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**The daemon Eros: Gothic elements in the novels of Emily and
Charlotte Brontë, Doris Lessing, and Iris Murdoch**

Magie, Lynne Adele, Ph.D.

University of Washington, 1988

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The Daemon Eros:
Gothic Elements in the Novels of
Emily and Charlotte Brontë,
Doris Lessing, and Iris Murdoch

by

LYNNE ADELE MAGIE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

THE DAEMON EROS: GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN THE NOVELS OF EMILY
AND CHARLOTTE BRONTE, DORIS LESSING, AND IRIS MURDOCH
by

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The first problem with the gothic is defining the term, which is used to denote at least three distinct phenomena at different levels of generality: a historical group of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, a literary genre of content, and a category of analysis. Disagreement about definitions, particularly of the analytical category, suggests that each critic tends to make use of that part of a complex family resemblance that best suits his own purposes. This is true not only of the gothic but of generic labels in general, which implies the usefulness of literary categories is as multiform and overlapping ideas rather than discrete entities.

The gothic is used here as a tool of analysis to discover the way the novels of the Brontës, Lessing, and Murdoch work and what their central concerns are, while at the same time exploring what some of women's interests in the gothic might be. The focus is on their use of the daemonic (so spelled to suggest the Greek concept of

morally ambiguous forces that are sources of both energy and compulsion), and in particular on Eros (love, libido, sexuality) as the form of the daemonic most often of interest to women writers. The analytical value of this image is that it tends to attract to itself the emotional contradictions of the work, marking the intersections of fear and desire and showing us what, in the universe of the novel, is to be loved and feared. It can function as a key to values and emotions that may not be explicit or perhaps even conscious. The writers and novels discussed are very different, and the attempt is not to impose a rigid terminology on them but to illuminate them with a common approach while dealing with each novelist, as nearly as possible, in her own terms.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Love, Fear, and the Gothic

. . . unnatural acts performed by improbable characters in unlikely places . . .

- Robert Kiely

The Gothic novel is a literary representation of our innermost fears. What we fear so much is ourselves.

- Sybil Vincent

The first problem that faces anyone who tries to write about the gothic is defining just what it is. This is not only because the actual membership of any given genre is notoriously a matter of debate, but because the term "gothic" is used to denote at least three distinct phenomena at quite different levels of generality.¹ (For that matter, the term "genre" itself is used without formal distinction at every level of generality.) At the most concrete level, the term is historical and denotes a group of novels written between 1764 (the year Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* was published) and a less definite date sometime in the early nineteenth century--perhaps 1820, when Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* first appeared. Some would set the second date considerably later to include the works of Edgar Allen Poe, but wherever the line is drawn, the term in such usage is conceived as an empiri-

cally derived historical label for a limited number of works, and wide agreement can be (and has been) reached on the works to be so labeled without any necessary agreement on the particular qualities they have in common. In fact, despite the deceptive uniformity of castle/skeleton/dungeon motif-centered descriptions of this group, even the small band of early gothic novels that includes *The Monk*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *Frankenstein*--and probably not more than a dozen other books that are still read by nonspecialists--is disparate in both means and ends. Joel Porte, commenting on the difficulties of finding a theoretical ground for this grouping, said: "We are faced, then, with such a bewildering variety of designs and intents . . . that the critic searching for something like a unified field theory of Gothic fiction will certainly be tempted to throw down his pen in despair" (Thompson 42). It is only when one is using the term in its limited historical sense that one can speak of "the end of the gothic novel." But it is misleading to do so, for the same reason people are still looking for workable theories about the gothic: because it did not become extinct in 1820 like an ill-adapted literary dodo. Works continued to be written (and later filmed) that resemble and sometimes consciously imitate the "designs and intents" of the gothic romance of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to acknowledge that fact the

term has been adapted to broader meanings.

A second and more general use of the term, then, is generic and denotes a genre of content (as opposed to a genre of form like drama or lyric), regardless of date of composition. Most of our genre labels, including such basic ones as "comedy" and "tragedy," are descriptive of content; perhaps only the precise and narrow terms for certain types of lyric--"sonnet," "vilanelle," and the like--denote purely formal distinctions.² "Gothic" is most often used to refer to a subgenre of prose fiction, though it is certainly possible to identify gothic plays (like *Death's Jest-Book*) and even gothic lyrics (like "The Raven"). As a generic label the term is also empirically derived, not only from observed resemblances between works but from the various uses of the word "gothic" by publishers, writers, and critics. The genre therefore includes contemporary works to which the name is now generally applied (such as the large body of popular women's fiction that took its impetus from the success of Daphne DuMaurier's *Rebecca* in the thirties, Isak Dinesen's *Seven Gothic Tales*, some of Faulkner's novels, and so on) and any such works produced in the future. In this broadened usage it becomes clearer from the multitude of phenomena it includes that the label identifies a perceived relationship but precedes any universally accepted analysis of what the relationship is.

The third and most general use of the term is theoretical and descriptive. It is used analytically to point out the elements of a work that create the relationship expressed in the genre label: the "feel" or atmosphere of the gothic, whether it occurs in acknowledged members of the genre or not. Thus, just as one might speak of a romantic setting, incident, or character even within a realistic context, one may also speak of gothic atmosphere or elements in a work one would not ordinarily label as a gothic novel. This does not mean that "gothic" is an unusually loose term; other genre labels tend to operate also, to our frequent confusion, as analytic categories, and this seems unavoidable and even desirable. But it is by no means clear at what point an analysis that shows, for instance, romantic or realistic or epic or gothic traits in a work becomes or ought to become a generic label. Is *A Study in Scarlet* a Western? Is *Troilus and Cressida* a tragedy? Is *Moby Dick* a gothic novel? Robert Hume and Robert Platzner had a sharp interchange of opinions over the last of these questions in the pages of *PMLA*, based in part on the confusion of meanings discussed here, and in part on a genuine difference of opinion about what the gothic is in theory.³ Similarly, some critics treat *Wuthering Heights* as a gothic romance while others (including Platzner) insist it is essentially a realistic novel. It is certainly not a question of

calculable percentages, but of something like critical mass or the threshold of recognition. And it is on this level of generality that our difficulties in reaching consensus about the nature of the gothic become obvious. Almost everyone attempts a definition, and no two definitions quite agree.

There are good reasons for this. Generally speaking, definitions of the gothic fall into one of two types: single-element definitions, and those based on a cluster of motifs or conventions. Thus in attempts to define a single gothic essence it has been called a genre of terror (the *Schauerroman*) (Birkhead, Reed), of the supernatural (Reilly, Peavoy), of inverted religion (G. R. Thompson), of evil (Hume), of the exploration of the psyche (Nelson), of passion (Heilman), of didacticism (Lewis), and so on; and whole books have been devoted to cataloging and explaining the gothic conventions (Railo, Sedgwick) or particular examples of them (Tracy, Howells, DeLamotte, Blondell, Doody, et al.).

The problem with single-element definitions is apparent in the lack of agreement about what the element should be and the related arguments over which works make up "the gothic." Inevitably any single element can be found either to be lacking in some gothic works (Radcliffe's novels, for instance, conspicuously lack the supernatural; *Vathek* is not particularly terrifying) or to

be substantially present in non-gothic works. The same kind of thing happens to lists of particular motifs: *Frankenstein* has no castle in it, though movie-makers invariably add one; dungeons, skeletons, veils, confinement, hero-villains, or any of the other items on the long list of conventions may or may not occur in a particular work that is nonetheless recognizably gothic. It is clear that the way we recognize members of this genre (or any other) involves a complex of elements that may include aspects of plot, setting, characterization, themes, diction, and affect. In other words, most literary labels involve what Wittgenstein (in *Philosophical Investigations*) called "family resemblance" rather than precise, mutually exclusive categories. The critics' carefully thought-out definitions and lists are not wrong, of course; on the contrary, the difficulty is that they are almost all right. But they are partial, and besides that, a genre is not a thing but a category of thought (or as Praz says, a "fiction"), and human beings take pleasure in mixing, inventing, and redefining categories. There is no reason why people should not have invented new gothic conventions or new uses for the gothic, as indeed they have since 1820, and no reason in the course of analysis to refuse to call such creations by the old name, even when new names have also become available.⁴

In other words, it is useful to think of genres not

as entities but as organizing ideas, and to expect most literary works to partake of the qualities of more than one of them, just as any given human being unites the bloodlines of at least two families--more, if one looks beyond the immediate parents. There is something to be said for seeing *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as both gothic and sentimental, or *Wuthering Heights* as both gothic and realistic, and little to be gained by trying to impose on the complex phenomena of art a purity they neither possess nor aspire to. As Robert Hume points out, there is no Platonic Form of the gothic novel--only a "variety of novels from different periods and countries" which are similar enough to be illuminated by comparison (Platzner 274).

The real reason for wanting to file a work neatly away in a single category has often been a matter of valuation rather than analysis. "Gothic" began, after all, as a term of ethnic abuse which Horace Walpole then decided to transform into a term of praise, and its subsequent history repeats the cycle more than once.⁵ When realism is in the ascendance, all forms of romance including the gothic fall into disfavor, and their finest examples (which no one wishes to give up) must be rescued by critics who point out that they are "really" realistic after all. "Psychological realism," which has often been attributed to the gothic, has been a useful category for

renovation jobs of this sort. On the other hand, when imagination and formal experiment are highly valued, as they have been again lately, these qualities must be rediscovered in the masterpieces of realism, which naturally no one wants to give up either. The valorization of realism and a consequent uneasiness with non-realistic forms began in the nineteenth century and lasted quite a long time; as recently as the fifties, D. P. Varma felt obliged to begin *The Gothic Flame* with a "justification" for writing about the gothic at all, sometimes falling back on the argument that it is important for its influence on "greater and more significant works," if not in itself.

This dissertation is concerned hardly at all with such questions of valuation. I take it for granted that realism and fantasy are complementary, not opposing forces, that both appear in every literary work,⁶ and that they are equally important objects of study. This also means assuming that the gothic, rather than being silly, self-indulgent trash, is a set of highly-developed literary techniques with a variety of interesting uses. The project of the studies that follow is not to add yet another definition to those already in circulation, nor to establish a theoretical unity among gothic novels. In fact, as the table of contents will already have indicated, in the historical sense of the word most of the novels

discussed here are not gothic novels at all, but novels published well after the first bloom of the gothic romance--some in the nineteenth century, some in the twentieth--that make use of gothic conventions to a greater or lesser degree, each for purposes of its own. Some are commonly regarded as members of the gothic genre (like Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn*), others are not (like Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*); some have been the subject of argument (like *Wuthering Heights*), others have been treated in the critical literature as either gothic or realistic depending on the interests of the critic (like Charlotte Brontë's novels). The method here is to use the gothic, in its third and broadest sense, as a tool of analysis, a way of discovering something about the way each novel works and what its central concerns are. The aim is also to explore, at the same time, what some of the uses of the gothic might be.

The starting point of this project was simply the observation that a number of the finest novelists of the last two centuries have made use of the gothic and continue to do so, and that the genre (as Edith Birkhead noted back in 1921) seems to have a particular appeal for women as both readers and writers. In light of the very negative view taken toward the female gothic by many feminist scholars,⁷ especially in its popular forms but also, it seemed to me, in established classics, I began by

wondering why it should be so popular. What could women have to gain from the gothic? Is it simply a way of expressing oppression, self-hatred, and fear, as Gilbert and Gubar and even Ellen Moers suggest? Unless one considers masochism to be a "feminine" trait, this hardly seemed an adequate explanation for the persistence of a genre whose end has been frequently and prematurely celebrated. I wanted to look at what women actually did with the gothic and whether it seemed to be different from men's use of the genre. That, of course, meant trying to come up with a working definition of what the genre was, at least for these purposes.

I began, like almost everyone else, by making a list of the gothic conventions and trying to find some common element that would justify the confident identification of any particular work as gothic or not-gothic. It didn't work very well. The list quickly became quite long, and whenever I looked at someone else's list I found things I had overlooked and needed to add; but the common element remained elusive. Eventually I realized that what I found myself tracing were some of the features of the family resemblance, and no key item was going to make an appearance. Ultimately, all one can say with accuracy is that certain motifs show up frequently (but by no means always or exclusively) in gothic works, and that where enough of them appear together one begins to become

conscious of the gothic "atmosphere."⁸

In spite of the multiplicity of ingredients in this brew, it is not a random assortment but a chain of associated ideas. Within that chain, some items seem to be more central to women's gothic than others. And so for the purposes of this dissertation there is a particular idea of the gothic at work, and the gothic elements identified and discussed are of particular kinds. The focus is on the gothic's long-established usefulness in portraying moral ambiguity and in connecting the internal with the external, psychological forces and terrors with both social and metaphysical problems. For this reason, I pay a good deal of attention to the motif of the daemonic, retaining that spelling to suggest the Greek conception of spirits or forces that are intermediaries between gods and men--in modern terms, between the universal and the personal, or between the one and the many--and so are felt as sources of both energy and compulsion, with the potential for both good and evil consequences. This is to be distinguished from the *demonic*, which has the later Christian meaning of a distinctly evil or Satanic force. In modern secular and psychological terms, the daemonic can be generally equated with libido or psychic energy; but to do so exclusively would be to lose the connection with religion and metaphysics, a subject which is a frequent gothic concern and has certainly not disappeared

with the loss of religious consensus in the twentieth century. The daemonic is often used to underline the difficulty of knowing whether the forces that move human actions are internal or external, natural or supernatural, physical or spiritual--whether, in fact, these apparently distinct categories can really be distinguished; in the moral realm, it is used to show the complexity of the relations between good and evil.

There is more than one daemon at work in human beings. Many gothic novels, for instance, concern themselves with what one might call Mephistopheles: the drive for power, of which the Faustian lust for forbidden knowledge represents only one kind. The hero/villain often has a taste for power; Walpole's usurping Prince Manfred is one such, as is Victor Frankenstein. But the conditions of most women's lives have, until recently, limited their opportunities to observe the exercise of power except in the personal sphere. Not surprisingly, they have been experts instead on the daemon so often relegated to them: Eros. This is not to say merely experts on love, for love is only part of Eros, whose power includes sexuality and the many forms its exercise and repression can take: possessiveness, murderous jealousy, sexual politics, religious mania. Psychoanalysis, of course, sees libido as fundamentally erotic, and so one might claim that Eros is the source of all psychic

energy; Iris Murdoch describes it in these terms. In any case, a focus on the daemon Eros is a fruitful one for the analysis of women's gothic, and so the version of the gothic I have been obliged (like everyone else) to construct in order to use the category consistently takes this as its central point.

Eros, like other daemons, is ambiguous not only morally but emotionally. In fact the daemonic, with its uneasy marriage of opposing forces, is a form of the sublime, as its effect on human emotions shows, for it combines compelling attraction with terror. Kant said that "the mind is not merely attracted by the [sublime] object but is ever being alternately repelled" (83), and this mixed affect is even more pronounced in our response to the erotic than in our reaction to a landscape of mountains or sea. Sexual energy has its demonic aspects, and in the history of human affairs the *femme fatale* has certainly accounted for fewer victims than her male counterparts. The gothic hero/villain acted as a kind of cultural model for Byron and his heroes, who passed the paradigm along; what Praz (referring to self-conscious later Romantics and connecting them with the ideas of de Sade) calls "Byronic Fatal Men"⁹ have continued to figure prominently in women's romances as they have continued in the Late Romantic patriarchal culture we inhabit to provide models of "masculinity" and male

hegemony. No one knows better than women how dangerous love can be. In nineteenth-century women's gothic, the possibility that such a Fatal Man might usurp the place of God himself was acknowledged. But as time time passed, the terms of the conflict changed. With the weakening of religious belief, an idealized love has taken the place of other numinous images. Love is the secular god of mass belief in the twentieth century, the answer to every problem, the good in shortest supply in an economy of absence; "all you need is love," the musicians tell us. This is the thing everyone wants, all the more because no one can have it--no actual experience can ever quite incarnate the ideal. In the gothic, desire and loss are one, as are love and fear.

The value of such a daemonic image for purposes of analysis is that it tends to attract to itself all the emotional contradictions of the work in which it appears. Its appearance marks the intersections of fear and desire. From it we can learn not only what the characters of the fiction love and fear, and when the two are the same, but what in the whole universe of the novel is to be loved and feared. It can function as a kind of key to values and emotions that may not be explicit or perhaps even conscious.

The women whose novels are discussed here represent only a small selection of the women who have worked with

the gothic, but they are among the best. They were not chosen as "illustrations" of gothic techniques but because they are interesting in themselves and seem to be illuminated by this common approach. In fact, time constraints have forced me to leave out some of the writers I had intended to include, the most glaring omission being Mary Shelley. But they do cover a fairly broad range of gothic possibilities, as well as more than a century of literary development. Their loves and fears are not the same. Their sense of what it means to be female is not the same. There are important differences even between the two Brontë sisters, who might be expected to be close in many ways. I have tried not to impose preconceptions or a rigid theoretical vocabulary on their books, but to deal with each, as nearly as possible, in her own terms.

Despite their differences, of course, these women do share certain common experiences and concerns that show up in their writing: there is such a thing as women's gothic. The generalizations one can make about a category that includes half the human race are necessarily cautious and limited, but they exist. Given the approach of this dissertation, I think they will make more sense at the end of the chapters that discuss individual authors, and so will reserve them for a short epilogue.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹In this it is very similar to the related term "romantic." In *The Romantic Agony*, Mario Praz comments on the usefulness of such "approximate terms" so long as they are not expected to supply an "exact and cogent definition of thought" (1). He argues, however, that their use should be limited to this first sense, for historical description; given the actual development and use of these terms, this strikes me as a spirited but doomed attempt to unthink a number of lines of thought that have already ramified considerably, and I can't imagine these particular djinns being successfully stuffed back into their respective historical bottles. We would be doing very well indeed if we were able to discriminate among their various meanings without confusing them.

²Northrop Frye comments in "Dickens and the Comedy of Humors": "Every novel of Dickens is a comedy (N.B.: such words as 'comedy' are not essence words but context words, hence this means: 'for every novel of Dickens the obvious context is comedy') (54). This implies, though not in the terms I use below, a category derived from a mixture of elements.

³Platzner, like Praz, wants to limit his term to historical uses, while Hume is attempting to define gothic

as an analytic category but then labels as "gothic novel" any book that possesses gothic qualities, thereby treating generic and descriptive uses of the term as identical.

