home, her childhood becomes a "refound object. That it was lost is a consequence of that – but after the fact" (118). While Madeline experiences this return as a refinding of a lost object, her childhood, its loss is a consequence of the reality that it has never been lost, that there never was a state of innocent perfection from which she has been estranged in her maturation process. She is not refinding something that has been lost, but finding a fantasy that constructs this finding as a refinding. By turning her childhood into a lost *object*, that ineffable state, that unnamable something for which Madeline longs becomes a tangible thing that can be refound, which would then soothe the pain of the present. While the veil of fantasy covers over the painful reality that a lost state of innocent perfection never existed, that never-lost past itself takes on the materiality of a veil; it becomes a spectral substance. But because there is no thing outside the material of fantasy, this search to, in Lacan's words, "reproduce the initial state, to find the Thing, again" (53) is a search for no thing; it will be as

fruitful as Madeline's childhood attempts to erase Clermont's pain. In this way, the present, and future, mirror the past; and like the past, both the present and future are veiled in fantasy.

Emily's experiences of superstition occur, too, within a fantastic temporal framework. Superstition contains a sense of imaginative freedom, an other-worldly form of consolation, a way of retreating behind the veil of innocence. In Emily's distress over the imprisonment of Madame Montoni, she imagines that the mysterious music she hears (which we eventually learn comes from Du Pont) is the voice of St. Aubert, reaching from beyond the grave to "inspire her with comfort and confidence" (331). In this way, superstition is a form of solace in the midst of deep pain and suffering. As Hoeveler notes, the gothic reveals a deep ambivalence about the historical progress of enlightenment, what she terms the "secularizing of the uncanny, a way of alternately valorizing and at the same time slandering the realms of the supernatural."<sup>41</sup> In the way that Emily prefers to attribute her fears to superstition and the supernatural, when in fact they are very much founded in the real threats of sexual violence, she similarly clings to the superstitious fantasy that her dead father is providing much-needed assurance that she can in fact withstand the seemingly endless tests to her moral fortitude. Early in the novel, St. Aubert shows Emily the dangers of indulging in her too-keen sensibility, essentially teaching her the lessons of enlightenment: one must reason to feel, and one must feel to reason; feeling and reason are always in the service of the other. When Emily misperceives the music as the supernatural presence of her father, then, she is, in Hoeveler's words, alternately "valorizing" and "slandering" superstition, which simultaneously veils and unveils the horror of reality. Though we know that St. Aubert taught Emily early in life to curb her overactive sensibility, to temper sentiment with reason, it would appear here that superstition is not a childish, innate quality

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<sup>41</sup> Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary, 1780-1820* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), p. xv.

which Emily must overcome in her maturation process; it is instead something she acquires in this very process. So when the gothic heroine experiences superstition, she is seemingly refinding her immature youth, but like the never-lost Thing, Emily's superstition is not something that has been lost and then refound; it is in fact found on her path to maturation, and is then displaced onto her retroactively constructed infantile past. While it would seem that Emily experiences a sense of loss when she experiences superstition, it is not a sense of loss for her simple and innocent past, but instead a loss of the simple and innocent past that never existed except in the work of fantasy.

Roche and Radcliffe resolve, or attempt to resolve, their heroines' traumatic maturation processes with compensatory conclusions, which promise domestic felicity as the reward for their long suffering. But, as Christine Berthin notes, "when order is restored it is a mimicry, a pure artifice, and its status is as fragile as that of the supernatural world of terror and fear."<sup>42</sup> Though they both attempt to explain away the real horrors the lifted veil of innocence reveals, in a revised version of the supernatural explained, Roche calls attention to the mimicry and artifice of the conclusion, while Radcliffe, like the gothic heroine, clings to the veil of fantasy that protects Emily from the lasting effects of trauma. These conclusions similarly reflect the work of history in both novels: while Radcliffe's reveals a fantastic rendering of the historical past, Roche's reveals the holes in the fantasies of the present.<sup>43</sup> Emily and Madeline are both stand-ins for the ideal eighteenth-century woman, but, while Emily represents the historical present placed in the world of the medieval past, Madeline occupies a more tenuous historical position.

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<sup>42</sup> Christine Berthin, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 65.

<sup>43</sup> Richard S. Albright reads this compensatory impulse in *Udolpho* as an attempt to assuage contemporary fears in the revolutionary decade of the 1790s. See Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future: Time and Narrative in Gothic and Sensation Fiction* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2009), p. 32.

Though Roche does not specify exactly when the events of her narrative take place, we know that Madeline's maternal grandfather, Lord Dunlere, "was one of the most faithful and zealous supporters of James the Second," and was exiled from Ireland to France with his two daughters because of this connection to "that unhappy Prince" (240). We can assume that this flight took place around 1690, when James was himself exiled after his defeat at the Battle of the Boyne. When Clermont and St. Julian fall in love with, and then marry, the two daughters, the events surrounding the so-called Glorious Revolution had taken place "some years back," so it seems likely that the main narrative in *Clermont* takes place in the early decades of the eighteenth century, which provides time for Geraldine and then Madeline to reach a marriageable age. Thus, while the narrative is not directly aligned with Roche's contemporary historical moment, it is within the range of the historical present.

*Clermont's* conclusion seems to present a happily-ever-after for all its deserving characters: all secrets are unveiled, order is restored, consanguineal families are reunited, and conjugal families are formed. After Madeline's union with de Sevigie, the two make a home of the Chateau de Valdore, which seems a peculiar choice given that the chateau is the first of three houses of horror Madeline encounters in her maturation process. Indeed, neither Madeline nor de Sevigie can enter the chateau "without mingled emotions of pain and pleasure" (377). That Madeline would feel pain upon returning to the space in which she was threatened with sexual violence is natural, though it is less convincing that this pain would be mingled with pleasure. While Kroger claims that ultimately "Madeline is able to 'un-ghost' herself and take control of both her body and future," I would argue instead that this return to a space of secrets, violence, and murder concludes the narrative not with a new beginning, but with a set-up for a repetition of

the past: the ghosts of the past will continue to haunt the future (8).<sup>44</sup> The lessons in horror Madeline learns as the veil of innocence is lifted cannot be unlearned; and the trauma of these lessons, while unacknowledged, precludes the possibility for the happy ending toward which Roche seems to (ambivalently) gesture. Roche's ambivalent conclusion lifts the veil of fantasy from the eighteenth century's perception of itself, and reveals the horrors of its realities: female maturation, the process of lifting the veil of innocence, is inherently traumatic; it is not a form of progress in the gothic, but structured upon a fantastic temporality of regression, anticipation, and horrifying decay.

Unlike Roche, Radcliffe makes a concerted effort to highlight the joyous promises offered in *Udolpho*'s conclusion. But because Emily has gone through the same traumatic maturation process as Madeline, Radcliffe's happily-ever-after reveals the work of fantasy in the construction of the past rather than the present. Emily and Valencourt do not return to any of the spaces where either experienced pain or suffering, to any of the spaces where the veil of innocence is lifted, but instead to the ultimate vale of innocence: Emily's pastoral childhood home, La Vallee. The conclusion thus provides a kind of double return: Emily's return to her idyllic innocence after the horrors revealed by the lifting veil of innocence, and the reader's (and Radcliffe's) return to the idyllic innocence of the historical past, a past in which all wrongs are righted, justice is served, and no matter what traumas one experiences or observes, innocence can always be restored. Indeed, the narrator's hyperbolized conclusion promises that "innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!" (672). But once the veil of innocence has been lifted, it can never really be

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<sup>44</sup> Daniel Cottom similarly argues that "the heroine must be victimized but made transcendent through this victimization." See Cottom, *The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 50.

restored. The marriage scene directly preceding this stale moral lesson in fact reveals that this promise of innocence restored is a form of fantasy. Not only is the marriage celebrated with “ancient baronial magnificence,” which is in itself curious considering Emily’s middle-class taste for the simple and understated rather than the opulent or decadent associated with the aristocracy, but the wedding feast is surrounded by historical tapestries depicting Charlemagne’s martial exploits and battles. While the narrator promises that Emily’s veil of innocence can and will be restored, this happy ending is veiled by the menacing tapestries of the barbarous past, which involves the violence of war and the infantile belief in the supernatural. Indeed, the servant Annette “almost fancied herself in an enchanted palace, and declared, that she had not met with any place, which charmed her so much, since she read the fairy tales” (671). Like a fairy tale, Radcliffe’s gothic novel is a work of fantasy, as is the depiction of a historical past in which happy endings erase the traumas of female maturation.

According to Radcliffe’s famous formulation, terror and horror are “so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.”<sup>45</sup> Though Radcliffe is supposed to represent the school of terror in her romances, and Roche the Radcliffean tradition of the female gothic, both transition from the expansion and awakening of sublime terror to the annihilation of horror in their depictions of female maturation. Emily and Madeline have no sublime moment of imaginative prowess when they confront the lifting veil of innocence. Instead of awakening their faculties to a high degree of life, instead of revealing blooming heroines of maturity, Emily and Madeline are left with the horror of reality. And this horror of reality once the veil of innocence, of

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<sup>45</sup> Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural in Poetry” in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820*, eds. E.J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 169.

fantasy, has been lifted makes the male gothic's school of horror, filled with grotesque supernatural figures, seem tame indeed.

### The Veil of History

As with Madeline's and Emily's maturation processes, the historical movement from darkness to enlightenment can be figured as an uncovering of the veil of innocence. Like the child's development from infant to adult, the historical past is seen as a form of infancy, which matures into adulthood in the Enlightenment. But this construction of the past, which is ambivalently idyllic and barbaric, is in fact formed in the work of gothic fantasy. While the veiled wax figure in *Udolpho* which incites superstitious fear in Emily represents the historical past as barbaric, as diametrically opposed to the enlightened age of reason, the historical past veiled in innocence incites a sense of loss for this idyllic past, and a fear that that past is diametrically opposed to the barbarity of the present. This longing for a lost past and fear of the present runs the risk of presenting a reactionary view of history, as Edmund Burke famously does in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). However, in the historiographical writings of Hugh Blair and William Duff, the movement from infantile past to matured present is indeed portrayed as a form of loss, though this loss is self-consciously presented as fantastic. Blair and Duff's work participate in the gothic fantasy of history and thus reveal the links between eighteenth-century historiography and the female gothic.

In *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, The Son of Fingal* (1763), partly a defense of Ossian's authenticity and partly a revisionist history of poetry, Blair's account of the "infancy" of society as a historical stage marked by an unbound imagination, which is most conducive to poetry, is an articulation of a fantastic temporality that grieves for the loss of the

“wonder and surprise” that marked the infancy of society.<sup>46</sup> Figurative language, according to Blair, is the only form of speech available in an age in which the objects of this “wonder and surprise” do not yet have proper names, and in which the passions run unchecked by the “uniform standard of politeness and civility.” In this infancy of society, everything is new and full of potential, particularly the rural landscape, which inspires “picturesque” figures of speech, and a sense of solitude and simplicity in addition to wonder and surprise. Society can reach a stage of enlightenment only at the cost of the imaginative freedom expressed in figurative language; and it is this loss for which Blair grieves. Indeed, when “human nature is pruned according to method and rule,” “language advances to sterility,” which replace the “substitutive forms of expression that give a poetical air to language” (2). It would seem that the present historical moment is contrary to “human nature,” that in fact, those “rude ages” were a period in which we were truly ourselves and in which figurative language was the “true” expression of that self; and the loss of human nature, of a “true self,” effectively kills the spirit of language. The enlightened subject is left instead with “sterility,” a dead language, and with “method and rule,” a dead self. Language has become petrified for Blair; it is a painful reminder of what once was, but is no longer.

In this construction of the historical past and present, Blair’s text is actually a work of fantasy, and in this way participates in the gothic fantasy of history as imagined in the female gothic. His account of the infancy of society reads much like a secularized myth of the fall, in its emphasis on pre- and post-lapsarian language. As Maggie Kilgour notes, “the gothic looks backwards to a kinder and simpler paradise of harmonious relations that existed before the nasty

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<sup>46</sup> Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* (London: T. Beckett, 1763), p. 2. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

world of irreconcilable opposition and conflict;” and, moreover, “the past is seen as closer to nature than the present, associated with the corrupting and artificial influence of society.”<sup>47</sup> According to Blair’s fantasy of the past, language was once infused with the “sprightliness and sublimity” of “fervor and enthusiasm,” but with the progress of society it has become more concerned with “accuracy,” with “correctness and precision” (3). Language in the infancy of society not only holds a closer affinity to the sublimity of the natural world, it is also capable of capturing and communicating the fervor and enthusiasm that characterized this state of being. So language was once expressive of an ecstatic lived experience of the world, an experience which, moreover, is shared among all humans in this stage of infancy. Blair’s gothic fantasy of history presents, in Kilgour’s words, “a kinder and simpler paradise of harmonious relations.” Language matches experience and, further, individual experience is not something that divides and alienates one from the other, but instead unites and bonds one to another. But with the progress of society, with the movement from infancy to maturity, “correctness and precision” replace the sublime spirit of enthusiasm and in so doing, splits individuals off from one another. Language and experience are no longer shared, but become instead markers of difference and separation.

William Duff, like Blair, uses literature as evidence of the manners and customs of the historical past in *An Essay on Original Genius* (1767). This evidence, he argues, is in fact more reliable than “traditionary or even historical accounts of the early ages, [which] are not much to be depended on.”<sup>48</sup> These literary texts “give us reason to think” that his account of the past is an accurate reflection of historical reality, though this counterargument to those who question

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<sup>47</sup> Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 15. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>48</sup> William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius* (London, 1767), p. 273. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

“whether such tranquility and innocence as we have supposed ever existed in any state of society” seems rather a feeble attempt. Thus, Duff himself acknowledges the work of fantasy that goes into his construction of the past. Duff, as well as Blair, participates in eighteenth-century debates about the nature and writing of history with which the female gothic is in conversation in its construction of the gothic fantasy of history. As Ruth Mack argues, changing attitudes about the function of historiography shift the focus from older models of historical writing primarily interested in “political actions of great men” to the manners and customs, the lived experience, of individuals in history.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, these texts participate in debates over romance stemming from anxieties about the so-called rise of the novel and the burgeoning reading public.<sup>50</sup> Duff’s account of history participates in the gothic fantasy of history because it self-consciously presents history and fantasy as one in the same: the reality of history is only accessible through the fantasy, or romance, of the present.<sup>51</sup>

The romances that were supposedly coextensive with the infancy of society are in danger of being replaced by the cruel realities of the present. This anxiety reflects an ambivalence about the historical progress from darkness to enlightenment in a revised version of the female gothic heroine’s lifting veil of innocence. As Clara Reeve puts it in her preface to *The Old English Baron* (1778): “history represents human nature as it is in real life; – alas, too often a melancholy retrospect! – Romance displays only the amiable side of the picture, it shows the pleasing

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<sup>49</sup> Ruth Mack, *Literary Historicity: Literature and Historical Experience in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 4. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter Two for a fuller discussion of the intersections between romance and the novel.

<sup>51</sup> Riccardo Capoferro has argued that the intersections between fantasy, romance, and the novel constitute a category of eighteenth-century fiction he, following Tzvetan Todorov, calls “the fantastic.” See Capoferro, *Empirical Wonder: Historicizing the Fantastic, 1660-1760* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 20.

features, and throws a veil over its blemishes.”<sup>52</sup> The veil of romance is then a protection against the melancholy truths of human nature in reality; its power lies in the ability to cover over the painful reality of history. For Reeve, the union of the “ancient Romance and modern Novel,” in what we now know as the gothic romance, provides the best solution for the fear of reality and longing for the veil of romance’s protection of innocence (3). This blending of the “marvelous,” the “manners of real life,” and the “pathetic” ensures that reading “excite[s] the attention; and secondly, direct[s] it to some useful, or at least innocent, end,” and strikes a balance between historical past and present.<sup>53</sup> In her *Progress of Romance* (1785), Reeve cites John Gregory’s work, *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man*, which also speaks to the fear of the lifting veil of innocence, particularly for young female readers. According to Gregory, romances are more conducive to the production of upright moral citizens than novels, “which represent mankind too much what they really are,” effectively stripping from the fair sex “the veil with which nature intended to protect them.”<sup>54</sup> Both Reeve and Gregory, then, fear the exposure of the truths of reality in the present, and long for the simplicity and innocence of the past that romance provides. But Duff’s text reveals that the supposed simplicity and innocence associated with the infancy of society is a romance of the past, a gothic fantasy of history.

However, Duff is not always so clearly self-conscious about his fantastic construction of history. The first reason he gives for the supremacy of poetic genius in the infancy of society is the sense of novelty of all objects and ideas concomitant with the “antiquity of the period itself”

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<sup>52</sup> Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, ed. James Trainer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>53</sup> James Watt reads *The Old English Baron* as an idealized version of the past, and uses it as his primary example of what he terms the Loyalist Gothic romance. See Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> John Gregory, *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man, with those of the Animal World* (London, 1777), p. 217.

(265). Duff goes on to attribute part of the “innocent rural pleasures of this primeval state” to the deep feelings of familiarity and similarity between these early humans, to the camaraderie established in the common, “unmixed and undisguised” “dictates of nature” (269). This idealized version of the past is similar to Blair’s in his emphasis on the infancy of society’s unity; both versions of the past long for a time in which humans are in communion with the natural world and humanity itself is in its “natural” state. Significantly, in describing the creative opportunities for these early geniuses, Duff’s language takes on a decidedly “modern” tone in its emphasis on competition, consumption, and accumulation. He further introduces a kind of rhetorical colonial conquest in describing the

undivided empire of Imagination without rival. The mines of Fancy not having been opened before his time, are left to be digged by him; and the treasures they contain become his own, by a right derived from the first discovery. The whole system of nature, and the whole region of fiction, yet unexplored by others, is subjected to his survey, from which he culls those rich spoils, which adorn his compositions, and render them original. (266)

This conception of the infancy of society is not one, in Kilgour’s words, of “organic wholeness,” but instead a mirror of the present, of “atomistic possessive individuals, who have no essential relation to each other,” which characterize modern bourgeois society (11). Fancy and the imagination are not natural sources of pleasure for all to share, but territories that one must map, explore, and mine before the competition can. By figuring fancy as a mine, Duff is consistent in his argument that the infancy of society is closer to nature, but in this instance, nature is a source of capital, which is to be destroyed for its “rich spoils,” its commodities. So, while Duff earlier unveils the role of fantasy in his construction of the historical past earlier in the text, this passage veils and unveils fantasy at once. It is hard to say whether Duff is purposefully using the contemporary language of commodity culture to describe the past, or if this language creeps in unwittingly. On one hand, the passage unveils the fantasy that the historical past exists apart

from its construction in the present. On the other, it veils the fantastic work of history by naturalizing contemporary language and culture as universal truths.

Read in this way, Blair and Duff's historiographical texts are in fact a part of the female gothic tradition. The movement of history, like the gothic heroine's maturation process, is both regressive and progressive. And like their novel counterparts, Blair and Duff veil the horrors of reality through the work of fantasy, and thus create a lost past of innocent perfection that makes the pain of the present more manageable. The female gothic is then not simply a convenient term used to distinguish novels written by women and men; it is a capacious category that includes a range of writings not limited to traditional gothic fiction. Revealing the anxieties surrounding the historical present, the female gothic calls into question the Enlightenment's narrative of historical progress. In so doing, the female gothic tradition simultaneously veils and unveils the work of fantasy that structures our understanding of history.

### **Lacan's Gothic Veil**

The conjunction of fear and loss that gets articulated in the gothic fantasy of history takes on a new, and equally fantastic form in Lacan. That the Thing can only be known as "something missed" elaborates the female gothic's fantasy of history in which the past is part of the present as a form of terror, and the present is part of the past as a form of a lost ideal. The present is not present, and the past is not passed; neither is the present past nor the past present. "The Thing is not nothing, but literally is not. It is characterized by its absence, its strangeness" (63). In this account of the Thing, Lacan turns the concept into a spectral figure: a ghost is "not nothing, but literally is not," it is both absent and present, and certainly strange. A ghost is an inexplicable phenomenon, an unnamable something; it represents fantastic time free from the constraints of logical time, and incites feelings of fear and loss simultaneously. If the Thing serves such a key

function in Lacan's structure, this looming presence of a ghost turns the structure into one that is essentially gothic. The ghost of the Thing always comes back to haunt the subject as something "unforgettable," though it was never lost and can never be found. Its spectral presence gives shape to desire, and at the same time alienates the subject from desire like a gothic secret that can never be spoken.

The *Ethics Seminar* is perhaps Lacan's most historically sensitive account of his elaborate symbolic structure. Not only does he include numerous historical, literary, aesthetic, and philosophical movements, he devotes an entire section of the lecture to the Middle Ages, in another prototypically gothic move, specifically in his discussion of courtly love. It is certainly problematic that Lacan turns a female figure, the Lady, into an object which represents "privation or...inaccessibility," but his extended historical metaphor for the function of desire in the symbolic still retains value, particularly in my tracing of the intersections between individual time and social history (149). According to Lacan's interpretation, courtly love is the historical staging of human desire; in a form that is "historically and socially specific, the *a* elements, the imaginary elements of the fantasm come to overlay the subject, to delude it, at the very point of *das Ding*" (99). This fantasm refers to the matheme Lacan creates for desire: ( $\$ \diamond a$ ). In this account, the unattainable nature of desire leads the subject to valorize the object *as* an object; human desire is for the object in itself, not the substance within. Human subjects become objects endowed with magical properties, though the key is that the secret behind this magic can never be revealed. What the subject cannot recognize is that there is no magic in objects or human subjects. That Lacan creates this formula of sorts for a fantasm seems contradictory: by nature a fantasm is a substance of spectrality, a ghost, but Lacan reveals an enlightenment impulse to contain the uncontainable in his matheme. The same may be said for his account of courtly love.

It attempts to isolate a specific historical moment as *the* beginning, as *the* “exemplary” articulation of desire; in essence, he is elevating the Middle Ages to the status of the Thing, *the* point of origin from which all else takes its reference (128). This is a historical fantasy that coincides with the individual’s temporal fantasy structured by the Thing. So while Lacan claims that the phenomenon of courtly love elevates the object to the status of the Thing, he is himself carrying out the same procedure in his construction of historical time.

Lacan’s account of the Thing, embedded in the relation between history and fantasy, takes up the same concerns as the long eighteenth century’s female gothic. And like the female gothic, the fantastic historicity of the Thing cannot be thought apart from the object world. However, “objects” take on new properties in Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the female gothic, as in the Marchioness’ crumbling veil, objects do indeed have material substance even if that substance is slipping away, impossible to contain. These gothic objects mediate fantasies of history, which, however fantastic, nevertheless express the real concerns of women in history, such as their roles as mothers and wives and the loss of legal and bodily autonomy that come with these roles. While the primary focus in the female gothic is on the bourgeois heroine, Dorothee’s presence, her crucial role in examining the crumbling veil, also suggests that “women in history” is not simply refer to bourgeois women. The term and concept “women in history” is, in the female gothic, as impossible to contain as the crumbling veil; like the Thing, it is not nothing but it literally is not. The Lacanian Thing thus provides a useful tool to deconstruct the work of history and fantasy, to tease apart their continuities and disjunctions, in the female gothic. At the same time, the female gothic’s fantasy of history offers insight into Lacanian temporality and objectivity. When the world of objects is reduced to the mind, to the unconscious mind at that, the subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis is confronted with a new space

of gothic horror: the mind itself. Peopled as it is with demons, ghosts, and monsters, the unconscious can present phenomena as terrifying as those the female gothic heroine confronts. As the female gothic articulates a *need* for fantasy to cope with the fear and loss that pervade the present, to veil the horrors of reality, so too does the Lacanian subject need the veil of fantasy to mediate between the conscious and unconscious.

## Chapter Two Portraits of Melancholia

In the female gothic, portraits are objects which mediate the gothic fantasy of history. Gothic portraits are of course fantastic when they take on supernatural abilities, as when the portrait/ghost of Alfonso the Good walks out of its frame in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), but portraits incite a more sinister fear – and radical loss – when they remain in an ostensibly realistic mode. As mimetic representations of human subjects, portraits not only blur the line between representation and original, between fantasy and reality, they similarly trouble the notion of a stable sense of subjectivity. The portrait splits the self in two, constituting the “self” as and in the splitting between subject and object, and in this split incites a deep fear and loss of self as other, which is far more terrifying than the supernatural phenomena typically associated with gothic portraits. In Radcliffe’s *Udolpho* and Roche’s *Clermont*, portraits further take on fantastic properties when they uncover family origins and identities, magically restoring family order. Providing proof of family identity, portraits restore harmony in the individual as such and as part of a family line. Set in the medieval past, Radcliffe’s recuperative narrative of restoration and regeneration in fact illustrates fears of and in the historical present, and a longing for a lost historical past of order and harmony. This lost past is, however, a fantasy construction, though the sense of loss of such a history nevertheless permeates throughout *Udolpho*. Roche, on the other hand, sets her narrative in the historical present, and in so doing calls attention to the holes in the enlightenment’s fantasy of itself as an age of progress and perfectibility. In this way, the portraits in both novels objectify the gothic fantasy of history: the female gothic’s ambivalent construction of the historical past as simultaneously barbaric and idyllic, and its equally ambivalent sense of the historical present. Like the gothic portrait, which seems to present an

accurate representation of “reality,” the historical past and present are objects of fantasy; and like the gothic portrait, the gothic fantasy of history reflects a deep sense of fear and loss.