⁴Many "new" genres have been born of the gothic: science fiction, fantasy, horror, the ghost story, the thriller, the historical novel, and certain kinds of romance developed by Rider Haggard and currently popular again not only in print but in films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Some examples of these genres no longer suggest the gothic; in others, the resemblance is still strong. It is worth noticing, for example, how much books like Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* owe to *Frankenstein*. And of course the relationship between these genres, the "mainstream" of realistic fiction, and the experimental novel is vexed, complicated, and fascinating.

⁵For a brief history of the word and its use, see Varma's first chapter.

⁶For a full argument of this point, see Kathryn Hume's fine book *Fantasy and Mimesis*.

⁷See, for example, Ann Ronald (Fleenor 176-206) on "castration" fantasies and "disturbed psychology" in Radcliffe and Brontë; Tania Modleski, who analyzes the gothic in terms of paranoia; Judith Newton; in fact, the majority of feminist treatments of the gothic.

⁸Lists quickly grow tedious and uninformative, but I will sketch mine briefly in order to make clear what I was

looking at in these novels and why they formed a logical group. It includes aspects of setting (historical distance, sublime landscapes, the great isolated structure--castle, abbey, fortress, country house--caves, grottoes, mountain peaks, prisons); of characterization (the hero-villain, priest, persecuted innocent, necromancer, supernatural being, madman or -woman, master/slave pairs, the double, the outlaw or outcaste); of plot (violence, mystery, incest, the love/death nexus); of affect (fear, guilt, despair, sexual passion); and certain objects that have tended to be gothic favorites from the time of Walpole and Clara Reeve (veils, corpses, animated paintings or statues, graves, bloodstains, ghosts, and so on). Certain kinds of language have also been much used: people are called devils, demons, fiends and the like; appeals are made to fate, destiny, providence, the will of God; moral qualities are personified. Even this partial list is awkwardly long, but it helps to suggest some of the characteristic themes of gothic fiction, which are also part of the atmosphere: the numinous, the daemonic, the nature of evil; death; moral transformations (corruption/redemption/damnation); delusion, obsession, and the nature of madness; metaphysics and religion; sado-masochism; sexual violence; the unconscious mind.

⁹Praz himself hardly seems to notice how literally fatal in his catalog of Romantic sadism and its love for

the theme of the "persecuted maiden," even as he quotes Poe's famous dictum that "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world."

Chapter 2

Eros and Death: *Wuthering Heights*

'What then is Love?' I asked; 'Is he mortal?' 'No.' 'What then?' '. . . he is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between the two . . . He is a great spirit (daimon), and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal.' 'And what,' I said, 'is his power?' 'He interprets,' she replied, 'between gods and men.'

- Plato, *Symposium*

If, on the other hand, we assume that *Wuthering Heights* is nothing more than a Gothic romance, we automatically exclude it as a serious study of any human problem.

- Melvin R. Watson

"Is Mr. Heathcliff a man?" asks Isabella Linton, who has returned from her wedding journey and is writing to Nelly Dean. "If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?"

One of the possible answers to her first question--that Heathcliff is a man--has been the focus of concern for those who find in *Wuthering Heights* a new and exciting kind of realistic novel.¹ The extent to which he is more than a man is the natural concern of those who wish to trace the influence of the gothic, since Brontë's text forces us to answer Isabella's last question in the affirmative: Heathcliff is indeed a kind of devil, as well as being more than a little mad. He is a spirit, an

incarnate goblin, a savage beast, a monster, a ghoul, a vampire, a fiend, a demon, a little dark thing with sharp cannibal teeth who is harbored by a good man to his bane, and eventually a phantom; at least, all these epithets and descriptions are attached to him, many of them more than once and by more than one person. He is Hindley's "evil genius" and perhaps his murderer, a gipsy brat whose God is "curiously confounded with his own black father"--by the best accounts we have of him, a sullen child and a "fierce, pitiless, wolfish man." He is a changeling himself and a destroyer of souls: "Now, my bonny lad, you are mine," he says to the child Hareton with "peculiar gusto." He adds, ominously, "And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!" (154). But as this reminds us, he is a devil made, not born--a very human devil, realistically produced by the harsh environment of Wuthering Heights and by Hindley's jealous hatred, possessing no supernatural powers, as helpless before the death of his beloved as the rest of us. A man, then ("Hush, hush! He's a human being," Nelly reminds Isabella (143)); but a man whose presence makes others think of demons, who inspires superstitious fear. In fact, both answers to Isabella's question are true, just as it is true that Wuthering Heights is both realistic and fantastic, a novel and a romance. Although nothing happens in it that cannot be

rationally explained, the book's atmosphere is distinctly gothic, and this effect is produced most obviously by Brontë's treatment of Heathcliff. It is also the result of a similar, though less striking, duality in the book's female characters.

But what is gained from such a double treatment? Why does Brontë provide her characters with this gothic shadow? She might as easily have told the story in an entirely realistic mode, if her thought could have been adequately expressed in that form; apparently it could not. It is not a matter of "romanticizing" her material, for she is unflinching--even ruthless--in her recognition of unpleasant truths. None of her characters is prettified, none of their fates seem unearned. It is not a matter of avoiding what is difficult, for the novel's events meet realistic standards of causality and characterization, so that the complication of the novel's genre by means of its Gothic elements is something added and deliberate rather than the dodge of a lazy or inadequate artist. The extent to which *Wuthering Heights* is, in fact, a realistic novel was a favorite topic of critics during the long period, only now drawing to a close, in which "realism" was a term of unqualified praise and "gothic romance" a term of dismissal.² It is still worth looking at the nature and extent of its gothic qualities to see why Emily Brontë might have chosen to include them,

and whether her treatment of Heathcliff, about which so much has been said, contributes something to the novel not available in the realistic mode.

The fact that Heathcliff is a daemon is kept persistently before us, preventing us from ever thinking of him as only or simply a man. He is the center of everything about the story that is uncanny, other: his introduction into the family at Wuthering Heights sets into motion all the events that follow; he is the one who is haunted by Catherine's ghost and whose own ghost dominates the end of the story, so that even Nelly Dean "[doesn't] like being out in the dark" any more; he is the source of the novel's mysteries, none of which are ever really solved; he is of unknown birth ("Who knows but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen...?" (54)) and dies apparently by an act of will,³ leaving the doctor "perplexed to pronounce of what disorder" he has perished. From beginning to end there is hardly an ordinary thing about him, or about his story, which equally mysteriously omits all that one would have expected to be central (his transformation into a gentleman, his acquisition of wealth, the revelation of his true identity) in order to concentrate with something of his own obsessiveness on his relations (direct and indirect) with Catherine. It matters a great deal that all of this reaches us indirectly, as a tale told many years after the

events have happened, for the perceptions and judgments of the witnesses are of the utmost importance. Our sense of Heathcliff as daemonic comes less from what he does (for his actual behavior is never violent enough to cross ordinary legal boundaries, confined as it is to a bit of woman-battering within the domestic circle and a fistfight or two) than from the terms Nelly and (through her) the other characters apply to him and from their own dread of him, so clearly communicated throughout. His own extraordinary speeches, as reported by Nelly, merely confirm the impression of him she and Lockwood have conveyed from the beginning.

In addition to his strangeness he is omnipresent, dominating the action simply by being on stage more than any other character. Lockwood's first words concern him ("I have just returned from a visit to my landlord"), and his last words are spoken over his grave; though he refers to the "sleepers" in the churchyard, Catherine seems to have become nameless. (Of the three headstones, we are told, "the middle one" is half-buried--"Heathcliff's still bare." The boy who reports the ghosts, too young to have known Catherine Linton, speaks of "Heathcliff and a woman, yonder.") Nelly's long tale, the heart of the novel, is told in response to Lockwood's request for an account of Heathcliff's history (though his private motive is to hear more of the younger Cathy); it begins with Heathcliff's

arrival at Wuthering Heights and ends with his death. Isabella's version of events, divided within Nelly's narrative between letter and parting conversation, begins (once her greetings to Edgar are over) with her questions about Heathcliff's humanity and ends with her last sight of him locked in combat with Hindley Earnshaw. So all of the book's narrative structures keep him at the center of our attention--because he is at the center of the fascinated gaze of the four women who surround him (and, in the narrative frame, of his tenant, who shares some of his peculiarities and has been called his "civilized double" (Mitchell 35)).

To say all of this about Heathcliff, however, is not to deny that Catherine Earnshaw is also central. Her actions motivate the plot; as the haunting spirit of Wuthering Heights, she shares with Heathcliff the novel's center of power; Lockwood's dream encounter with her ghost is by far the most frightening event in the book, and happening as early as it does it colors the rest of our experience. And although she has no part (beyond Lockwood's report of the fragments of her diary) in the narration of the novel, one of its considerable achievements is to make us see Heathcliff, ultimately, through her eyes and with something like her judgments. She alone is neither frightened by him nor sentimental about him; she alone never doubts either that he is human or that he

is "unreclaimed" and dangerous. Both her description of him in the famous "I am Heathcliff" speech and her warning to Isabella show that she has a perfectly realistic view of his character and his probable actions. Yet she alone loves him, and she is always aware of him even in his absence; and we come to share something of her sympathy despite his appalling behavior and to be equally, though uneasily, aware of his dominating presence, wondering about him when he disappears from the action and always expecting (correctly) to see him again as the story unfolds. We, like Catherine, are safe from him and can give him dispassionate attention, and this is a vantage point not even Nelly can share. And though it may seem odd to call Catherine's view of Heathcliff "dispassionate," certainly the account she gives of him seems less colored by her emotions for him, however powerful, than Nelly's is by both fear and pity, or Lockwood's by ignorance and misunderstanding.

Thus Catherine's is, despite its own oddities, the central consciousness in the book where our sense of Heathcliff is concerned. But she is not the only woman, of course, whose perceptions inform and direct our own. Heathcliff's almost continual presence on stage, either as actor or as the object of the narrator's attention, and the brief frame provided by Lockwood obscure the extent to which the entire narrative is a feminine one. It is a

story told by a woman, Nelly Dean, much of whose reporting is devoted to the words and actions of other women, its hero's deeds reaching us only through the medium of female response and accompanied by a rich text of female commentary. It is not Lockwood's version of Heathcliff that we accept, but one pieced together from the things said about him by Nelly, the two Catherines, and Isabella.

The plot of *Wuthering Heights*, then, may be dominated by Heathcliff, but the power that moves him is Catherine and the novel's voice is Nelly Dean's; the daemonic male is surrounded, motivated, and interpreted by women, all of whom have something of the daemonic about them also. This is most obvious in the case of Catherine, whom we meet as a ghost--first the ghostly trace of the past found by Lockwood in the margins of her books, then the more terrifying child-ghost of his dream--and who only later becomes alive and human to us, so that her presence is always touched by the supernatural. She also has alarming flashes of prescience in which she predicts her own future and Heathcliff's. ("We must pass by Gimmerton Kirk, to go that journey!... I won't rest till you are with me" (108); "How strong you are! How many years do you mean to live after I am gone?" (132)). There is nothing necessarily supernatural in these moments--good guesswork could produce the same statements--but they strike us as uncanny because of the novel's narrative order, in which we have already

seen the events she describes come to pass, and so they reinforce our sense of Catherine herself as daemonic. This quality is not confined to her, however. In one of her states of delirium, a state in which things become clear to her which have been concealed before, she accuses Nelly Dean of unnatural meddling:

I see in you, Nelly . . . an aged woman--you have grey hair, and bent shoulders. This bed is the fairy cave under Penistone Crag, and you are gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers; pretending, while I am near, that they are only locks of wool. That's what you'll come to fifty years hence. (105)

When she discovers Nelly has no sympathy with her self-induced illness, she cries, "Nelly is my hidden enemy. You witch! So you do seek elf-bolts to hurt us!" Even practical, sober Nelly, we are reminded, is a creature of the wild moors, though her own tendency to superstition makes her afraid to hear Catherine's dreams. She describes that fear oddly: "I was superstitious about dreams then, and am still; and Catherine had an unusual gloom in her aspect, that made me dread something from which I might shape a prophecy, and foresee a fearful catastrophe" (72). In fact, she is afraid of her own powers of prophecy, not Catherine's possible revelations.

The young Cathy Heathcliff, as we first meet her, has also been changed by her association with the Heights into someone more sinister. In one of her first speeches she

threatens Joseph with witchcraft when he abuses her:

"Are you not afraid of being carried away bodily, whenever you mention the devil's name? I warn you to refrain from provoking me, or I'll ask your abduction as a special favour. Stop, look here, Joseph," she continued, taking a long, dark book from a shelf. "I'll show you how far I've progressed in the Black Art--I shall soon be competent to make a clear house of it. The red cow didn't die by chance; and your rheumatism can hardly be reckoned among providential visitations!" (22)

Only later will we see her as the naive girl she once was, and later still as Hareton's smiling tutor--her progress in the narrative order of the book, though not in its chronology, is from experience to innocence to creator of a new order at Wuthering Heights.

Even the usually passive Isabella leaves Heathcliff for the last time by throwing a knife back at him and wishing "that he could be blotted out of creation." Clearly these are no ordinary women, just as Heathcliff is no ordinary man, and something unusual is at work in the conception of Brontë's characters.

Although we needn't look far for analogues to Heathcliff, particularly among the heroes of Byron's romances, this daemonizing of the women in the story represents an important shift in female roles. The phenomenon of Byronism had both drawn from and complicated the moral configurations of eighteenth-century gothic, in which the daemoniac had been simply evil (demonic).

Byron's *Manfred* owed a good deal to Walpole's *Manfred*, though all the histories of Romanticism remind us that he lived in a more ambiguous universe in which good and evil were difficult to distinguish and the villain had become a hero. However much Byron may have contributed to the moral possibilities for heroes, though, he added little to the characterization of women. He left the expectations for gothic tales created by Walpole and Lewis pretty much intact: the powerful hero/villain will be the moving force behind the plot, and the women caught up in his machinations will either be destroyed by him or escape from him. It remains unusual for other characters who show daemonic traits to be anything but villains or *femmes fatales*, the kinds of women one would expect to find in the company of the supernatural. But in *Wuthering Heights* they are people who have our sympathy, though it may not be unqualified. This is a significant change. To associate heroines with the daemonic is to claim power for them, and more--it is to claim a morally neutral power which can be exercised as they will. The heroine of the earlier gothic (and indeed of many modern pop-gothics) is menaced by the supernatural and must escape it, be rescued from it, or explain it away. She does not participate in it. What *Wuthering Heights* does is to claim this realm for women, as the gothic and its predecessors had already claimed it for men, and refuse to damn them for inhabiting it.

Traditionally, a woman who was herself daemonic would have functioned as an agent of evil and contributed to the destruction of the villain; a heroine would have been free of any taint of the daemonic and have functioned as a moral pattern and a source of good. Catherine Earnshaw, who has aspects of both, does not fit either pattern, nor do Nelly or Cathy. If there is a conventional gothic heroine in the book it is Isabella Linton, and Brontë prevents us from sympathizing overmuch with her by making her a fool about Heathcliff. By the time she flees from him and from the Heights, she has left her romantic illusions behind and become a different woman, both colder and stronger. Once this transformation is complete, there is not a woman in the novel who would qualify as an old-fashioned heroine. They feel too strongly, say too much, act too independently. As a matter of aesthetic politics this is very different from creating the familiar angelic women of countless other novels, whose "power" lies in selflessness and passivity and in their alignment with the controlling patriarchy of the Christian heavens.

In fact, the Christian paradigm of self-sacrifice, contrition, and deferred rewards, which Nelly sometimes tries unsuccessfully to impress on Catherine, is alien and hostile to the world in which Catherine and Heathcliff exist. This is one significance of Catherine's dream about heaven, which she calls "nothing" in comparison with

other, more important dreams that have changed her ideas: "they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind," she tells Nelly. What those dreams were, we are never to know. The trifle she is able to tell over Nelly's objections seems meaningful enough, however, since it shows us what she sees as the alternative to a conventional heaven, and it is far from the place prepared for sinners Nelly warns her of: "the angels were so angry," she says, "that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy. That will do to explain my secret, as well as the other" (72). Her secret has to do with the reason she knows it is wrong to marry Edgar Linton; and somehow it also has to do with heaven. What is that secret, if not her rejection of all that a conventional heaven stands for, as well as the conventional embodiment of an ambitious girl's dreams in Thrushcross Grange and its prosperous young master? At least Nelly seems to suspect her of such a meaning, since she returns to this conversation in her account of Catherine's last meeting with Heathcliff. She has seized him by the hair and told him, "I wish I could hold you till we were both dead!" It is the beginning of their exchange of recriminations over her approaching death and the separation it will mean. Nelly's reaction to the scene is peculiarly detached:

The two, to a cool spectator, made a strange and fearful picture. Well might Catherine deem that heaven would be a land of exile to her, unless, with her mortal body, she cast away her mortal character also. (133)

The comment is tart, but accurate. Catherine's outstanding trait is the strength of her will; it is from this that whatever is daemonic in her arises, for she wills her own continuance as a ghost (as does Heathcliff, whose demand that she haunt him is half a curse, half a prayer). It is hard indeed to imagine her in a Christian heaven, for she neither possesses nor desires the humility of a saint. What could heaven mean to such a woman, or to such a man as Heathcliff? Their complete equality is nowhere clearer than in the inadequacy of Christian myth to provide a place we can accept for either of them. Its explanations and promises are rejected over and over again, not only in Catherine's dream but in Heathcliff's cry after her death ("Where is she? Not there--not in heaven--not perished--where?" (139)), in the hauntings, in young Cathy's and Linton's quarrel about what heaven will be like, in the way our attention is focused on those ambiguous graves in the book's last paragraph. In the afterlife, as in so much else--including her death--Catherine has her own way, whatever the cost; and whatever our moral judgment of her, this is a measure of how much the novel claims for her.

Hers is not necessarily a happy position, nor in saying that Brontë's novel claims power for women do we need to conclude that Brontë imagines it to be so: power may be turned, at times, to self-destruction. But we may conclude that happiness is not the correct standard to apply. Catherine has something to say on this point about her love for Heathcliff: it "resembles the eternal rocks beneath--a source of little visible delight, but necessary. . . . not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself--but as my own being--so, don't talk of our separation again--it is impracticable . . ." (74). These are strange words to use about love.⁴ We are accustomed to the language of desire in such situations, even of overmastering desire, but not to that of necessity. The particular daemon that drives Catherine and Heathcliff, the "great spirit" we sometimes call Eros, makes them fit only for each other; other consolations, other societies--even the society of heaven--are irrelevant, "impracticable." And in their limitation lies their extraordinary power.