In addition to these female gothic novels, I also explore the figure of the portrait in eighteenth-century debates about romance as it intersects with and diverges from both the novel (the “modern romance”) and historical writing. Looking specifically at Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748), which, according to Richardson, is supposed to be an “accurate portrait of real life,” we see that this sentimental novel is in fact a *gothic* portrait of real life, a fantastic romance. The text itself, then, functions in the female gothic mode as a fantastic portrait, and literal portraits throughout the novel function in the same way as in the female gothic novel; they are objects of fantasy which blur the line between representation and original, constitute the self as and in the splitting between subject and object, and magically restore family order. This fantastic presence of the romance within a novel that is supposed to be aligned with real life and manners reflects a kind of longing for the historical past, figured in the romance, and a fear of the historical present. However, Hugh Blair’s “On Fictitious History,” which places value on fictitious rather than “accurate” accounts of history, reveals that the novel’s longing for the romance of the past is in fact based upon a fantastic loss, upon the gothic fantasy of history.

The loss which gothic portraits incite, from a psychoanalytic perspective, is specifically melancholic.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) is not only rhetorically fashioned as a form of portraiture, the affect of melancholia is itself a kind of mental portraiture. Not only does Freud use the language of portraiture to describe the condition of melancholia, the condition itself works as an installation of the portrait of the lost object within the mind. Lacan’s

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<sup>55</sup> David Punter, in his description of the gothic as a “terrain of loss,” suggests conversely that we see it as “work in mourning.” Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), p. 203.

account of mourning in “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*” (1959) illustrates the role of fantasy in the loss that comes with the splitting of subjectivity, and does so by means of a curious rendering of the gothic portrait: the graph of desire. Like the portrait in the female gothic, the graph of desire is an object of fantasy; at the same time that it visually captures the work of fantasy and loss within the unconscious, its topography, its very existence, is in fact a fantasy that the work of the unconscious can actually be charted and graphed in a visual representation. Though Lacan never refers to melancholia as such, what he deems “insufficient mourning” in Shakespeare’s play (itself seen as a prototype of the gothic) reveals that mourning, loss, is always already melancholic. The synthesis of the Freudian and Lacanian accounts of loss presents a portrait of gothic melancholia: the fantastic construction of retroactive loss.<sup>56</sup>

### **Freudian Melancholia and Gothic Mothers**

In “Mourning and Melancholia,” the Freudian melancholic copes with unresolved grief by incorporating the lost object into the ego, turning object-loss into ego-loss as “the shadow of the object [falls] upon the ego.”<sup>57</sup> The melancholic’s ego is split in two, and the ego as altered by this melancholic identification thus takes the critical activity of the ego as its own “substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer” (250). Thus the ambivalent relation between the subject and the now-lost object repeats itself within the subject’s own ego in a kind of magical preservation, a refusal to face the reality of loss. Unlike mourning, melancholia has

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<sup>56</sup> While almost all critical formulations of melancholia in literary and cultural studies respond to Freud’s model of melancholia, Slavoj Žižek provides one notable exception. Žižek’s argument that “melancholy interprets” Lacanian lack “as a loss, as if the lacking object was once possessed and then lost” coincides with my own reading of the retroactive nature of melancholic loss in Lacan, though I am skeptical of Žižek’s more traditional reading of the fundamental lack built into Lacanian structuralism. Žižek, “Melancholy and the Act,” *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (2000): 657-681, p. 661.

<sup>57</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1989), p. 248. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

an ambiguous point of origin. Melancholia can result from the loss of “some abstraction...such as one’s country, liberty, and ideal, and so on” (242), or, later in the essay, from “a loss of a more ideal kind” in which the melancholic “cannot consciously perceive what he has lost” (244). The essay becomes a gothic text not only in the ghostly presence of the lost object’s shadow cast upon the ego or in the loss of a ghostly abstraction, but in Freud’s figurative language, which fashions the text in a kind of rhetorical portraiture. Throughout, the condition of melancholia is described as a “picture,” turning melancholia into a visual object (243, 246, 247, 252). Indeed, the essays unfolds as the interpretation of the visual object that is melancholia, as when Freud slowly and carefully unravels the distinctions between mourning and melancholia, which makes “this picture become a little more intelligible” (244). So, though Catherine Soussloff argues that it is in Lacan’s account of the mirror stage that “for the first time outside art history, we find an explicit linking of the concept of the subject, the action of identification, and the object of an image,” Freud’s rhetorical portrait of melancholia in fact does this very work of linking subjectivity to the objectivity of the image.<sup>58</sup>

And, indeed, it is in “the action of identification” that Freudian melancholia fuses subject and object. When the melancholic’s lost object gets incorporated into and casts a shadow over the ego, this lost object essentially becomes a gothic portrait not just in its haunted and haunting shadow, but as an *image* of that which has been lost. While it would seem that the comparison of this melancholic image to a portrait restricts the lost object in a fixed status, the comparison to a specifically gothic portrait recognizes the fantastic and ghostly nature of the lost object to shape shift and wreak havoc within the mind. In Soussloff’s words, “where the essential person

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<sup>58</sup> Soussloff, *The Subject in Art: Portraiture and the Birth of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 17. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

is thought to be seen, the essential image is thought to reside,” and though she is again referring to Lacan’s mirror stage, the conflation of person and image, melancholic subject and lost object, provides key insight into the portraiture of Freudian melancholia (21).

In both *Udolpho* and *Clermont*, as in the female gothic more widely, the heroine’s exact resemblance to maternal figures is a form of portraiture, one which blurs the line between representation and original and which splits the self between subject and object. As Angela Wright puts it, resemblances between heroines and maternal figures construct “living individuals [as] evocations of those who are absent.”<sup>59</sup> In an inversion of the gothic portrait that takes on fantastic qualities of animation and enchantment, even while remaining in an ostensibly realistic mode, human subjects become living objects of portraiture in their resemblances to mysterious maternal figures. Not only, then, are these unknown figures whom the heroines resemble lost objects, the heroine’s sense of self as autonomous individual becomes a lost object when she learns that she is merely a copy of an original to which she has no access. In both novels, the heroines’ resemblances do not bolster filial ties, but incite instead a sense of fear and loss of self as other. These figures which the heroines resemble are, moreover, deeply tragic. Their fates cast a shadow over the heroines’ futures, not only calling into question the stability of individual subjectivity, but also of family bonds.

When the mysterious Countess de Bouville happens upon the secluded cottage in which Madeline and her father, Clermont, live retired from the world, she exclaims upon looking at Madeline: ““what a resemblance!”” (27). Though Madeline does not know to whom this resemblance refers, Clermont “cries” that it is ““a fatal one; it often embitters the pleasure I take

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<sup>59</sup> Wright, “‘To live the life of hopeless recollection’: Mourning and Melancholia in Female Gothic, 1780-1800,” *Gothic Studies* 6.1 (2004): 19-31, p. 21. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses.

in gazing on her; the eyes, the voice, the smile!” The Countess concurs in her hope that “the destiny of this dear young creature will be happier than was that of the person she resembles.” Madeline does not learn until late in the narrative that the “fatal” resemblance she bears is to her dead mother. When she first is told that she resembles this unknown figure, she is completely ignorant of her family history. In typical gothic fashion, family secrets are veiled in mystery until Clermont is forced to relate his unhappy story. The product of a secret marriage between his noble father and commoner mother, Clermont and his mother are eventually denounced as illegitimate, freeing his father, the Count Montmorenci, to marry within his own station and produce a legitimate male heir, the Count St. Julian. Though the half-brothers secretly reconcile and fall in love with and marry a pair of sisters, Clermont is tricked into believing that Geraldine, his wife, and St. Julian are involved in an illicit affair. Clermont avenges this injustice (or so he believes) by murdering St. Julian, though we, along with Clermont, eventually learn that he merely wounded St. Julian, who has been alive though kept imprisoned by the family’s rivals, the d’Alemeberts. Geraldine’s sister dies giving birth to her son by St. Julian and Geraldine dies after the shock of learning that Clermont is a supposed fratricide.

But as Madeline prepares to leave her childhood home to be educated by the Countess, she is as yet ignorant of her family history. Upon her departure she laments that she is “going, I may say, into a new world, without really knowing the family to which I belong, – the mother from which I sprung or one circumstance about her” (35). She checks her curiosity, however, when she reasons that, “could the knowledge I desire add to my happiness, it would not be kept from me, – never, therefore, may my rashness again attempt to raise the veil which prudence as well as tenderness, I must believe, has cast over past events.” In this instance, portraits and veils coincide in their functions as secret keepers. While the reference may not be a direct one, Roche

undoubtedly would have been familiar with Radcliffe's work, and Madeline's language of lifting the veil uncannily invokes the famous scene in *Udolpho*. When Emily St. Aubert lifts the black veil, expecting to find a mysterious portrait, but instead finds what she mistakes as a dead and decaying body, she is filled with deep regret and horror, which haunts her throughout the remainder of the narrative. Madeline knows that, in her "fatal" resemblance, she is a living portrait of someone with a tragic past, but she is unwilling or unable to lift the veil of secrets, which may reveal something even more horrifying.

Indeed, the knowledge Madeline gains that she is a living portrait of a mysterious someone is horrifying in itself, inciting, in Kamilla Elliot's words, a "horror that resemblance may *be* identity."<sup>60</sup> And not only does this incite fear of the self as object, it furthermore incites a sense of gothic melancholia. The mysterious someone Madeline resembles functions as a lost object which casts a shadow over Madeline's autonomous self and, as with Freud's melancholic, this shadow becomes an ideal portrait within the mind. This ideal portrait is, moreover, gothic in fantastic properties. Because Madeline does not yet know who is represented in this portrait, though her reference to her mother in her departure scene seems to indicate that she has some intuition, she must fill in the gaps and picture to herself who and what she imagines might be depicted in the portrait. Madeline can make a good guess about the image in the portrait by turning to another object: a mirror. Madeline is the only referent she has for what the portrait of the lost object represents. In this way, Madeline, in her resemblance, is a portrait of her dead mother at the same time that the dead mother as lost object is a portrait of the living Madeline. So Madeline cannot know her self without reference to the original whom she resembles, but she

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<sup>60</sup> Elliot, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 269. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses.

cannot know that original except through the work of fantasy because Clermont and the Countess shroud the portrait in mystery and secrets. Because the mysterious someone is a blank canvas before fantasy paints its own portrait, so too is Madeline a blank object constituted by and in the work of fantasy.

### **Lacanian Melancholia and Gothic Portraiture**

In his account of “insufficient” mourning, what I am calling Lacanian melancholia, Lacan not only picks up on Freud’s original formulations of melancholia as “loss of a more ideal kind,” but similarly links portraiture with melancholic loss. The key that Lacan’s formulation of insufficient mourning provides to Freud’s “ideal” loss is the primacy of fantasy in melancholia. As articulated in “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*” the subject grieves for a loss that was never actually lost: for the retroactively constructed phallus that, according to the imaginary fantasy, was once possessed in a state of *jouissance* prior to subjection to the Law and chain of signification. But there is no origin for the origin of this loss, a loss that is necessarily melancholic, for a never possessed and never lost object that can only be known through the signifiers that mark its absence. The lost object is not an object at all, but rather a signifier with an impossible signification.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Feminist psychoanalytic critics have long debated the problematic concept of the phallus as paternal metaphor. While Jane Gallop has argued that the concept of the phallus is actually a *maternal* metaphor, Kaja Silverman has usefully explained that “it may not always be politically productive to differentiate sharply between penis and phallus.” More recently, Keith Reader has asserted that, though there is an “inescapable relationship between the phallus/signifier and the penis/organ,” “the phallus that interests [Lacan] is neither a fantasy nor a part-object.” I agree with both Silverman and Reader that we cannot completely disentangle the phallus from the paternal metaphor, but, in my reading, Lacanian melancholia is conceptualized around the phallus as an object of fantasy whose loss is equally fantastic and thus melancholic. See Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 131; Silverman, “The Lacanian Phallus,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 4.1 (1992): 84-115, p. 89; Reader, *The Abject Object: Avatars of the Phallus in Contemporary French Theory, Literature and Film* (New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 19, 25.

Lacan reads Hamlet's mourning as "insufficient" because his father's death has not been properly ritualized. Gertrude's hasty marriage to Claudius puts a premature end to the period of mourning for the murdered king Hamlet, whose ghost, and the injunction to avenge his death, then comes back to haunt Hamlet, who is famously plagued by the inability to "act," to follow this injunction. Rituals function in such a way as to make the gap caused by the real loss "coincide with that greater symbolic lack" that constitutes the symbolic register.<sup>62</sup> This ghost is not just of Hamlet's father, it is the ghost of the king, the sovereign figure of the law; it is the Father whose Law structures the symbolic order. The father's injunction to avenge his death is a version of the Father's injunction for the pre-oedipal subject to submit to castration. However, he "reveals himself from the beginning as the barred Other;" barred because he is no longer a presence in the world of the living, and also because the Father, whose Law enforces castration, is only ever a castrated father (44). The ghost is not of the father, but is essentially the ghost of the phallus that, according to the imaginary fantasy, was given up upon entrance into the symbolic. So, the rituals of mourning performed for the memory of the dead are actually performed for the "memory" of the lost phallus that was once possessed in a state of jouissance, which haunts the subject of the symbolic like a gothic ghost; to be a (castrated) subject in the symbolic is to become a subject of radical loss. This loss is specifically melancholic because it is inextricably linked with fantasy: the phallus only ever exists as a ghost, as a haunting absence. Because it can never be possessed it is never lost; its fantastic existence and equally fantastic loss is, according to Freud's formulation of melancholia, a "loss of a more ideal kind." In this way, the phallus is an object of fantasy, a fantastically lost object of melancholia.

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<sup>62</sup> Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 38. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

Like the ghostly existence of the phallus, whose fantastic loss haunts the subject of the symbolic, Lacan's graph of desire hovers as a spectral presence throughout the text of "Desire." Within the first few pages, Lacan refers to his graph's "hook, the question mark, of the *Che vuoi?* of subjectivity constituted and articulated in the Other" without further mention of the graph (13). This "subjectivity constituted and articulated in the Other" essentially forms the basis of Lacan's meditation on *Hamlet*, and is thus essential to the text's presentation of Lacanian melancholia. However, the only appearance the graph makes is in Shoshanna Felman's editorial note to this passage, which provides an illustrated representation of the graph's three stages, and in so doing paints a portrait of that which is missing from the body of the text. Like the ghost of the gothic subject contained within the portrait as object, the graph provides the key to the meaning of the text, which cannot be interpreted without its presence, though that presence is phantasmatic and almost impossible to grasp. In this way, the missing graph functions as the lost object which has never actually been lost. So the gothic structure of the text itself enacts the melancholia that it outlines in Hamlet's insufficient mourning.

The graph also functions as a gothic portrait in its depiction of the work of fantasy. Though it purports to graphically chart the subject's fantasies of desire on the journey from the imaginary to entrance into the symbolic order, the three seemingly progressive stages of the graph reveal the key role that retroactive fantasy plays in this structure. The first graph depicts A (the Other) as its starting point, ending with \$, the barred subject split by and in its encounter with the chain of signification, while the second graph switches the starting and ending points. In "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire" (1966), Lacan's most thorough account of the graph, he explains that this switch "is a retroversion effect by which the subject, at each stage, becomes what he was (to be) before that, and 'he will have been' is only announced

in the future perfect tense.”<sup>63</sup> Perhaps one of his most difficult texts to decipher, this explanation seems to obscure rather than reveal the meaning of this “retroversion effect,” which I understand as a form of retroaction. This opaque explanation might be understood in this way: the subject is always already a barred subject, a subject split by and in the signifying chain. There can be no existence, or consciousness of existence, prior to signification, because signification *is* existence according to Lacan. So there is no whole and complete self that is then subjected to the signifier, but instead the self is constituted as an object of signification. The whole and complete self that is lost is then an object of fantasy; the subject will always have been split by the system of signification which constitutes subjectivity as a form of objectivity. In this way, the initial graph is a portrait of melancholic loss, a loss of that which has never existed. Indeed, this “retroversion effect” of \$’s switch from ending to beginning causes “the ambiguity of a misrecognizing that is essential to knowing myself.” This form of misrecognition that is essential to knowing the self is a form of fantasy, a tantalizing rendering of the reality it covers over, the reality that the self is not anchored in a stable subject, but is instead a fragmented and fragmenting object.

As Emily learns more and more about the Marchioness in *Udolpho*, as their histories become increasingly intertwined, she not only threatens to replace Emily’s mother as her point of origin, the Marchioness begins to cast a shadow over Emily’s own subjectivity. Even before the Marchioness’ portrait begins to call her sense of self into question, though, Emily is herself captured in a miniature, “esteemed a striking resemblance,” and the loss of this “striking resemblance” sets the novel’s chain of losses into motion (10). The Marchioness, then, does not actually overshadow Emily’s autonomous subjectivity, for in her miniature, Emily is, from the

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<sup>63</sup> Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire,” *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006), p. 684. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

very beginning, a subject split in two. When Emily comes face to face with the Marchioness' portrait, gazing intently upon it, she "thought that she had somewhere seen a person very like it, though she could not now recollect who it was" (533). Of course this "person very like" the portrait would ostensibly be St. Aubert, although Emily does not yet know that this is her father's sister. At the same time, however, the portrait provides Emily a kind of mirror image of herself, but she does not recognize this image as her own. Mirrors and portraits, reflections and resemblances, original and reproduction, are thus confused. This melancholic misrecognition, however, is essential for the structure of subjectivity, which depends upon the construction of a self that is not always already an other, a self that is not eclipsed by the signifier. According to Diane Long Hoeveler, "the sad fact is that Emily St. Aubert cannot recognize the face in the portrait as her own because she cannot accept the fate of woman as her own."<sup>64</sup> I would argue that over and above this fear of ascension into the patriarchal social order, Emily cannot recognize herself in the Marchioness' mirror/portrait because doing so would reveal the truth the melancholic misrecognition covers over; the truth that she does not resemble a portrait, Emily *is* a portrait, an object rather than a subject.

The final and most elaborate in the series of graphs presented in "The Subversion of the Subject" similarly depicts the fantasy of fantasy to which Lacan returns in "Desire." Though the subject seemingly constructs a fantasy of desire based on the irrevocable loss of the phallus upon entrance into the symbolic order (castration), this [conception of desire founded upon loss is itself a fantasy]. The state of jouissance in which the pre-linguistic subject is supposed to have possessed the phallus is a fantasy retroactively constructed from within the confines of the symbolic order. Indeed, the signifier of jouissance – the phallus – is introduced in the graph as a

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<sup>64</sup> Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontes* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 92.

negative, as a loss:  $-\phi$ . That the signifier is in the negative and the lower case reveals its double, and paradoxical, signification. On the one hand, a state of jouissance before entrance into the symbolic is an impossible concept; it is only fantasy of a time and space prior to the law of the symbolic from a position *within* the symbolic. On the other hand, because the phallus represents that which is lost in the desired image, and, according to the fantasy, there is no loss in the construction of jouissance before the symbolic,  $-\phi$  signifies a loss of a loss. Jouissance is, moreover, a time and space of “Non-Being,” (679) of negative signification, since the subject can only come into existence as a signifier in the chain of signification, and can only come into existence as a lack in the symbolic order. So the gothic portrait of the graph in its entirety images the work of fantasy on two levels, and, moreover, binds melancholic loss and fantasy to one another.

In his famous tract on physiognomy, Johann Caspar Lavater extols the art of portrait painting, which “is the communication, the preservation of the image of some individual; the art of suddenly depicting all that can be depicted of that half of man which is rendered apparent, and which can never be conveyed in words.”<sup>65</sup> From the outset, Lavater indirectly acknowledges that the portrait is merely a part-object; though it is more powerful than words, it can only depict “that half of man which is rendered apparent,” what he later refers to as one’s “emanation” (238). So there is something mysterious and shadowy which cannot be captured in a portrait. At the same time, portraits have the power to depict an image “better than in nature herself, since in nature nothing is fixed, all is swift, all is transient. In nature also we seldom behold the features under that propitious aspect in which they will be transmitted by the able painter” (239). In this case, a portrait, a representation, is even more valuable than the original whom it depicts; it takes

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<sup>65</sup> Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy* (London: William Tegg and Co., 1878), p. 237. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

on *supernatural* power in its ability to transform the original into something better, more vivid, than itself. So, though, a portrait is a representation of human nature, it is extra natural, contains a surplus of nature, which is “better” than the swift and unfixed qualities of human nature.

Lavater’s depiction of the power of portraiture is essentially a gothic portrait of portraits. Within the portrait resides a power that is superhuman, extra natural, to which the human subject itself pales in comparison. In fact, one detects a sense of longing in Lavater’s description of nature in comparison to portraiture: “in nature nothing is fixed, all is swift, all is transient.” It would seem that, in nature, something is lacking, something which can only be conveyed in the power of the portrait. Indeed, the portrait has the power to cast a shadow over the original’s human nature, indicating that there is something lacking, or perhaps lost, within the original that can only be found in the portrait. This, then, incites a sense of fear of the portrait’s powerful shadow, fear that something is lost or lacking in the self. But Lavater gives no indication of what this loss might consist other than that it must be opposed to that which is fixed, swift, and transient. As in Lacan’s portrait of Hamlet’s insufficient mourning in the graph of desire, the loss that Lavater describes is for an unknowable something that has never been possessed and thus never lost. Life, human nature, as depicted in the gothic is always already fixed, swift, and transient; there can be no existence without these qualities. So the supernatural power of the portrait reminds us of what we never had, but which we desire, and so nevertheless experience as melancholic loss.

Lavater goes on to describe the perfect portrait as “a countenance in a mirror, to which we would speak, that speaks to us; that contemplates more than it is contemplated; we rush to it, we embrace it, we are enchanted!” (308). So not only is the portrait a supernatural object, it is, moreover, a fantastic object in its imaged ability to speak, to contemplate, to embrace, and to enchant. In fact, the image in the portrait has power over the viewer; it contemplates *more* than

it is contemplated. The complex relation between portrait and mirror is further entangled in *Udolpho* when Sister Agnes/Laurentini first mistakes Emily, the “resemblance,” for the “original herself” (662), the Marchioness de Villeroi, but then tells Emily: “you need only look in that mirror and you will behold her; you surely are her daughter” (645). Though Sister Agnes is incorrect in her picture identification of Emily as the Marchioness’s daughter, she attributes the same power to portraits and mirrors as Lavater. In this way, the miniature portrait of the Marchioness, which Agnes has kept all these years out of guilt and shame, takes on supernatural power; it casts a shadow over Emily’s subjectivity, confusing the relation between portrait and mirror and resemblance and original. The mirror in which Emily is instructed to look becomes a portrait not only of Emily, but of the Marchioness she so resembles, and the miniature portrait becomes a mirror that reflects Emily’s resembling image. The Marchioness takes on the supernatural power of Lavater’s portrait in her ability to speak, contemplate, and embrace via her existence within Emily; her portrait becomes more real, more natural, than Emily herself. Indeed, the portrait speaks louder than Emily; it contemplates Emily more than she contemplates the portrait. But unlike Lavater’s viewer of portraits, Emily does not rush to or figuratively embrace the image which she resembles. Instead, she is “lost in a labyrinth of perplexities” (648). This labyrinth of perplexities, the mystery of the portrait, is so powerful that Emily becomes lost in them, she loses her self in the shadow that the Marchioness’s portrait casts over her subjectivity. The miniature portrait does not delight Emily in enchantment, but rather horrifies her in stupefaction. So the portrait incites both fear and melancholic loss within Emily, though the lost object that is her subjectivity is in fact retroactively constructed through the work of fantasy. As the lost miniature of Emily early in the narrative illustrates, Emily is always already an object split in two.

## Gothic Melancholia and Matrophobia

As in Lacanian melancholia, it turns out that the lost object in *Clermont*, Madeline's dead mother, has never really been lost. As with the loss of the phallus, which is a fantastic loss, a loss "of a more ideal kind," because it has never been possessed, Madeline has never and will never know her mother. Geraldine dies while Madeline is yet an infant, and so Madeline has no frame of reference for the person she has lost, and whom she resembles. While many female gothic heroines have physical portraits of their dead mothers, Madeline has no image but her self to guess at what and who her mother was. There are no portraits or miniatures of Geraldine when she was living, and both Clermont and the Countess refuse to disclose any information about the person in the image Madeline so resembles. The self, then, becomes a lost object when compared to the person whom she resembles; and like the never possessed and never lost mother, Madeline's self, which would seem to get lost in the shadow her mother's ideal portrait casts over her, never existed in the first place. As in the graph of desire, when the barred subject moves from the ending to the beginning point of the graph to illustrate that the subject always already exists as a subject split by the signifier, Madeline has no knowledge of her family origins prior to Clermont's and the Countess's remarks about her resemblance, and so she does not have a full sense of self. An autonomous and whole self never existed before Madeline's subjectivity is split between self and living object of portraiture when she learns of her resemblance to the mysterious someone. As Wright notes, "loss *precedes* acquaintance with the loved ones because they only come to be known through their portraits" (22). So in the way that Madeline will never know the original of the figure she resembles, she can never know herself except through recourse to this resemblance to a mysterious someone. Loss does not precede acquaintance with

a loved other, in Wright's words, but precedes the knowledge, and thus existence, of the self that is not always already an other.

Madeline's resemblance to her dead mother reflects the gothic's presentation of eighteenth-century fear and loss surrounding the family. While Elliot's claim that, "as incarnate resemblances of mothers, daughters restore the social and physical power evacuated by ghosts and portraits" (133) coincides with Wright's that "the living embodiments of wronged mothers and aunts return, effectively, to haunt those who have wronged them" (25), I agree with Margarita Georgieva that, instead, gothic heroines "are images of their parents and inherit the parents' past, their features and characters as well as their curses and sins."<sup>66</sup> Madeline's "fateful" resemblance to her mother is a curse rather than a blessing, and sets Madeline up to experience similarly tragic circumstances. The mother as lost object indeed casts a wide shadow, and not only over Madeline's sense of self in the present, but also over her future, presaging yet unknown terror and tragedy. And Madeline does indeed experience terror and tragedy. Beginning with the mysterious death, which turns out to be murder, of the Countess, to the odious d'Alembert's desire to make Madeline his personal prostitute, to the knowledge that her father is a fratricide (before learning the truth), Madeline experiences a series of terrors that surpass even her mother's suffering. The ideal portrait of the unknown someone installed in Madeline's mind thus takes on supernatural capabilities in its power to curse, to determine the future, which turns the ideal portrait into a gothic portrait within the mind. As Ruth Perry notes, "maternal absence forces individuation for women in a patriarchally constructed world," but

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<sup>66</sup> Georgieva, *The Gothic Child* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 23.

Geraldine's maternal absence is also a form of presence in Madeline's resemblance to her.<sup>67</sup> In this way, it is her mother's *presence*, via her gothic portrait within the mind, which subjects her to a patriarchally constructed world; she determines Madeline's fate, which is not just a repetition, but an escalation of her own. The mother, then, is not a consoling or nurturing presence, but instead embodies, in Deborah Roger's words, a form of "matrophobia," which is not just a fear of mothers, but also "fear of identification with and separation from the maternal body and the motherline."<sup>68</sup> This matrophobic depiction of the mother is a startling critique of the eighteenth century's fantasy of motherhood and family life, which is supposed to be newly nuclear and affectionate, based on sentiment rather than older systems of family based on blood alone.

At the same time that Roche critiques the fantasy of the eighteenth-century family, she also presents a fantasy version of the historical present in her depiction of family reunions and resolutions, which are facilitated by portraits. When Madeline, upon narrowly escaping the clutches of d'Alembert the younger, happens upon a prototypically gothic castle, the Castle of Montmorenci, the Marquis of the castle finds a miniature portrait Madeline dropped of her father. A servant observes that "I never saw my Lord more disturbed than he was just after finding the picture, I thought when he returned to his apartment he would have fainted" (205). When the Marquis questions Madeline about the miniature with "a wild and eager look," he observes the resemblance between Clermont and Madeline: "Yes, (cried he) I see traces of that face of one – which no time can wear from my remembrance" (206). Though the web of secrets

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<sup>67</sup> Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 369. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>68</sup> Rogers, *The Matrophobic Gothic and its Legacy: Sacrificing Mothers in the Novel and in Popular Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 1.

entangling Madeline's family history is yet to be unraveled, we later learn that the Marquis is Clermont's father who once disowned him and his mother. Already repentant for this injustice, the Marquis cannot help but face the truth of reality when he comes across Clermont's miniature, which forces the Marquis to acknowledge him as his legitimate heir. And as her resemblance to her mother, Madeline's resemblance to her father, her status as living portrait, is powerful enough to convince the Marquis that the image in the miniature is indeed his long lost son. Portraits, then, both living and inanimate, have the power to restore family relations and offer restitution for those who have been wronged.

While Roche presents a fearful version of the family, she also presents a fantastic fictional version of the family that has been lost in reality. According to Perry, the preference in fiction for a happily-ever-after "reflects the actual erosion of consanguineal relationships by the forces of modernity and thus represents nostalgia for what was being lost" (373). So Roche's depiction of family is ambivalent in its fantasy construction; it is both barbaric and idealized. Like the Freudian melancholic's lost object, which is constructed as ambivalent, the narrative simultaneously "rages against" and melancholically longs for the family as lost object. In Perry's words, "by showing what was lost, or imagining the loss retrieved, these narratives confirmed the new conjugal paradigm of kinship," which invoked deep fear and loss (51). But like the Lacanian melancholic, both the barbarous and the idealized family are objects which have never been lost; they are fantasy versions of the family constructed from a position in the historical present.

In Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, the family is constructed through portraits as gothic fantasy of history. Set in the "barbarous" medieval period, the narrative, like that of *Clermont*, simultaneously rages against and melancholically longs for the family as lost object of the

historical past. Both Sister Agnes/Laurentini and the servant Dorothee are entranced by Emily's resemblance to the dead Marchioness. While Agnes initially mistakes Emily for the "original," she becomes convinced that Emily's resemblance to the Marchioness is evidence that she is her daughter, for "such a striking resemblance is never found but among near relations" (645).

When Agnes presents Emily with a miniature of the Marchioness, Emily is struck by the resemblance of the miniature to another portrait: that mysterious portrait introduced early in the novel which evokes deep emotion from St. Aubert, though Emily knows not why. Though the narrator assures the reader that Emily "would now have suffered something more than surprise, had her confidence in his integrity been less; as it was, she could not, for a moment, believe what the words of Laurentini insinuated; yet she still felt strongly interested" (647). Agnes/Laurentini is a double figure of and for the historical past in her double existence as both amorous aristocrat and retired nun; she poses a double threat to the family as mistress and as a female absenting herself from the role of wife and mother. So her misidentification of Emily as the Marchioness' daughter reveals the twisted conception of family in the supposedly barbarous past; she threatens to destroy Emily's sense of self by insinuating an illicit affair between St. Aubert and the Marchioness.

Ultimately, order is restored when Emily learns of Agnes's misidentification and finds that St. Aubert and the Marchioness were beloved siblings, not lovers, and that the woman Emily knew to be her mother has always been so. Indeed, in the first pages of the narrative we learn that "in person, Emily resembled her mother; having the same elegant symmetry of form, the same delicacy of features, and the same blue eyes" (5). If resemblance is proof of family identity, then we can be certain that Emily is indeed the product of the marriage between the people she has known to be her parents. But this assurance of the resemblance between mother

and daughter early in the narrative is shadowed by the ensuing narrative's numerous observations of the resemblance between Emily and the Marchioness. Agnes's claim seems to have more evidence than Emily's belief in her father and mother's integrity. This is not to say that Emily might actually be the product of an incestuous relation between brother and sister, but to call attention to the anxieties that surround Radcliffe's otherwise idealized portrait of bourgeois family relations embodied in the St. Aubert family. By displacing this idealized bourgeois family in the otherwise barbarous past, Radcliffe simultaneously shows the strength of these family bonds in the compensatory narrative, but also reveals the fragility of these bonds when we consider the shadow that resemblances cast over the narrative. This shadow reveals the idealized bourgeois family as a gothic fantasy of history, and by displacing this idealized family in the historical past, it is kept from contamination of and from the anxieties surrounding the family in the present, but is then perceived and felt to be a lost object. Looking at the work of fantasy that goes into the construction of the family both in the historical present and past, however, we see that this lost object has never been possessed and so it has never been lost.

### **The Romance of the Gothic Portrait**

In his postscript to *Clarissa* (1748), Richardson provides a rationale of sorts responding to some of the criticisms made about the novel in its serial publication. He acknowledges the opposition to the length of the novel, but attributes this opposition to those "who perhaps looked upon it as a mere novel or romance."<sup>69</sup> He claims, however, that the minute details were necessary "in order to preserve and maintain that air of probability, which is necessary to be maintained in a story designed to represent real life." With the novel's emergence came great

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<sup>69</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa Harlowe; or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), vol. 9, loc. 3857. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

anxiety about how and what a novel should be, and this ideal is almost always opposed to the “mere” romance. Ostensibly, the sentimental “history,” not novel, must follow the rules of reality so that it can provide its readers with proper moral instruction (IX.3827). Nicholas Paige terms this dedication to historical fact a “pseudofactual pact” between eighteenth-century reader and writer; the pseudofactual novel “masquerades as serious utterance” while the reader pretends “that the novel’s collection of people, actions, and events are in fact a subset of the larger collection of the discrete facts that make up history.”<sup>70</sup> Richardson subscribes to a hierarchy of literary form which exalts the supposed reality, or truth, of history and rejects the fantasy of romance, here used interchangeably with the novel. It would seem that Richardson participates in the eighteenth-century naturalization of gendered modes of writing – romance and sensibility are “feminine” while philosophical and historical writing are “masculine” – in his insistence on working within the prescribed mode of “history.” However, “history” in the eighteenth century was not the stable category Richardson seems to put forward. History, romance, and fiction<sup>71</sup> were messily mixed with one another;<sup>72</sup> and it is not just the female gothic novel that enfold this modal mixture in its gothic fantasy of history, but Richardson’s novel does so as well in its blending of history and romance. In this way, *Clarissa*, though written by a male author, can be read as an articulation of the female gothic’s concern with fantasy and history as mediated by

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<sup>70</sup> Paige, *Before Fiction: The Ancien Regime of the Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. xi, 13.

<sup>71</sup> As Catherine Gallagher has influentially argued, “fiction” did not exist as its own category before, but emerged simultaneously with, the novel. See Gallagher, *Nobody’s Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. xvi. While I use the term “fiction” to describe an eighteenth-century mode of writing, the term and concept were still in early development.

<sup>72</sup> For the interdependence of history and novel see, among others, Everett Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction: History and the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 31. For the relation between romance and fiction see Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 2.

material objects. In Richardson's case, the gothic fantasy of history reveals itself in his use of romance techniques and in the function of portraits throughout the narrative, and articulates a sense of melancholic loss.

In the *Rambler*, 4, Samuel Johnson similarly places the value of literature in its ability to accurately reflect real life and manners. The contemporary writer must provide an "accurate observation of the living world," and must be "engaged in portraits of which every one knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance."<sup>73</sup> At the same time, however, Johnson explains that "it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind as a mirror which shews all that presents itself without discrimination" (145). Essentially, then, the task of the novelist is to present a fantastic portrait of real life to the reader, one which presents certain aspects and elements of reality but omits others. While he certainly would eschew the overtly fantastic elements of the romance, Johnson in fact reveals that a fantasy version of reality is more desirable than a purely mimetic portrait of real life. As with Emily St. Aubert in Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, portraits and mirrors becomes confused in Johnson's language. A novel must provide a portrait of real life, one which will be judged on the exactness of its resemblance to reality, but it must not present a mirror of real life, which indiscriminately presents, along with the beauty, the ugliness of humankind in reality. The portrait requires art to supplant the image of nature while the mirror reflects nature unadorned. At the same time, however, the mirror is like the portrait in that the meaning of its reflected image requires a viewer's interpretation of that image. Both portrait and mirror, then, require the work of fantasy for their images to make meaning. Whether the novel is a portrait or mirror of real life, fantasy

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<sup>73</sup> Johnson, *Rambler*, 4, Saturday, March 31, 1750, *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record*, ed. Ioan Williams (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1970), p. 143. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

cannot be separated from its presented image. Despite Johnson's emphasis on the novel's exactness of resemblance to reality, his skeptical view of mirrors reveals an underlying ambivalence around the novel as mimetic portrait.

In a review of *Sidney Bidulph* for *The Critical Review*, the novel's portrait of real life, according to the reviewer, must "imitate nature more closely...marking the characters more strongly, and introducing a variety of natural circumstances, that cannot fall under the pen of an historian. Slight strokes, and gentle touches, seemingly frivolous and impertinent, have an astonishing effect in strengthening the resemblance of the portraiture."<sup>74</sup> In this instance, the reviewer takes a similar position as Lavater regarding nature and portraiture: portraits provide better images than nature alone because, unlike nature, they may be supplanted by "slight strokes, and gentle touches," which may seem "frivolous and impertinent," but in fact strengthen the resemblance between the novel's portrait of real life. Indeed, the historian cannot mark her characters more strongly because she must record that which has already happened; but the novelist/painter may do so because she records what might have happened or could happen. In his essay, "On Fictitious History" (1762), Hugh Blair similarly finds value in what he deems "fictitious history," or romance, which "hardly bear[s] any resemblance to the world in which we dwell."<sup>75</sup> Unlike Johnson, Blair prefers the romance to the novel, which is "formed upon nature and upon life, without extravagance," but "tend[s] to dissipation and idleness" (251). In fact, the more that romance resembles human nature, the less useful it becomes. The portrait of romance, then, is to be favored over any mimetic portrait resembling real life and manners. Like the reviewer of *Sidney Bidulph*, resemblance does not lie in a mimetic representation of nature, but

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<sup>74</sup> "Review of *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761)," *Novel and Romance*, p. 234.

<sup>75</sup> Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London: J.F. Dove, 1823), p. 248. All subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

in improving upon nature with strengthening strokes and touches. Romance provides a better version, a more beautiful portrait, of human nature than reality, which is not only mundane and tedious but vicious and cruel. This version of reality that romance offers provides “a more splendid order of things,” which expands the mind and “gratif[ies] our capacious desires” (248). Blair’s preference for romance reveals a sense of longing for a lost historical past, one that was structured by a more splendid order of things, one that does not resemble the dissipation and idleness of the present.

“Romance,” of course, is as slippery a term as “fiction” or “history.” Though it can signify an idealized lost past, as Blair suggests, it can also conjure scenes of terror and suffering. After all, the first wave of gothic fiction, beginning with Walpole, almost always includes “romance” in its titles. As Miranda Burgess puts it, romance does not persist “in ghostly or nostalgic traces within novels, not knowing it is dead. Rather, it lives and grows within the species of fiction, declaring itself distinct from the novel but also emerging at discrete moments within novels, providing the present with the images and influence of a lost, beloved, but invented past.”<sup>76</sup> This description of romance is essentially of the female gothic’s fantasy of history, its ambivalent construction of the fantastically lost past and its critique of enlightenment fantasies of the present. So while romance paints, for Blair, a more splendid order of things, it simultaneously takes on the horrifying properties that constitute the female gothic in the long eighteenth century. In *Clarissa*, romance serves a dual function: it paints a more splendid order of things, which reflects a sense of longing for a melancholically lost past, but it also paints a terrifying portrait of reality for women, which reflects the horrifying realities women face in the present.

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<sup>76</sup> Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order, 1740-1830* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 5.

Though Richardson avows in his postscript that the “history” is meant to provide “a well-drawn picture of nature,” the plot, specifically the romance plot, does not provide a well-drawn, or mimetic, picture of nature, but instead a female gothic portrait of reality (IX.3887). Early in the novel, Clarissa awakens from a dream, terrified by the “frightful images raised by it upon my memory. But why should I, who have real evils to contend with, regard imaginary ones?” (II.191). For the gothicized sentimental heroine, the relation between reality and romance takes on a new form; for her, the fear of the supernatural is nothing compared to the very real threat to her virtue. The monster she must face is not a giant or a dragon, but the lecherous aristocrat. In an inversion of the courtly romance, the male figure who should be the “hero” is in fact the villain. Indeed, once Lovelace has succeeded in kidnapping Clarissa and holding her in captivity, Anna Howe cannot account for his treachery except by recourse to romance. She claims that “I never had any faith in the stories that go current among country girls, of specters, familiars, and demons, yet I see not any other way to account for this wretch’s successful villainy...but by supposing, (if he be not the devil himself,) that he has a familiar constantly at his elbow” (VI.3868). While making an attempt to distance herself from the superstition of “country girls,” Anna cannot make sense of Lovelace’s plots, which *must* be the work of fantastic romance, since they are too horrifying to make sense in reality. But the real horror here is that Lovelace is *not* a specter, familiar, demon, or devil. He is a man in a position of power, and as such he may construct a slow and intricate plot to bring about Clarissa’s downfall. Indeed, there is paradoxically a sense of longing revealed in Anna’s dismissal of country superstition: if only the worst one had to fear were specters, familiars, and demons. Would that it were only in the fantasy of romance that men plot to hold hostage and rape innocent young women, but as Clarissa and Anna both know, what should be contained within the world of

romance is in actuality an everyday threat to female subjectivity; it is part and parcel of reality for women. In this way, the hints of romance woven throughout the narrative reveal that *Clarissa* is a female gothic portrait of reality, and in this portrait participates in the female gothic's project to cast into relief the work of fantasy that constructs the long eighteenth century's perception of itself as an enlightened age of reason and natural rights.

Richardson similarly borrows from the romance in his depiction of Mrs. Sinclair's death scene, turning this horrifying scene into a female gothic portrait of reality. Seemingly inhuman throughout the narrative in the active role she plays in bringing about Clarissa's downfall, in the midst of death she is painted as both a supernatural demon and as an animal from the natural world. On her deathbed, Mrs. Sinclair, according to Belford, becomes an inhuman creature whose "rage and violence" makes her flesh swell, "splitting her face, as it were, into two parts; and her huge tongue hideously rolling in it; heaving, puffing as if for breath" (IX.815). In this portrait, Belford paints Mrs. Sinclair as a monster seemingly bursting at the seams, serpent-like in her tongue rolling, dragon-like in her huffing and puffing. She takes on features of numerous supernatural creatures perhaps because, from Belford's perspective, there is no single creature that equals Mrs. Sinclair's malevolence. Furthermore, Mrs. Sinclair violently attempts to cling to life, "raving, crying, cursing, and even howling, more like a wolf than a human creature," or, alternately, "more like a bull than a woman!" (IX.777). In this instance, Mrs. Sinclair is utterly devoid of her humanity in a double sense: first, she is compared to an animal rather than a "human creature," and secondly, she is stripped of her female gender and made masculine in her comparison to a bull. "Unnatural" in her cruelty in life and health, Mrs. Sinclair physically transforms into a seemingly unnatural version of nature in sickness and death: human has become animal and female has become male. According to the romance narrative within the

novel, only a base animal is incapable of empathizing with Clarissa in her suffering, and only a male could be capable of inflicting such violence upon an unprotected woman. And in this romance narrative, evil characters learn that the punishment fits the crime when justice is served. But the disturbing reality is that, though Mrs. Sinclair takes on animalistic qualities in Belford's portrait, she is a *human*, not an animal or supernatural monster. In the way that Anna cannot make sense of Lovelace's human cruelty except by recourse to romance, Mrs. Sinclair's equally human cruelty seems irreconcilable with the laws of nature. But her cruelty cannot be explained by comparing her to an animal or monster, only by realizing her humanity. The romance narrative is much more comforting than the novel's avowed "picture of real life," and reveals a sense of longing for a lost past in which justice is always served and the seemingly inhuman are punished for their cruelty. As Jesse Molesworth puts it, "the rationality of any traditional plot," such as the conniving Mrs. Sinclair meeting her just fate, "is little more than an alibi concealing a more strongly developed allegiance to the magic of teleology;" and, further, "teleological thinking is not so much a facet of superstition but, rather, its very definition."<sup>77</sup> In this conclusion, in which justice is served, Richardson borrows from the idealized elements of the romance and provides a narrative resolution that is almost never found in the realities of lived experience.

Not only elements of romance, but literal portraits too are strewn throughout the narrative of *Clarissa*. Soon after Lovelace forces Clarissa into an elopement, Arabella Harlowe writes to Clarissa, cruelly explaining that "your whole-length picture, in the Vandyke taste...[has been] thrown into your closet, which will be nailed up, as if it were not a part of the house, there to perish" (III.208). In this same letter, Arabella informs Clarissa of the curse their father has cast

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<sup>77</sup> Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 17.

upon her, a curse which haunts Clarissa until the moment of death. In this way, curse and portrait coincide in their power to taunt and haunt Clarissa. Because Clarissa's body can no longer be directly controlled by the family, the portrait becomes a stand-in for her person, blurring the line between representation and original, and they enact revenge upon the person by locking away the portrait. This banishment of the portrait is meant to give the illusion that it, and by extension Clarissa, are not part of the house, but in this act of banishment, Arabella actually reveals just how crucial both Clarissa in body and in portrait are to the house, down to its structural integrity. Her wording makes it seem that, prior to its imprisonment, the portrait was a necessary part of the house. While "it" could ostensibly refer to Clarissa's closet, which will no longer be considered part of the house, "it" is in fact the portrait which has been, but will no longer be, part of the house or family. Significantly, it is not a miniature or even a portrait of the head and torso, but a "whole-length picture," which captures Clarissa's body and spirit, her whole self, which the family punishes in her place. Portrait and self, then, become interchangeable for the family, and the letter detailing the portrait's imprisonment along with her father's curse is meant to further split Clarissa's subjectivity into a form of objectivity. Not only does the family interpret a living presence within the portrait, which turns Clarissa into a portrait object, she is, moreover, the fantastic object of her father's cruel curse. As Clarissa fears, the curse is carried out to the very letter, and, though she never consciously associates the supernatural with the curse, she attributes the reality of her sufferings to this curse.

As Alison Conway notes, the Harlowe family places Clarissa, via her portrait, in an early grave in this moment, "nailing the closet door as if it were a coffin and leaving Clarissa's portrait

to perish.”<sup>78</sup> In tandem with her father’s curse, the locked-away portrait anticipates the macabre coffin Clarissa creates in a kind of gothic portraiture. The “sketch of symbols” Belford describes in his letters include a “crowned serpent, with its tail in its mouth, forming a ring, the emblem of eternity,” a winged hour-glass, an urn, and the head of a white lily snapped off (VIII.2654). This portrait of the coffin painted by Belford shocks and concerns all but Clarissa herself, who calls what Belford deems an “awful receptacle” her “house” (VIII.2884, 2899, 3900). In the same volume, Clarissa comments on her image in a mirror: “my countenance, said she, is indeed an honest picture of my heart” (VIII.198). So in the way that her face images her emotions, the coffin images not only her emotions, but becomes a metonymy for Clarissa’s very self. In so doing, the coffin functions as a portrait by splitting the self into subject and object in the very act of imaging the self. At the same time that the coffin is a kind of portrait, it is also, according to Clarissa, a house, and both objects blur the line between subject and object. While the portrait captures a subject into a seemingly static image, an object, the home ostensibly contains living human subjects. But in the female gothic, portraits do not function as static but instead images of fantasy even while they remain in an ostensibly realistic mode. So the coffin as portrait fantastically captures Clarissa’s decayed sense of self, her subjectivity, in the objects it depicts, emblems of death. And while the home typically houses living subjects, in Clarissa’s case, the home will house the ultimate object of stasis: a dead body.