Heathcliff and Catherine are isolated from the ordinary world of Victorian England by both their intensity and their exclusiveness, by what they include--the whole universe of erotic love--and what they seem incapable of perceiving, including much of ordinary morality. They seem as remote from daily human affairs,

in some ways, as supernatural beings would be; for all the detailed realization of their surroundings these two are detached, frozen in the aspect of desire: we never see Heathcliff farming, or Catherine keeping house, though they must do such things. Part of our feeling that such activities would be irrelevant to the story comes from their association with the daemonic, their gothic "shadows." We do not ask of a ghost how it earned its keep when it was alive, but what its passions were and its tragedies; if we see a man becoming a devil, we do not ask about his finances but about what he loves and what he hates.

Having isolated them, Brontë creates an equilibrium between them. Much of their energy is spent in a contest between themselves which continues even after Catherine's death; and in spite of Heathcliff's dominance of the scene, it is Catherine who seems to have the greater power--she has power over Heathcliff, who in turn obtains power over everyone else. He gains the ascendancy over Edgar Linton and Hindley by taking over their money and property;⁵ he controls Hareton through affection and enforced ignorance; he rules Isabella by the fear of violence and later extends this patriarchal reign of terror to Linton and the younger Cathy. Even Nelly Dean, who is not easily intimidated, is afraid of Heathcliff with a fear half superstitious and half physical which

prevents her from offering him any real opposition. When she tries to rescue Cathy from the "shower of terrific slaps" with which he ends her attempt to escape from his house and a forced marriage to Linton, Heathcliff silences her with "a touch on the chest" that takes away her breath and nearly knocks her down. This does not entirely end her resistance, but it takes the initiative away from her and she is helpless to recover it, or to rescue Cathy. Her fear of Heathcliff does not attach itself to his violence, however, but to his uncanniness, and when she falls into speculation about his nature just before his death it is with a "sense of horror" she finds hard to shake off:

"But where did he come from, the little dark thing . . . ?" muttered superstition, as I dozed into unconsciousness. And I began, half dreaming, to weary myself with imaging some fit parentage for him . . . (260)

No cheerful idea of a Chinese emperor and an Indian queen emerges from this reverie, but the image of Heathcliff's headstone bearing the single name and the date of his death. And so out of Nelly's associations and fears our sense of Heathcliff as powerful and sinister is built up, and in his speeches as reported by Nelly that power is passed on to the woman who is, for him, the source and end of everything. Whatever spirit of wrath and vengeance rules him when he is away from Catherine, in her presence (real or phantasmal) he is subdued to his interest in her,

the one obsession of his life. And so all the territory staked out by Heathcliff is ultimately annexed by Catherine and subsumed into their relationship; as he says to Nelly, as the end approaches: "I have a single wish . . . it has devoured my existence. I am swallowed in the anticipation of its fulfillment" (256).

It is this fierce, unnatural concentration that is most characteristic not only of Heathcliff but of the whole Catherine-Heathcliff plot, and that gives that plot its dominance over our sense of the novel as a whole. After all, one might be forgiven for wondering why Heathcliff, coldly considered, should be popularly regarded as romantic and why the book should be world-famous as a "great love story," for it lacks the sentimental warmth we generally associate with "romance" of the feature-film type. And of course plenty of people have gone to considerable trouble to explain that this idea of the book is a misconception, a rather frivolous misreading. But the idea persists anyway, and I think for good reason. What makes the otherwise horrifying Heathcliff irresistible (and for men, one gathers, the otherwise insufferable Catherine unforgettable) is simply the quality of his attention to his beloved. Unlike other lovers, who are torn between loyalties or must resolve conflicts in duty, he is whole and single-minded. (In this, he is purer than Catherine, for she is troubled

enough by the prospect of social degradation in marrying him that she chooses Edgar Linton instead, though without the slightest intention of giving Heathcliff up.) And unlike other men, who demand of women that they fit pre-existing categories--angel, whore, child-wife, temptress, mother, virgin--he takes Catherine quite seriously, while his concentration on her permits him to see her as she really is. What is more, his attention is absolute and permanent; nothing Catherine says or does can affect it, not even her marriage to another man; not even her death. His love (and Catherine's) is in this sense, if not in others, ideal and godlike, a force of transcendent power and value. It is also, on the unconscious level, the answer to everyone's deepest fantasy. It is not a fantasy peculiar to the nineteenth century or limited to the realm of the erotic; W. H. Auden described it memorably in "September 1, 1939":

The windiest militant trash
 Important Persons shout
 Is not so crude as our wish: . . .
 For the error bred in the bone
 Of each woman and each man
 Craves what it cannot have,
 Not universal love
 But to be loved alone.

Catherine and Heathcliff represent the achievement of what, in real life, we "cannot have"; this is why they have entered our cultural imagination as the apotheosis of what we rather euphemistically call romance.

Morally, their story is profoundly ambiguous: a heady mixture of danger and satisfaction, of selflessness and self-aggrandizement, of transcendence and corruption. This play of contraries is characteristic of the realm of the daemonic, and so of the gothic; where powerful contradictions arise that are at once external and internal, cultural and psychological, we find gods and daemons to preside over them and to represent them. Love is a god because he is as dangerous as he is beautiful. This is the dimension added to the novel by Heathcliff's shadow and Catherine's ghost: they touch desire with fear. However accurate she was in her treatment of property laws, however convincing her settings, Brontë did not deal with love merely as a practical matter or one that belonged entirely to the daylight world. She wrote a novel that gets at the complex, contradictory, violent emotions it arouses, at our sense that it is in some way an absolute, like death--at the reality that death is often one of its consequences, particularly for women--at love as at once the most desirable and the most perilous of all human experiences. The fate of Catherine Earnshaw is played out as a desperate struggle for the power to control the circumstances of her own life, a struggle in which love and death meet. And so, enter ghosts and demons, delirium and dreams. The passions are a middle ground between consciousness and the unconscious, between choice and

fate. To represent this mixture Brontë chose a mixed medium, and at the center of the plot she placed the "great spirit" Eros who animates both Catherine and Heathcliff and stands at the border between life and death, fulfillment and destruction. Because their love partakes of this power, it can gain a victory over death; for the same reason--not because class barriers are impenetrable--it is perfectible only in death.

But a concern with daemonic love is hardly confined to women's gothic; it forms one of the staples of men's gothic as well. There are, however, some interesting differences between *Wuthering Heights* and masculine gothic like Lewis's *The Monk*. The Eros of that work is simply a devil (or demon), destructive in all its effects.

Ambrosio's fall into ever more horrifying depths of violence and perversity begins with his seduction by the demon Matilda, a seduction that gains added power to titillate from her disguise as the boy novice Rosario. The account we are given of Ambrosio's upbringing within the monastery clearly suggests that repression of his natural impulses under the artificial rules of Roman asceticism is to blame for his destruction; Lewis finds a handy source of inexhaustible vice in Catholicism.

Ambrosio is corrupted at an ever-increasing rate once the loss of sexual innocence releases his unconscious desires.

To some extent the work is a pioneering psychological

study; it contains at least a submerged argument against excessive and hypocritical repression of the sexual urge. But its structure is very conservative. In fact, any sex at all quickly becomes criminal and perverse in this story, or is punished out of all proportion to the offense (as in the adventure of the Bleeding Nun, and the affair of Agnes and Raymond). As a consequence of his lust Ambrosio is soon embroiled in incest, murder, and the willing abandonment of his soul to the devil. If acts are to be judged by their consequences, *The Monk* is as sweeping a condemnation of sexuality as any prude could desire, even though its willingness to wallow in acts of sex and violence was (and perhaps still is) shocking. The freedom claimed by the book, then, is to name forbidden acts while reinforcing the prohibition against them. Sex is mere lust, and like pride is a snare set by the Devil for Ambrosio's soul; the "god" for whom Eros interprets is Satan. Given this conception of the erotic, naturally the women in the book remain cardboard emblems of virtue or vice, mere counters in the contest between Ambrosio and the Daemon who preys upon him.

Against this background of pious sensationalism, how startling the morality of *Wuthering Heights* looks! Brontë's sense of the erotic is far more complex (and obviously far more positive) than Lewis's, though it is hardly as positive as the one expressed by Socrates in the

Symposium. Love does not appear to lead Catherine and Heathcliff to a love of the good, nor does it make them less selfish (though they occasionally seem selfless--as Heathcliff does when he must remind himself to breathe). But then no account of Eros given by a member of a Christian culture is likely to be as positive as Plato's. Brontë, however, is never merely conventional. The Catherine-Heathcliff relationship is saturated with physical desire and yet remains chaste. Arnold Kettle finds this remarkable: "the scene at Catherine's death is proof enough that this is no platonic passion, yet to describe the attraction as sexual is surely quite inadequate. . . . What is conveyed to us here is the sense of an affinity deeper than sexual attraction, something which it is not enough to describe as romantic love" (133). In fact, the "sense of affinity" is conveyed by the same things that daemonize the two lovers, including their passionate sexlessness.

Yet "platonic" might be exactly the word to use, if one is describing not the lack of sex but its transcendence, a relationship for which both everyday fulfillment and a Christian reunion in heaven are "inadequate" because alien to its spirit. This is the love that is "neither mortal nor immortal," that mediates between life and death, between heaven and hell, between male and female, between the spirit and the flesh; it is, in fact, the

hopeless and irresistible set of contradictions love often is in real life. And the human embodiments of this love must be equally contradictory, equally irrational.

Like Plato's ideal lovers, Catherine and Heathcliff remain "fiercely chaste" (Oates 447), while embodying the fullness of desire. Unlike Plato's lovers they face each other across the gulf of a difference of sex, but one effect of Brontë's treatment is to minimize this difference by refusing to satisfy our expectations for romance. Her protagonists resist categories. Is Heathcliff a hero or a villain, a lover or a vengeful proto-capitalist? Is his death the final act of a tragedy--or is it a triumph? Is Catherine, with her "feminine" preference for the Grange and her "masculine" will, conscious or unconscious of what she is doing, faithful or unfaithful? Part of the transcendence the novel seeks for them is the emptying of categories, including the category of gender--the social category that makes it a necessity for Catherine to marry, even as Hindley makes marriage to her only possible partner an economic and social impossibility⁶--the category that tells us love cannot be the business of a man's life.

In this story of sexual love, sex itself finally becomes irrelevant though it is the ground on which all else is based; the lovers' search is not for sexual satisfaction but for wholeness, for absolute union, for

all that love promises and can never really provide. The love that is a daemon is not physical passion, but the desire which can never be satisfied: to be one with the beloved, to become the beloved. "I'm too happy," Heathcliff tells Nelly the day before he dies, "and yet I'm not happy enough. My soul's bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself" (262). Catherine had cried, "I am Heathcliff," and Heathcliff has his own plans for making this a physical reality after his death. He tells Nelly he has seen the dead Catherine and dreamt of sleeping "with my heart stopped, and my cheek frozen against hers." Nelly asks, "And if she had been dissolved into earth, or worse, what would you have dreamt of then?" He answers: "Of dissolving with her, and being more happy still!" (228) The language is sexual, but the desire is absolute and so can find its full expression only in terms of death, the contradictory absolute that must involve transcendence if it is not to be pure nothingness.

This balance of contraries in the characters and their fate is related to the genre problem this novel has always presented to critics. The book is full of dualities and doublings, opposites and complements:⁷ the Heights and the Grange, the Earnshaws and the Lintons, Heathcliff and Edgar, Hareton and Linton, Catherine and Isabella, Lockwood and Nelly; most important and pervasive of all, the division of the plot between first and second

generation, with repetitions in both names and relationships (so that one must speak of Cathy 1 and Cathy 2 or devise some other shorthand for distinguishing them, and the love triangle and fatal marriage are played out in both generations).⁸ But the double plot (reminiscent, as much of the gothic novel is, of the seventeenth-century drama) produces opposition rather than simple repetition. The story of Catherine and Heathcliff ends in death, that of Cathy and Hareton in marriage. In other words, the Catherine/Heathcliff plot is a tragedy, the Cathy/Hareton plot a comedy. Moreover, the gothic elements of the novel belong almost entirely to the Catherine/Heathcliff plot, while the story of the second generation--only disentangled from the other in the last few pages, after Heathcliff's death--ends on an entirely realistic note, with Cathy educating Hareton for life at the Grange and the position of a gentleman. What, then, is *Wuthering Heights*--romance or novel, comedy or tragedy?

Recent critics have found this question unanswerable. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, says: "The best readings, it may be, are those . . . which repeat in their own logic the text's failure to satisfy the mind's desire for logical order . . ." (52-53). Nancy Armstrong puts the case more bluntly: "this is an essentially disjunctive novel" (253). Neither seems to think that this state of things in the book is deliberate. In fact, Armstrong

describes the novel as "falling into" the world of Dickens and Thackeray "of necessity, as the idealist categories of Romantic discourse break down."

But the interesting thing about this ambiguity is that it is by no means peculiar to *Wuthering Heights*. It is a recurring trait in the Brontës' fiction, and seems to appear in company with gothic qualities: in the equally "disjunctive" structure of *Jane Eyre*, in the startling conclusion of *Villette*, in the nested narratives of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, where the tragedy of Helen Huntingdon's first marriage is surrounded by the comedy of her courtship by Gilbert Markham. The same kind of thing can be seen in modern gothic novels like *Rebecca*, and in even the most predictable of formula pop-gothic potboilers; the plot must be arranged to threaten the heroine's life, health, and sanity, but these threats are almost never carried out. The proper formula for the ending is the long-delayed union of the heroine with her proper husband.

In this as in other things, *Wuthering Heights* is unusual. Brontë does not deflect her potentially tragic plot toward comedy; instead, she brings it to its promised end but leaves us uncertain about whether it is as tragic as it seems. Then she follows it with the "happy ending" Ann Radcliffe would have chosen. But the comedy is overshadowed and somehow devalued by its position and by its

inability to keep even Lockwood's attention, which veers back to the story he has been told, the tale of the Demon Lover with its ambiguous dénouement.

The change that has come over Heathcliff before his death is not melancholy--far from it. Cathy describes him as "very much excited, and wild and glad"; Nelly speaks of his appearance of "unnatural joy" and of her futile efforts after his death "to close his eyes--to extinguish, if possible, that frightful, life-like gaze of exultation, before anyone else beheld it. They would not shut; they seemed to sneer at my attempts, and his parted lips and sharp, white teeth sneered too!" (264) The lovers are dead, but they keep the book's central vitality with them. Cathy and Hareton are alive and ought, being much nicer people, to be more attractive; but Brontë leaves us with the distinct feeling that their love is a paler, feebler shadow of the *Liebestod* embodied by their predecessors. We are persuaded to rejoice in the idea that Catherine and Heathcliff are still out there on the moors, wrapped in some unimaginable fulfillment; but which of us, knowing what we do about them, would really want to meet them on our way home some dark night? Most of us would find life at Thrushcross Grange far more comfortable than the Heights, but the novel turns us against ourselves, tempting us into open partnership with the fateful, brilliant shadows of our own unacknowledged desires.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹For instance, Edith Fenton distinguishes the spirit of *Wuthering Heights* from that of the Gothic, which she sees as superficial and negative, by claiming that in Brontë's work the supernatural is a result rather than a cause of human emotion (Fenton 119); Joyce Carol Oates sees the "gothic-romantic mode" as a childishness whose inevitable rejection is central to the novel's structure. Arnold Kettle speaks of David Wilson's "valuable service in rescuing *Wuthering Heights* from the transcendentalists." And naturally, Marxist and other new-historical readings depend heavily on the realistic aspects of the novel.

²See, for example, Kettle, Eagleton, Miller's opening paragraph, Fenton's heroic attempt to rescue the novel from being called a gothic romance at all.

³Or perhaps, as Giles Mitchell suggests, by the relaxation of his will: "He simply ceases to remind himself to breathe" (Mitchell 33).

⁴I owe this observation to Professor William Dunlop.

⁵Marxist accounts of Heathcliff, like Terry Eagleton's, while they draw our attention to aspects of *Wuthering Heights* as a realistic novel that are certainly worth noticing, have no real account to give of the book's

gothic elements or Brontë's possible reasons for including them.

⁶Richard Chase considers this a "moral failure" on Catherine's part to "fulfill her mission; which was, clearly, to marry Heathcliff" (114). This absurd statement can only come from a refusal to imagine what that marriage would have been like.

⁷Inga-Stina Ewbank sets out many of these oppositions at length.

⁸This is clearly laid out by Charles Percy Sanger, complete with genealogy, in the discussion of the novel's structure.

Chapter 3

Charlotte Brontë: Realism and Despair

*The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.*

- Robert Frost
"The Oven Bird"

If there was one thing Charlotte Brontë knew about, it was how it felt to want what you could never have; and she knew especially well the refinement of that torment that lies in wanting two things incompatible with each other.¹ Not because she was a neurotic, or the passive victim of a tragic fate; after all, these are things all of us know more or less, and it is in the nature of desire to exceed its fulfillment. But because her life was difficult, though not so uniquely tragic as it has sometimes been made out to be, she had the opportunity to study loss, and the more so because she had possessed wealth in her childhood that really was unique. She had had, after all, her own world, a particularly sublime one with its mountains and burning deserts and alabaster cities set by the rolling floods of great rivers, peopled with extraordinary men and women who were caught up in high actions and swayed the fate of nations, creatures of fire and passion and beauty who were so real to her, so intimately

known, that she saw them with her waking eyes even in the pedestrian surroundings of Miss Wooler's school, long after she had "grown up." This was unusual enough. But the unique part was that she had companionship there, that Angria was a shared world, and contiguous to the other shared world of Gondal inhabited by Emily and Anne. She lived in a world of the imagination without paying in eccentricity for her entry there, or at least without paying the full price of isolation. Even after she had to leave Haworth to work, her world did not fail her for some time. She could not, of course, speak of these things to her friends at school, but from time to time she could go home; she had letters and visits from Branwell in which they exchanged news of what was going on in Angria; she remained one of a society of young demiurges, creating their imagined histories like explorers of a strange new country miraculously free of the dull, the predictable, the petty.

She wanted that existence to continue, of course--if one can speak of "wanting" something essential to one's being. Romance was her medium and her *métier*; her later use of the gothic, which is of course one category of romance, was not a departure from a realistic norm but a return to an earlier mode of expression. Her early writings dealt wholesale in the stuff of desire: passion, love, politics, war, and fame. But even in youth she was not

sentimental, and neither were her romances. And she wanted more than fantasy: she wanted the real world, she wanted glory and mastery and the companionship of the brilliant and the excellent, she wanted love, she wanted power; she wanted freedom from the limits of her person, her circumstances, her fate. All this is merely to say she was human.