Indeed, after her death, when Mr. Harlowe looks upon the coffin “in a profound reverie,” there are, according to Colonel Morden, “marks of stupefaction imprinted upon every feature” (IX.1042). So the coffin, like a portrait, functions primarily as a visual object. As Lavater’s

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<sup>78</sup> Conway, *Private Interests: Women, Portraiture, and the Visual Culture of the English Novel, 1709-1791* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 88. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

depiction of a portrait that contemplates more than it is contemplated, the coffin as portrait has the power to entrance Mr. Harlowe, to lose the self in face of the object. Furthermore, Mr. Harlowe's face becomes a mirror of the coffin: the marks of stupefaction might be understood both as facial features and as the emblems of eternity that Clarissa chooses for her portrait/coffin. So the portrait/coffin takes on the seemingly supernatural power of the female gothic portrait to fantastically come to life and haunt its viewers. This power of the object as visual image, the coffin as portrait, similarly reveals the elements of romance creeping into Richardson's picture of real life. Not only does the portrait/coffin become an animated representation of the now-dead Clarissa, it is also an inanimate representation of the living Mr. Harlowe, blurring the line between subject and object, representation and original, and the living and the dead. In this way, the coffin as portrait takes on a life of its own, becomes a supernatural object of fantasy, which has the power to restore the vision, the insight, which Mr. Harlowe has lost throughout the narrative. He now realizes by gazing upon the portrait/coffin that he has been as cruel as Clarissa's captors, and though he is not punished in the manner of Mrs. Sinclair, he will be forever haunted by his lack of foresight and compassion. The power of the portrait/coffin coincides with the romance plot that runs throughout the narrative, which, contrary to the female gothic portrait of reality, provides justice, solace, and closure for the reader by ensuring all characters meet their deserved fates.

In her will, Clarissa leaves behind portraits and miniatures of herself, images meant to soothe the pain of loss and restore family order. Conway remarks of the earlier locking away of the Vandyke style portrait that, "by symbolically shutting the door on her representation, [they are] refusing her a family identity," and so it would seem that the unlocking of the portrait in Clarissa's will restores some sense of self-autonomy as well as family relations (87). But,

because Clarissa does not bequeath any portraits or miniatures of her self to her family, she effectively leaves “the living members of her family in the tomb of remembrance, without any visual markers of the daughter they have betrayed” (111). Kathleen Oliver adds that, in this omission of personal portraits for her family members, “Clarissa denies them any token of love, any sign of forgiveness.”<sup>79</sup> The objects that Clarissa does leave for the family members are the ancestral portraits bequeathed to her by her grandfather, which, along with her own plot of land, incited deep resentment and jealousy within the family. These family portraits, herself excluded, Clarissa bestows upon the family who disowned her, and who disowned her largely out of fear of the stain on the family name that represents those captured in the portraits. The Harlowes are so concerned with the family name that they place more importance upon the family portraits than they do on Clarissa, by locking her pictured self away and by disowning and cursing her. Clarissa omits her own portraits from her legacy to her family because they do not value her as part of the family until after her death, when they realize the extent of their cruelty, which, in fact, stains the family name far more than Clarissa’s tragic circumstances.

Though portraits are supposed to restore family order, their absence from Clarissa’s legacy to her family instead reveals a deep sense of fear and loss surrounding the eighteenth-century family. The Harlowe family’s obsession with the family name furthermore signals an acute anxiety surrounding the rise of the middle classes, which is supposed to be simultaneous with the rise of the so-called nuclear family. The Harlowes occupy a tenuous position in eighteenth-century class politics: though they are wealthy, as Lovelace snidely remarks, the family “was not known to its country a century ago” (IV.75). They do not have an aristocratic genealogy, but they are not middle class either. As Kamilla Elliot notes, ancestral portraits are

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<sup>79</sup> Oliver, “‘With My Hair in Crystal’: Mourning in *Clarissa*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 23.1 (2010): 35-60, p. 55.

key objects in separating aristocratic families from the newly emergent middle classes; they depict the age and legacy of a family name (13). The Harlowes' obsession with their own ancestral portraits, which cannot go back very far, is representative of, in Conway's words, their "desire for a powerful genealogy" (83). Though the Harlowes are not aristocratic, they represent all that is corrupt in the aristocracy: love of power, greed for property, and a decided lack of sentimental filial bonds. But in their obsession with their ancestral portraits, indicative of their family name, they paradoxically reveal that they are *not* aristocratic, and indeed their family name is irrevocably tarnished by the cruelty they show Clarissa. The Harlowes' desire for a powerful genealogy, which they do not yet have is also representative of the ambivalence surrounding the rising middle classes. Though the bourgeois middle class defines itself on everything that the aristocracy is *not*, the narrative of enlightenment is that the bourgeoisie will replace the aristocracy as arbiters of morality and taste. But if the rise of the middle class is anything like the attempted rise of the Harlowes to the aristocracy, there is indeed much to fear. On one hand, we we might see Richardson's portrait of the Harlowes as a cautionary tale about the aristocracy's obsession with power and greed; on the other hand, we might also see it as a fearful expression of what will come with the rising middle classes. In this way, Richardson's family portrait reveals the holes in the enlightenment's fantasy of itself and instead depicts a female gothic version of reality.

Clarissa leaves her self, depicted in her portrait, not to her lineal family, but instead to "that sister of [her] heart," Anna Howe (IX.1447). Though not a literal portrait of herself, Clarissa further bequeaths a miniature picture of Anna to Charles Hickman, which she has "constantly worn, and shall continue to wear next to my heart till the approach of my last hour" (IX.1455). By wearing this miniature of Anna next to her heart, Clarissa and Anna are literally

sisters of the heart, and so this miniature becomes a metonymy for Clarissa herself. In bestowing these portraits upon her chosen family members, Clarissa's will casts deep doubt over the fantasy of the newly sentimental nuclear family and its ability to provide love and protection for its members equally. Instead, chosen family members occupy the seat of sentimental affect – the heart – and are the ones who provide love and protection. In this way, Clarissa's chosen family *is* the new sentimental family, a family based in sentimental affection rather than lineage and blood. She similarly gives Colonel Morden, who tends to Clarissa with care and love during her dying days, a miniature picture of herself, which was once intended to go to “the man whom [she] should be one day most inclined to favour” (IX.1440). This bequest is especially significant, not only in its proof of the power of chosen family over Clarissa's cruel family of origin, but also over the conjugal paradigm of kinship. Clarissa's miniature was supposed to go to the man she would one day marry, with whom she would start her own family. But Clarissa cannot be part of a conjugal family because of her rape and, perhaps more importantly, because her own family of origin has proved the danger and cruelty the nuclear family can inflict upon its own members. So by giving her miniature to Colonel Morden, Clarissa is articulating a double sense of loss: a loss of the family of her own she will never have, and the loss of the loving consanguineal family she once believed she had.

Part of this female gothic portrait of the family is the revelation of the lack of power women, particularly mothers, have in the family unit. Throughout the narrative, Mrs. Harlowe is the ultimate figure of female disempowerment. Despite her attempts to advocate for Clarissa, the Harlowe men have the final say in controlling, disowning, and finally cursing her. As in Roche's *Clermont*, *Clarissa* presents a “matrophobic” view of mothers and motherhood, a female gothic rendering of the eighteenth-century family. While the ideal of the self-sacrificing mother, the

mother who can and will do anything for her family at the cost of her self, emerges in this new model of kinship, in *Clarissa*, Mrs. Harlowe not only sacrifices her self (the very act of becoming a wife and mother is indeed a sacrifice), she cannot help but allow for the sacrifice of Clarissa for the preservation of the family name. Indeed, the mother cannot even sacrifice herself for the sake of her child. Mrs. Harlowe plays the gothic part of the absent mother, leaving the daughter to fend for herself, not because she is dead or imprisoned, but because she has no autonomy or power within the family unit. According to Ruth Perry, the absent mother “tells a story about disappearing maternal power and the suppression of maternal inheritance in a changing world” (7), which “reflects the actual erosion of consanguineal relationships by the forces of modernity and thus represents nostalgia for what was being lost” (373). From Perry’s perspective, the disappearing maternal power that comes with changing kin relations in the eighteenth century is a form of loss, a dramatic and disempowering shift from earlier models of kinship based on consanguineal ties. While many gothic and sentimental narratives provide a “fictional solution to the painful shifts in kinship loyalties [as] a favorite wish-fulfillment fantasy,” *Clarissa* paints a disturbing portrait of reality stripped of fantasy (371).

While Mrs. Harlowe is not dead as the typical female gothic mother, she serves the same function as the fantastically lost melancholic object. Family, in Richardson’s novel, acts in the same wily ways as romance, which takes on both idealized and horrifying properties. As part of the female gothic tradition, *Clarissa*’s family portrait reveals that any perfected image of the family unit, whether displaced onto the historical past or imagined as thriving in the historical present, is an articulation of the gothic fantasy of history. The fear that in actuality constitutes eighteenth-century family relations, particularly that felt by mothers, inspires the work of fantasy to construct a lost past in which those relations were once nurturing, fulfilling, and sustainable.

But as in the lost object of melancholia as conceived in both Freud and Lacan, this lost ideal only ever exists or has existed as a fantasy produced within the present. Eighteenth-century family trouble as imagined by the female gothic thus brings together psychoanalytic and gothic melancholia, romance and history, and makes the line between fact and fiction impossible to discern.

### Chapter Three Colonial Mirrors

The female gothic of the long eighteenth century not only produces a gothic fantasy of British history, but, more sinisterly, reproduces and displaces that fantasy in a subset of the mode, the “colonial gothic.”<sup>80</sup> While I have been arguing that the female gothic lifts the veil of fantasy from the Enlightenment’s perception of itself, this chapter also considers the female gothic’s troubling participation in that fantasy in its depictions of colonialism. In Charlotte Smith’s novella, *The Story of Henrietta* (1800), part of her unfinished collection, *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, and Sophia Lee’s Jamaican episode in *The Recess* (1785), the gothic fascination with the supposed barbarity of the feudal past gets transferred to the supposed barbarity of the colonial present. Though *Henrietta* takes place in Smith’s contemporary historical moment, colonial Jamaica is presented as a remnant of the unenlightened historical past, which is inimical to the values of the present age of enlightenment. In both works, Jamaica and its colonial subjects are constructed by gothic fantasy, imagined and imaged as backward in historical time.

In his influential work, “In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopa, History, Culture,” Fred Botting conceptualizes the gothic genre as a mirror, which reflects “eighteenth-century mores and values:

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<sup>80</sup> Janina Nordius succinctly summarizes the colonial gothic as those texts that “center on the destabilizing forces at work in the colonial encounter: its dehumanizing effects on the colonized and the way the normalization of colonial structures desired by the colonizers is always already haunted by unspeakable horrors buried at the heart of the colonial project...the specter of these repressed horrors tends to return in the narratives of colonial Gothic as representations of deeply felt cultural anxieties or brutal eruptions of violence.” “Racism and Radicalism in Jamaican Gothic: Cynric R. Williams’s *Hamel, the Obeah Man*,” *ELH* 73.3 (2006): 673-93.

a reconstruction of the past as the inverted, mirror image of the present.”<sup>81</sup> While the gothic mirror, according to Botting, allows the enlightened historical present to shine in contrast to the darkness of the feudal past, it simultaneously presents “a perfected reflection, an idealization of elements of the past and the establishment of a continuity with the present.” This ambivalent mirrored relation between historical past and present constitutes what I have been calling the gothic fantasy of history, in which fear and loss of and in the long eighteenth century incites a retroactive fantasy of a lost past which is simultaneously barbaric and idyllic. Colonial Jamaica in Smith and Lee’s female gothic texts is thus a gothic mirror of the British historical past, and is perceived as barbarous, infantile, and frightening in contrast to the present age of reason, progress, and maturity.

As opposed to the gothic works I have previously discussed, *Henrietta* and *The Recess* do not reveal any longing for the lost historical past as represented in colonial Jamaica; they do not, in Botting’s words, reflect any “idealization” of the past. Particularly in Smith’s *Henrietta*, colonial Jamaica is depicted as a space of tyranny, unchecked passion, superstition, and perpetual war, all characteristics of the British eighteenth century’s fantasy of its own gothic past. Part of the fantasy of the colonial past-within-the-present is that the colonial other is unable to participate in the world of language. In *Henrietta* and *The Recess*, Afro-Caribbean characters either speak a poor imitation of Jamaican Creole or do not speak at all. In the work of fantasy spun in these texts, the colonial other is unintelligible and illegible in the language of the “mother country,” indicating that she is outside the social, outside culture, and outside of history.

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<sup>81</sup> Botting, “In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture,” in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), p. 5. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

The colonial mirror of the female gothic, which seemingly serves to distance and separate the British present from the colonial “past,” is in fact a product of the gothic fantasy of history, based on deep fear and anxiety within the present. One of the most obvious sources of fear for eighteenth-century Britons was the threat and actuality of insurrection in the West Indian colonies. While Maroon violence was widespread though ultimately unsuccessful in Jamaica throughout the long eighteenth century, the insurrection in Saint Dominique, Haiti, eventually led to revolution just four years after *Henrietta* was published. For Lee, the loss of the American colonies would still have been freshly felt and further compounded by the tumult of the Gordon Riots in 1780. Indeed, they seemed to express deep fear and anxiety about British national identity and security. British Protestant fears of the Catholic “other,” violently come to life in the riots, is then not only expressed in the gothic in anxious accounts of medieval France, Italy, and Germany, but projected onto contemporary colonial Jamaica and its supposedly superstitious inhabitants. Wrapped up with these fears of revolutionary violence in the colonies, in France, and “at home” was anxiety about commerce and the somewhat-newly emergent industrial capitalism. If colonial uprisings led to revolution, as it did in Haiti, how could this emergent structure of capitalism continue to thrive, or even function, without depending on captive labor? Further, how could British reliance on the luxurious and exotic goods of colonialism and chattel slavery, which had come to define women’s roles as consumers and objects of desire, continue to shape gendered and commercial cultural patterns?

When the protagonists of both Smith’s and Lee’s texts meet their “mirror images” in colonial others, they register fear and disgust, and fantasy goes to work on these others to make them irreconcilable with eighteenth-century conceptions of female identity. Indeed, this is one of the most damaging and violent enactments of the gothic fantasy of history in these texts: while

female British subjects ostensibly shore up a stable sense of subjectivity by defining themselves against them, these colonial others are erased and abjected from this scene of identification. In these female gothic works, colonial subjectivity is flattened into a reflective objectivity that provides meaning only for the gazing British subject. However, the fear and loathing that these protagonists experience is in fact indicative of an unstable sense of self, and an ambivalence about female subjectivity. The anxieties and ambivalences felt by the female gothic heroine thus uncovers the ability of colonial subjects to destabilize the mirrored relation between British subjectivity and colonial objectivity, between colonized Jamaica and colonizing Britain. In the way that the female gothic heroine is haunted by the colonial other's reflection of her own deepest fears and anxieties, so is British culture of the long eighteenth century inescapably haunted by its colonizing presence in Jamaica. The mirrored relation between colonized and colonizing subjects and spaces reflects a reciprocal haunting, or what Pheng Cheah calls, a "mutual haunting of the state and nation."<sup>82</sup> While postcolonial critics, particularly those who deploy psychoanalytic theory, frequently frame the neocolonial conditions of former colonies as a form of haunting, these female gothic works figure eighteenth-century coloniality as a haunting and haunted relation between colony and metropole.<sup>83</sup> Fantasy in these female gothic works operates, then, on two levels: it participates in the imagined conception of colonial Jamaica and its inhabitants as backward and barbaric while simultaneously revealing that the enlightenment's image of itself is, too, a fantasy construction.

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<sup>82</sup> Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 307.

<sup>83</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has influentially formulated postcolonial temporality as a form of "hauntology." See Spivak, "Ghostwriting," *Diacritics* 25.2 (1995): 64-84, p. 70. More recently, Ranjana Khanna and Paul Gilroy have shifted the paradigm of postcolonial haunting to one of melancholia. See Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

In one reading of Lacan's seminal work, "The Mirror Stage," the imaginary is a time and place prior to language and entrance into the social world of the symbolic order. Captured in the experience of the mirror stage, the imaginary is a developmental stopping point on the path from the infantile to the maturity of adulthood in the symbolic. It would seem, then, that the colonial other as imaged in the female gothic mirror of *Henrietta* and *The Recess* is in an infantile stage of development, and, moreover, that the movement from the Lacanian imaginary to the symbolic is a reiteration of the eighteenth-century conception of history as a movement from infantile darkness to matured enlightenment. But when we consider the work of fantasy in the female gothic and in Lacanian psychoanalysis, we see that these conceptions of developmental history are actually retroactive revisions of the past from positions in the present. The Lacanian structure of the individual's encounter with the social is thus a gothic fantasy of history: fear and loss in the subject of the symbolic incites a retroactive fantasy of a lost past – the imaginary mirror stage – which is free from the constraints of the present. And in the female gothic, the depiction of the colonial other as outside of language, and thus backwards in history, is a racialized fantasy of history.<sup>84</sup>

Beginning with Frantz Fanon's Lacanian conceptualization of coloniality, particularly his oft-cited footnote on the mirror stage in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), postcolonial critics have explored in depth the relation between colonial subjectivity and the mirror stage. As Kelly Oliver puts it, "the pathological mirror of racism has the opposite effect of the Lacanian mirror. Rather than produce the ego with its agency as a fictional defense against alienation, the

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<sup>84</sup> For an especially astute explanation of eighteenth-century conceptions of "race" see Marlon B. Ross, "The Race of/in Romanticism: Notes Toward a Critical Race Theory," *Race, Romanticism, and the Atlantic*, ed. Paul Youngquist (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 27-39.

alienation in the racist mirror destroys the ego.”<sup>85</sup> Calling this process the “reversed mirror stage,” Oliver argues that the alienation experienced in colonial subjectivity is not a universal phenomenon, as strict Lacanians might believe, but one unique to the violence of racism, which perpetuates a “double alienation and double misrecognition” (38). However, because of the potentially dangerous power of fantasy on the individual and cultural psyche, the British subjects – and authors – of these female gothic works do not or cannot recognize the violence that occurs when they imagine themselves in a mirrored relation to colonial others.

To say that these colonial figures and conceptions of history and culture throughout *Henrietta* and *The Recess* are products of fantasy is not to ignore the very real consequences of, the violence perpetuated by, these fantasies in the reality of eighteenth-century settler colonialism and chattel slavery. As Peter Erickson notes of the mirror relation between colonized and colonizing subjects, what he calls the colonial mirror stage, “this aggrandized image or imaginary fullness” of the latter at the expense of the former “may be born in fantasy, but its effects are all too real.”<sup>86</sup> So instead of ignoring the fact that fantasy’s “effects are all too real,” I want to call attention to the violence of the mirror of fantasy, which reflects both a psychic and a cultural process. In fact, this view of fantasy in relation to colonialism and slavery captures the interwoven nature of psyche and culture as manifested in the female gothic. In the way that the colonial other is imagined through the work of fantasy as produced by and

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<sup>85</sup> Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 32-33. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>86</sup> Erickson, *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, Empire in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) p. 32. For another Lacanian discussion of colonial fantasy and its harmful effects on lived experience see Dominique Wolton, “From Colonial Stereotypes to the Postcolonial Gaze: The Need for an Evolution of the Imaginary,” *Colonial Culture in France Since the Revolution*, eds. Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel, and Dominic Thomas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 536-546.

productive of a dangerously backward culture, so is the female gothic of a culture that dangerously exploits the power of fantasy. While the female gothic sometimes exposes it also participates in the danger of cultural and psychic fantasy. Smith and Lee's works dramatically enact these gothic ambivalences: though they are ostensibly meant to expose the horror of colonial slavery, they ultimately perpetuate violently harmful fantasies of colonial culture and subjectivity. In so doing, these works mirror at once the reality and the fantasy of enlightenment.

### **The Mirror of Language**

In Fanon's theory of colonial language, he explains that to speak "means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization... a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language."<sup>87</sup> Language and culture, then, are inextricably linked; language is embedded in culture and culture in language. With the power of language comes the ability to inhabit, understand, and, perhaps, critique the culture from which it stems. To speak and, ostensibly, to be understood is a form of possession, a mastery of the cultural world of and in language. Furthermore, language carries with it "the weight of a civilization," not only the world of culture in the present but also the history of the past leading up to and contained within that present. But, according to the narrative of the colonizer, the colonized subject "has no culture, no civilization, no 'long historical past,'" necessarily placing this subject outside the world of civilized and civilizing language (34). The colonial subject is thus turned into an object of fantasy without the culture, civilization, or history that animate subjectivity because of a perceived inability to speak, understand, or be understood in the language of the "civilizing nation," or "mother country" (18). The eighteenth-century female gothic participates in this fantasy of the colonial subject as an "other," an object

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<sup>87</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 18. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

that is seemingly external to the self but is actually a fantasy production and projection of that self, which is backward in culture, civilization, and history because it does not or cannot participate in the language of the colonizer. The colonial other thus becomes a mirror image, a darkened reflection of the British present, which is perceived in contrast to shine in the light of advanced culture, civilization, and history.

In Lee's *The Recess*, Matilda and her infant daughter, Mary, are imprisoned after a slave rebellion and find that their jailor is an enslaved elderly woman who "was so totally deaf, that not one word reached her, nor did she speak any other language than her own, and very imperfect Spanish, to which I was a stranger."<sup>88</sup> Jamaica was a Spanish colony in the timeframe of Lee's novel, so the unnamed woman is in fact capable of speaking the language of, in Fanon's words, the "civilizing nation," but Matilda makes a point to undercut the woman's capacity for language by calling her Spanish "very imperfect" though Matilda herself is a "stranger" to the language. Matilda does not seem to understand that the enslaved woman's perceived deafness is not necessarily a hearing impairment, but is simply an inability to understand English; it does not seem to matter either way to Matilda. Lee thus creates a hierarchy of language, in which the enslaved woman's "own" language is clearly at bottom, coming after Spanish, which comes after English. As a speaker of English, Matilda seems to have the inexplicable ability to discern when an unfamiliar language is being used improperly, which signifies her cultural superiority. So it is not just the enslaved woman who lacks culture, civilization, and history, but the Spanish colony, too, which is set in contrast to Matilda's British identity.

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<sup>88</sup> Lee, *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times*, ed. April Alliston (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), p. 145. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

What is most disturbing to Matilda, however, is that the enslaved woman's "untaught soul" seems impenetrable to and incapable of acknowledging the language of sentiment. In this respect, the novel presents a reactionary, though not uncommon, view of enslaved subjectivity counter to the rising tide of abolition, which was based on the concept of universal sentimentality.<sup>89</sup> When Anana, the mistress of the Spanish Governor, sends the woman to bring her Matilda's daughter, Mary, Matilda does not understand her "unintelligible message" (146). Though Matilda "prayed, wept, intreated, groaned to the poor wretch, whose eyes alone of all her senses seemed affected by my agonies," the enslaved woman "snatched the child from those weak arms wanted an equal power of resistance" (147). The language of sentiment becomes a language of and for civilized British culture; its signs signify a cultivated and emotionally complex order of humanity. In this way, the speakers and interpreters of the language of sentiment are not simply versed in cultural codes of fashionable decorum, they more importantly use this language as an expression of a deeply felt and deeply feeling interiority. And Matilda's language of sentiment is especially pathetic because she is expressing a key component of female sentimentality: maternal love. The enslaved woman is portrayed as backward in culture and civilization because she does not understand the language of sentiment as a form of signification; but she is also portrayed as inhuman, or at least unfeminine, because she appears not to empathize with Matilda's maternal emotions. Though she visually registers Matilda's suffering, the enslaved woman's "eyes alone of all her senses seemed affected by my agonies," signaling that her interior sensibility is insufficient or nonexistent. What Matilda ignores or denies is that

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<sup>89</sup> On appealing to universal sentimentality as an abolitionist tactic see, for example, Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing Sentiment and Slavery* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 79-86 and Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 10-16.

the enslaved woman simply does not have the power to deny Anana's request no matter how eloquently Matilda speaks the language of sentiment. Instead of acknowledging this powerlessness that comes with slavery, Lee constructs a gothic fantasy of the enslaved colonial other as backward in culture, civilization, and history because she is unable to speak or understand the language of sentiment. In the work of fantasy in the text, the enslaved woman and Matilda are mirror images of one another. Matilda can express a cultivated identity and emotional interiority, products of an advanced stage of civilization and history, through sentimental language while the enslaved woman cannot, not because she does not have the power to express her emotional interiority through action, but because she is inherently incapable of speaking and understanding this language and is thus a product of a primitive stage of civilization and history.

In Smith's *Henrietta*, the slave Amponah, who is presented for the majority of the novella as sympathetic to Henrietta's trials, speaks Smith's poor imitation of Jamaican Creole. As Fanon puts it, to make the colonial subject "talk pidgin is to fasten him to an effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible" (35). In this way, the colonial subject is fashioned into a split object in its speech, which is at once a self and an effigy of the self in a gothic rendering of subjectivity. This effigy of the self is a form of memorialization, an image of that which is either absent or dead; it is also an object meant for damage and destruction. In this vision of colonial speech and subjectivity, the self is a spectral presence of a being that has been lost and is simultaneously an object upon which violence and anger are carried out. Constituted by both loss and violence, the colonial subject's speech reduces and imprisons it in an "essence," which is a false essence, a product of fantasy. Though this essence is only an illusion, the colonizer, who fantastically constructed that

essence in the first place, misrecognizes the illusion as natural reality. Thus Smith imagines that Amponah's speech signifies an essence that is degenerate and uncivilized. When, in the midst of a slave rebellion, Amponah helps Henrietta escape the marriage her father has arranged, she finds herself exchanging one kind of sexual threat for another as Amponah declares his desire for Henrietta. "Missy," he says, "I tell trute now – I love you. I no slave now; I *my* master and yours. Missy, there no difference now; you be my wife. I love you from a child! You live with me: nay, nay no help for it; I take care of that."<sup>90</sup> Not only the speech itself, but the content of that speech portrays Amponah as a "savage" who is enslaved by law and by his sexual passions. The signifiers and signified of Amponah's speech construct an essence that is backward in culture, civilization, and history. Amponah's use, which is conveyed as a misuse, of language turns him, in Fanon's words, into "the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible," but it also implicates Jamaican culture at large in this essence or appearance for which it is not responsible. If, according to Fanon, to speak "means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization," then Amponah's speech, according to the gothic fantasy of history, would appear to assume an unenlightened culture and to support the weight not of an advanced civilization, but of one encumbered by vice and ignorance. The weight of an advanced civilization is imagined as both heavy with the accumulation of ages of development and also as light with the ease and freedom of civilized order; the weight of a backward civilization as heavy with the burden of chaotic disorder and light with infant newness. Amponah's speech signifies a dangerously backward essence, which is produced by and productive of a dangerously backward culture, and thus the female gothic fantastically constructs colonial Jamaica as the darkened reflection of enlightened Britain.

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<sup>90</sup> Smith, *The Story of Henrietta*, ed. Janina Nordius (Richmond: Valancourt Books, 2012), loc. 3333. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

## The Colonial Mirror: Subjects and Objects

In “The Mirror Stage,” Lacan accounts for a decisive developmental moment in which an infant first recognizes its own image in a mirror. By perceiving this reflection, a transformation takes place in the infant which projects it from the impotency of infancy into the stability of maturity. Though the infant is “still trapped in [its] motor impotence and nursling dependence,” its image in the mirror reflects back a total form of the body, a gestalt, which allows the infant to “anticipate the maturation of [its] power in a mirage.”<sup>91</sup> This mirrored mirage of a total body appears to be “in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it,” but nevertheless allows the infant to imagine a future in which it assumes the identity of that total body reflected in the mirror. The “temporal dialectic” of the mirror stage is, however, anticipatory and retroactive at the same time (78). While the infant anticipates a future moment separate from the present when it will become that which is reflected in the mirror, the infant simultaneously realizes in retrospect that, prior to this present moment, it has been insufficient and dependent.<sup>92</sup> Its movements cannot be understood as “turbulent” until its encounter with the mirror, which reflects a previously unimagined image – unimagined because the infant could not have perceived its being without seeing it reflected as an image – of totality that casts a shadow over the present and the past. The mirror image reflects what the infant will be in contrast to what it is and has been. In addition to introducing a new sense of present, past, and future, the mirror stage inaugurates a previously unknown split between subject and object, self and other. Prior to this moment, the infant is in a narcissistic relation to the world in which it knows no

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<sup>91</sup> Lacan, ““The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), p. 76. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>92</sup> For the play between anticipation and retroaction in “The Mirror Stage” see Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 78-91.

distinction between internal and external. But when the infant catches a glimpse of itself in the mirror, that specular image is both part of and other to the infant's self; it will become that image, but, in the moment, image and self are not yet aligned. By "self" I mean consciousness of one's bodily and cognitive existence, though for Lacan any consciousness of that self is always and only in relation to an other. The image is then an object against which the infant defines itself, and in this opposition, the infant learns that it is a subject in relation to objects external to, other than, that self. This split between subject and object anticipates the alienation that occurs when "the specular *I* turns into the social *I*" (79). In the mirror stage, the infant perceives its specular image as both self and other, and in the ensuing "cultural intervention" of the symbolic order, the subject will learn that the self is always and only other from itself. With the introduction of language, the symbolic turns the subject into an object of and in discourse, and, in retrospect, the mirror stage will appear as a time and place outside the alienating world of symbolic language.

Smith's Henrietta first faces herself in the colonial mirror when she encounters her half-sisters, her father's daughters by his Afro-Caribbean female slaves. By looking at her sisters, who might resemble Henrietta in some way, she looks at a mirror image of herself. Writing to Denbigh, she expresses her horrified shock at these mirrored images by exclaiming, "I would I could escape ever naming them!" (1609). To name is to identify, as in Fanon's account of colonial language and culture, to acknowledge personhood, and Henrietta is unwilling or unable to do this. Rather than identify these young women as volitional human subjects, Henrietta is so troubled by their existence that she consigns them to the world of objects by refusing to name them. They exist always and only as projected mirror images of her self, as optical illusions that cannot be named because doing so would shatter the mirror of fantasy that constructs these

human subjects, with their own identities and experiences entirely separate from Henrietta's, as unnamable objects. Furthermore, Henrietta cannot name her half-sisters because she cannot place them in her understanding of the social order: they are neither masters nor slaves, neither white nor black, neither human subjects nor inanimate objects. Indeed, she cannot categorize the race of her youngest sister, "who is a quadroon – a mestize – I know not what" (1616). What she does observe about this young girl is that she "is nearly as fair as I am," and wonders, "as I am a native of this island, perhaps I have the same cast of countenance without being conscious of it." As Charlotte Sussman notes of this passage, Henrietta's white body is "devalued as a signifier of racial superiority, as physical characteristics prove unstable markers of racial difference."<sup>93</sup> There is no clear demarcation between Henrietta and her "fair" sister, no discrete division between gazing spectator and the object gazed upon: the image in the mirror, perceived to be an object fixed and frozen in time, is in fact a living, breathing being who is capable of gazing right back at Henrietta. And when the mirror image takes on human properties and characteristics, which are almost indistinguishable from Henrietta's, she, in Sussman's words, "undermines the capacity of physical, moral, or cultural differentials to legitimate the racial divisions that uphold slavocracy" (171).

What Henrietta does narrate of her sisters is their "unnatural" interest in material objects, imagining them as shallow, insipid mirror images of the idealized British bourgeois female. According to Henrietta, "their odd manners, their love of finery, and curiosity about my cloths and ornaments, together with their total insensibility to their situation, is, I own, very distressing to me" (1615). In this way, Henrietta imagines her sisters as embodying everything that the

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<sup>93</sup> Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713-1833* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 171. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

morally upright British female subject is supposed to define herself against: indolence, luxury, and insensibility.<sup>94</sup> From Henrietta's perspective, her sisters have no interiority; they are defined by their relation to material objects, their attachment to luxury, and are thus seen as two-dimensional. These mixed-race women become the objects that they are said to hold so dear, and, like these objects, there is no human depth beneath the surface. Stripped of subjectivity, they are seen only as images, as racialized images, "reduc[ing] the ego to skin."<sup>95</sup> Unlike Henrietta's clothes that her sisters are so fascinated by, which cover the contours of the white body (the exteriorization of the human soul), her sisters are flattened into images that are nothing but skin, the clothes they can never take off. Henrietta mistakes *her* obsession with her sisters' racialized skin as *their* obsession with her ornamental clothing. Imagined as empty racialized images lacking interior depth that goes beyond skin, Henrietta's sisters become mirrors that reflect identities against which Henrietta defines her own. As the infant apprehends a split between subject and object, between self and other, in the fantasy of the Lacanian mirror stage, so Henrietta perceives a fundamental split between herself, imagined as a subject, and her sisters, imagined as objects. The colonial subject/object, figured in her mixed-race sisters, becomes the abject other of the colonizing British subject, an other that is necessary in order to define the self as its opposite. Henrietta's early encounter with her sisters thus dramatizes a key "moment" of development that occurs in the colonial scene: the colonizing subject, according to Kelly Oliver, "abjects the black body and thereby fortifies its own identity" (23). In this process of abjection,

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<sup>94</sup> For alternative accounts of luxury as an indicator of economic health and the progress of civilization see Daniela Garofalo, *Women, Love, and Commodity Culture in British Romanticism* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 75-80 and Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (eds.), "The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates," *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) p. 33. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

the colonial other becomes an object fixed and frozen in the imaginary capture of the colonial mirror, which has the appearance of natural reality but is in fact a fantasy constructed by the culture of colonialism.

Though Lacan seems to present the mirror stage as a “real” event in the subject’s maturation process, it is in fact a logical fiction, a fantasy construction. Early in “The Mirror Stage,” Lacan postulates that the infant’s encounter with the mirror “seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic identification with the other, and before language restores to it, the universal, its function as subject” (76). In one reading, the mirror image is a “primordial form,” an early manifestation, of what the infant will become at the symbolic matrix, which comes *after* the mirror stage. However, the imago is the very objectification of “the dialectic identification with the other;” it does not come prior to, but is simultaneous with, this dialectic. And, while the imago appears to be “before language,” language in fact *restores* to the imago its “function as subject,” which implies that its function as subject comes before the imago. Though the imago is imagined as prior to language, language in fact constructs the imago. To restore is to return that which has already been known or held, and in this instance, when language restores to the imago its function as subject, it is an uncanny return of the repressed. The primordial form is not the imago, which will become the subject of the symbolic; it is instead the symbolic subject’s retroactive fantasy of an imago prior to language, prior to being objectified in the dialectic identification with the other. So the mirror stage comes in a “fictional direction;” it is not antecedent to the symbolic world of language, but a fantastical fiction produced within the language of the symbolic.

When she is captured by the Maroons, Henrietta finds herself face to face with a new colonial other: the Maroon chief's mother. Henrietta's response is one of fear and loathing: "I never beheld so hideous, so disgusting a creature; and such was the dread with which I was inspired as she hung over me, that I was once more on the point of losing my misery in insensibility" (3376). This woman is thus depicted as an inhuman monster, a supernatural figure that is so frightening that Henrietta is (almost) rendered senseless. Unlike the typical European gothic heroine, who has the luxury of momentarily escaping a dangerous and terrifying situation by fainting, Henrietta is offered no such reprieve in this colonial encounter. Her terror is so consuming that she cannot respond physiologically the way that she is supposed to; she cannot register and process her psychological terror in and through the body. The Maroon woman is further supernaturalized when Henrietta describes "the menacing attitude and countenance assumed by the sorceress [which] terrified me into submission" (3385). Henrietta distances herself from this woman as much as possible by turning her into a mythical other, a "sorceress," more in line with the fables and romances of the British past than with the reality of the present. By imagining the Maroon woman as a supernatural sorceress of romance, Henrietta captures and contains what she perceives as the threatening presence of the Maroon woman. Instead of existing in reality as a true source of danger, the Maroon woman becomes in Henrietta's mind a fictional construct that exists merely in words on the pages of romance. Henrietta imagines the Maroon woman as existing not only in the fictional world of romance, but also in the historical past associated with the romance. In this way, Henrietta not only projects the fantasy of the British past onto the colonial present, she inadvertently calls attention to the work of fantasy that constructs the colonial other as monstrous and abject. As with a sorceress, who is a fantastical figure of romance, the colonial other is, too, a fantastical figure, a fictional construct, of British

colonialism. Lacan's mirror stage comes in a "fictional direction," in which the imago is fantastically constructed as representative of an imaginary time and space prior to the language of and in the symbolic order, and so too does the colonial gothic work in a fictional direction, in which the colonial other is fantastically constructed as representative of an equally imaginary time and space of the historical past figured in the romance. The Maroon woman is imagined as the abject other, the mirror image, of the British female subject, as are Henrietta's sisters.

Unlike Smith's depictions of the colonial other whose depth is only skin-deep or who exists only as a fantastical figure of romance, Sophia Lee's *The Recess* figures the colonial other as containing an excess of emotion. When Matilda and her infant daughter are kidnapped by the lecherous Mortimer, and taken to his Jamaican plantations, she is saved from a forced marriage by a timely slave rebellion only to find herself imprisoned by the Spanish colonizers who quash the revolt. In their captivity, Matilda's daughter, Mary, attracts the attention of a "gentle black" (147), Anana. Anana's interest in the infant is so strong that she forcibly takes Mary from Matilda's arms, and when she returns Mary to Matilda, she "had lavishly adorned the tender object of a suprizing attachment...her little arms and ancles were encircled with fanciful bracelets, of different coloured beads, while her hands bore a gilt basket, filled with the fruits of the country." Though Anana seems to be as interested as Henrietta's sisters in the luxury of material objects, she proves her "suprizing attachment" is based on maternal care rather than lavish adornment. In fact, Matilda observes, Anana's "fondness for my daughter [is] scarce inferior to my own" (149). When Anana is infected with small pox, "she threw herself into such agonies," which, according to Matilda, is characteristic of "the apprehensions people of Anana's complexion [which] contribute, most probably, to render it so fatal" (150). In Matilda's imagination, colonial others respond to disease with a kind of superstitious apprehension; they

endow it with supernatural terror and power, and in so doing, cause their own deaths. In the midst of such superstitious “agonies,” Anana is “delirious alike with the dreadful malady, and extreme fondness for my daughter.” The maternal affection that Anana holds for Mary is thus conflated with the delirium of disease; the “extreme fondness” seems to refer both to the child and to the colonial other’s perceived attachment to the superstitious expression and apprehension of infection. In Anana’s delirium of “extreme fondness,” she begs to see Mary as a last “wild and erroneous” request (151). It is unclear whether this request demonstrates Anana’s ignorance that she might very well infect Mary with her disease, or simply a lack of care. On the one hand, Anana is imagined as ignorant as well as superstitious, and on the other, she is so inflamed by delirious passion, an unchecked version of maternal love, that she is willing to risk Mary’s health in order to satisfy her own desires. And when Matilda finds “reason ineffectual” with Anana, she succumbs and brings her “little treasure” to Anana’s “bed of infection and death...with a resignation I could only compare to that of Abraham.” In contrast to the ornaments with which Anana first decorated Mary, for Matilda, it is Mary herself who is the “treasure.” Thus, in Matilda’s portrait of Anana, the colonial other is depicted as “wild and erroneous” in contrast to the “reason” that characterizes the British female subject.

Like Anana, the women who participate in the slave rebellion are similarly imagined as wild and excessive in their emotions. When Spanish forces respond to the rebellion, Matilda observes that some of the female rebels, “rendered furious by the occasion, followed with such scattered weapons as they could collect, and the rest, no less tamed, gathered themselves and hapless children around me, as if I could preserve them; pursuing their friends with a cry that might shake the throne of mercy” (142). These enslaved women are divided into two camps –

active warriors and passive observers – and both reflect racist fantasies of colonial subjectivity.<sup>96</sup> While one group is imagined as abandoning their feminine qualities in the violence of battle, the other as so helpless that they assume Matilda can protect them. This desperate helplessness is imagined as equally unfeminine, lacking in moral resignation and fortitude. But the helpless women are constructed as simultaneously passive and animalistic; like their counterparts in battle, they are “no less tamed,” and are capable of producing a wild cry that has the power to “shake the throne of mercy.” When the throne of mercy ignores this wild cry, and the Spanish emerge victorious, “those guilty but unfortunate women, prostrating themselves before the presented pieces, endeavoured, by the most submissive gestures, and offers of their children, to assuage the wrath of the incensed victors” (142). In this way, these women are represented as so violently submissive that they are not only willing to debase themselves, but to abandon their children. As with their wild cry, the women’s willingness to sacrifice their children makes them inhuman creatures of the wild rather than loving, sentimental mothers of the civilized world. Indeed, their sacrificial offers are directly opposed to Matilda’s moral and affective dilemma when she must sacrifice her daughter to Anana’s passions. These depictions of colonial women who appear to misunderstand the “nature” of maternal love, imagined both as an inalienable instinct and as a culturally conventional display of that instinct, thus appear as backward in civilization, as naturally and culturally incapable of feeling and expressing the highest of female emotions.<sup>97</sup> In the fantasy of the colonial mirror, enslaved and colonial female subjects are the abjected others of British female subjects in their perceived ability, or inability, to experience

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<sup>96</sup> In actuality, many of the slave rebellions that occurred over the eighteenth century (at least seventy-five) were indeed led by women. See Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 70.

<sup>97</sup> For an account of maternity and the colonial scene see Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 22-47.

and express maternal affection. While the British mother, figured in *Matilda*, is matured, rational, and sentimental in her care for her infant, enslaved and colonial mothers, figured in the rebel slaves and Anana, are infantile, irrational, and unsentimental. These female subjects are not only mirrored others of the British subject of enlightenment, they are also mirrors of their own children: helpless, immature, and uncultivated. Colonial Jamaica, figured in its mothers, is thus depicted in an infantile stage of historical development in Lee's novel. But, in the way that the mirror stage is a retroactive fantasy of the child's development from impotent infant to masterful adult, the construction of the colonial state and its inhabitants as a form of childhood in contrast to the matured adulthood of British enlightenment is built by the work of gothic fantasy.

### **The Colonial Mirror: Nature and Culture**

*Henrietta* and *The Recess* misrecognize the colonial present of Jamaica as a mirror image of the British past, which we see in the fantastic relation between nature and culture in these texts. In discussing eighteenth-century exploration of the South Pacific, Kathleen Wilson argues that "theories of social evolution, grounded upon a view of the essentially 'progressive' character of humankind and human society, allowed British observers to see in the customs, gender relations or technologies of primitive societies 'mirrors' of their earlier selves...in the versions of evolutionary progress being canvassed, rationality itself, as well as custom, material culture, sexual politics and physical characteristics, became intractable parts of the progression from a lower to a higher humanity."<sup>98</sup> Wilson continues to invoke the image of the mirror as her argument progresses: "the Pacific present and British past mirrored each other, and the Pacific peoples became imaginatively associated with the customs of English people's own ancestors"

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<sup>98</sup> Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 78. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

(87). In my consideration of two female gothic works, the same mirroring work that Wilson describes in the South Pacific occurs in Britain's image of the Caribbean. While Wilson's argument applies to the indigenous peoples of the Pacific islands, and Smith's and Lee's works consider a combination of white Creoles, Afro-Caribbeans, and captive African peoples, all of these populations are imagined as part of a primitive colonial society that is opposed to the enlightened age of the British present. And to make sense of the supposedly primitive society of Jamaica in a "state of nature," these texts transform the colonial present into a mirror image of the British past through the gothic fantasy of history.

As Botting describes the European gothic mirror, these female gothic texts that construct colonial gothic mirrors image the colonial "past" in a double relation of distance and proximity. By projecting the British past onto the Jamaican present, the female gothic claims a kind of historical and cultural continuity, a vision of universal human development that applies to all societies; but at the same time, it undermines this vision by creating a deep chasm between a lower and higher order of humanity. Both versions of such projections are gothic fantasy constructions. While the female gothic reveals the work of fantasy that goes into creating the enlightenment's perception of itself as an age of reason and progress, it simultaneously participates in this fantasy of enlightenment, which constructs colonial Jamaica as a darkened reflection of the British past. Smith's *Henrietta* is a particularly pertinent example of the fantastic construction of the colonial "past" as mirror image of the British past in its depictions of tyranny, unchecked passions, superstition, and violence.

Lacan uses phylogenetic language throughout "The Mirror Stage" to further confuse the fantastic temporality of the subject's assumption into the symbolic, which manifests as a

confused relation between nature and culture.<sup>99</sup> In the first sentences of the essay, Lacan compares the human infant to a chimpanzee who, at this developmental stage, is in fact more intelligently advanced than the infant. From the beginning, the human subject is seen in relation to nature, and put in the context of evolutionary development. Read this way, the “beginning” refers simultaneously to the start of the text and to the origins of the species. It would seem, then, that the essay would chart the progressive maturation of infancy into adulthood, of untamed nature into civilized culture. In this reading, nature and culture are inextricably linked in a relation of cause and effect. But in the text the figure of the natural world, the chimpanzee, is more developmentally advanced than the figure of the cultural world, the infant. The infant and the chimpanzee are thus in a mirrored relation to one another: the chimpanzee is the specular image of what the infant will become. Nature exceeds culture. Instead of evolving from primate to human, from nature to culture, “The Mirror Stage” charts culture’s evolution into nature. What appears to be the natural cause is actually the cultural effect: the mirror stage is not the cause but the imaginary effect of the symbolic order. But in the fantasy of the mirror stage, which is retroactively “prior to his social dialectic,” the infant recognizes “an organic inadequacy of his natural reality – assuming we can give some meaning to the word ‘nature’” (77). So the “organic inadequacy of his natural reality” is neither organic nor natural; it is a fantasy based on the inadequacy of the reality of the symbolic. Lacan reveals as much when he questions whether we can give any meaning to the word “nature;” he reveals that nature is a fantasy of culture. The

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<sup>99</sup> Adrian Johnston argues on the contrary that Lacanian theory is fundamentally incompatible with the phylogenetic. See his “Reflections of a Rotten Nature: Hegel, Lacan and Material Negativity,” *Genealogies of Speculation: Materialism and Subjectivity Since Structuralism*, eds. Suhail Malik and Armen Avanessian (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 41-45 and *Prolegomena to any Future Materialism: The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), pp. 61-76. For a discussion of the intersection of the natural and the cultural in Lacan see Gilbert Chaitin, *Rhetoric and Culture in Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 60-62.

evolution of the human subject's maturation is not a natural progression of insufficient infancy to masterful maturity, but instead works, as with the gothic, within a fantastic temporal framework in which the effect comes before the cause.

Smith's mirrored image of the British historical past sinisterly captures the African and African-descended men and women of the island. In her portrayal of their supposed love of superstition, Smith places these figures backwards in historical time, in an infantile and uncivilized stage of history, and in so doing imagines them in a lower order of humanity opposed to the matured and advanced stage of history and humanity in the British present. Henrietta observes that the enslaved men and women of her father's plantation "have some strange superstitious notions...some wild and absurd impression or other in regard to every object that surrounds them" (1891). Henrietta's preoccupation with the "wild and absurd" notions surrounding material objects places the perceived superstition of the colonial present in relation to the supposed superstition of Britain's own Catholic past, which, in the gothic fantasy of history, was a form of barbaric iconoclasm.<sup>100</sup>

In "On Fable and Romance," James Beattie attributes the Catholic superstition of the feudal past to a lack of education and commerce, which both offer opportunities for increased knowledge about the individual's relation to history and to the larger world. "Navigation and industry were neglected; and, except on pilgrimage to the shrines of saints, people seldom travelled beyond the bounds of their native country, or native province," Beattie observes; and "being equally uninformed of what was now happening in other countries, they would without scruple give credit to any fabulous reports that might be told them, concerning what was to be

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<sup>100</sup> For the gothic association of the feudal past with the superstition of Catholicism see Diane Long Hoeveler, "Demonizing the Catholic Other: Religion and the Secularization Process in Gothic Literature," *Transnational Gothic: Literary and Social Exchanges in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Monika Elbert and Bridget Marshall (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 89-95.

seen in foreign parts...and when once people were satisfied, that such things were common in other lands, it was natural for them to believe, that they were not uncommon in their own,” leading to the “extravagance of fancy, and love of superstition.”<sup>101</sup> Not simply a lack of access to education, but the absence of a capitalist economy contributes to the Catholic superstition of the feudal past from Beattie’s perspective. The feudal state was then devoid of an understanding of the self *and* of the function of capital. By contrast, the British present is enlightened because it has advanced into a proper (Protestant) relation of self to spirit and a proper (capitalist) relation of self to commerce.

In the way that Beattie characterizes the superstition of the feudal past, Smith similarly imagines the enslaved as not only uneducated, but incapable of learning, which leaves them vulnerable and prone to, in Beattie’s words, the “extravagance of fancy, and love of superstition.” According to Henrietta, the “vices and superstitions of the negroes, are too apt to imbibe both the one and the other; and what attempts have been made to give them other ideas, seem to me only to have made in their minds a sort of ‘darkness visible’” (1900). While Beattie attributes the superstition of the feudal past to a crude state of civilization, which will eventually be outgrown and left behind in the forward movement of history, Smith attributes the superstition of the enslaved to their constitution, to an inherent inability to understand and accept the ideas and practices of a more advanced state of civilization. That Henrietta can quote Milton in her account casts into relief the work of fantasy that constructs a stark contrast between the educated and civilized British subject and the ignorant and superstitious enslaved colonial subject. Though Smith does not specify whether she believes the enslaved Jamaicans are

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<sup>101</sup> Beattie, “On Fable and Romance,” *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London: W. Strahan, 1783), pp. 519-520. All subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

superstitious, backward in historical time, because, like their inability to be educated, they are also unable to understand the structure of capitalism, when read with Beattie's analysis of the feudal past, we might imagine this as a possibility. To imagine superstitious colonial Jamaica in a mirror relation to the feudal economy of the British historical past is of course a deeply misguided fantasy given that the operation of capitalism in the long eighteenth century (and beyond) was inextricably linked with the institution of slavery.