But she was too intelligent to believe, once she had tried the world outside Haworth, that she would be able to go on as she had. Her work shows how observant she was, and when she turned her attention to writing about the world she saw around her, one thing that forced itself on her attention again and again was the gulf between desire and truth, between the glorious forms of the imagination and the tepid satisfactions of an ordinary life. And an ordinary life was all that offered itself to an impoverished young gentlewoman without beauty or prospects. She was uneasy about her own future, seeing in it much to desire and little to hope for. She knew very well that she lacked the qualities she had given her Angrian heroes and heroines, and that might have brought her what she wanted: money, of course--and she was under no illusions about the power of money to make up for other deficiencies; birth; but more especially the personal qualities of beauty and vitality. She was never sure of her power to please, Gaskell tells us; when she turned to novel writing for a

wider audience than the home circle, she took the standard advice offered to new artists and wrote about what she knew best, about people who were never sure of their own power to please. She decided to leave romance behind and to describe the world as she knew it. And so she became one of the first and greatest masters of the art of making fiction out of unappealing people, especially plain women and poor men. She became the poet of disappointment.

When she wrote realistically it was always in self-conscious distinction to the romance that was her first impulse. "I determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides," she wrote to G. H. Lewes about *The Professor*; "I restrained imagination, eschewed romance, repressed excitement . . . and sought to produce something which should be soft, grave, and true" (quoted in Gaskell, 329). The second paragraph of *Shirley* begins, "If you think . . . that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken . . . Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard." Realism of her sort was to bring her fame and the company of Thackeray, Martineau, and Gaskell, and she is still praised for it--these days usually for "psychological realism"--but it is worth noticing that she thought of it as grave and lowly, or as she continued in *Shirley*, "cold lentils and vinegar without oil . . . unleavened bread with bitter herbs, and no roast lamb." It was time to put

in the things that had been excluded from Angria: drudgery, permanent poverty, suffering that earns only contempt because it lacks the stature of tragedy; time to look at characters who are denied the solace of action. It was time finally to give up the heady freedom of her male Angrian narrators and to write as a woman, from the point of view of women as ordinary as herself--in fact, lacking an Angria of their own, more ordinary than herself.

Brontë had often used a male persona to tell her Angrian tales; even when the voice was her own, its account of her characters had been strictly objective and had entered as freely into the consciousness of her men as her women. On the whole, especially because of her obsession with Zamorna, she gave more attention to men's actions and inner lives than to women's, even in pieces that have since been named after their female characters (like "Julia," "Mina Laury," and "Caroline Vernon"). Our titles show our own assumption that a woman writer must be focussing on female characters more than they reflect any attempt on Brontë's part to take a particular interest in women's experience. In those early works, Brontë is free to take up the whole range of human experience as she understands it, and she does so with a zest that, however naive, comes as a breath of fresh air compared with the painstakingly rendered lives of the young Jane Eyre,

Caroline Helstone, and Lucy Snowe, which are as cramped as Brontë's early copies of copperplate engravings. And although the Angrian writings are full of tragedy and violence, they show little sign of the gothic; in them, though desire may be thwarted, it is not yet an occasion of fear.

The difference in feeling between the novels and the "juvenilia" is very striking and suggests just how much her sense of reality and the hard lessons of her teaching years were forcing her to give up in order to satisfy her equally powerful need for truth. These Angrian men and women suffer; they are passionate and energetic, and often bring disaster on themselves. But they are free to make choices, free to follow their own natures wherever they may lead. At their emotional center is Zamorna, the royal Duke of Angria, and the real dream of the Angrian years is not to marry Zamorna (hardly a happy fate), but to be Zamorna. He is rich, free, powerful, beautiful, above all loved--or hated with equally gratifying intensity--by everyone around him. He represents Romance itself, the apotheosis of desire, and writing a story without him required a conscious effort. The traces of that effort show in her first attempt at a "real" novel, *The Professor*, where she retains the male point of view and for the last time allows her characters an unambiguous happy ending. To write consciously as a woman in *Jane Eyre*

is the first deliberate move into a realm of frustration and compromise in which such endings will be impossible; though she will not write a real tragedy until *Villette*, the endings of the next two novels will be shadowed with compromise and diminishment. The more she reaches into her own reality for subject matter, the more a kind of despair appears at the emotional center of her work.

Her shift in allegiance to realism, however, never became complete. If romance is the roast lamb of literature, it is a dish Brontë never gave up, though she tried. In fiction as in life, she continued to draw on both halves of an apparent contradiction. "Real" life, it seemed, was not romantic; yet the elements of romance, never defined but always felt as the whole life of the affections, as freedom, as the power to achieve,² were not simply imaginary--they must exist in every life if that life was to have meaning or joy, if it was not to be a blank of suffering. About such an existence there could be nothing to say. She wrote, for instance, to Ellen Nussey:

I am silent because I have literally nothing to say. I might indeed repeat over and over again that my life is a pale blank and often a very weary burden . . . but what end could be answered by such repetition . . . ?

The evils that now and then wring a groan from my heart . . . cannot be helped and therefore *imperatively must be borne*, and borne with as few words about it as may be. (Quoted in Gerin, 508)

What could not interest her oldest friend about her own life would hardly make promising material with which to entertain the novel-reading public. And so in her books she arrived at various compromises between realism and romance, all of which have been criticized as inadequate³ though no two are alike, and though they are responsible for much of the popular appeal of her books. (It is worth remembering that *Jane Eyre*, in particular, still has a life as popular fiction--far more so than most surviving novels of its time.) The attempt to include both sides of her experience sets up a tension in her works that is clearest, perhaps, in *Villette* where Lucy Snowe declares her allegiance alternately to Imagination and to Reality without being able, finally, to do without either; at the intersection of romance and realism lies the terror of losing all that the romance world represents, and so in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* as in *Wuthering Heights* desire is touched with fear, becomes daemonic because of its association with power and loss. Under this tension the happy marriage-plot ending of *The Professor* dissolves into the ambiguous unions that end *Shirley*, and the sunnier romanticism of *Angria* is gradually transformed into the gothic. To mark this experience as belonging to women, specifically female figures of terror enter the plot: the mad wife, the

ghostly nun.

The experience of love in these novels, while retaining the romantic potential of fulfilled desire, also brings with it the gothic threat of madness and death because for Brontë's heroines, who are always in a position of disadvantage, it is accompanied by its shadow: the experience of being deprived of all love, a nightmare of isolation that waits for them if their hoped-for romance fails. This vulnerability is both economic and emotional. They are all orphans, and poor: Frances Henri in *The Professor*, Jane Eyre, Shirley's Caroline Helstone, Lucy Snowe; often enough this is also the case for her male protagonists, who seldom have living parents or indeed any close relations. But the men generally have society in the form of a friend (Crimsworth has Hunsdon), a brother (the Moores), or a circle of equals (Rochester, Dr. John), and they have either property or work for which they are well fitted. Only for Brontë's women is a disappointment in love likely to be accompanied by solitude and either enforced idleness or galling drudgery --or worse, by near-starvation and breakdown. In these circumstances love itself becomes a problem--the problem--of women's lives, a daemonic power that will have to be dealt with sooner or later. It is a kind of initiation or test that will determine the entire course of their lives, though since bad marriages are disastrous one can never

know until the end whether any particular outcome has been fortunate or unfortunate; avoiding or missing love is not an escape, but a kind of death and one of the significant consequences of the test. This branding experience--this angel of Fate--stands across every young woman's future and every old woman's past. This is the middle-class tradition with which Brontë must wrestle, recognizing both the seductiveness of the sexual sweepstakes in which one may win everything at once--position, affection, children, security, companionship, permanent employment--and the intolerable injustice of having everything depend on one's ability to please an audience whose tastes have been corrupted by self-interest and vanity.

It is part of her affinity for indirect, non-realistic modes of representation that Brontë's imagination habitually works through personification and allegory. On the one hand, she found gothic figures, already in the tradition as signs of isolation, death, madness, and conflict between unconscious forces, very useful in dealing with and objectifying the core of internal conflict in women's lives. On the other, she was able to make subjects and agents out of the ideas that people her women's minds. She frequently uses the half-human figures of personified abstractions as a middle ground between fantasy and a form of realism that is very shrewd about the mind's tendency to make daemons of its own categories

of thought. Reality, Imagination, Truth, Interest, Despair, Duty, Temptation, Hope--these are the demigods who whisper in the ears of her characters the promises and threats that move them to action. The nun and the madwoman, object lessons in the workings of these forces, stand as symbols of their power to destroy. These apparently ornamental turns of phrase are not stylistic extravagances, any more than the gothic elements of her plots are a failure to be "realistic"; she is concerned with limits, especially with the inadequacy of "real" life to the needs of the spirit and the inadequacy of ordinary consciousness to express the full life of the psyche. Her departures from realism mark the points at which these limits are reached.

Her novels are not equally concerned with such matters, of course. *Shirley* is an experiment in the social novel on the model of Thackeray which finds itself interwoven rather unexpectedly with a study of emotional deprivation in the life of Caroline Helstone and, by association, the lives of all "superfluous" women; its mode is largely realistic, with some fascinating exceptions. In *Jane Eyre* the balance between realism and romance is most even; it is this book that provides the most influential single model for modern formula gothic in English, even to the repetition of the role of governess long after such a job has become a rarity. When people

think of contemporary "women's gothic," they are most often thinking of modern imitations and adaptations of *Jane Eyre*. Some of this influence is undoubtedly the result of the fact that it is a very successful female *Bildungsroman*, as Adrienne Rich has pointed out. But I think it is also because its comic ending, however modified and shadowed, allows for consolation and a sense of justice. But of the three major novels, perhaps *Villette* is, as Robert Heilman said, "most heavily saturated with Gothic" (80). For this reason I want to look at it first, even though it was written last; in it the relations between gothic and realism are more disjunctive than balanced, and it is easiest to see how Brontë uses the gothic mechanism to raise very real questions about the power of the daemon Love over women's lives. This book delivers the meal of bitter herbs Shirley only threatened; here if anywhere in Brontë's work her sense of reality is firmly in control, enforced and not softened by romanticism transformed into the gothic and driven to acknowledge despair.

Villette: The Funeral of Hope

The emotional climate of *Villette* is one of an almost stunned despair. It is perfectly captured in a poem by

one of Brontë's contemporaries, Emily Dickinson:

There is a pain - so utter -
 It swallows substance up -
 Then covers the Abyss with Trance -
 So Memory can step
 Around - across - upon it -
 As one within a Swoon -
 Goes safely - where an open eye -
 Would drop Him - Bone by Bone.

"You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given," wrote Charlotte Brontë to her publishers about Villette's heroine, Lucy Snowe; "I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid" (quoted in Gerin, 509). Lucy herself says something very similar as she describes the onset of her depression during the long vacation, alone at Madame Beck's pensionnat:

My spirits had long been gradually sinking . . . the dumb future spoke no comfort, offered no promise, gave no inducement to bear present evil in reliance on future good. . . . The hopes which are dear to youth, which bear it up and lead it on, I knew not and dared not know. If they knocked at my heart sometimes, an inhospitable bar to admission must be inwardly drawn. . . . I dared not give such guests lodging. So mortally did I fear the sin and weakness of presumption.

Religious reader, you will preach to me a long sermon about what I have just written, and so will you, moralist; and you, stern sage: you, stoic, will frown; you, cynic, sneer; you, epicure, laugh. Well, each and all, take it your own way. I accept the sermon, frown, sneer and laugh; perhaps you are all right: and perhaps, circumstanced like me, you would have been, like me, wrong. (218-219)

Here is a long list of positions her imagined reader might

take with respect to Lucy's experience, all hostile; and such asides are common in the narrative. One of the hopes Lucy dares not know is the hope of being understood. But Brontë is not Lucy Snowe, and however appealing biographical readings which identify them may be, they miss the distance Brontë maintains from her and the coolness of her analysis. She does not expect her readers to approve of her heroine, nor to like her easily, because she does not "approve" of her herself. Approval, her letter suggests, is not the reaction she is after. *Villette* is a study of a "morbid" condition brought on by intolerable circumstances, of its causes and its cure--and of the fate that may prevent a cure. Its focus on morbid states of mind is one occasion for Brontë's use of the gothic, for the terror inspired in Lucy by the "ghostly" nun she encounters in *Villette* is clearly a result of her own vulnerability as much as de Hamal's playacting.

But the reason for performing such a study was not merely that Brontë herself had experienced similar circumstances; this might give it the personal interest of glorified gossip, but would hardly command serious respect. The point was that the experience was widespread, if not always so prolonged or so destructive; that the circumstances were not uncommon, especially for women. The real point was that the condition of some lives was hopelessness, in part because that is the last thing

anyone else wants to see and so the hopeless person, the depressed and lonely person, the person with nothing to offer becomes invisible and lives out the existence of a ghost surrounded by but unable to touch or be touched by the living. Brontë's novel tries to make us feel the fear of such a life, and so the nun impersonated by Alfred de Hamal is not the only specter in the Rue Fossette. Lucy, who has come by temperament and bitter experience to regard hope as "the sin of presumption"--and, more tellingly, a weakness she dare not entertain--is not really alive either, and she tells us so many times. Just as Jane Eyre is touched with the uncanny, beginning with the scene in the red room, Lucy Snowe is touched with abnormality. When Miss Marchmont describes her as "a worn-out creature," she agrees though with a reservation:

I saw myself in the glass, in my mourning-dress, a faded, hollow-eyed vision. Yet I thought little of the wan spectacle. The blight, I believed, was chiefly external: I still felt life at life's sources. (48)

This seems hopeful, but we find as we go along that the external "blight" afflicting Lucy is neither temporary nor trivial, and it is very sternly self-enforced. It seems to be shaken off for a while when Miss Marchmont dies and Lucy sails for the Continent on the aptly named ship *Vivid* to be met by the rainbow, "an arch of hope"; but these days of unaccustomed freedom and energy are followed at once by a repressive reaction, even before she reaches the

shore. She asks us to draw a moral from her rainbow: "Day-dreams are delusions of the demon" (76). She does not specify which demon--presumably she has the devil in mind--but it seems in context to be her own personal daemon, hope, whose misleading consolations she dreads. Throughout the novel she is torn between hope and the dread of disappointment, between the desire for the love and security she sees others enjoying, and fear of the fate she imagines--quite accurately--to be her implacable enemy. That exhausting fluctuation of emotions begins here to be the pattern of her narrative. It is not clear whether the tag about daydreams is a warning from the older Lucy of what is to come or the reaction of the over-excited girl who is travelling so daringly alone. But the next reaction, "becoming excessively sick," is contemporary with the rainbow.

So it goes throughout the story. Every movement toward expansion and freedom is followed by a counter-impulse of constraint and imprisonment, very frequently self-imprisonment, and is presided over by such daemonic personifications as "the rude Real" and the hag Reason who whispers in Lucy's ear everything she does not want to believe. Her journey ends in the capital city of a foreign country, but rather than exploring it, so far as she could do so with propriety, Lucy buries herself in the Rue Fossette and takes her exercise walking in the allée

defendue, where she dreams of England and her childhood:

Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I could feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future--such a future as mine--to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature. (151-152)

This language of death, or rather of life-in-death, of an unnaturally still surface maintained by force to cover a tumult of suffering and rebellion, recurs only a paragraph later. A thunderstorm breaks over Villette, an event Lucy notes because it left her "roughly roused and obliged to live," and because it filled her with longing for a change; this longing, she says, "it was necessary to knock on the head," and she follows with the famous comparison to Jael and Sisera. But her longings, refusing to die, "at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench: then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core" (152). The disturbing violence of this imagery prepares us for the entrance of terror and makes the crucial connection between Lucy's own suffering and self-created "death" and the apparently supernatural manifestations that will follow. It describes the intersection of desire and fear that is the ground of the gothic and the locus of this novel. It is no accident that these passages occur in the same chapter that first tells us about the ghostly nun who had been buried alive, a chapter called "The Casket" (referring literally to

de Hamal's ivory box, containing a letter to Ginevra).

Being buried alive is the novel's controlling metaphor, and it extends Villette's gothic elements far beyond their obvious appearances in the plot. It is sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit in images of trance, enchantment, or imprisonment, as in Lucy's stay with Miss Marchmont: "All within me became narrowed to my lot," she says of that time. "I demanded no walks in the fresh air" (50). Walking in London, she says, "my spirit shook its always-fettered wings half loose"--but only half loose. When she hesitates to accept Madame Beck's offer to make her a teacher, she says that she is content with little in reality so long as her "life of thought" is "nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy" (105). In the evenings, avoiding the lecture pieuse in the refectory, she leans out the dormitory window, "thinking . . . my own thoughts, living my own life in my own still shadow-world" (164). The first time M. Paul leads her out of her self-imposed isolation, persuading her to act the fop in the school play, she finds within her surprising dramatic powers, but her reaction is startlingly negative. She disapproves; she resolves never to do such a thing again:

. . . to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by, and fastened them in with the lock of a resolution which

neither Time nor Temptation has since picked. (157)
Why would she so quickly and so finally reject what she herself sees as strength?

Actually, she has given us the reason much earlier, and we should not be surprised at this reaction, or at her similar rejection of the proffered friendship of the other teachers and her preference for solitude. The explanation appears at the end of that significant interlude with Miss Marchmont, whose death, like the thunderstorm, is an unwelcome goad to action: "I had wanted to compromise with Fate," Lucy says: "to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains. Fate would not so be pacified . . ." (50). In this personified Fate Lucy is to find an enemy more deadly even than Reason, a kind of devouring goddess on whose altar she offers up her life in vain. Fate is the first and will ultimately be the last of the novel's embodied ideas or forces to exercise a daemonic sway over Lucy, its weapon first a metaphoric and then a literal shipwreck; and her fully justified fear of it sets up a metaphysical resonance between gothic imagination and reality as Lucy experiences it.

But for the moment she refuses to believe that Fate will not be pacified, and so she goes on attempting to avoid pain by avoiding engagement with life. Hence the name Brontë chooses for her; hence the nun who mirrors

her withdrawal from the world. Lucy's demands on life are not great: she really cares only for two things, love and liberty. Her strategy for dealing with an existence that denies her everything she wants is self-immolation, which at least has the virtue of being chosen and so leaves her some freedom. Much later on, immediately after Lucy has buried Dr. John's letters, Paulina de Bassompierre asks her to come live with her, offering three times the salary Madame Beck pays her. Her refusal of this proposal is even swifter and more definite than her rejection of acting:

Rather than be a companion, I would have made shirts, and starved. . . . I was no bright lady's shadow--not Miss de Bassompierre's. Overcast enough it was my nature often to be; of a subdued habit I was: but the dimness and depression must both be voluntary. (427)

Paradoxically Lucy Snowe, whose life is abnormally confined, and who chooses to confine herself, values liberty above almost everything else. But this is the center of what is valuable in her, the hard irreducible core of integrity that makes her story bearable because she herself finds a kind of freedom and even a certain amusement in it. She is not simply a victim. She has learned to cope with her life by being still, by choosing to be "an onlooker at life," and so she maintains a precarious balance. The book's apparently sprawling plot follows the events that shake her balance, all of which have to do with love and its loss, and where they lead her; this is why the opening chapters at Bretton, which

have often been treated as a mere prologue, are an integral part of the action.

We discover how early the habit of stillness and the repression of feeling have taken hold of her from her highly ambivalent account of little Polly Home at the very beginning of the novel. In the scene in which Polly joins them at Bretton, for instance, Lucy refers to her as "[t]he creature which now appeared," and frequently uses the pronoun "it" rather than "she." This is merely cool, but we soon get hints that the distance is deliberate. "These sudden, dangerous natures," Lucy observes, "--sensitive as they are called--offer many a curious spectacle to those whom a cooler temperament has secured from participation in their angular vagaries." This from the narrator who only a few lines before has confessed that the sight of the child praying in the moonlight has called up thoughts in herself "hardly more rational and healthy than that child's mind must have been" (15). Her reaction to Polly, as she describes it, is alternately remote and sympathetic. When Polly runs out the door to greet her father, Lucy says, "I was on the point of turning, and quietly announcing to Mrs. Bretton that the child was run out mad, and ought instantly to be pursued"; yet when Polly is wounded by Graham's neglect, Lucy intervenes with Graham and takes the child into her own bed where she can be "tranquillised and cherished"--though

she describes herself as merely thinking, "A very unique child."

Lucy never tells us that she was fascinated by Polly, or that she identified with her, but she says some revealing things. When Mr. Home arrives, to Polly's inexpressible delight, Lucy says, "I wished she would utter some hysterical cry, so that I might get relief and be at ease" (emphasis added). And when Mr. Home leaves, she is attuned to Polly's response: "I perceived she endured agony. She went through, in that brief interval of her infant life, emotions such as some never feel;... she would have more of such instants if she lived." Then she adds, unnecessarily and unconvincingly, "I, Lucy Snowe, was calm" (28). It gradually becomes clear that what happens to Polly Home is not just a passing show, but of some deep personal interest to her. By the time Polly leaves Bretton, we are aware that Lucy is a narrator who is not telling us things--perhaps the most important things--about her own feelings, and who insists on reactions that seem enforced by some need of her own. This is the beginning of our sense of her "morbidity," which will later be underlined by the events in the foreign climate of Villette.

The impressions made by her account of Polly are confirmed in the passage which immediately follows. Why it is that she has had to reach such a cautious accommoda-

tion with life will never be completely explained to us. But in addition to whatever has made her a girl who believes in being "calm," there is obviously some family tragedy in the years after she leaves Bretton for the last time. Characteristically, Lucy avoids telling us what it is. Instead, she makes it the first occasion for sarcasm at our expense:

It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! the amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass--the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest? . . . However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been a wreck at last. . . . (46)

We have had evidence before this that Lucy Snowe has a streak of irony and no little wit; they are a part of her narrative style, which is by turns objective to the point of coldness and bracingly astringent in its observations on others' behavior. Now we begin to see also that some part of the cool distance she maintains belongs to the "morbidity" induced by a life of isolation and disappointment. There are things she cannot bear to talk about, things she will never tell us. Here for the first but not the last time a certain slippage or displacement becomes the marked characteristic of Lucy's

storytelling. The facts we expect to be told are suppressed and in this case displaced by irony and a series of bland, children's-book images; and after three chapters set at Bretton we are brusquely told in two short sentences, almost as an aside: "Of Mrs. Bretton I had long lost sight. Impediments, raised by others, had, years ago, come in the way of our intercourse, and cut it off" (47). What impediments? What others? Again the answer is silence.

Somewhere behind Lucy's reticence then, behind what soon comes to feel like her repression of certain memories, is some unhappy family history we are never to know. Also at work, once the events she calls "wreck" have arrived, are the restraints laid on her by poverty, which alienates her from her class and lays on her the burden of work for which she was not raised and is not particularly well suited. And there is a third major factor in her choice of stillness as a strategy and camouflage. She never tells us what she looks like, but it is clear that her looks are ordinary at best, and that she entirely lacks Polly's china-doll prettiness and "feminine" charm. In fact, near the end of the novel she is finally surprised into saying to Paul, "Ah! I am not pleasant to look at," and she admits to us, "I never remember the time when I had not a haunting dread of what might be the degree of my outward deficiency" (698). From

what she does not say, rather than what she does, we get the impression that she has never been the object of much affection. She liked to visit Bretton, and "in a quiet way" she was "a good deal taken notice of" by Mrs. Bretton. She does not say this is why she liked to go to Bretton; in fact, she makes more of the house itself, but the more one learns of Lucy's life the more like a haven Mrs. Bretton's kindness seems. And Lucy's desperate hunger for the normal affection and attention she lacks is the feeling she tries hardest to conceal; it colors everything she tells us, including her version of Polly's love for Graham Bretton.

It is impossible to tell whether the sixteen-year-old Graham took any notice of Lucy or not; on this point she is silent. What she does say is that he immediately notices little Polly, who has arrived while he was away, and begins trying to win her affection in a style that can only be described as flirtatious--he refers to her as "a young lady," calls himself her slave and her "ma'am," offers her his pony and books, asks her opinion of his looks. It is a mocking flirtation whose avowed aim is his own amusement, but it succeeds. Polly transfers much of her need for her absent father into her love for Graham, which like their first meeting is an imitation of a grown-up relationship in which she sees to his comfort and flatters his vanity in return for his teasing attention

and his company.

This is a serious business for little Polly but only a pastime for Graham. Judith Newton has pointed out how painful a version of the dependent life Polly represents in these chapters, but she sees the suffering as belonging to Polly while Lucy "participates vicariously" and gains a certain "ironic consciousness of the division between ideologies about women's lives and the potentially painful realities" (91). This is true enough, but there are suggestions that Lucy's investment in Polly's attachment to Graham is more than vicarious. As usual in this narrative, the evidences of her emotions are displaced and denied. In her actual account of life at Bretton, there are only moments when Lucy shows odd reactions or uses a surprising turn of speech; but these center on Polly, toward whom she sometimes displays considerable hostility, and Graham, toward whom her attitude is even more inconsistent. About the attempts of little Polly to wait on her father, for instance, she says, "I thought her a little busy-body"; telling us that Polly showed no "originality" when she was apart from Graham, she says, "I ceased to watch her under such circumstances: she was not interesting." She also finds her "officious" and "fidgety" when she waits on Graham at tea, and comments: "I often wished she would mind herself and be tranquil; but no--herself was forgotten in him." She tells us

Polly's readiness to enter into Graham's interests is "curious": "One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own . . ." After her hours of comforting the child on the night before she must leave Graham and Bretton to rejoin her father, Lucy wonders, "How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason tell me are prepared for all flesh?" (44-45).

In all this Lucy's tone is carefully objective and distant. But hints of powerful feeling creep into her descriptions of Graham. The first comes when she is about to describe his first teasing encounter with Polly, and she uses one very odd expression. "Graham," she says, "was at that time a handsome, faithless-looking youth of sixteen." She then seems to notice how strange that term is, for she hastens to add, unconvincingly:

I say faithless-looking, not because he was really of a very perfidious disposition, but because the epithet strikes me as proper to describe the fair, Celtic (not Saxon) character of his good looks; his waved light auburn hair, his supple symmetry, his smile frequent, and destitute neither of fascination nor of subtlety, (in no bad sense.) A spoiled, whimsical boy he was in those days! (20)

So here we have a spoiled, subtle Graham, rather a faithless and supple Celt than a sturdy Saxon. Yet he is subtle "in no bad sense" and he goes on to be, for a spoiled teenager, consistently if rather carelessly kind

to little Polly. When he hurts her--as he does--it is not deliberately, but because he needs her company less than she needs his and he does not understand the depth of her feeling. An entire incident shows us that his Sunday-self, which is quieter and more thoughtful than his weekday persona, has traces of really admirable character, even if indolence and complacency are partly the cause. But when Polly hugs Graham at the end of such a Sunday afternoon, Lucy comments:

The action, I remember, struck me as strangely rash; exciting the feeling one might experience on seeing an animal dangerous by nature, and but half-tamed by art, too heedlessly fondled. (37)

She goes on to say that she fears Graham may repulse Polly carelessly, and that would be "worse almost to her than a blow." And indeed, when Graham learns that Polly is leaving, he merely says, "What a pity! Dear little Mousie, I shall be sorry to lose her: she must come to us again, mamma." Then he forgets her in his studies.

Lucy's own departure from Bretton is not described, but she gives us no reason to think that it meant even this much to Graham, who had never, so far as we know, made a playfellow of her. Nor does much about her narrative of this time encourage us to compare her with Polly or to ask whether she might have felt jealous of her. It is only much later, when she awakes at La Terrasse with her mind confused by depression and illness and finds

on the wall by her bed a portrait of the young John Graham Bretton, that she gives us another clue about that long-past time. She describes the sketch in loving detail, saying, "Any romantic little school-girl might almost have loved it in its frame," and even more revealingly, "I well remember how I used to mount a music-stool for the purpose of unhooking it, holding it in my hand, and searching into those bonny wells of eyes . . ." But the memory is not an entirely happy one, for she also remembers wondering, "How it was that what charmed so much, could at the same time so keenly pain?" (243) She does not say, of course, what it was about the portrait that pained her, but she recalls asking Polly to look at it and noting the same reaction in her; so whatever it is, they share it--and we know from Lucy's detailed account exactly what in Graham was painful to Polly. It was that she loved him and he did not love her. At this point we may be reminded of the two girls' last conversation at Bretton, when she warned Polly not to expect too much of Graham, "or else he will feel you to be troublesome, and then it is all over." Polly is perceptive enough to ask whether Lucy likes Graham as she does, but doesn't notice how indirect her answer is when she tells her, in characteristic fashion, not what she feels but what she should feel:

"Wise people say it is folly to think anybody perfect; and as to likes and dislikes, we should be friendly to all, and worship none."

"Are you a wise person?"

"I mean to try to be so. Go to sleep."

All of her concern with not feeling too much, the maxims she aims at Polly that come so gravely from a fourteen-year-old girl, are aimed then primarily at herself, as the story of the childish Polly Home at Bretton is the story of Lucy Snowe, displaced and disowned by her. She is enough older to be more cautious and to avoid being "troublesome," but she is really neither cold nor wise enough to be indifferent to the beautiful Graham, and her nature is as sensitive and vulnerable as Polly's own, without Polly's ability to charm. She understands Polly better than anyone else because she is so much like her, behind her defensive stillness--a defense we see Polly also beginning to adopt in relation to Graham. Well might Lucy wonder, looking at the sleeping child, "How will she get through this world?"

Suggesting that Lucy was already hopelessly in love with Graham Bretton when they were teenagers might seem an exaggeration of a few guarded comments, if he were not also the subject of the most startling and otherwise least explicable of Lucy's narrative displacements. Shortly after she recognizes the portrait at La Terrasse, she must finally confess to us not only that Dr. John is in fact John Graham Bretton, but that she had realized his identity almost a hundred pages earlier and has been concealing

it from us deliberately. In fact, he was almost the first person she met in Villette, though she did not recognize him either then or in Ginevra Fanshawe's descriptions of her suitor "Isidore"; but once he becomes the doctor to Madame Beck's little Fifine, it is not long before Lucy recognizes in him both her old acquaintance and the rescuer of her first night in the city. This, one might think, would be news indeed for the reader, and she even describes the scene of recognition to us--but conceals what the "idea" is that has struck her about Dr. John. In an account allowed to be openly romantic, we might see that the major result of Lucy's move to Villette is to reunite her with Graham and to continue the story of her involvement with him--one can imagine, for instance, how Jane Eyre would have described the same events--but Lucy's distortions of narrative order manage almost entirely to obscure this fact. She gives us an explanation of sorts:

To say anything on the subject, to hint at my discovery, had not suited my habits of thought, or assimilated with my system of feeling. On the contrary, I had preferred to keep the matter to myself. I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through, while he stood before me under a ray of special illumination . . .

Well I knew that to him it could make little difference, were I to come forward and announce "This is Lucy Snowe!" So I kept back in my teacher's place . . . (249-250)

Now this is very strange indeed. It explains why she said nothing to Graham, and the allusion to her "system of feeling" is very suggestive. But it does not explain why

she said nothing to us, her readers, when she "first recognised him . . . several chapters back" (249). One explanation is substituted for the other without comment, in a kind of narrative sleight-of-hand. And indeed maybe both pieces of behavior have to do with her "habits of thought" and "system of feeling," in a way that helps to explain why the gothic becomes such an integral part of her story. Gothic tends to be a marker of conflict, in particular of conflicts between desire and fear, and between consciousness and the unconscious. Lucy tries very hard to remain unconscious of what she wants and how much she wants it, because she fears so much the pain of being denied it; and she tries to keep even what forces itself on her consciousness out of her narrative when she can. She is in the habit of refusing to think about what gives her pain, and of feeling as little as possible. Her queer method of storytelling makes it clear that there is something connected with her recognition of Dr. John that she cannot and will not tell, that she will admit even to herself only when she must and after the bad moment is safely over. And their meeting has meant one more humiliation for her: she recognizes him, but he does not recognize her--"though [she], perhaps, was still less changed than he." She will permit herself only a flash of irony about this, when Mrs. Bretton recognizes her within ten minutes of the time they sit down together. "Women,"

Lucy remarks, "are certainly quicker in some things than men" (250).

The whole complex of Lucy's feelings for Graham Bretton, developed so subtly and indirectly through the first half of the novel, will be embodied in the figure of the ghostly nun once her ambiguous adult relationship with him has been established. It is hardly necessary to recapitulate the incidents that show us Lucy is in love with the grown-up Graham at the same time she is beginning to know and love Paul Emanuel; this is meant to be obvious, and its honesty earned the disapproval of Martineau and Thackeray. But a part of the situation that makes Lucy sometimes "morbid" is the impossibility of ever gaining the kind of love young girls learn to desire: the love of a man who is beautiful, strong, a natural winner and so, like most heroes of naive romance, a natural egotist--the love of a Zamorna, or a Dr. John. The adult woman finds out that the love of such a man can be had, if at all, only at a price and by a few, and that there are other men whose love may be more worth having. But the knowledge that liberates also disappoints and embitters. Not only is the prince unattainable, he never really existed; yet her desire for him lives on as a kind of ghost. Only near the end of her story, when Dr. John is engaged to Paulina (and Lucy has already acknowledged her love for Paul) does she speak openly of the strength of her feeling for him:

. . . gradually, by long and equal kindness, he proved to me that he kept one little closet, over the door of which was written "Lucy's Room." I kept a place for him, too--a place of which I never took the measure, either by rule or compass: I think it was like the tent of Peri-Banou. All my life long I carried it folded in the hollow of my hand--yet, released from that hold and constriction, I know not but its innate capacity for expanse might have magnified it into a tabernacle for a host. (662)

It is love, not merely poverty, that carries with it the necessity of "constriction," of "catalepsy and a dead trance" for a woman like Lucy who possesses neither the selfish coquette's power of Ginevra Fanshawe nor the more genuine attractions of Paulina de Bassompierre. The most dangerous folly such a woman can commit is to fall in love with a man like Dr. John, especially since she is intelligent enough to understand him all too well while he is completely unaware of her own nature. Lucy's struggle against her own half-articulated desire is the strand that holds the incidents of the novel together. In relation to Graham, she is at least partly successful because she refuses to entertain hope. Indeed, she vehemently denies that love is in question: "Women do not entertain these 'warmer feelings' where . . . to do so would be to commit a mortal absurdity: nobody ever launches into Love unless he has seen or dreamed the rising of Hope's star over Love's troubled waters" (363-364). The patent falsity of this statement does not strike her because it is so important for her to believe it to be true. By refusing to hope,

she tries--and just manages--to avoid the fate at Graham's hands that she tells Polly is worse than the sadness of solitude: "Deeper than melancholy, lies heart-break" (617).

But hope is not something that can be dealt with once and for all; it is notorious for recurring. And so Lucy, desiring and fearing desire, must kill it over and over again. The Nun, that figure of license wearing the garb of restraint,⁴ does not appear randomly. She marks the phases of Lucy's battle with hope. She is a figure both of fear and of mockery, since she eventually turns out to be nothing more than de Hamal engaged in a bit of sexual intrigue, but she is a genuine portent of ill for Lucy Snowe, a sign both of internal conflict and of a hostile fate. Her appearances seem at first to be connected with Lucy's love for Graham, but later, as M. Paul moves to the center of the stage, connections with him are revealed; ultimately, she appears as a shadow that threatens any attempt of Lucy's to find love.

She appears for the first time when Lucy has received the promised letter from Dr. John and has taken it to the garret where she expects to enjoy it without interruption from the narrow reality of Madame Beck's pensionnat. Lucy tries to moderate her pleasure, even in memory, pointing out to us--and herself--that the letter is "simply good-natured--nothing more," that her happiness is of "shallow

origin" and will not last long, that she may never get another letter; but finally her language betrays her. "The present moment had no pain," she says, "no blot, no want; full, pure, perfect, it deeply blessed me." And immediately afterward she asks, "Are there wicked things, not human, which envy human bliss? Are there evil influences haunting the air, and poisoning it for man? What was near me?" (350-351) Then she describes the figure of the nun stepping out from among the cloaks at one end of the attic. From the beginning she is associated with the experience of "bliss" and with something that will not let us enjoy it. Her appearance marks the end of Lucy's perfect moment, and indeed the fear she arouses is so great that Lucy drops the letter itself. It is only returned to her after some rather cruel byplay with Dr. John, who is on the premises himself; and though the fact that he teases her by withholding the letter when she is in such distress does not seem to make her value it any the less, we I think are bound to wonder whether he is as kind as she wants to believe him, and to see more clearly why she does not permit herself to hope much from him.