The superstition that Henrietta attributes to the enslaved Jamaicans stems, she believes, from the practice of Obeah or Obi, a West African-based religious practice found mostly in the British West Indies. As Beattie imagines in the Catholic feudal past that "priests, deluded themselves with visionary legends... find it in their interest to deceive, amuse, and terrify the vulgar" (520), so Henrietta believes that Obeah leaders delude the "vulgar," the uneducated and uneducable enslaved population, into believing in their "supernatural powers" (1895).

Attempting to make sense of these imagined figures of superstition, Henrietta compares the Obi men and women to "the witches of Macbeth round the magic cauldron" (1896). In this way, Henrietta fantastically captures and contains the unknown in the world of fiction. By comparing Obeah leaders to Shakespeare's witches, Henrietta diffuses any potential threat posed by Obeah by turning it into a fictional practice. Obeah, then, is not only imagined as an infantile belief in primitive superstition, irreconcilable with the enlightened reason of the historical present, but also as irreconcilable with the laws of reality and thus relegated to a fictional status.

Furthermore, in this reference to one of the primary inspirations for the eighteenth-century gothic romance, Shakespeare, we are reminded of the fictional status of Smith's own gothic work. As in the mirror relation between colonial present and British past, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Smith's *Henrietta* mirror one another, and the work of fantasy in one reflects back on the other.

It is not Obeah that is fictional, fantastically placed backward in the historical past; Smith's work itself is a gothic fantasy of history that imagines Obeah as a primitive superstition. In this depiction of Obeah, Smith actually depicts a fantasy of fantasy.

While Henrietta misunderstands the practice of Obeah as a form of primitive superstition, a fictional and fantastic construct, she also seems to anxiously believe in its power. Writing to Denbigh, she reveals that "it is weak and ridiculous, I know, and you, my friend, will severely reprove me for it...but I will not disguise my folly: there are times when the hideous phantasies of these poor uninformed savages affect my spirits with a sort of dread, which all my conviction of their fallacy does not enable me to subdue" (1893). Henrietta's ambivalent perception of Obeah as both harmless superstition and uncontrollable power reflects contemporary anxieties about the spiritual practice on the island.<sup>102</sup> Though it is "weak and ridiculous," Henrietta is vulnerable to Obeah superstition simply, it seems, because she is in close proximity to its believers and practitioners. In a kind of fear of contagion of the mind, Henrietta does not appear to have much faith in the solidity of the Protestant bourgeois values with which she was raised, in her ability to withstand the imagined weakness and vices of those around her. In this way, Henrietta carries a "superstitious" fear of the contagion of superstition. That which she perceives as infantile and barbaric in the enslaved population is actually Henrietta's own inability to believe in the narrative of enlightened historical progress. On one hand, we might read this fear of superstition's power to infect as further proof of the inescapable barbarity of the colonial present, which is so powerful that it threatens the reason of even the most faithful bourgeois British subject; on the other, proof of the fragile and labile fantasy of enlightenment, which is

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<sup>102</sup> See Kirsten Raupach, "The Art of Darkness: Representations of the Obeah Woman in British Fiction," *Religion in African-American Culture*, eds. Winifred Herget and Alfred Hornung (Heidelberg: Winter, 2006), pp. 29-35.

subject to shatter at the slightest touch. The fantasy of the colonial state as backward in historical time because of the pervasive (and primitive) belief in superstition is at once the mirror image of the fantasy of the British past and the captured image of the fantastic construction of the enlightened British present.

As *Henrietta* participates in the fantasy of the colonial state as mirror image of the British historical past in its depiction of superstition, it similarly imagines Jamaica in a perpetual state of violence and war befitting eighteenth-century Britain's fantasy of its own feudal past. In *Henrietta's* fantasy of the colonial present, the frequent threat of violence by Maroons, or rebel ex-slaves, is represented as an innate quality of a lower order of humanity, of an uncivilized and barbaric historical past. However, in Smith's depiction of the Maroons, she captures contemporary British anxiety surrounding revolutionary movements in the colonies as well as "at home," revealing that a state of war and violence is not in fact a characteristic of the imagined feudal past but of the reality of the present. The gothic fantasy of the colonial present as mirror image of the British past is, then, based on a pervading sense of fear and anxiety within the present.

As the British imaginary presupposed a connection between Obeah, synonymous with superstition, and insurrection in the colonies,<sup>103</sup> so Beattie links the feudal "love of fighting" with the "popery and ignorance" of superstitious Catholicism (539). While Beattie constructs the Crusades as the most fitting emblem of this joined love of fighting and superstition, Richard Hurd attributes "perpetual violence, rapine, and plunder" to the internal structure of feudalism

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<sup>103</sup> For the linked fear of Obeah and insurrection see Alan Richardson, "Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807," *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, eds. Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 179-190.

itself, which “breathed nothing but war.”<sup>104</sup> Both accounts of the feudal past capture the fantasy of the colonial present as backward in historical time because of its propensity for violence, which signals an uneducated and uncultivated stage of humanity. In one reading, *Henrietta* fits into the abolitionist tradition, as when Henrietta attributes the Maroon violence to “savages driven to desperation” by the horrors of slavery (1706). From this perspective, the African and African-descended people of the island are not constitutionally “savage,” but are forced to regress into a primitive state of violence because of the barbarity that attends slavery. But when Henrietta describes the Maroon and enslaved populations as “thirsting for the blood of any who resembled even in colour their hereditary oppressors,” she betrays her belief in a racialized fantasy of history, in which African and African-descended colonial inhabitants are violently “savage,” backward in history and humanity, by nature (1706).

Henrietta’s love interest, Denbigh, similarly imagines the Maroons as inhuman in their perceived propensity for violence. When he is captured by a group of Maroons, he describes the “Indian nakedness oddly intermingled with military ornaments; their dark faces, and that peculiar look of ferocity which the eye of the negro rolling in its deep socket gives to the whole race of Africans, and which was, in one instance, rendered more so by the plumed helmet of an English soldier, whom the black had killed and stripped; in another by a sort of turban, from which waved the scarlet feathers of the mackaw; and in a third by part of an old uniform, and a laced hat” (2051). What seems particularly troubling to Denbigh is the “oddly intermingled,” the hybrid, status of the Maroons, who lie somewhere in between nature and culture. Their nakedness combined with the “peculiar look of ferocity” attributed to their rolling eyes place the Maroons not only in an animalistic state of nature, but also in a supernatural realm. Though the

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<sup>104</sup> Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), p. 14. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

attribution of rolling eyes to the animalistic black body was a common British depiction, this image seems equally fitting for a supernatural demon of the gothic. In Denbigh's depiction of the black body as simultaneously animalistic and supernatural, nature becomes unnatural. And this conception of an unnatural nature is further compounded by the unnatural use of cultural objects, which highlight the Maroons' natural violence. Juxtaposed with the Maroons' nakedness and ferocity, the military ornaments lose their cultural signification and instead come to signify the Maroons' fundamental inability to understand and participate in the world of enlightened culture. These military ornaments are purchased with English blood, and thus figure the fantasy of an inherently violent nature and backward culture of the colonies and their inhabitants, which are not only the mirror image of the British past, but are moreover at war with the cultural values of the British present.

Henrietta's description of the Maroon woman echoes Denbigh's in her preoccupation with the woman's ornamented body: "this negress was a fat and heavy creature, her neck and arms ornamented with beads, strung seeds, and pieces of mother of pearl; and though there was an affectation of European dress, she was half naked, and her frightful bosom loaded with finery was displayed most disgustingly" (3380). This description further distances the woman from the natural order of humanity; she is a grotesque caricature. Diametrically opposed to the soft and delicate features of the idealized white European body, the Maroon woman is not only "fat and heavy," she is a "creature," not a human being. Her bosom is, moreover, "frightful," which dehumanizes her by projecting horror onto her female features. The ornaments that she displays "most disgustingly" range from the common commodity (beads) to luxury goods (mother of pearl) to products of nature (seeds), grotesquely intermingling objects of nature and culture,

which come together with the effect of travesty.<sup>105</sup> The Maroon woman further misunderstands the division between nature and culture in her “affectation of European dress,” which is contrasted with her half-naked body. Imagined as outside the British social order, the Maroon woman is placed backward in time in a state of nature as opposed to the enlightened state of civilization of the present. Like Henrietta’s sisters, the woman seems to be preoccupied with “finery,” with the ornamental. Though she ornaments herself with cultural objects, with “finery,” she does so in excess, which indicates a misunderstanding of the function of ornamentation, placing her closer to nature than to civilized culture. And as in Lacan’s “The Mirror Stage,” in which nature and culture are in a confused relation of fantasy with one another, so does *Henrietta* confuse the fantastic relation between nature and culture. Nature is in a mirrored relation with culture and culture with nature. While Henrietta imagines herself as an enlightened figure of culture in contrast to the uncivilized figure of nature, the Maroon woman, when we consider that this woman has also been imagined as a supernatural figure of romance, we see that, as in Lacan’s essay, nature is a fantasy of culture. Or, more accurately, the historical past, imaginatively conflated with nature, is a fantasy of the historical present, imaginatively conflated with culture.

### **The Colonial Mirror and the Fantasy of History**

In the fantasy of the Lacanian mirror stage, upon assumption into the symbolic, the *I* turns “into an apparatus to which every instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation process. The very normalization of this maturation is henceforth dependent in man on cultural intervention” (79). In the world of the symbolic, it

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<sup>105</sup> For the relation between nature and culture in the context of colonial slavery see Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), pp. 172-175.

would seem that the nature of the subject becomes dangerous; nature becomes unnatural. The subject's instincts are alienated from its being, which becomes an "apparatus," a mechanical object that is perpetually threatened with destruction from the pressure of the friction between nature and culture. However, these instincts are not in fact productions of nature, but of "cultural intervention," they are "mediated by the other's desire." So nature does not become unnatural through the alienating process of cultural intervention; instead, the natural is always a product of cultural intervention, which produces a fantasy of an instinctual nature with which the alienated subject must part. As the essay moves toward its conclusion, Lacan compares the *I* to various cultural objects from "armor" to a "rigid structure," a "fortified camp, or even a stadium – distributing, between the arena within its walls and its outer border of gravel-pits and marshes, two opposed fields of battle" (78). In the world of the symbolic, the subject is in a state of war with itself, with its competing conceptions of nature and of culture. Furthermore, this figuration of symbolic warfare brings to mind the feudal past with which the gothic is so preoccupied. The gothic imagines the historical past as an uncivilized state of untamed natural passions – including a propensity for violence and war – in contrast to the civilized maturity of the enlightened present; but Lacan imagines the matured subject of the symbolic as part of a violently alienated *present* due to the effects of cultural intervention. While it would seem that the natural subject imaged in the mirror stage transforms into a cultural creature of violence and war, the symbolic subject, figured in relation to impenetrable cultural objects, retroactively transforms its self into one that has been alienated from its natural state. But as with the gothic's fantastic conception of history, Lacan's is similarly ambivalent. At the same time that the gothic produces a fantastic version of history in which a barbaric past has evolved into an enlightened present, it simultaneously longs for an idealized past of freedom and simplicity free from the constraints of

the civilized and alienating present. In much the same way, though the Lacanian subject of the symbolic retroactively produces a lost past prior to the alienating effects of culture, the fantasy of the mirror stage imagines the infant in a state of dependency and insufficiency as opposed to the mastery of adulthood in the symbolic. In one sense, the Lacanian mirror stage works along with the female gothic in “a double temporal movement” in which the future becomes “a site of dark projection... [a] place of destruction and decay, spectral fears and primitive energies, [a] fictional world in which the future is as ruined as the past.”<sup>106</sup> In another sense, in both Lacanian and female gothic fantasies of history, “the movement is prospective,” “the self-image of the present is pressed forwards in an anticipatory, imaginary recovery of self on another plane;” “it is not a movement between fixed poles, a movement that leaves either past or present intact, but a rhythm in which history and writing are mobile” (205).

Henrietta’s father is the prototypical gothic tyrant transferred from the moldering castles of the European feudal past to the plantations of the colonial Jamaican present. Born on the island, Maynard from an early age “had been [so] used to exercise caprices of a very bad temper on half a dozen African boys and girls” that, upon arriving in England for his education, he “conceived such an aversion from a place where he had been on the footing of equality with other boys, that he never desired to revisit Europe. From being a despot on his own estate, he imagined he might exercise unbounded authority over every being that belonged to him” (2426). In Richard Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, he explains that feudal barons, or “puny princes,” were given so much power over their subjects that “they set up for themselves; affected an independency; and were, in truth, a sort of absolute Sovereigns” (7). Using Hurd as a source

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<sup>106</sup> Botting, *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 85-86. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

in “On Fable and Romance,” James Beattie compares the tyranny of feudal barons to that of “petty kings,” and describes the feudal past as a state in which “publick justice was eluded, and the authority of the law despised: and a wicked and powerful baron, secure within his own castle, would even defy the power of the sovereign himself” (541). Both Hurd and Beattie are concerned with the amount of power given to feudal barons, which threatens to disrupt the social order when it becomes so great that the power of the feudal nobility overshadows the power of the sovereign. In fact, according to Beattie, there is no proper social order to disrupt in a feudal state because the unchecked power held by the nobility is incompatible with “publick justice” and the “authority of the law.” Maynard’s tyrannical power in the colonial present is thus commensurate with the “puny princes” and “petty kings” of the feudal past. While, according to the narrative of enlightenment, Britain has evolved from its past of petty tyranny and social disorder to become a land of liberty and justice, colonial Jamaica is imagined as being stuck in a barbarous historical past. Maynard cannot assimilate into the enlightened British social order because it places everyone “on the footing of equality,” so he must return to Jamaica, travel backwards in time and space, where he is free to “exercise unbounded authority.”

In addition to his love of tyranny, Maynard is represented as a figure of the feudal past in his sexual licentiousness, which is ultimately a function of his tyrannical power. When Henrietta first arrives in Jamaica, she is shocked to learn that she has a host of half-siblings by her father and his female slaves.<sup>107</sup> A select few of Maynard’s daughters are a part of the household, though all are “considered attached to the soil” (1285), and Henrietta is doubly shocked when

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<sup>107</sup> What is unclear is whether Henrietta’s awkwardness reveals any inkling that this “sex” with enslaved women, who, as his property, would not have the power of consent, is in fact rape. See Joseph C. Dorsey, “‘It Hurt Very Much at the Time’: Patriarchy, Rape Culture, and the Slave Body-Semiotic,” *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. Linden Lewis (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), pp. 193-196.

she finds that “the awkwardness I felt when I was first under the necessity of addressing myself to them, seemed very wonderful to the people here, who see nothing extraordinary or uncommon in such an arrangement as my father has made in his family” (1612). No doubt Henrietta’s “awkwardness” stems from the knowledge that her father is engaged in sex outside marriage and that the British anxiety surrounding miscegenation in the colonies is in fact grounded in the reality of Smith’s creation. Henrietta’s half-siblings, particularly her sisters who reside in the household, “become symbols of her father’s degradation, a further sign of the descent into ‘savagery.’”<sup>108</sup> Maynard appears to be unable or unwilling to check his sexual passions, which marks him as a degraded “savage;” his unchecked passions place him in a lower order of humanity, in an uncivilized and unenlightened stage of history. Furthermore, colonial Jamaican culture itself is implicated in this savagery because no one other than Henrietta seems troubled by her father’s behavior. This savagery is not only associated with the constitution of white Creoles in the British imaginary, but also with the sexual and cultural miscegenation of life in the Caribbean colonies. Maynard is a “slave” to his passions because he is a Creole *and* because of the degenerating impact of chattel slavery. In one reading, the savage (uncivilized and unenlightened) institution of slavery is the perceived cause of the white Creole’s degeneracy; in another, it is contact with the uncivilized and unenlightened slaves themselves. In both instances, Maynard’s sexual licentiousness figures the fantasy of a primitive colonial society that is opposed to the enlightened age of the British present.

Not simply Maynard’s sexual “degradation,” but also his domestic arrangement is horrifying for Henrietta. Instead of a sentimental nuclear family safe in the confines of the

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<sup>108</sup> George Boulukos, “The Horror of Hybridity: Enlightenment, Anti-Slavery and Racial Disgust in Charlotte Smith’s *Story of Henrietta* (1800),” in *Slavery and the Cultures of Abolition: Essays Marking the Bicentennial of the British Abolition Act of 1807*, eds. Brycchan Carey and Peter Kitson (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2007) p. 94.

private domestic sphere, Maynard's family incites gothic horror in Henrietta because his children are illegitimate and because there is no distinction between public and private. His daughters (and presumably their mothers) are both "attached to the soil" and are "received into the house." Henrietta can perceive no neat divisions or categories of family roles by which she has learned to understand the form and function of family. Resembling more a clan system of the feudal past than the nuclear family of the British present, Maynard's family represents the imagined perception of the colonial state as backward and uncivilized. Henrietta goes on to refer to her father's domestic arrangement in his household as a "seraglio" (1763), which Samuel Johnson defines as "a house for women kept for debauchery."<sup>109</sup> Though we know that Henrietta's half-sisters live in the house, Smith never clarifies whether their mothers do too, leaving room for speculation that the "debauchery" of this domestic arrangement includes incest between Maynard and Henrietta's sisters. A common trope in the gothic romance, incest figures contemporary anxieties surrounding the ascendancy of the nuclear and sentimental bourgeois family; it becomes associated with an uncivilized state of society, with unchecked passions and a fundamental misunderstanding of the function of family.<sup>110</sup> That Maynard may possibly have incestuous relations with his daughters places him in a barbaric historical past, which is inimical to the bourgeois values of the enlightened British present. Whether or not he engages in incest, Maynard's seraglio certainly takes on another of its meanings: a harem. In this way, Smith confuses East and West, Orient and Caribbean, and projects the imagined figure of the languid and licentious Oriental onto the sexually depraved Creole. As with the imagined Oriental harem,

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<sup>109</sup> "Seraglio," *A Dictionary of the English Language*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1766.

<sup>110</sup> For accounts of incest portrayed as a misunderstanding of family relations in the gothic specifically see Margot Gayle Backus, *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) pp. 217-238, and in the eighteenth-century novel generally see Ellen Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel, 1684-1814* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 184.

Maynard's female slaves (and perhaps his own daughters) who make up his seraglio are his sexual property, confined to an existence in which their sole purpose is to provide sexual service. Priding their nation for the high value it places on women, British historiographers consider this value as a marker of an enlightened state of civilization, and the supposedly uncontainable sexuality of colonial subjects – white and black, male and female – of a savage and barbaric state. Maynard's seraglio, then, is a metonymy for the colonial state of Jamaica, which is imagined as backward in historical time and irreconcilable with the values of the British present.

Maynard's tyrannical love of power extends not only to his enslaved property, but also to Henrietta herself. He is the antithesis of the benevolent, bourgeois father figure, and views Henrietta not as a sentimental object of filial affection but as a means to further advance his power on the island. Henrietta learns after her arrival that her father has summoned her from England to Jamaica for the sole purpose of marrying her off. For Maynard, marriage is not a tie of love, affection, and respect, as the bourgeois narrative of enlightenment would have it, but is an economic opportunity for accumulation more in line with the eighteenth-century perception of the feudal nobility. Henrietta is not a feeling, willful agent; she is a pawn. The man of Maynard's choice, Sawkins, is oddly not an equally powerful figure with whom Maynard can form a politic alliance, but is in fact a low-level employee on his plantation. Maynard, then, does not seek to consolidate and expand his power, but to concentrate the limited power he already holds in his "strange resolution to *raise* a dependent to the rank of his son-in-law; to make the fortune of a man in humble life wholly dependent on, and owing every thing to him" (1636). Maynard is not only a failed father figure who holds no sentimental attachment to his daughter, he is also a failed capitalist. The accumulation he seeks is not of capital. He does not work within a capitalist but a feudal economy, in which power has more currency than wealth. Instead

of making an economically advantageous choice for Henrietta's husband, he chooses a greater degree of power, which he can wield over both Henrietta and Sawkins. This is an especially odd choice, given that in reality the slavocracy of the Caribbean colonies offered opportunities for white men and women alike to considerably increase their social rank and wealth. Smith's father-in-law in fact acquired his own money from Caribbean slave labor. But in *Henrietta*, Maynard's tyrannical love of power exceeds his economic interests, placing him outside the capitalist economy of the present and backwards in history. Thus, according to the gothic fantasy of history, colonial Jamaica is a mirror image of the British past, a darkened reflection of its own enlightened present.

Henrietta equates her father's tyranny toward herself with his power as a slave owner, drawing an equivalence between a forced marriage and captive labor. She introduces Sawkins as "the person for whose slave my father designs me" (1641), and as the fateful plan progresses she observes that "lawyers have been some days in the house drawing up the bill of sale, for what else can I call it? He has been used to purchase slaves, and feels no repugnance in selling his daughter to the most dreadful of all slavery!" (1748). Charlotte Sussman argues that the equality Henrietta imagines between herself and enslaved women is "based not, as abolitionists would claim, on shared domestic sentiments, but rather on their similarly disempowered positions in patriarchal culture...if a white woman becomes the subject of physical force, her body becomes virtually indistinguishable from a slave's," which, according to Sussman, is "the most startling connection Smith's novel suggests, but does not elaborate" (172). As Janina Nordius puts it in her introduction to *Henrietta*: "Smith equates the disempowered position of women with African slavery, making the horrors of the one reflect back on the other;" and in so doing, she reveals "how the present is still haunted by a despotism more befitting a feudal past than the dawning

nineteenth century” (699). From a twenty-first-century perspective, it is indeed problematic to equate the situation of bourgeois white women with that of African and African-descended slaves, though it was not uncommon to do so in the long eighteenth century;<sup>111</sup> but both Sussman and Nordius seem to overlook the troubling implications of establishing such an equivalence. Setting aside these problems, however, we see that Smith’s female gothic work, while deeply entrenched in the racist fantasies of eighteenth-century Britain, simultaneously calls attention to the enlightenment’s fantasy of itself as an age of reason and progress. In one light, Maynard’s tyrannical plan to force Henrietta into an unwanted marriage is further evidence that, according to the gothic fantasy of history, colonial Jamaica is stuck in a feudal past; in another, it dramatizes the impossible situation in which British women were placed in the long eighteenth century. In an age of reason, natural rights, and progress for a select few, married women were the property and responsibility of their husbands in a parallel, not equivalent, situation to enslaved black women. While *Henrietta* presents Jamaica as backward and barbaric, a mirror image of Britain’s outgrown feudal past, it is also a mirror that reflects back the reality of “enlightenment.”

The female gothic’s fantasy of colonialism thus reveals significant, unavoidable holes in its own mode of critique. At the same time that it radically calls attention to the untenable conditions of life for eighteenth-century British women, it inflicts and perpetuates colonial violence in its reactionary depictions of colonial scenes and subjects. So while there *are* elements of critique within *Henrietta* and *The Recess*, we must acknowledge their participation in the colonialist culture they at times call into question. Stephen Frosh has argued that

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<sup>111</sup> For a sustained discussion of British women’s conflation of their situation with enslaved women see Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22-39.

psychoanalysis is haunted by its colonialist origins. As he explains, “the key issue here is the location of psychoanalysis in a historical and cultural position that aligns it not with critical and progressive trends but rather with *repressive* factors that if anything maintain the presence of ghostly remainders of the past – and continuing – oppression.”<sup>112</sup> When read alongside psychoanalytic theory, we see that the female gothic is too haunted not only by omissions and erasures but also by acts of violence. The colonial mirror complicates the gothic fantasy of history and shrouds it in darkness; it involves gothic fantasy in the horror it purports to expose. Some critics write off psychoanalysis because of its colonial ghosts, they dismiss it altogether because of its violent history, and I suppose those critics might similarly disavow the female gothic of the long eighteenth century because it is haunted by those same ghosts and that same history. Frosh justifies the continued use of psychoanalysis as a way of bringing “these hauntings to consciousness” (169), and acknowledging “messages from the past of what the future will become if we do nothing about it” (168). My contention is that actively working to shed light on the ghosts that haunt the female gothic and its fantasy of history certainly does not exorcise these ghosts but instead acknowledges them as inextricably linked and uses them productively as tools to expose harm and injustice.