The nun's second appearance also seems to be triggered by a pleasure involving Dr. John; it comes just before Lucy goes out with him for the last time. He has arrived alone and without notice to take Lucy to the theater in his mother's place, and she has just explained

to us, rather unnecessarily, that they need no more chaperoning than would a sister and brother; but she is still in a flutter of excitement. When she goes to the garret to find her best dress, the nun is waiting for her in the form of "a solemn light, like a star, but broader." This turns out later to be de Hamal, lighting a cigar, but its effect on Lucy is deep even though she has not seen the ghostly nun herself. She makes no attempt to find out whether there is some natural explanation for the light, but "snatches" her dress and runs downstairs, trembling so much that Dr. John remarks on it. Again, the nun's appearance is a true portent of unhappiness to come. At the theater Lucy sees Vashti the actress, a figure of unbridled female energy and emotion, who is to her "a mighty revelation" and "a spectacle low, horrible, immoral." She is fascinated by this antithesis of her own choices, this "spirit out of Tophet":

Before calamity she is a tigress; . . . Pain, for her, has no result in good; tears water no harvest of wisdom: on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of a rebel. Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty . . . (285)

This way of dealing with Fate stands in opposition to the figure of the nun, directing its negative energies outward toward the world rather than inward against the self. Lucy rejects it, as Brontë did, but she is not indifferent to it, as Dr. John is. He simply rejects all

that is "wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming"; all, in other words, that Lucy and Polly are careful to hide from him in their own natures, that most women are still careful to conceal from men. And he passes his negative judgment on Vashti "as a woman, not an artist." Here is the limitation in Dr. John's nature that will make Lucy forever invisible to him--fortunately, since if he could see her clearly he would disapprove of what he saw. As if to underline the separation between their characters, the night at the theater ends with the reintroduction of Polly Home, now Paulina de Bassompierre, who at once interests Dr. John as Lucy cannot. This event is followed by the end of his letters and by seven weeks of solitude and torment for Lucy. She has admitted hope to her life (though she confesses only to the hope of getting more letters), and she must pay for it with the kind of rigid self-control nuns and prisoners must exercise. The obvious portent of the nun is fulfilled in these seven weeks.

The nun's third appearance, still connected with the fortunes of Lucy's love for Graham, marks the turning-point of the novel. Lucy's solitude has ended with an invitation to La Terrasse, where she finds little Polly Home now transformed into the "little countess" Paulina Home de Bassompierre, and a romance between her and Dr. John already well underway. Lucy, as usual, makes no

comment on this state of affairs, but ends the chapter with another odd simile:

Graham, too, must have been tired with his day's work: he . . . said very little himself, and followed with his eye the gilded glance of Paulina's thimble, as if it had been some bright moth on the wing, or the golden head of some darting little yellow serpent. (417)

With the entrance of this little serpent Lucy's fool's paradise has come to an end. Dr. John writes no more letters and takes her to no more plays; the next chapter, picking up and making explicit the metaphor suggested by the nun, is called "A Burial." What Lucy literally buries is the five letters she has received, and the reason she gives is that she cannot bear to think that they may fall into M. Paul's hands; but she adds, "I was not only going to hide a treasure--I meant also to bury . . . that grief over which I had lately been weeping." The grief, described in terms of the failure of water in the desert, a companion-metaphor to the recurring one of shipwreck, has another name:

I said to myself, "The Hope I am bemoaning suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome." . . . In the end I closed the eyes of my dead, covered its face, and composed its limbs with great calm. (421)

This is a voice out of the past, telling us, "I, Lucy Snowe, was calm." Once more fear has been justified and has triumphed over desire. The letters buried, Lucy lingers in the *allée défendue* to consider what she must do

next, and once more the nun appears, this time standing only a few yards away and looking at her. But Lucy, having just disposed of false hope yet again, is in a reckless mood and this time tries to touch the figure, which retreats before her and disappears in the shrubbery. The tide seems to have turned in her favor; she may be shaken, but she has been victorious for the first time in her battle with terror. And indeed one wonders, as the plot disentangles her from Dr. John and puts M. Paul Emanuel in his place, whether the nun has served her purpose and will return only to be explained and domesticated. This is almost the case.

But we find first that she is not a spirit associated exclusively with Dr. John. Her fourth appearance follows a conversation between Lucy and M. Paul in the allée, in which they seem to be reaching a new level of understanding and intimacy. The conversation, like Lucy's whole relationship with Paul, is intertwined with her feeling for Dr. John. She has been watching Paul's god-daughter, toward whom she feels a kind of repressed jealousy, and has fallen asleep; when she wakes, finding herself covered with a shawl, she wanders once more into the garden where she tries to plan out a future of independence as the owner of a school. Her lack of enthusiasm about independence which must be enjoyed in solitude reminds her of Dr. John, to whom she once again says goodbye; and only

then does M. Paul enter the scene to interrupt her continual oscillations toward and away from her first love, and the future of lonely usefulness to which that love helps to doom her. New possibilities enter with him, and new affection; it is he who has put the shawl around her, he alone who will ever say to her, "we are alike-- there is affinity" (531). But when their conversation turns to the ghostly nun, we discover that he has seen her too, the only other person in the novel to do so. In fact, the more we (and Lucy) learn about M. Paul, the more the nun seems to belong to him, as the ghost who was buried alive for "a sin against her vow" is replaced by the figure of Justine Marie, Paul's would-be bride who died rather less dramatically but was in truth a nun. The idea of an envious force inimical to human happiness seems to give way to a jealous spirit particularly attached to M. Paul. And as they stand there talking, the nun actually appears for the last time, passing them "with an angry rush," followed by wind and rain. Can it be the spirit of Justine Marie, we are encouraged to wonder, come to discourage the growing understanding between Lucy and Paul?

The final unmasking of the "nun" as an expedient of de Hamal's illicit courtship of Ginevra would seem to lay all such speculations to rest and to reveal her power to disturb Lucy and Paul as a sign of their own vulnerabil-

ity, their internal conflicts: Lucy's between hope and her strategic apathy, Paul's between the duties he has taken up to replace love and marriage and a new hope that a full emotional life may still be possible. The nun's function has not really changed when we discover Paul has seen her too: for him, as for Lucy, she marks the appearance of a hope that may be dangerous, and that will certainly upset his long-established ways of surviving a difficult life while maintaining his integrity. She is a warning of trouble.

And yet, of course, she is a false sign and a sign of falseness. There is nothing supernatural about her, nothing intentional in her appearances which, so far as de Hamal knows, are entirely accidental--he does not even recognize Lucy in the allée, taking her for Madame Beck. When Lucy finds the "nun" in her bed--this time Ginevra's creation--after her night of drifting through the park like a ghost, observing everyone she knows in the world while passing almost invisible among them, she disposes of the false specter once and for all with a unique display of violence:

. . . I defied spectra. In a moment, without exclamation, I had rushed on the haunted couch . . . I tore her up--the incubus! I held her on high--the goblin! I shook her loose--the mystery! And down she fell--down all round me--down in shreds and fragments--and I trode upon her. (681)

Language and action alike reflect the high point of Lucy's

strength in the novel, the moment in which she permits herself the greatest freedom. Surely this moment, followed by the irony of Ginevra's letter explaining the all-too-natural genesis of the phantom, shows Brontë's rejection and mockery of all this Gothic nonsense?

Perhaps. Certainly she is not interested, as a novelist, in "real" ghosts and demons; physically, the nun is shown up as not only false but silly. But this is not the same as a rejection of the gothic. The ghosts and demons here are creatures of the mind, and as Robert Heilman pointed out, Brontë extends and alters the "old gothic" of Walpole and Lewis by moving it toward the psychic and emotional and away from the "crude mechanisms" of the supernatural. But even here, in this most psychological of Brontë's novels, the terrors of the mind have a transcendent force; they are not idle fears, the offspring of mere morbid imagination. "Anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid"--Lucy's fears are grounded in reality, the same reality that makes the realization of desire impossible, that makes Graham Bretton unattainable and half-illusory, that will drown Paul Emanuel on his way home to her. This grounding becomes even clearer after the goblin-doll of the nun is removed from the stage.

The shadow that hangs over Lucy's life, and especially over her hopes of love, is quite real, and it is not

only the shadow of repression or of self-denial. The final unmasking of the nun follows the pattern of her earlier appearances: this time it follows an encounter with not one but both of Lucy's loves. But rather than an awakening of hope, the encounters in the park have seemed to indicate the end of all hope. Dr. John is there with Paulina, to whom he is now engaged, and it is now that Lucy makes her final assessment of her place in his affections: it is a little closet,

not so handsome as the chambers where he lodged his male friends; it was not like the hall where he accommodated his philanthropy, or the library where he treasured his science, still less did it resemble the pavilion where his marriage feast was splendidly spread . . . (661-662)

It is not quite nothing; not something to be dismissed. But it is not a "tabernacle for a host." And after her encounter with Dr. John she sees Paul, still in Villette though she had thought him gone, and imagines that he now intends to marry his ward: "a young bride and a rich inheritance. As for the saintly consecration," she says, "the vow of constancy, that was forgotten: . . . at length, his nun was indeed buried" (675-676). Now for the first time she feels jealousy, and ironically it is now that she tells us of the liberating power of Truth: "Truth stripped away Falsehood, and Flattery, and Expectancy, and here I stand--free!" (677). Before, reality had been the realm of "[t]his hag, this Reason, [who] would not let me

look up, or smile, or hope," who was "vindictive as a devil"; now it is to be the source of liberation. And why? Not only because the ghostly Justine Marie has turned into a Villette schoolgirl, "well-nourished, fair, and fat of flesh," but because Lucy thinks she has seen the worst: "To see and know the worst is to take from Fear her main advantage." Now it seems she has reached the end: not only is Dr. John lost to Paulina but the limits of his affection have been measured and acknowledged, and even M. Paul has been shown up as inconstant and ignoble. For Lucy, as we have seen, love is always accompanied by fear. To feel that one has lost all hope of it is to be set free, not from pain, but from the unbearable alternations of hope and disappointment. To see reality plainly is, for someone in Lucy's position, to despair, and thereby to gain some kind of peace, if only the peace of emotional death.

But not yet. Nothing is to be so simple, not even despair: this Truth of hers is even more false than de Hamal's nun. Paul has no intention of marrying the young Justine Marie, and in fact has only delayed his departure so that he can make arrangements for Lucy's well-being in his absence. The conclusions she draws from what she sees in the park are not the result of "the swift-footed, the all-overtaking Fact," but of the same fear she imagines she is disarming. And so even the destruction of the bed-bolster "nun" still leaves her

wrapped in a kind of illusion. That particular ghost will never trouble her again, but the question of love and its possibility for her must be gone through once more, and this time the Fate she hoped to appease will take a hand. The end of her story will continue to be haunted by the gothic.

The nun of the Rue Fossette is not the only gothic figure in the novel. As our attention is shifted to the growing relationship between Lucy and Paul, she becomes only one--and the least powerful, because the least real one--of a group of blocking figures that Lucy in the drug-induced clarity of her night in the park will call "the whole conjuration, the secret junta": Madame Walravens, Madame Beck, and Père Silas. The object of what Lucy sees as their "conspiracy" is to maintain control over Paul Emanuel, for whom each has some private purpose, and to that end they attempt to separate him from the foreign interloper Lucy Snowe and to destroy his affection for her.

Madame Beck, of course, we have known well from the beginning of Lucy's stay in Villette, and she is a fully drawn realistic character. To her already formidable personality, her association with the other members of the "junta" and her growing hostility to Lucy lend a tinge of fear. She becomes demonic (at least in Lucy's eyes) in her ruthlessness, her selfishness, her utter lack of heart.

Lucy even suspects her of wishing for Paul's death: "The thing she could not obtain, she desired not another to win; rather would she destroy it" (668). The coolness and strength which were once the object of Lucy's half-unwilling admiration become the object of her fear once Madame begins to threaten the one relationship that still has promise for her, and as Madame maneuvers in the third volume of the novel to separate Paul from Lucy, the account of her we are given becomes less balanced and judicious. We hear no more of her intelligence, her powers of management; when Lucy finally acknowledges her as her rival on what she thinks is Paul's last day in Villette, she tells us: "I saw underneath a being heartless, self-indulgent, and ignoble" (647).

Madame Beck has been ambivalently treated from the first, but now the weight of Lucy's narration falls firmly on the side of dislike and disapproval, to which Madame's alliance with Madame Walravens adds the seal. Whatever Lucy's final judgment, however, ours remains somewhat mixed. She has never been presented to us as likable, so there is no reversal of feeling for Brontë to manage in making her a kind of wicked step-sister to Lucy; but we are not likely to forget that she is "a very great and a very capable woman" for exactly the reasons she is not Lucy's friend, that in Lucy's opinion "she ought to have swayed a nation," that there have been moments when Lucy,

despite her evident dislike, has cried "Brava! once more, Madame Beck." Whatever irony is mixed with the praise she receives, there is no doubt of her talent or her self-control. But despite these qualities, as a serious enemy she is something of a paper tiger; her worst act is to give Lucy an opiate, and that doesn't work properly. So if she represents a real danger it is not so much because she opposes Paul's love for Lucy, or because she tries unsuccessfully to prevent their meeting, as because she represents one set of Lucy's own negative possibilities. Lucy is continually struggling to overcome her own passionate feelings and to live in "a dead trance," so that she will not make a fool of herself. Madame's nature has accomplished what Lucy cannot: "She did not behave weakly, or make herself in any shape ridiculous. . . . she had neither strong feelings to overcome, nor tender feelings by which to be miserably pained" (145-146). She lives alone without suffering from loneliness and finds adequate outlet for her powers in running a successful school; this is the same trade in which Lucy will succeed, and a similar widowhood is before her. But the price of Madame Beck's success is the real coldness of which all Lucy's self-control can only produce a pale image, and when Lucy sees before her the figure toward which she has been shaping herself she is appalled. Interestingly, however, she seems nearly as much repelled by Madame's strength as

by her lack of sympathy, and this suggests a less conscious reason for her reaction.

Their difference is felt by Lucy early on to be related to her ideas of womanhood. In the scene in which Madame Beck offers her a promotion from nursery-maid to teacher, Lucy speaks of a "challenge of strength between opposing gifts," and says, "At that instant she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's" (107). Madame represents a life based wholly on self-interest, according to Lucy, but also encodes a female life centered on the possession and exercise of sheer force of will; though she makes Lucy feel "all the pusillanimity of [her] slackness to aspire," and though Lucy values the independence and tranquillity of such a life, it is a goal she rejects for herself.

This is one of a number of possible female roles represented in the novel and rejected by Lucy. Madame Beck is the complement of Vashti, on the one hand--an excess of reason to balance an excess of passion, but in both the tendency to confront circumstance with a "masculine" directness--and of Ginevra Fanshawe on the other. Both she and Ginevra manipulate men in the service of their own interest, but Madame is a plotter who "could have comprised the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police. Wise, firm, faithless; secret, crafty, passionless . . ." Ginevra is merely the coquette, negligible for

all her charm, selfish and calculating in the traditional "feminine" style and rather stupid even about keeping an eye on the main chance. Lucy is extremely ambivalent about both, and extremely critical of both. When she is forced to give them their due, it is the shallow but openly self-seeking Ginevra who has her affection, as a kind of charming (and, one notes, a not-too-successful) rogue, and the more redoubtable Madame Beck who has her respect. But her final comment on Ginevra is applicable to Madame Beck as well. Lucy is once more ironic at our expense: "the reader will no doubt expect to hear that she came finally to bitter expiation of her youthful levities," she says. "Of course, a large share of suffering lies in reserve for her future." But that future is actually full of self-satisfaction and the same kind of contriving and maneuvering that was typical of the young Ginevra: "and so she got on," Lucy says, "--fighting the battle of life by proxy, and, on the whole, suffering as little as any human being I have ever known" (691). In this she is like Madame, who had no "tender feelings by which to be miserably pained"; their lack of suffering marks them, in this novel, as flawed--like Vashti, for whom "pain . . . has no result in good," or Dr. John who lacks sympathy for "what belong[is] to storm"--or even Mrs. Bretton, in whom Lucy cannot confide because for all her goodness she is quite incapable of understanding an

experience less happy than her own. (In expressing this, Lucy reverts again to the always-significant metaphor of shipwreck: "No, the *Louisa Bretton* never was out of harbour on such a night, and in such a scene: her crew could not conceive it; so the half-drowned life-boat man keeps his own counsel, and spins no yarns.")

At its heart this is a novel about suffering, and suffering is the touchstone by which all its characters are tried. If there is to be a good life for such as Lucy Snowe, it must be reached by the road of pain. Here the problem of suffering is intersected for our narrator by fear, and while the characters whose good luck merely leaves them insensitive remain "realistic" and are delicately delineated, the others who are driven to cruelty--whether by excess of feeling, like *Vashti*, or by lack of feeling, like *Madame Beck*--are surrounded by the fearful glamour of the gothic.

The kind of life Lucy wants for herself, beyond the suffering that has made her what she is, includes self-assertion and freedom; Brontë is clear about the necessity of both in a healthy existence. But it is even more essential that it include both love and some kind of service. Lucy makes this quite explicit in her musings about the plan of opening her own school, which she finds desirable but also "too selfish, too limited":

. . . afterwards, is there nothing more for me in

life--no true home--nothing to be dearer to me than myself . . . ? Nothing at whose feet I can willingly lay down the whole burden of human egotism, and gloriously take up the nobler charge of labouring and living for others? (522-523)

The narrowness in Modeste Beck that keeps her, in spite of her abilities, from being a model for Lucy is her inability to see egotism as a burden, and we are expected to mark the distinction--to share Lucy's belief that selflessness is a genuine virtue. This has been seen by some as the product of an unfortunate attachment on Brontë's part to a Victorian ideal of female self-sacrifice, which keeps her from valuing economic independence and the free life as she ought. Such an ideal is certainly at work. But it is worth noting that this is also a Christian ideal that long precedes the nineteenth century and that Brontë by no means limits its application to women. It is Dr. John's professional life, in which he suffers considerable discomfort without complaint, that draws Lucy's real admiration, and it is learning of Paul's life of self-sacrifice that, she says, "made of my dear little man a stainless little hero." Lucy Snowe, like Jane Eyre, sees herself as one who must find the object of her life neither in herself nor in service to a cause--teaching the young clearly will not do--but in a personal relationship of loyalty and devotion. Brontë clearly regards this as an adequate, though not the only way of being; her deep ambivalence toward those who serve even the noblest

abstractions in preference to personal loyalties is most obvious in the very masculine character of St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*. Those who seek in her heroines models for political action are doomed to be disappointed. Madame Beck would make an admirable leader for a public cause, if she could be persuaded to take an interest in one; but the very qualities that make her strong also make her, like St. John, a cold friend and a domestic tyrant--more a warning than a model. About such characters in Brontë's fiction hangs an air of the gothic villain and his monumental egotism, attaching to their ruthlessness, which is all too natural and common, some sense of the genuine evil it produces in human affairs.

Next to the figure of Interest represented by Madame Beck in the gothic junta stands the Roman priest, representing the perversion of the sacred. Père Silas enters the story innocently enough as the priest who listens to Lucy's confession on the night of her breakdown during the long vacation; he seems even an admirable character, sympathetic and kind. But the fact that he follows Lucy in an attempt to discover her address makes him faintly sinister, and Lucy's anti-catholicism soon turns him in her narrative halfway into the persecuting priest who would be at home in *The Monk* or *Melmoth*, a crafty Jesuit always manipulating his former pupil Paul for the church's ends by appealing to his virtues and his prejudices, even to

his detriment. Again, our own judgment is likely to remain mixed. In the priest's case, as in Madame Beck's, it is his association with Madame Walravens and with her selfish domination of Paul Emanuel's life that is the most damning evidence against him. He serves his church, but if like Lucy one regards that church as an inadequate object of devotion--or worse, a source of corruption--his service cannot save him from the charge of profiting by another's distress. But he seems genuinely concerned about spiritual things as he understands them, and so like the nun he is also a sign of over-conscientiousness. For her (and for Lucy and Paul), its fruit is self-immolation; for him hypocrisy, a willful blindness to the way his influence over Paul serves the entirely secular and selfish ends of Madame Walravens and Modeste Beck.

The most gothic member of the "junta," because the most exaggerated and the least necessary to the plot, is Madame Walravens. Her name suggests a feeder on carrion, and in fact her hold on Paul is based on his love for her granddaughter, the dead Justine Marie, whose death in her noviciate can be laid at the door of the grandmother who forced her to give up her lover and to flee to the convent to escape marriage to a rich man. Though Madame Walravens is real enough, "a harsh and hardy old woman," as Lucy concludes in the park when Madame raps Desirée Beck with her cane, she is a true grotesque. We are given a minimum

of mundane information about her, while she is wrapped in a web of fairytale associations. The chapter in which we meet her is titled "Malevola," preparing us even before our first sight of her for some embodiment of female ill-will. To find her, Lucy is sent by Madame Beck with a basket of fruit, like Red Riding Hood seeking her grandmother and finding only the wolf. She must descend into "the old and grim Basse-Ville" accompanied by gathering rain, which she likes because "the sullen down-fall, the thick snow-descent, or dark rush of rain, asks only resignation . . . it petrifies a living city, as if by eastern enchantment; it transforms a Villette into a Tadmor." The address is in the Rue des Mages, near the "half-ruinous" shrine of the Magi. At the door she finds Père Silas, whom she keeps mysterious in true Lucy fashion by failing to recognize him, describing him as "an infirm old priest . . . the type of eld and decay." The servant who answers the door is also old, dressed in an "antique" costume, "cantankerous" and deaf; the salon to which Lucy is ushered is church-like and gloomy. When Madame Walravens enters, it is through an arched passage "with a mystic winding stair" concealed behind a portrait of the dead Justine Marie. Unlike the manifestations of the nun's ghost, these gothic trappings will not be explained away later. They are cleverly designed to be plausible while suggesting the fantastic, as is the figure at their

center: "Cunegonde, the sorceress! Malevola, the evil fairy"--Magloire Walravens, the wicked grandmother.

The mythical associations are quite deliberate, not only on Brontë's part but on Lucy's; she seems to be half-playful in compiling all the details of the scene and showing us the near-superstitious fear with which they impressed her. "Hoar enchantment here prevailed," she tells us; "a spell had opened for me elfland--that cell-like room, that vanishing picture, that arch and passage, and stair of stone, were all parts of a fairy tale." At the center of the fairy tale is a witch, or perhaps a version of the thing Lucy thought was near her in the garrett: a wicked thing "which envies human bliss." Madame Walravens is tiny, misshapen, "malign," and androgynous, for her voice is masculine and she has "a silver beard"; and she is dressed with bizarre richness: "Hunch-backed, dwarfish, and doting, she was adorned like a barbarian queen." She even carries "a wand-like ivory staff" with a gold knob--the one with which she will later rap Desirée Beck. Later, in the park, Lucy will describe her as "retaining" Paul Emanuel "for twenty years in her service, blighting his life, and then living on him, like an old fungus." Everything about her suggests unnatural old age, yet another kind of death-in-life: the "dull displeasure" of her eyes, the "hundred years in her features," her "skeleton hands." Her manners are as

eccentric as her appearance, for she rejects Lucy's basket of fruit out of hand and sends a rude message to Madame Beck ("et quant à ses félicitations, je m'en moque!") before disappearing to the sound of a clap of thunder from the storm outside: "The tale of magic seemed to proceed with due accompaniment of the elements. The wanderer, decoyed into the enchanted castle, heard rising, outside, the spell-wakened tempest." All of this seems theatrical, and in fact Lucy's exposure to it seems to have been stage-managed by Madame Beck so that she may hear from Père Silas the story of Paul's love for Justine Marie and of his heavy, self-imposed obligations to her family--the aim being, of course, to discourage her from thinking of marrying him. Madame Walravens is to be the death's-head at any wedding Lucy may imagine. She represents, among other things, the incubus of female dependency.

Her actual effect on the plot, of course, is the opposite of what Madame Beck had planned. Madame has a tendency to overdo her effects, and so just as her opiate later rouses Lucy instead of putting her to sleep, the visit to the "enchanted castle," followed as it is by her unwise suggestion to forget about professors, actually increases Lucy's interest in Paul and encourages her to think the barriers between them are merely the result of human selfishness, which she not only can but should break through.

Paul himself, as we have seen, is being transformed-- partly through Lucy's better acquaintance with him, partly by the revelations of Père Silas--into a kind of knight. He had entered Lucy's life as someone who interested but annoyed her; until the last quarter of the novel he has remained, by contrast with John Graham Bretton, a distinctly second-best kind of lover, by the standards of Romance. The one has beauty, grace, and a growing fortune; the other is harsh-featured, irascible, and poor. Graham is English, Protestant, a childhood friend, and a provider of pleasures, while Paul is a foreigner, a Catholic, a busybody, and a critic of what few pastimes Lucy is offered. Dr. John, whose "well-proportioned figure was not to be mistaken," refers to the slighter de Hamal as "[a]n unprincipled, gambling, little jackanapes . . . whom, with one hand, I could lift up by the waistband any day, and lay low in the kennel, if I liked" (211). But the adjective most frequently applied to M. Paul is also "little," even after Lucy has fallen in love with him. His name seldom appears unaccompanied by some reference to his size, whether Lucy is pleased or annoyed by him: "Never was a better little man, in some points, than M. Paul: never, in others, a more waspish little despot." "They made of my dear little man a stainless little hero." He is one who almost literally gains stature as she learns to know him, and much of the book follows the education of

Lucy's taste, so that she is able to see in the apparently unromantic Paul a truer hero than in the beautiful Graham. But it is part of Brontë's greatness that she captures the loss that accompanies growth. Childish dreams may be outgrown and set aside, but they are never forgotten. Paul is lovable, generous; Lucy could be happy with him in the Faubourg Clotilde as she could never be happy with Dr. John at La Terrasse; he is her "king," her Adam, her "magnificent-minded, grand-hearted, dear, faulty little man." But the one thing he can never be is John Graham Bretton, just as plain little Lucy will never be Paulina Home de Bassompierre, one of "Nature's elect." In terms of desire, he is more "real" than Dr. John--he partakes of fewer of the attributes of daydream. But he is in the power of the gothic Beck-Walravens-Silas conspiracy, which derives from the existence of the real nun, Justine Marie, and which will send him to the West Indies and ultimately his death, in part to keep him from being too real and too accessible, because Brontë has other plans for her ending than Lucy's wedding. One of the things the gothic does in this novel, as it does in *Jane Eyre*, is to mark the boundary between the real and the dream--not the "real" in some absolute sense, but what Lucy is to be allowed to hope for.

But the threat this touch of fairytale grotesquerie represents is postponed, even apparently defeated. The

"clique" that surrounds Paul Emanuel, the "basilisk with three heads," seems to be explained away as, like the ghost of the nun, a rather ordinary situation lent fear by Lucy's imagination, consisting in reality of no more than two selfish women and an old priest whom Lucy herself admits to be "a good man." She says during the night in the park: "The sight of them thus assembled did me good. I cannot say that I felt weak before them, or abashed, or dismayed. They outnumbered me, and I was worsted and under their feet; but, as yet, I was not dead" (666).

When Paul returns to the Rue Fossette and insists on seeing Lucy over Madame Beck's objections, all misunderstandings are ended and with them the power of the "junta." The two lovers spend an afternoon and evening in the Faubourg Clotilde reaching an understanding and walk home through "such moonlight as fell on Eden." The long tangle has been smoothed out, it seems, and the tragedy is to be transformed, as it was in *Jane Eyre*, into the comedy that is appropriate to a parable of growth and transformation; Lucy has arrived at independence and freedom, through the same process that has taught her to value the true sensitivity and warmth of her "little man." The nun has been disposed of, and fear seems to have done its worst. We readers are relaxing and perhaps smiling, imagining that we recognize the kind of story this is: a romance after all, rather piquant in its choice of pro-

tagonist and its triviality of incident--more a *Bildungsroman* than a love story, perhaps. Brontë has been at some pains to provide a plausible happy ending for her heroine and to keep us in suspense until the last moment, but the whole impulse of the plot after Lucy buries Dr. John's letters is toward reconciliation and fulfillment as the "faithless" love is replaced by the true.

So what is waiting for us on the last page comes as a considerable shock. There is a tendency in recent feminist criticism to treat Paul's drowning as inevitable, forced on Brontë by a recognition of the value of real independence, or of the economic and social forces operating against her heroine and the inadequacy of a personal solution to a social problem.⁵ It is certainly true that Brontë was aware of these dimensions of women's lives and addressed them in her fiction. But somehow these explanations for the dénouement of *Villette* fail to take into account the actual experience of reading it: the shock, the outrage one feels, the sheer brutal suddenness and inscrutability of this ending. It is one of the quickest and least developed reversals in the history of the novel. The comment most frequently made about it is that Brontë left the conclusion ambiguous to please her father; but surely there is no one who really doubts that Paul has died in the storm. The "ambiguity" takes too familiar a form as the last of Lucy's narrative displacements, and

even the nature of the catastrophe reminds us of the metaphor of shipwreck with which she told us of her early misfortunes, inviting us to imagine her "idle, basking, plump, and happy," only to follow up with "I must somehow have fallen overboard." This time she comes closer to telling us what actually happened but cuts herself short, beginning with a genuine cry of pain and slipping as if inevitably into her characteristic irony:

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life.

Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell. (715)

Here she seems not so much sneering at those "sunny imaginations" as envying them, but the bitterness of the final paragraph is almost unbearable, if one has the resilience to notice it after the sudden wreck of one's expectations. "Fare well," she says to us, and leaves our own minds to add, "if you can." And if we can, we may join the ranks of the wicked and undeservingly happy--or those of "Nature's elect," like Dr. John, "guided from a soft cradle to a calm and late grave." The tone of these parting words does not suggest an older, wiser Lucy whose life has been, except for this disaster, satisfactory in its well-earned independence; it returns us to the girl

who cannot bear to name the events that changed her life. Paul's death is not an incident among other incidents; it is literally and dramatically the end. "There is enough said." The few words that give us this bitter parody of a social novelist's wrap-up seem forced out through clenched teeth; only silence will follow.

Sudden though this ending is, it is not hasty. In the appearance of the gothic "junta" as the final word of the novel, we can see at last the purpose for which they were being prepared, and why the gothic is, in fact, appropriate--not a trivial affair of fancy surface trappings, but part of the fabric of the novel in its most basic conception. The daemon's ground lies at the intersection of good and evil, and of desire and fear. In spite of the real gains made by Lucy Snowe economically and emotionally--gains seen by "sunny imaginations" as making this a female *Bildungsroman* that transcends its unhappy ending--she is doomed to lose what she wants and needs most. This is not finally a parable of growth but a tragedy--Brontë's only tragedy--and fear has had the last word after all.

And it is fear of a very fundamental kind. The Fate who stood across Lucy's path has finally revealed the face of a skeleton, death at the heart of love--just as Lucy has always predicted, always hoping the prediction would be disproved. Many times she has told us that she has been fated, like "a huge mass of . . . fellow-creatures in no

better circumstances," to find life an experience of "denial and privation" (523), that "Fate was of stone, and Hope a false idol--blind, bloodless, and of granite core" (224). She is a Christian and so must believe this to be the work of providence and the will of God, part of a justice that will be revealed beyond death: "Certainly, at some hour, though perhaps not your hour, the waiting waters will stir; in some shape, though perhaps not the shape you dreamed . . . the healing herald will descend . . ." But even in the middle of such a declaration of faith she is forced to cry out:

Long are the "times" of Heaven: the orbits of angel messengers seem wide to mortal vision; they may en-ring ages: the cycle of one departure and return may clasp unnumbered generations; and dust, kindling to brief suffering life, and, through pain, passing back to dust, may meanwhile perish out of memory again, and yet again. To how many maimed and mourning millions is the first and sole angel visitant, him easterns call Azrael. (256)

Is this the reality of the providence that shapes our lives? No wonder she says later, about the weeks in which she suffered "bitter fears and pains" from the forgetfulness of the Brettons, "I admitted, what . . . I had jealously excluded--the conviction that these blanks were inevitable: the result of circumstances, the fiat of fate, a part of my life's lot, and--above all--a matter about whose origin no question must ever be asked, for whose painful sequence no murmur ever uttered" (383, emphasis added). The unaskable question is about the goodness of

God in creating lives like Lucy Snowe's, like Brontë's, like her sisters' and brother's, perhaps like our own. If doubt on this point were admitted, to look reality in the face with the eyes of Reason would be to despair indeed; even the unacknowledged ghost of the question, denied utterance in the novel, casts a long gothic shadow.

Jane Eyre: Desire and Survival

As a child, Jane Eyre dreams of distant lands and of the possibility that she may one day travel to them. They are strange lands, not the Paris or Rome of a more worldly child's daydreams but lands of fantasy, danger, and excess. She tells us one of her favorite books was *Gulliver's Travels*, and that she preferred it even to fairy tales because, having searched in vain for elves in the vicinity of Gateshead, she had concluded that they had all "gone out of England to some savage country where the woods were wilder and thicker, and the population more scant; whereas Lilliput and Brobdignag being, in my creed, solid parts of the earth's surface, I doubted not that I might one day, by taking a long voyage, see [them] with my own eyes. . . ." As she sits in the window seat on the first cold winter day on which we meet her, excluded from the warm drawing room by Mrs. Reed, she lingers over the

pages of Bewick's *History of British Birds* which describe the empty countries of the north where only the sea-fowl linger: "the coast of Norway, studded with isles . . . the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland. . . . Of these death-white realms," she says, "I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive." These "forlorn regions of dreary space" are as cold and lonely as her life at Gateshead, but they have the virtue of being entirely without inhabitants and therefore without disappointment, brutality, and malice. Jane will always prefer physical suffering to the emotional starvation that comes from living among unsympathetic natures, so it is not surprising that these landscapes have a certain frightening charm for her; they feed her imagination, and for a sensitive child in her circumstances it is inevitable that imagination will fill in the blank of her existence somehow. The charm in which she finds consolation is distance--from the Reeds, from herself, from the kind of world in which she must submit to John Reed's snobbery and bullying and be "humbled by the consciousness of . . . physical inferiority" (3). But she is fated to visit the analogues of these northern wastelands many times,⁶ finding that survival there requires all her strength; and these tastes of hers prepare us for the

entrance of the fantastic into her narrative, especially the fantastic associated with death: the gothic.

The first appearance of the gothic in Jane's own experience is her imprisonment in the red room,⁷ where she is "struck into syncope" by the sight of a light on the wall which "glided up to the ceiling and quivered over [her] head." The red room is a room of death and of the forbidden: her uncle had died there, and "since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion." Its colors are deep red and white, the colors of blood and snow, and it is very cold with its "snowy Marseilles counterpane" and the white chair "like a pale throne" by the bed; as the afternoon goes on, Jane becomes "cold as a stone." She has been imprisoned in a kind of arctic wasteland at the heart of Gateshead, as cold and hostile as Mrs. Reed's feeling toward her and, unlike the spaces in Bewick's pictures, confining and claustrophobic. Its first effect on Jane is to alienate her from herself. Her image in the mirror has "the effect of a real spirit," and she associates it with "one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming up out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers" (11). The language of this description looks forward in odd ways to later incidents, especially her meeting with Rochester and her wanderings on the moor near

Whitcross, where she finally meets a second belated traveller, St. John Rivers, at his own doorstep in the dusk. It is, like her later dreams at Thornfield Hall, a kind of presentiment, and it begins at this early stage in the narrative to attach a certain uncanniness to Jane Eyre.

The death signified to Jane by the red room is of a particular kind: the death of love. She has never known real affection, but she knows that her uncle had insisted on caring for her over his wife's objections; "I doubted not," she tells us--"never doubted--that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly." The moving light terrifies her because she imagines that her uncle's ghost may have risen from its grave to avenge the injustice her aunt is doing her: "I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world." She may be fascinated by distance, but she is not in love with death. Jane's toughness, which Rochester will comment on later, is that of a healthy warm-blooded creature; she is indeed "tenacious of life." Her brush with death in the red room marks her permanently, she tells us: "it . . . gave my nerves a shock, of which I feel the reverberation to this day" (17). But she recovers, and the incident provides the occasion for her first actual journey--to Lowood.

What is more, it does not destroy her pleasure in

fantastic landscapes. The depth of the impression made on her by Bewick's pictures can be seen in the resemblance between her descriptions of them in the first chapter and the paintings she later does herself during her last vacations at Lowood and shows to Rochester. The child Jane was "happy at least in [her] way" looking at vignettes of a "broken boat stranded on a desolate coast" and of a "cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking"; a scene set in a churchyard shows "its two trees, its low horizon . . . and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide"; these are followed by more sinister images of a "fiend" and a "black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows." Death is the common theme in these pictures, and fear their predominant emotion, but for the lonely child they are a source of pleasure and interest. The grown-up Jane also finds "keen" pleasure in painting her own pictures. The three described to us are of a wrecked ship sinking in a "swollen" sea beyond sight of land, with a cormorant holding a gold bracelet taken from the arm of a drowned corpse; a hilltop "with grass and some leaves slanting as if by a breeze" as foreground for the image of a woman representing the Evening Star--the twilight of the churchyard in Bewick transformed by an ambiguous but living female presence; and "the pinnacle of an iceberg

piercing a polar winter sky," forming the backdrop for an image of King Death leaning against the ice. These desolate scenes are, like the Bewick engravings, devoid of human life but they are filled with Presences--the landscapes of dream or of half-conscious allegory.⁸ Jane has learned to draw conventional landscapes and portraits as well--later Mary and Diana Rivers, in their comfortable rationality, will be impressed by them--but these lonely, strange paintings portray the country of her imagination and the creatures of fear and longing who dwell there. In summoning them up she is already a traveler beyond the confines of sensible Victorian England.