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<sup>112</sup> Frosh, *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 6. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

## Chapter Four Fragmented Documents

This final chapter examines the gothic fantasy of history as mediated by written documents in two novels that serve as bookends of the long eighteenth century's female gothic tradition: Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1785) and *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey* (1797), written by an author known only as Mrs. Carver. While all of the novels I have previously discussed participate in the gothic fantasy of history, the reimagining of a lost historical past based on a sense of fear and loss within the historical present, *The Recess* and *Oakendale Abbey* enact this historical sensibility as a means of *exposing* its construction in fantasy. Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, Roche's *Clermont*, Smith's *Henrietta*, and even Lee's Jamaican episode in *The Recess* all convey a certain degree of ambivalence in their constructions of the historical past and present. They call attention to the work of fantasy that goes into their imaginings of the past, clearly at some times and covertly at others, but there is always a lingering belief in, or at least the *desire* to believe in, the "truth" or "reality" of that imagined past, whether it is one infused with fear or loss. The same may be said of these novels' constructions of the historical present: though they tear apart the veil of fantasy that goes into the enlightenment's perception of itself as an age of progress and reason in the face of unimpeachable evidence of the contrary, they also maintain a degree of faith in the truth or reality of that fantasy. However, Lee's drama of history reveals that, in the female gothic, any conception of the past is necessarily built upon the retroactive work of fantasy, that the impossibility of ever fully comprehending the past turns history into an object of fantasy.

While the narrative content of Lee's novel eschews any sense of longing for a lost past, the "Advertisement" that precedes the narrative, which presents the text as a found manuscript,

introduces an ambivalence about the accessibility of the past in the present. By turning the novel into a recovered manuscript unearthed by a contemporary editor, Lee simultaneously longs for and rejects the notion that history can be understood apart from fantasy. The narrative presented to the reader in the present, which bears the marks of time in the gaps and holes that haunt the manuscript, tells a “tale of other times” by following the lives of twin sisters, Matilda and Ellinor, who are the secret daughters of Mary Queen of Scots and the Duke of Norfolk. Each sister narrates her experience of life in her own memoir,<sup>113</sup> from growing up in the obscurity of the eponymous recess to navigating the treacherous world of Elizabeth I’s court, which come together to form the text of the found manuscript. In her account of a tale of other times, Lee makes an early attempt at what will come fully into being as “historical fiction.”<sup>114</sup> But her account remains unique in its clear focus on women and their experiences in and writing of history. Lee, then, essentially writes the story of female gothic history, which her literary descendants, including Carver, will respond to and revise throughout the long eighteenth century. Significantly, both Lee and Carver’s novels, one in the developing stages and one in the maturity of the female gothic tradition, fantastically unfold in relation to written documents. Their gothic novels thus call attention not only to the textual nature of history, but also to the imbrication of history, fantasy, and material objects in the female gothic.

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<sup>113</sup> Though critics sometimes call *The Recess* as an epistolary novel, or refer to Matilda and Ellinor’s narratives as letters, I make a specific point to call these narratives “memoirs” since, as Felicity Nussbaum points out about the eighteenth-century memoir mode, it “often interweaved fiction and history with biography and autobiography.” This seems a more fitting descriptor for the twins’ narratives than letters. Nussbaum, “Biography and Autobiography,” *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 4, The Eighteenth Century*, eds. H.B. Nisbet, Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 302.

<sup>114</sup> For studies that situate historical fiction as a developing mode prior to Walter Scott, see Fiona Price, *Reinventing Liberty: Nation, Commerce and the British Historical Novel from Walpole to Scott* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Anne Stevens, *British Historical Fiction Before Scott* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

*Oakendale Abbey*, in contrast to the Elizabethan setting of *The Recess*, unfolds directly in the historical present. Thoroughly steeped in the conventions of the eighteenth-century female gothic, the novel charts the trials and tribulations of the prototypical gothic heroine, Laura, as she is held hostage in the decaying abbey of the novel's title by a lecherous aristocrat (who we later learn is her uncle) and slowly begins to uncover her unknown family origins before escaping and reuniting with her lost love, Eugene, the idealized man of sentiment. Though *Oakendale Abbey* is entirely conventional of the female gothic, it is also anomalous in its contemporary setting, tackling the current horrors of reality rather than the imagined threats of the past. The events surrounding the French Revolution in fact play a key role in the narrative and set the stage for the primary "event" that sets Laura's quest for her true identity in motion: the loss of the written proof of her family name when she is imprisoned in France in early childhood. Placing the loss and recovery of written documents at the center of the narrative plot, and engaging narrative strategies that call attention to the text as fictional document, Carver objectifies the work of fantasy that constructs the historical present as an age of natural rights and equality.

*The Recess* undermines enlightenment narratives of historical progress in its recursive and repetitive plot, which essentially recycles and repeats loss ad infinitum. In this construction of history, Lee highlights mothers' inability to bequeath legal rights or property to their daughters, binding both mothers and daughters in what I call a "maternal inheritance of loss" mediated not just by written documents, but also by oral narratives. Thus, the painful and repetitive stories passed down from mother to daughter perpetuate a form of maternal inheritance that is a curse rather than a gift, a lesson in the horror of history. By telling this story of the maternal inheritance of loss in the historical past, Lee reveals that, for women, there is no difference between the past and the present. The tragedies that the fictional characters in the

novel experience around legacy and inheritance reflect the very real fears that defined women's experiences in the British long eighteenth century, particularly the loss of legal and bodily autonomy that came with the doctrine of coverture. What gets lost in Lee's work, then, is the comfort provided by the fantasy of a lost past that was in some way distinct from the present. Even when the past is imagined as something to fear as a barbaric and infantile state, there is indeed comfort in the assumption of difference. Instead, Lee forces her readers to face the *sameness*, the repetition, of history, which incites an anticipatory fear of and loss in the future. While fantasy weaves a veil that retroactively reconstructs the past as something that has been lost, even if that loss is ambivalent, Lee unravels this veil of fantasy and uncovers the startling reality that there is no difference between the past and the present.

#### **“Chasms in the Story”: The Found Manuscript**

By presenting the ensuing narrative as a found manuscript, Sophia Lee's "Advertisement" to *The Recess* serves a dual function: to highlight the work of fantasy that constructs the female gothic's conception of history and to show that this fantasy of history unfolds in relation to material objects, in this case written documents. As a textual artifact of the past, the found manuscript that Lee presents is an object of fantasy; it is an object that requires the contemporary reader to fantastically imagine the time and place from which it came. And as a fictive creation produced in the present, the found manuscript turns history itself into an object of fantasy. The historical past, like the narrative presented as found manuscript, is a lost object that has in fact never been lost; its loss is retroactively constructed through the work of fantasy in the present.

Horace Walpole's preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) specifically locates the text as found manuscript in "the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of

England,” and gives the exact time and place of its original printing, Naples in 1529.<sup>115</sup> Five years after *The Recess* was published, Ann Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) provides a vignette that places the found manuscript in a Sicilian monastery, which the editor transcribes after she “passed some hours in interesting conversation” with the monks.<sup>116</sup> Lee, however, obscures the origins of her found manuscript, explaining that she cannot “publish the means which enrich me with the manuscript from whence the following tale is extracted.”<sup>117</sup> Unlike Walpole before and Radcliffe after her, Lee shrouds her found manuscript in mystery. In so doing, she highlights the inaccessibility of the past by barring our access to it. Lee casts into relief the retroactive function of fantasy in female gothic history by beginning her narrative with the premise that the lost past is unavailable to us, and, thus, that any conception of that past is a fantasy of and in the present. But Lee complicates these premises by introducing a question about the found manuscript’s origins. She does not publish any contextualizing information not simply because she is unable, but because Lee is not “permitted” to do so (647). In one instance, she is perhaps unable to share this information because Lee as editor does not know the story behind the manuscript. In another, she chooses not to include the information she has available to her as a stylistic choice. And in yet another, Lee is prohibited from doing so by some unknown injunction. While an eighteenth-century audience, used as they were to the found manuscript trope in novels and literary history (which I will go on to discuss in more detail), may or may not have bought into the existence of the found manuscript as material object, Lee encourages her

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<sup>115</sup> Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance*, ed. Allison Milbank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> Lee, *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times*, ed. April Alliston (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), loc. 647. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

reader to entertain the notion that it might indeed exist in reality by concealing and revealing information about the manuscript's origins at once. In this way, the lost past is unavailable to us without the intervention of fantasy, but we nevertheless long for unmediated access to that past. We know that the found manuscript is an object of fantasy, but by obscuring its origins Lee asks her reader to participate in the fantasy anyway. The "Advertisement" thus functions as a metonymy of the gothic fantasy of history by simultaneously imagining and foreclosing the found manuscript's existence in reality.

Lee further objectifies the gothic fantasy of history in her representation of the found manuscript as material object of the past *and* as a narrative written in the present. "I make no apology for altering the language to that of the present age," Lee explains, "since the obsolete stile of the author would be frequently unintelligible" (647). The novel in the contemporary reader's hands is at once a product of the past and the present. In the way that Lee obscures the origins of the found manuscript, she further removes the found manuscript from the scene of reading in the present by taking authorial ownership of the narrative. Without apology, this act of claiming the narrative as her own interpretation of a written document produced in the past reveals Lee's skepticism about ever fully understanding that lost past. As the (nonexistent) original author's "obsolete stile" is "unintelligible" from a position in the present, so too is the historical past. The found manuscript has no meaning in itself as object of a lost historical past; it must be translated into the language of the present. The work of translation is essentially the work of fantasy, of imagining a time and place that never existed except as they are imagined as existing in the present. As the found manuscript is a lost object that has never been lost, so too is the historical past.

While Lee illustrates the retroactive function of fantasy by anchoring the narrative as her own production in the present, she also provides in the “Advertisement” an image of the found manuscript as a material object of the past. Though Lee makes no apology for translating the narrative content of the manuscript into the sentimental idiom of the present, she notes of the material manuscript that “depredations of time have left chasms in the story, which sometimes only heightens the pathos. An inviolable respect for truth would not permit me to attempt connecting these, even where they appeared faulty” (652). So while Lee can take liberties in her translation of the content, there is meaning or “truth” within the fragmented form of the manuscript, which she must reproduce without editorial intervention. Here it would seem that Lee reverses her previous message about the fantastic relation between past and present, that in fact the found manuscript is a material object containing within it a transcendent truth about the past from which it came, one which is not a product of fantasy in the present. However, the truth contained in the fragmented manuscript is not that the past can exist and be examined as a complete whole in the present, but that the past exists in an incomplete form fragmented by the work of fantasy. According to Melissa Sodeman, the point of the “Advertisement” “is not to recover the past, but to generate highly wrought images of its irrecoverableness.”<sup>118</sup> The heightened “pathos” the chasms inspire is, then, built upon a sense of longing for material access to a lost past that is not marred by the ruins of time.

By calling attention to the “chasms in the story,” Lee situates the manuscript in the lost historical past *and* in the present, particularly in the contemporary fascination with fragments, ruins, and recovered documents that marked the converging fields of literature and history. The

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<sup>118</sup> Sodeman, *Sentimental Memorials: Women and the Novel in Literary History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 21. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

literary traditions of the established sentimental and emergent gothic novels were both structured on the illusive presence of and quests for recovered documents. Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) presents itself as a material object of the past, a found manuscript riddled with holes graphically conveyed in asterisks, which serves a humorous function in the present as the material for gun-wadding. While Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778) abandoned the found manuscript trope deployed in its first edition, *The Champion of Virtue* (1777), it maintains the use of asterisks in addition to authorial commentary to signal the gaps that mark the found manuscript. Anne Stevens links literature's interest in recovered documents with the cultural phenomenon of literary forgery, the most notable (and controversial) examples being James Macpherson's supposed recovery of third-century poetic fragments written by the Scottish bard Ossian. As she puts it, "the phenomena of literary forgery and literary history are dialectically linked: as scholars evince an increasing interest in the past and confidence about their investigations, forgers prey upon this interest by creating new documents meant to pass for historical artifacts."<sup>119</sup>

Alongside this "emergent literary historicism," in which "literature comes increasingly to be valued as a repository of history," came the revival of the controversy around another set of historical documents that might too have been forgeries: Mary Queen of Scots' "casket letters," a set of letters possibly written by Mary implicating her in the death of her husband, Lord Darnley. First reprinted in 1720, the casket letters, and the mystery surrounding them, reemerged as a popular topic of debate when the antiquarian Walter Goodall published a defense of Mary in

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<sup>119</sup> Stevens, "Forging Literary History: Historical Fiction and Literary Forgery in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 37 (2008): 217-32, pp. 219-20. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

1754, concluding that the letters were forgeries.<sup>120</sup> The ensuing battle among antiquarians and historians for the final word on Mary and her letters cannot have been unknown to Lee, and *The Recess* has been read by Sodeman as “a charismatic rewriting of the casket letters” (37) and by Stevens as a “fictional exoneration of Mary” (224). While there can be no doubt that Lee was responding in some way to the casket letters controversy, I would add that the mystery surrounding the letters’ origins, the question of their being forged documents of fantasy or true documents of history, coincides neatly with Lee’s presentation of history and fantasy as mediated by written documents.

To add to the mysterious elements of history, fantasy, and documents that surround *The Recess* and the casket letters controversy, there is a textual variant that occurs in the “Advertisement” in two editions of the novel, which, to my knowledge, no one has yet explored. In April Alliston’s recent edition, Lee’s discussion of the relation between history and painting reads thus:

As painting can only preserve the most striking characteristics of the form, history perpetuates only those of the soul; while too often the best and worst actions of princes proceed from partialities and prejudices, which live in their hearts, and are buried with them. (652)

In this instance, historical writing is privileged over painting as a representation of the depth of human interiority, the soul. Painting, on the other hand, merely preserves the outward forms of things. The relation between history and painting is then one of opposition, of surface and depth. In opposition to this opposition is the heart, the seat of sentimental affect, which cannot be captured in any mode of representation; it is an unknown and unknowable secret buried within the individual in life and in death. In an earlier edition of the novel, excerpted in E.J. Clery and

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<sup>120</sup> See Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, *Mary Queen of Scots: Romance and Nation* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 108.

Robert Miles's *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook* (2000), the relation between history and painting is not one of opposition but of similarity: "history, like painting, only perpetuates the striking features of the mind; whereas the best and worst actions of princes often proceed from partialities and prejudices, which live in their hearts, and are buried with them."<sup>121</sup> Here, history and painting are not representations of outward forms or of the soul, but instead of the mind, which is then opposed to the "partialities and prejudices" of the heart.<sup>122</sup>

The textual variants in each edition clearly complicate the way we interpret Lee's conception of history and its transmission. And, indeed, this textual complication, over which Lee had no control, mimics the slippages between textuality, history, and fantasy over which she *did* have control. By a happy accident, the printed editions of the novel in the recent past pose questions about its written and textual origins in the way that Lee's "Advertisement" itself challenges the reader to reevaluate the relation between history and fantasy by creating the persona of editor of a found manuscript with questionable origins. Furthermore, the textual variants in the "Advertisement" call attention to the narrative as written and *printed* document, to its status as material object in the past and present. The relation between printed books and written documents in the eighteenth century was an especially fraught one. While print institutions could preserve and circulate written documents that might otherwise have been lost,

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<sup>121</sup> Clery and Miles, *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 180.

<sup>122</sup> Mark Phillips has influentially argued that, beginning in the eighteenth century, the form and function of historiography shifted to reflect the contemporary preoccupation with sentimental interiority, which significantly impacted both modes of writing. See Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. xii. For one of the earlier scholarly recoveries of *The Recess*, which investigates the "secretly twinned structures of historiography and sensibility," see Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, "'Ev'ry Lost Relation': Historical Fictions and Sentimental Incidents in Sophia Lee's *The Recess*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7.2 (1995): 165-84, p. 168. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

the drive to do so indicates at the same time a sense of longing for an earlier manuscript-based literary culture. Sodeman contends that “in Lee’s redaction of the transition from a manuscript-based literary culture to the late-century print marketplace, the manuscript has been utterly supplanted by the book,” that the novel “suggests how manuscripts seemed to belong to a past to be recovered by – and fixed in – print” (30). The inconsistency in printed editions of the novel unwittingly articulates the gothic fantasy of history for present-day readers; it enacts in the present that which female gothic writers of the long eighteenth century were conceptualizing long before modern and post-modern theories of fantasy and history: the reality that the past is only accessible in fragmented and imperfect forms, which require the work of fantasy in the present to make meaning.

#### **“Chasms in the Story”: Ellinor’s Narrative**

While Lee establishes an equivalence in the “Advertisement” between the found manuscript’s textual chasms and the “pathos” of the narrative, the graphic reminders of these chasms, denoted by asterisks, appear only sporadically throughout the novel. Their primary function seems to be not to maintain the pathos of the narrative by reminding the reader of the historical chasm between past and present, but instead to signify Ellinor’s descent into “madness.”<sup>123</sup> Like many later gothic works, particularly those that employ the use of the found manuscript trope as in Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), the textual body of *The Recess* is a contorted complex of narratives within narratives in oral, epistolary, and memoir forms. Matilda is the primary, or at least the first, narrator who documents the narrative that gets

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<sup>123</sup> We know from a twenty-first-century perspective that there are many neurodivergent conditions which may have been attributed to “madness” in the eighteenth century and that, with advances in psychology and psychiatry (and indeed psychoanalysis) from the nineteenth century forward came the associations of women with “madness” or “hysteria.” Given the problematic history of madness as a term and concept, scare quotes will always be implied when I use the term or describe the affective condition that Lee calls madness.

imaginatively passed down to Lee in the fragmented manuscript. Appended to Matilda's written account mid-narrative, however, is Ellinor's own account of her life, entitled "The Life of Ellinor, Addressed to Matilda" (3056). This narrative, which recasts the events that Matilda has described from Ellinor's perspective, breaks off when, long after their separation, Ellinor fakes her own death in the hopes of later reuniting with her lost love, Lord Essex. Ellinor continues to chart her trials and tribulations in letters to her friend, Lady Pembroke, until she is finally overcome by the madness that has haunted her throughout her narrative and can no longer be "her own historian" (4697). The insertion of Ellinor's narrative into Matilda's overarching frame thus establishes a tense relation between the two, alternative history and master narrative, which contend and clash with one another. I detail the intricacies of Ellinor's narrative not just to highlight the formal complexity of Lee's novel, but more importantly to argue that this "broken narrative" (3835) – broken by lapses in time, geographical space, and cognition – is, like the "Advertisement," a metonymy for the gothic fantasy of history.

The recurring theme of madness in Ellinor's narrative plays with eighteenth-century conceptions of "fantasy" as a term implying "fancy," or irrationality, imagination, and unreason, and their roles in the writing and rewriting of history. Ellinor and Matilda both experience a seemingly endless series of tragedies, but early in her adulthood Ellinor copes with these tragedies by retreating internally into a world of madness. Ellinor's first experience of this internal retreat comes after she is forced into an unwanted marriage and tricked into denouncing her identity as Mary Stuart's daughter, which is then used as an excuse to execute the Queen of Scots. Only after these events do the textual chasms that Lee introduced in the "Advertisement" begin to appear with regularity. While these chasms ostensibly signify in graphic form Ellinor's fragmented state of mind, it also seems possible that they could alternately signal the textual

chasms that fragment the found manuscript. The found manuscript as representation of the past is a lost object that has never been lost, and when Lee marks the chasms in the manuscript throughout Ellinor's narrative we are reminded of the status of both manuscript and narrative as textual objects of fantasy and fancy. In a moment of lucidity after Ellinor has begun to exhibit and experience the symptoms of madness, she describes the experience as a "blacken[ing] and confus[ing]" of her intellect, which "frequently realized scenes and objects that never existed, annihilating many which daily passed before my eyes" (3518). With this description of madness, Ellinor essentially articulates the female gothic's fantasy of history, which "frequently realized scenes and objects that never existed" in its retroactive construction of the lost past. Ellinor's narrative is a reminder of the past's existence in the present as an object of fantasy; at the same time it shows that Ellinor's fancy of the mind, or madness, is no different from the interpretive speculation, the fantastic projection, necessary for any conception of the past in the present.

In the way that Lee makes the editorial decision to preserve the textual chasms of the manuscript in the interest of "an inviolable respect for truth" (652), Ellinor also finds value in the fragmented form and content of her writing, which accurately reflects the internal turmoil she experiences. In a passage riddled with asterisks Ellinor writes:

Something strangely intervenes between myself and my meaning. – No matter, I am too stupefied now to explain it. Oh, these cruel wanderings! – but I dare not attempt to correct or avoid them, lest in the very effort reason evaporate, and one inconsiderate stroke should confuse my whole story. (3553)

While the "something" that "strangely intervenes" between Ellinor and the meaning she attempts to convey is her state of madness, if the asterisks are signs of the found manuscript's textual chasms then we might also think of that "something" as the work of fantasy, which indeed "strangely intervenes" between the historical past and present. That strange something which intervenes in Ellinor's meaning is not, however, something to be corrected or even avoided; it is

essential to the “whole story.” Ellinor worries that the attempt to revise her “cruel wanderings” in writing will negate her meaning entirely, that one faulty editorial choice will “confuse” the whole story. As a writer of female gothic history, Ellinor, like Lee, cannot correct her wanderings, no matter how cruel, because those wanderings *are* the story of history as told in the female gothic. I do not mean to suggest that we take these wanderings at face value as expressions of madness, and I have no interest in valorizing madness either as subversive rhetorical tactic or as the deeply problematic signifier for mental illness and neurodivergence. Instead, Ellinor’s wanderings should be considered as the textual chasms in Lee’s story, as signs of the gaps and fissures that foreclose the possibility of telling a “whole” story of female gothic history apart from fantasy.

Ellinor’s memoir further fragments the novel as a “whole” by contesting Matilda’s writing of history. Once we have seen Ellinor’s point of view, both in narrative and textual chasms, Matilda is no longer the omniscient interpreter of events who we have assumed relates information clearly and accurately. In this way, the contending twin narratives “repeatedly destabilize the reader’s sense of the reliability of historical narratives by undermining previous accounts.”<sup>124</sup> Indeed, Ellinor’s memoir reveals the sisters’ diametrically opposed interpretations of character, specifically in the figure of Lord Leicester with whom Matilda falls in love and secretly marries against the wishes of Elizabeth I. While Matilda sees Leicester with the perfected vision of love, Ellinor observes that Leicester’s “heart, not warm by nature, had been rendered in a great degree callous, from its having expanded in the chilling atmosphere of a Court” (3074). We then learn from Ellinor’s narrative that the picture Matilda painted in her

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<sup>124</sup> Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 29. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

original account of the unbreakable sentimental bonds between sisters was an inaccurate depiction of reality, that the sisters' contending evaluations of Leicester's character were so opposed that the childhood bond between the two had been irrecoverably damaged. We also learn information that Matilda glossed over, without entirely omitting, in her narrative. When Matilda and Leicester flee unexpectedly after inciting the wrath of Elizabeth, Ellinor is shocked that they "had surrendered me up a hopeless, helpless victim" of the merciless queen's rage (3324). Ellinor's narrative blasts apart any notion of structural cohesiveness in narrative, particularly in the writing and interpretation of history. The broken narrative that is Ellinor's memoir is like the narrative as fragmented manuscript that Lee introduces in the "Advertisement;" it tells in fact the true story of history stripped of the veil of fantasy, which covers over the reality that the past is only available in fragmented bits and pieces, in inescapable chasms, in the present. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is only when the veil of fantasy is lifted that we can see the operation of fantasy. Fantasy and history are, in this female gothic work, one in the same.

### **Oakendale Abbey: Exemplar and Anomaly**

As Lee objectifies the work of fantasy in the formal complexities that structure and restructure the "whole" narrative in relation to the fragmented found manuscript and Ellinor's "broken narrative," Carver makes a point throughout *Oakendale Abbey* to call attention to the novel's status as fictional document, as object of fantasy. While it is entirely conventional for female gothic works to incorporate seemingly endless numbers of backstories for major and minor characters alike, Carver pairs this convention of narrative overflow with frequent authorial intrusions into the narrative. At crucial moments in the plot, Carver will leave the scene of drama and return to another set of characters in another plotline. After Lord Oakendale has chased

Laura throughout the abbey, and encountered a series of seemingly supernatural phenomena along the way, the narrator chooses to leave him in “anxiety and passion...for the present, in order to give our readers an account of some other personages who have as yet appeared but in the background of this history.”<sup>125</sup> Or, when Laura first learns of the “evil spirits which were said to haunt the abbey,” the narrator leaves her in a state of suspense because “it may be necessary to give the reader some account of the family to whom the Abbey belonged, and how Laura came to be its present inhabitant” (36).

These rhetorical moves certainly increase the reader’s sense of suspense and sensation, but they also ensure that that reader never has the chance to suspend disbelief, willingly or not. Unlike Coleridge’s reader, Carver’s has no poetic faith in either narrative or narrator because she is never sure when the scene will shift.<sup>126</sup> The reader is then constantly reminded of the novel’s existence as textual object, as a carefully crafted document that is a fiction of Carver’s creation, and reminded, too, of the scene of reading this document in the immediate present. Indeed, in one of the many instances of storytelling throughout the novel, Laura’s interlocutor observes that her “story is replete with uncommon circumstances of distress; and I am as much interested by it, as I am surprised and entertained” (107). The sympathetic Mrs. Greville might well be describing the experience of reading *Oakendale Abbey*, Carver’s own novel object. Though Carver is clearly indebted to the conventions of the sentimental novel, which anchor their narratives in the world of textual objects,<sup>127</sup> she revises these textual conventions to perform the specific work of

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<sup>125</sup> Carver, *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey*, ed. Curt Herr (Crestline: Zittaw Press, 2006), pp. 114-15. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>126</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions* (New York: Leavitt, Lord, and Co., 1834), p. 174.

<sup>127</sup> Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) is the most obvious example of a sentimental novel that obsessively dramatizes its textuality. The genre’s penchant for the epistolary form similarly anchors it in the object world of documents.

the female gothic. In one sense, Carver crafts narrative uncertainties, disruptions, and intrusions that reflect Laura's harrowing experiences within the plot, and in another, they reflect the female gothic's critique of enlightenment narratives of progress. The dominant cultural narrative that supposedly unites all reasoning subjects in equality is, as Carver specifically and the female gothic generally intimate, structured upon the same workings of fantasy that constitute a gothic novel. While Lee emphasizes the textuality of her novel to illustrate the historical past's existence in the present as an object of fantasy, Carver does so to expose the present as an equally fantastic object.

One of Carver's unique contributions to the female gothic tradition lies in her direct use of contemporary events that frame the novel's plot. While she paints a portrait of the French Revolution with violently gory strokes more typical of the male gothic, Carver ultimately uses this portrait as a mirror to reflect in contrast the horrifying realities of everyday life for British women in the ostensibly safe spaces of the home and family. The novel is unusual in its direct evocation of the Revolution in a moment marked by paranoid suspicion of any French sympathies, but it is exemplary of the female gothic in the novel's ability to lift the veil of fantasy from the Enlightenment's perception of itself, revealing behind the veil the ever-present horror of reality. The interdependent relation of the gothic novel and the French Revolution has long been established in gothic scholarship and continues to provide new material for exploration.<sup>128</sup> To my knowledge, however, Carver's is the only gothic novel to explicitly include the events surrounding the Revolution as a major plotline in her narrative. Charlotte

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<sup>128</sup> For one of the earlier and most influential accounts of the French Revolution's impact on the gothic see Ronald Paulson, "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution," *ELH* 48.3 (1981): 532-54. For a more recent take on the gothic relations between Britain and revolutionary France, and one that is already proving to be as respected as Paulson's, see Angela Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Smith's *Henrietta* makes reference to the British war with France, as when French privateers seize Denbigh's ship travelling to Jamaica, but they are not central to the plot.<sup>129</sup> In *Oakendale Abbey*, the terrors of the Revolution haunt Laura from her early childhood, when recently orphaned she travels from the East Indies to England only to be captured and imprisoned in France. Though she is adopted by a French couple, the du Frenes, who are her "dear, my more than parents," her loyalist adopted father is captured and executed by a mob during the insurrection of 10 August (97). On that "fatal" day "of ever-lasting disgrace to the French nation, when Paris was deluged in human gore," Laura must watch as du Frene's head is "struck upon a pike, reeking and clotted with blood!" While it would seem that Carver's depiction of the Revolution falls in line with the reactionary responses of Britons concerned with its potentially anarchic effects on their own established traditions and political structure, Laura's real trouble begins only after she has crossed the channel into England.

Separated from Madame du Frene on their journey, Laura falls prey to the machinations of the married Lord Oakendale. When he cannot convince her to become his "prostitute" willingly (143), Oakendale imprisons her in his family's ancestral abbey "under the idea that the horrors of the place, and the obscurity of the village, would sooner dispose a mind, like hers, to coincide with his base desires" (40). Little do either Oakendale or Laura know that his family and property are also Laura's, that she is his niece. Not only does the family home threaten Laura's body with the dangers of sexual violence, it also impedes her internal capacity for reasoning with the terrors of seemingly supernatural phenomena.<sup>130</sup> *Oakendale Abbey* thus

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<sup>129</sup> Smith's novels often tread a fine line between sentimental and gothic modes. While *Desmond* (1792) directly addresses the French Revolution, I would not classify this particular work as gothic.

<sup>130</sup> Early feminist and psychoanalytic critics of the gothic figured the gothic castle as a metaphor for the maternal body, a tradition which continues today. For an early reading of the castle as

contrasts the very real threat of “tyrannic power” with “supernatural terror,” and contains these competing threats within the space of the family home, to show that, for women, reality is more horrifying than any terror associated with the supernatural (78). As Laura contends with Oakendale’s sexual threats and the abbey’s supernatural terrors, she cries: “Would some airy spirit did indeed inhabit this Abbey, who would protect innocence, and shield me from the snares villainy and terror!” (67). In this way, Laura invokes the supernatural as a form of protection against the “villainy and terror” that she faces from Oakendale.<sup>131</sup> As Emily St. Aubert calls upon her dead father’s spirit to protect her from Montoni’s threats in *Udolpho*, Laura would rather regress into a childlike belief in the supernatural than face the realities of matured adulthood, which give her every reason to fear for her mind and body. While Laura’s first-hand experience of revolutionary violence is horrifying, while her ignorance about her family origins is deeply disturbing, what she learns about the family’s internal capacity for violence is indeed as horrifying as viewing her adopted father’s decapitated head, and more disturbing than her ignorance of her family identity.

Carver’s use of the supernatural explained uncovers the horrifying threats of reality for women while anchoring *Oakendale Abbey* in the historical present, casting a shadow over the

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maternal metaphor see Claire Kahane, “Gothic Mirror,” eds. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, Madelon Sprengnether, *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 338. For a more recent account see Christine Berthin, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 84-7. In one of the latest scholarly recoveries of the novel, Evan Gottlieb has argued that the Abbey structurally stands for British repression of colonial violence. See Gottlieb, “No Place Like Home: From Local to Global (and Back Again) in the Gothic Novel,” *Representing Place in British Literature and Culture, 1660-1830*, eds. Gottlieb and Juliet Shields (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 100.

<sup>131</sup> In a perhaps overly simplistic argument, Margarita Georgieva claims that the union between Oakendale and Laura is impossible not because the novel sees incest as wrong, but because Laura’s “masculinity” requires she make a “feminine” object choice in Oakendale’s son, Eugene, the prototypical man of feeling. See Georgieva, *The Gothic Child* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 92.

Enlightenment's fantastic perception of itself. Most of the supernatural threats that are explained away in the female gothic can ultimately be attributed to threats of violence from men, from amorous aristocrats lurking in the heroine's bedroom to banditti hiding in crumbling castles, but these situations are typically couched in medieval or foreign settings. E.J. Clery has argued that the narrative process of explaining the supernatural "echoes the history of enlightenment itself. The reader progressively moves from the sense of mystery that encourages fearful, false ideas to full knowledge of the facts, intelligibility of causes, means and ends, and confirmation of the truth of reason: in other words, reliving the passage from gothic to modern times."<sup>132</sup> I agree that the supernatural explained "echoes the history of enlightenment," but not quite in the way that Clery formulates. Instead of shining a light on the reason and rationality of the present, the supernatural explained in the female gothic invokes a true sense of horror as it repeatedly stages the threat of male violence against women. The supernatural explained in *Oakendale Abbey* reveals that the seemingly supernatural phenomena that threaten Laura's reason are the tricks of "resurrection men" who use the Abbey as the receptacle for dead bodies and skeletons.<sup>133</sup> Laura learns, then, that "the ghosts of Oakendale Abbey were indeed dead; but brought thither by those unfeeling monsters of society, who make a practice of stealing our friends, and relations from the peaceful grave where their ashes, as we suppose, are deposited in rest!" (159). The resurrection men, the "unfeeling monsters of society," are wholly products of the British present, the underbelly of eighteenth-century advances in biological sciences and medicine. But these men do

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<sup>132</sup> E.J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 107.

<sup>133</sup> Jason Colavito suggests that the "grisly crimes" of the resurrection men was "one of the period's most morbid scandals." See Colavito, *Knowing Fear: Science, Knowledge and the Development of the Horror Genre* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2008), p. 72. Resurrection men were indeed a popular topic of cultural inquiry ranging from popular art, in Thomas Rowlandson's print *Resurrection Men* (1775), to legend, in the rumor that Laurence Sterne's corpse had ended up on a Cambridge dissection slab after being dug up by resurrection men.

not lurk in the outskirts of society; they have penetrated the boundaries of the domestic sphere, of the family home.

Oakendale too is a member of the “unfeeling monsters of society,” a monster who uses the space of the family home to threaten the family itself. In a revised version of the supernatural explained, often noted as illogical and unsatisfying, Carver provides an equally flimsy explanation for Oakendale’s conversion from would-be rapist to sentimental uncle. Once Oakendale learns the truth of Laura’s identity, the sentimental bonds of family are so deep that he feels them physiologically: “the fondness which Lord Oakendale felt for the only offspring of his family, wanted no corroborating testimony that their blood flowed from the same source” (167). Though Carver’s description of Oakendale’s inexplicable shift borrows from the language of sentiment, which highlights the interconnected nature of physiology and affect,<sup>134</sup> of the heart and the body, it also signals contemporary anxieties about family bonds and the shift from emphasis on blood to sentiment.<sup>135</sup> In an earlier scene of reading, when Oakendale discovers the slip of paper from which Laura has been disastrously separated throughout the narrative, “the colour forsook his cheeks; his eyes glistened, and he held the paper in his trembling hand...however he might wish to disbelieve the facts, an impulse of a different nature from what he had hitherto experienced, made him shudder for his own crimes” (142-3). This slip of paper holds such power over Oakendale that he physiologically responds as if he has witnessed a supernatural phenomenon. And indeed, the paper written by his dead brother attesting to Laura’s

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<sup>134</sup> For the links between sentimentality and physiology see Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1-14.

<sup>135</sup> See Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 2.

family of origin functions as a paper ghost; Laura's father has the supernatural power from beyond the grave to intervene before Oakendale can incestuously rape her.

By constructing this discovery as a scene of reading, Carver further highlights the textuality of her novel object, as she does in her narrative strategies throughout, which remind the reader that she is interpreting a textual object in an act of reading rather than escaping into a world of fiction. Carver's female gothic novel presents a fantastic document that forces its readers to face the horrors of reality without the comfort of fantasy. In so doing, *Oakendale Abbey* revises the gothic fantasy of history; it shifts the focus from the fantastic perception of a lost historical past and instead confronts the elements of fear and loss that make the realities of the historical present as horrifying as the fictional scenarios of gothic novels. As Laura learns in the novel, that supernatural terror is preferable to "tyrannic power," so is the craze for gothic sensation indicative of a desire to retreat into the fantastic world of gothic novels rather than face the realities of everyday life. In its evocations of the fear constitutive of the home and family, *Oakendale Abbey* does not grieve for a fantastically lost past but instead for the loss of the fantastically constructed present. The loss that permeates the text is the loss of fantasy itself.

### **The Maternal Inheritance of Loss**

Laura learns of the threats posed by the family from Oakendale, though she is also saved from sexual violence by the paternal intervention of her father's written testimonial accounting for Laura's family of origin. In *The Recess*, however, young women learn painful lessons about history, the family, and inheritance from the written and oral narratives of maternal figures. The novel recycles the same tragic narrative for each of the primary female characters, enacting a repetition of loss that is the fate of each before her birth, which she will then be forced to bequeath to the next generation of women. While Diana Wallace has argued that "matrilineal

inheritance in *The Recess* is repeatedly blocked and erased” (56), I argue instead that it is alive and well throughout the novel, but that that matrilineal inheritance consists of painful lessons about the blockages and erasures of women in history. Thus, the written and oral narratives of mothers and mother-figures perpetuate a maternal inheritance of loss, which is a curse rather than a gift. Though the events of the novel take place in the sixteenth century, the maternal inheritance of loss which binds female characters reflects in fact eighteenth-century fear and loss surrounding legacy and inheritance. Transposing the fears of the present into the past, *The Recess* undermines enlightenment narratives of historical progress and casts into relief the work of fantasy that retroactively constructs a lost historical past. While sixteenth-century women might well have faced similar concerns as those in the eighteenth century, the “reality” of the historical past only exists insofar as it is imagined from within the present. The novel proves that the lost past is not anything to mourn because it is the same as the present but, more significantly, that the past is the same as the present precisely because it can only be imagined within the present as an object of fantasy.

Matilda and Ellinor reach the end of the childhood innocence that has kept them safe within the walls of the recess when Mrs. Marlow, the woman who has raised them and who they believe to be their mother, is forced to admit that she is not in fact their mother. As soon as Matilda begins to ask a questions about “our mother –” Mrs. Marlow interrupts and explains that she “lives – but not for you – enquire no farther; let this specimen of knowledge teach you to fear it. – When the time requires it, I shall disclose your whole story” (723). The first knowledge that the twins gain about their mother is actually a form of mystery; it is a secret of which they have been unaware, and has yet to be fully explained. In this early lesson about mothers and motherhood, the twins learn that their own mother’s existence is entirely separate from their

own, that their mother, knowledge, and fear are impossible to tease apart. As Radcliffe and Roche's heroines experience the path from innocence to experience as a traumatic lifting of the veil of fantasy, Ellinor and Matilda begin their young adulthood with a painful lesson about female subjectivity and motherhood. And this lesson incites a retroactive sense of loss for something and someone they never knew they were missing. Mary Stuart becomes, then, a melancholic object of loss, which has in fact never been lost because it has never been possessed. In her mysterious oral narrative, Mrs. Marlow reveals only to conceal, teaches only to fear knowledge. The twins' childhood ends and adulthood begins with fearful secrets shrouding any knowledge of their mother, who becomes a distant figure the twins learn both to long for and to fear.

Mrs. Marlow is eventually forced to "disclose [the] whole story" on her deathbed, so that her brother, Father Anthony, is not the one to shed light on the mystery of their mother. She explains that "there are among its incidents, some that need the gentleness of a woman to teach you to bewail, without imitating" (799). Storytelling, particularly telling the stories of and about mothers, is a maternal task; if knowledge cannot come directly from the mother, it must come from a mother-figure. The maternal inheritance of loss in the female gothic binds both mother and daughter, mother-figure and daughter-figure. While the daughter is cursed with the knowledge of the pain and suffering passed down from the mother, the mother is cursed too in her duty to impart this painful knowledge upon the daughter. This bond between mother and daughter incites both fear and loss, matrophobia and melancholia. In this oral history, Mrs. Marlow introduces the narrative that will repeat itself in the forthcoming generations of daughters, the narrative of fear and loss which her own mother bequeathed to Mrs. Marlow,

which Mary Queen of Scots, via Mrs. Marlow, bequeaths to Matilda and Ellinor, and which Matilda will go on to bequeath to her own daughter, Mary.

Matilda's narrative in particular is an uncanny repetition of Mary Stuart's, complete with forbidden love, secret marriages, and daughters borne of those marriages. While she warned the twins of "imitating" their mother's story, Matilda's maternal inheritance, which is passed down through Mrs. Marlow's oral narrative, makes it impossible for her to avoid this imitation.

Throughout her narrative, in fact, Matilda laments that she has "inherited my mother's fate with her features" (1433), and she is accused of "inherit[ing] the faults with the features of thy mother" (1546). As she secretly marries Lord Leicester against Elizabeth's wishes, as Mary and the Duke of Norfolk had before her, Matilda "compared with grief her fate and mine" (1581).

Maternal inheritance is, then, not something to celebrate but to grieve; it is the transmission of loss. Matilda loses any sense of autonomous agency or identity in her inherited fate and features: her life, like her appearance, is beyond her control, predetermined by "a combination of events, forerunning even my birth" (4409). And when Matilda becomes a mother herself, she cannot help but transmit the grandmother's and the mother's fate to her daughter. When she first learns of her pregnancy, Matilda apostrophizes to her unborn child: "Ah, unhappy babe, thy mother's anguish foreran thy birth! Deprived by a sad combination of circumstances of a welcome, throbs of terror were thy first symptoms of existence," reflecting that "I saw myself almost in my royal mother's melancholy predicament when I was born" (2027). As Mary matures, only to die after James I imprisons mother and daughter for fear of their asserting claims to power, Matilda laments that Mary has been a "dear inheritor of misfortune!" (5279).

By telling these stories of, in Wallace's words, "a matrilineal cycle of repeated defeats" (48), Lee makes it impossible to believe in history as progressive, as moving towards freedom

and equality. While the female gothic's fantasy of history fantastically reconstructs the past as a lost time and space of innocence and simplicity, free from the dark complexities of the present, Lee's depiction of the maternal inheritance of loss within her narrative strips the veil of fantasy from the perfected vision of the past. Lee evokes the gothic fantasy of history to expose the work of fantasy in its operation. In this depiction of the history, the past is not something to mourn or long for, but to fear for the horrors it presents for women. And the historical past that Lee constructs is in fact more indicative of the horrifying realities of the present rather than the past. Given the confines of the common law doctrine of coverture, married eighteenth-century women legally had no power of ownership and thus no ability to inherit or to transmit property. Indeed, this lack of legal rights extended to a woman's own children, who were the property of her husband. Not until the late nineteenth century were women free from the legal bind of coverture and capable of petitioning for custody of their children. As Donna Dickenson notes, "coverture was the culmination and consequence of a long decline in women's civil rights, including their rights in property," beginning with its institution in the seventeenth century; it ensured that "a married woman was effectively dead at law."<sup>136</sup> The historical past imagined in *The Recess* is then not a nightmare from which the British eighteenth century has woken; it is a retroactive fantasy, a product of the dream-work, of the nightmarish reality of the present. In an age when coverture turned married women's very identities into legal fictions, the enlightenment narrative of progress becomes a fiction as well, a fantasy that veils the horrors of reality.

In its formal complexity, the narrative further enacts the maternal inheritance of loss mediated by written documents. The complex of narratives – memoirs, letters, and histories – that make up the found manuscript is meant for a specific (female) reader: Adelaide, the daughter

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<sup>136</sup> Dickenson, *Property, Women and Politics: Subjects or Objects?* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 81-83.

of a French diplomat who Matilda meets late in life. The first narrative that the reader of *The Recess* encounters after Lee's "Advertisement" is then Matilda's retrospective reflections about the events that will unfold in the ensuing narratives. And in the way that Mary Stuart and Mrs. Marlow bequeath tragedy to Matilda and Ellinor and Matilda to Mary within the narrative, Matilda imposes the maternal inheritance of loss upon the reader of her written document, Adelaide. This first narrative frame, which brackets the narrative plot, begins and ends in tragedy, infusing that plot with loss before we know the circumstances of those losses. By beginning at the end, Lee illustrates that the historical past is too framed within the narrative of the present, that it is accessible only in the framing work of retroactive fantasy.

Matilda seems to feel ambivalent about passing on her legacy to Adelaide through her narrative. "Alas!," she writes, "your partial affection demands a memorial which calls back to being all the sad images buried in my bosom, and opens anew every vein of my heart. Yet consummate misery has a moral use" (661). Though recounting her past brings back the deep pain and suffering she has experienced, Matilda resignedly concedes that Adelaide's "affection demands a memorial." There is something, then, about the tie of affection between mother- and daughter-figures, between female writers and readers, which carries with it a demand, a burden. When the narrative returns to this original frame at the novel's conclusion, Matilda admits that "it is with regret I present to your youthful eyes so melancholy a chart of my voyage through life" (5811). Matilda's ambivalence stems it seems from two sources: a desire to shield Adelaide from the losses constitutive of gothic female identity, and "regret" that she is burdened with the task of teaching Adelaide these painful lessons. In the way that the narrative frame begins with the end, so does it end with a tragic beginning. Matilda asks that Adelaide "accept from this hand the casket I bequeath," which literally refers to the all-important yet illusive set of documents

that provide the “proof” of Matilda’s identity. At the same time, this casket figures the maternal inheritance of loss transmitted in written documents. As we have seen throughout the narrative, maternal bequests only ever repeat legacies of suffering. That Matilda bequeaths this casket of written documents sets Adelaide up to first experience and then bequeath loss herself, to repeat the cycle of passing down the painful narratives of women in history.

In *Oakendale Abbey*, Carver too depicts the female gothic’s maternal inheritance of loss. The slip of paper, recovered towards the novel’s conclusion, that attests to Laura’s family identity reveals that she is the daughter of William Carleton, Oakendale’s younger brother, and a “Greek Lady, of illustrious birth, and exquisite beauty,” named Zelima (144). Zelima has no textual identity within the narrative, though we know “her religion, her country, and her laws, were all sacrificed to the powerful passion of love” (145). Essentially, she exists as a negation. And, indeed, when Laura’s father is killed Zelima “only survived to cast a mournful look upon the mangled corpse of her husband, gave a compulsive shriek, and expired, leaving a female infant ‘unpitied, and forlorn!’” (147).<sup>137</sup> It would seem that, without her husband, for whom she has sacrificed her Greek identity, Zelima cannot exist at all. She can speak only to shriek and can live only to mournfully die. Zelima, then, does not bequeath any history of or knowledge about her identity to Laura, but instead passes down a legacy of mystery and uncertainty. Though Carver provides no physical description of Laura, we can assume that Carver envisioned her in a way that meets the British standards of beauty in the long eighteenth century. So her appearance is her paternal inheritance devoid of her mother’s features, history, and identity. As Gottlieb puts it, the novel “can conclude with Laura’s happy marriage to an appropriate husband only by

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<sup>137</sup> The most recent edition of the novel provides no source for this quote. Without more knowledge about Carver’s identity and history, it is impossible to say what her original source material might have been. Some possibilities include the Psalms of David and Alexander Pope’s “Autumn; or, Hylas and Aegon” (1709).

erasing the foreign traces of her lineage (100). Zelima as foreign other bequeaths to Laura the loss constitutive of female gothic subjectivity, but Carver compounds this loss by alienating Laura from her mixed ethnicity. Reading from a twenty-first-century position, we might indeed consider the authorial figure “Mrs. Carver” as a participant in the female gothic’s maternal inheritance of loss. Like Zelima, Carver has no certain identity, textual, biographical, or otherwise; she, too, exists as a negation. And as Zelima transmits the hole at the center of female gothic identity to Laura, so Carver and her novel stand for an absence at the center of gothic scholarship.

### **Fantasy: History and Future**

Reading these two works, simultaneously exemplars and anomalies of the female gothic, is a historical reading practice; it is (a) practice in reading history. At the same time, reading the female gothic is a fantastical reading practice built on retroaction, projection, and anticipation. To say that historical documents are fantasy productions is not to demean or dismiss their value, but to bring to the forefront their symbolic meaning, their status as fictional documents. In clinical psychoanalysis the analyst takes for granted that the patient’s narrative account of the past is a fantasy produced within the present, but this in no way diminishes the importance of that fantasy construction. The point is not to fight against the work of fantasy, to try and recover the “truth” of the past; the point is to work *with* fantasy to create meaning in the present, which informs both the past and the future. Both the female gothic and psychoanalysis teach us the same lesson in reading and interpretation: they teach us to read history as fantasy and fantasy as history. Fantasy does not get in the way of our understanding of history; it *is* our history. Furthermore, the primary theme of the female gothic novel of the long eighteenth century is that reality is always more horrifying than fantasy. This indeed is the function that fantasy serves: to

mediate the horrors of reality. The female gothic thus reveals that we *need* fantasy to cope with reality. Though this chapter specifically, and this dissertation generally, have examined the painful losses constitutive of identity and history in the female gothic, I conclude with this chapter on documents to look toward the future. Female gothic writers (and their fictional counterparts) are especially concerned with instruction, with teaching young (female) readers the painful lessons of the past through the act of reading. In this way, they bequeath the only property that is fully their own: their stories. And because subjectivity as imagined in the female gothic is inextricably linked with textual objects, these women writers are passing down parts of themselves to readers in times and places they never could have imagined. Though these part-objects are not only tangled up with fantasy but also with painful lessons of suffering and loss, there is nevertheless great power in these bequests. By telling stories of repetitive cycles of fear, longing, and loss, women writers provide the painful instruction in the gendered trauma of and in history, but in so doing demand that their readers imagine, at the very least, a different kind of future.

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