Whenever Jane actually does travel, it marks a major change of direction in her narrative. In fact, the structure of her autobiography is one of sudden and dramatic journeys, each to a very different kind of world and a new challenge. Her first is from Gateshead to Lowood, another place as cold and fatal as the arctic, whose doors close behind her like those of a convent or a prison. She finds injustice and death here, too: her first spring at school coincides with an outbreak of typhus, and Helen Burns dies of consumption in her arms. "[D]isease had thus become an inhabitant of Lowood," she says, "and death its frequent visitor" (80). Yet the change is for the better, even before the typhus epidemic forces improvements in the school's regime; Jane is cleared of

the charge of being a liar, she finds friends, she does better in class, she begins to acquire the precious knowledge of French and drawing she had hoped for. "I would not now," she tells us, "have exchanged Lowood with all its privations, for Gateshead and its daily luxuries." From this she may reasonably conclude that movement, though dangerous, is desirable. But the confinement of her life there does not encourage thoughts of travel and we hear of none. It is only when she watches the newly married Miss Temple's chaise disappear behind the hill and discovers she is throwing off the habits of eight years in a single afternoon that she finds herself in her "natural element" and looks up beyond the quiet valley in which Lowood lies:

. . . now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. I went to my window, opened it, and looked out . . . there was the garden; there were the skirts of Lowood; there was the hilly horizon. My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks: it was those I longed to surmount . . . I traced the white road winding round the base of one mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between two: how I longed to follow it further! (89)

Her first prayer is for liberty, her second for "change, stimulus." But she cannot believe in real freedom for herself, hobbled as she is by her youth and poverty, by the narrow expectations her life has permitted thus far, most of all by her femaleness. She can hardly run away to

sea or go to London to seek her fortune--since only one kind of fortune awaits penniless young women there. It is this consciousness that makes her amend her request to "a new servitude," an ambition possible even for a girl of no position: "Any one may serve." In fact it is only her orphaned, friendless state that gives her what freedom she has; in order even to take a new job she must send for permission to Mrs. Reed, her "natural guardian." She has not yet really escaped Gateshead. But luckily that lady is entirely indifferent to her fate and does not interfere with her movements as a genuine friend or relation might well have done.

And so Jane goes on her second journey, a slightly longer one this time of about seventy miles, and she enters the green world of Thornfield Hall, a place of wonders and terrors more akin to the the Forest of Arden than to the arid daytime reality of Lowood or the acutely observed social fabric of Gateshead, where she has learned lessons in class distinctions and the power that comes with possessions. So different are these places that at first she herself seems to be almost the only connecting link between them, since she is destined for unusual events and yet is intensely practical and truthful; thus she has found the fantastic at Gateshead and Lowood; and she injects a note of sturdy common sense even into the excessively dramatic life of Edward Rochester. She

contains oppositions and has a knack of finding her balance.

But Thornfield is not a place where balance is easy. It is the center of strangeness in the novel, and if we see the entire book as gothic or mythical it is because of what happens here. For Jane it is a magical place, complete (once Rochester arrives) with enchanter and resident demon. She first enters it, appropriately enough, in the dark and is relieved by the coziness of Mrs. Fairfax's room, where there is "no grandeur to overwhelm, no stateliness to embarrass." But she finds next day that there is more than this to contend with, after all; the house has a master. Outside she finds a green and beautiful solitude; inside, the "vault-like air" of the stairs and gallery she noted the night before is succeeded by daytime impressions of a "stately" and "imposing" dining room and the crimson-and-white drawing room, a "general blending of snow and fire," which so dazzles Jane that she calls it "a fairy place"--adding at once, with her usual common sense, "Yet it was merely a very pretty drawing room." And the third part of this significant scene is the third floor, full of old furniture which gives it "the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory." So peculiar is the impression it makes that in describing it Jane uses the word "strange" four times in one sentence:

I liked the hush, the gloom, the quaintness of these retreats in the day; but I by no means coveted a night's repose on one of those wide and heavy beds: shut in, some of them with doors of oak; shaded, others with wrought old English hangings crusted with thick work, portraying effigies of strange flowers, and stranger birds, and strangest human beings,--all of which would have looked strange, indeed, by the pallid gleam of moonlight. (112)

This is the part of Thornfield's three-level stage that corresponds to Jane's pictures, especially the small back hallway that looks "with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle," and where she is greeted that first day by the madwoman's laugh. It is here she comes to walk away her restlessness when she has been dreaming of the "regions full of life" she has never been able to reach; here she indulges in a continuous imaginary story like the chronicles of Angria, "quickenened," she says, "with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence." In the Thornfield transformed by Rochester's presence into a kind of faeryland, lying beyond the borders of daytime England in a world of imagination and danger, here she is furthest in and highest up, closest to the dark heart of its mystery.

By contrast, the main floor is the backdrop for Rochester at his most perverse and for the false, empty society of his social and economic peers. This is the arena of disguise and charade, of power games. Here Blanche Ingram and her harpy of a mother snub Jane while

Rochester pretends not to notice or care; in the game of charades, Rochester and Blanche act out a false wedding as part of the ominous word "Bridewell"; here Rochester disguises himself as the gypsy woman to prove Blanche mercenary and to try to get Jane's confidence; here in their first conversation he puts her through a difficult interrogation and conceals his interest in her under an abrupt, whimsical manner. The dominating image of this main part of the house is of Jane, in her plain black silk, sitting unnoticed and silent in the window seat while the fashionable ladies lament the necessity of "the whole tribe" of governesses. It is a hostile landscape very much like a grown-up version of Gateshead, and its red-and-white furnishings suggest the chill of the red room. Jane will not find her lover here, but only the absence suggested by his averted eyes and his flirtation with Blanche Ingram.

As the adjectives Jane chooses at her first sight of it show, it is also an arena for the display of wealth and its power. The distance between Jane and Rochester in the realistic terms of the drawing-room can be measured in money, just as in third-floor terms it can be measured in corruption. However familiar the convention may be, it is nevertheless brilliant of Brontë to make Rochester a rich man as a way of suggesting the power differential between men and women and the obstacle it presents to her idea of

a genuine union. Wealth, like gender, is an unearned source of privilege, conferred by birth, impersonal, inherently unjust. In *Jane Eyre* it is not merely a bit of fairy-tale-based wishful thinking that has Jane fall in love with a man of property, but a metaphor for the higher ground on which men stand by virtue of their sex and the way their potential for dominance helps to corrupt them in their relations with women. It has been felt by Brontë's female imitators to be an essential part of the story, and the great country house with its rich master is a marker of modern women's formula gothic, long after the kind of class structure represented by *Thornfield* has become the exotic remnant of an earlier time. In *Jane Eyre*, wealth is always problematic whether its possessor is male or female: the interests of Blanche Ingram and Mrs. Reed are more hostile to Jane than those of Edward Rochester at his most possessive, largely because the two women in the rigidity of their affluent roles are entirely unable to sympathize with her; and when Jane herself inherits money she gets rid of three-fourths of it at once, using it to "buy" a permanent relation of equality to her Rivers cousins. "It would please and benefit me to have five thousand pounds," she says; "it would torment and oppress me to have twenty thousand." In the dynamic of the novel, superfluous wealth of the kind displayed in the *Thornfield* drawing room is not Rochester's virtue but something he

must overcome and at least in part be stripped of before he and Jane can be married; it represents power badly used. The public rooms at Thornfield continue the exploration begun at Gateshead into the question of the extent to which money is really to be desired. The gothic figures of Bertha Rochester and the dead Mr. Reed that haunt the two great houses, demanding vengeance, suggest the impending disasters that will result in their fall.

But if the interior of Thornfield is alternately dreamlike and a source of irony, the outside is the land of heart's desire. Here Jane meets Rochester on the road to Hay; as they walk together in the grounds, he tells her the story of Céline Varens and Adèle's birth, and Jane begins to know him; when she returns from Gateshead after Mrs. Reed's death she finds him waiting at the stile; in the garden, surrounded by the evening fragrance of "sweet briar and southernwood, jasmine, pink, and rose," and accompanied by the song of a nightingale, he asks her to marry him. Its beauty is a source of constant pleasure to Jane from the first day when she climbs to the leads with Mrs. Fairfax: a "sunlit scene of grove, pasture, and green hill of which the hall was the centre." It is also a landscape of the imagination. Jane rather hopes for a glimpse of the supernatural, as her disappointment over the lack of elves has shown us, and so when she hears the approach of Rochester's horse in the Hay lane at dusk she

half-expects to see the "goblin" called the Gytrash. She apologizes to us for this weakness:

In those days I was young, and all sorts of fancies bright and dark tenanted my mind: the memories of nursery stories were there amongst other rubbish; and when they recurred, maturing youth added to them a vigour and vividness beyond what childhood could give. (119)

But despite the dismissive tone, we can hardly doubt that the imagined danger of the Gytrash is a source of enjoyment to her and adds a spice to her subsequent interchange with Rochester. We might also remember that this is a book in which portents and presentiments are real. The Gytrash, like the tiny Jane-spirit of the red room, "haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers." Fear has already touched Jane's figure: fear of which she is both subject and object. Her image in the mirror had had "a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still"--glittering with the fear of a demonic self. Now the thrill of mingled attraction and repulsion which surrounds the Gytrash--the true gothic *frisson*--is to be attached to a demonic other in the very substantial form of Edward Rochester, who arrives in its place; and in him, goblin or not, both danger and opportunity are quite real.

What makes the gothic an appropriate way of presenting him is its affinity for moral ambiguity; an object of desire that is also a source of fear takes on a

daemonic aspect, which can be presented psychologically (or subjectively) as obsession--as it is, later on, when Jane says, "He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol." But it can also be presented "objectively" by surrounding the source of obsession with an aura of real power; and the amount of power Brontë saw love as having in women's lives is as clear here as in *Villette*. The association of Rochester with the Gytrash is merely a piece of whimsy, undercut by Jane's apology; but it is the first of a series of such associations which culminates in the "real" phenomenon of his call to Jane across the miles which separate his open window at Ferndean from the garden where she is walking with St. John Rivers, an incident which Brontë defended as being drawn from real life. Through Rochester Jane herself will take on most of her further associations with the fantastic, the fey, and the "elfin" and so partake of the power once reserved for the gothic villain, like Catherine Earnshaw before her.

And so Rochester turns out to be even more attached to "fancies bright and dark" than Jane is. He is constantly playing with the idea that she is an agent of the supernatural, beginning in their first conversation at Thornfield. If Jane has been thinking of the Gytrash, it

appears he has been doing much the same: "When you came on me in Hay Lane last night," he tells her, "I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse: I am not sure yet. Who are your parents?" It is a shrewd question, for indeed Jane's connections with the world are very slight. When she confesses that she has no parents, he accuses her of waiting for "the men in green" so that she may dance with them in the moonlight, and she answers him "as seriously," remembering her vain search at Gateshead, that they "forsook England a hundred years ago." This interchange, which puzzles the literal-minded Mrs. Fairfax, sets the tone for the relationship that is to grow between them. They find their common ground in a half-joking, half-serious love of faery: that is, of all that is most distant not only from sober England but from the real world they know and from its constraints, from which both of them have had occasion to suffer. It is no small part of Rochester's attractions that he has been a wanderer and can tell stories of life on the continent such as Jane has never heard--and such as she (and we) ought not to hear, the early reviewers tell us. But this vicarious travelling is a source of pleasure to Jane, like Bewick and Gulliver --"I . . . followed him in thought through the new regions he disclosed," she tells us--and we also enjoy the unexpectedness, the foreign quality in both Rochester and

Jane, who as he remarks is no ordinary "raw school-girl governess."

In their hearts, they are both creatures of moon-light, and the moon shines on all the important events in their mutual history, from the meeting in Hay Lane to the "vague, luminous haze" Rochester sees from his window at Ferndean when he calls Jane back to him. Describing his recovered sight in the last pages, she will say, "the sky is no longer a blank to him." Rochester proposes in the evening, when "sunset is . . . at meeting with moonrise"; but when he defies opinion and claims that God sanctions his marriage to Jane, the moon's light is extinguished. Jane exclaims, "But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were all in shadow: I could scarcely see my master's face . . ." This moon is not a natural object but a spiritual force, an analogue of God's watchful presence. But fascinatingly, the only supernatural being Jane ever sees is the moon-goddess of her dream just before leaving Thornfield.⁹

The novel seems to be divided, on the spiritual level suggested by its fantastic elements (of which the gothic is one), between opposing and perhaps complementary forces. The spirit that presides over Jane's love is female, like the demon who haunts it in the form of the mad Bertha; and there is much that is "feminine" about Rochester himself, who for all his gruff exterior and

abrupt manner is sensitive, emotional, and intuitive and is able to counterfeit an old gypsy woman well enough to fool a houseful of guests and even Jane's observant eye, for a while.¹⁰ So the female genius that broods over Thornfield is set off against the stern father-god of Mr. Brocklehurst and even against the more benign warrior Christ of St. John Rivers, who seems to have the last word in the text: "Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!" This phrase signifies death and the Christian's triumph over death--and Christianity is most present in the novel during Jane's early days at Lowood, ending with the typhus epidemic and the death of Helen Burns, and during her stay with St. John Rivers and his sisters. St. John the minister saves her from dying of exposure only to urge her to the near-suicide of missionary life in India. The mother-goddess she sees at Thornfield, on the other hand, urges her to save herself and seems to be concerned with the processes of life; but the mother Nature of the moors near Whitcross, although vital, is indifferent to human needs, and Bertha Rochester, the embodiment of uncontrolled, excessive female "nature," is a destructive force. All of this suggests oppositions in a necessary tension with one another and resists easy categories of thought. The novel does not allow a sorting of "male" and "female" figures or traits into good and bad groups; the reality is more complicated than that and demands a more careful

moral response. The acknowledgment of such moral ambiguity is one of the basic traits of the gothic, and Brontë makes full use of its potential: like her sister Emily, she broadens the gothic conventions by avoiding gender stereotypes.¹¹

So it is that the energetic Rochester, whom Richard Chase calls the "symbolic embodiment of the masculine élan" (107), is more like Jane Eyre than anyone else in the novel. This is partly because, like the Zamorna of the Angrian chronicles, he is someone a female writer (or reader) might very much like to be. He is rich, vigorous, powerful; he has seen the world and has experience ("I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years' difference in age and a century's advance in experience," he tells Jane), especially the sexual experience forbidden to women on penalty of becoming Bertha Mason or, at best, Céline Varens; he has even the privilege of solitude--not isolation among strangers, but the command of his own movements, so that he may be alone or have company as he chooses. Most of all, he has (or seems to have) freedom. The Rochester Jane falls in love with has everything. He is a kind of Byronic masculine ideal--a bit corrupted by his contact with the world, but that is part of the ideal (and seriously so, to save us from admiring a virtue so weak it cannot survive life, or so rigid only a saint or an ascetic can hope to possess

it). And he is clearly meant to be a character we identify with. Brontë believed in the power of the imagination, and our imaginations are not so paltry that we can only identify, as if mechanically, with characters of our own gender. Much of the delight of the dialogues between Rochester and Jane comes from playing both parts in the imagination, from falling in love (as readers do) with both of them.

While his "masculine" privilege and his exploitation of it aligns him with the earlier gothic and romantic hero/villains, his "feminine" sympathy makes him a new kind of character. Much of Rochester's appeal lies in his ability to understand and value Jane, which is revealed over and over again even when he is pretending to be indifferent; in this he is very much like Heathcliff and Paul Emanuel. No one--not even Helen Burns or Miss Temple--has ever observed Jane so closely or responded with such quick sympathy to her changes of mood and her characteristic turns of thought. Jane is reticent except under the stimulus of powerful emotion; Rochester spends a good deal of time drawing her out and extrapolating from her answers. Once he gets to know her he will even tell her what she is thinking in the face of her own denials, and he is always right. When he asks her why she is leaving the drawing room on the second evening of his house party, she says she is tired; "And a little depressed," he adds.

She denies it: "I am not depressed." "But I affirm that you are," he tells her; and of course we know why, knowing as he does not the history of her paintings of herself and Blanche Ingram. But he has calculated all along, we later discover, on her jealousy of Blanche. He is like Heathcliff in that his love is not necessarily a kind or generous emotion; his desire to possess Jane is selfish, though he also cares for her welfare, and his tactics are often rather cruel. But the emotion itself is honest and is based on a true assessment of her character, which no one else has ever cared to make. If we forgive him, as Jane does, it is because he genuinely loves her, not only as his potential salvation--though she is that--but in and for herself. He alone really sees all that is good in her and responds to it. Everything else is secondary to that.

Their kinship is most evident in the pleasure both take in the fantastic, and here Rochester out-Janes Jane. He has even more of a stake than she does in escaping the confines of the here-and-now, and of course he wants to imagine Jane as something other than human so he will not have to acknowledge her likeness, however remote, to the wife he hates. Bertha he has come to regard as less than human: when he shows her to the would-be wedding party, he contrasts her pointedly with Jane, "this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon." Later he calls

Bertha "that fearful hag" and speaks of her as being "prompted by her familiar to burn people in their beds at night, to stab them, to bite their flesh from their bones, and so on--" She is his "filthy burden," "a monster" whose room is "a wild beast's den--a goblin's cell." He refers to her as "the lunatic," "the maniac," "the fury," "the thing." It is important to him to create as strong a contrast as possible by thinking of Jane as a fairy or an angel, and especially as being free of any danger from him. As he is telling her the story of Céline Varens, he pauses to reflect on what the critics later did not scruple to call the impropriety of his speaking so freely:

Strange that I should choose you for the confidant of all this, young lady . . . But . . . I know what sort of a mind I have placed in communication with my own: I know it is not liable to take infection: it is a peculiar mind; it is an unique one. Happily I do not mean to harm it: but, if I did, it would not take harm from me. The more you and I converse, the better; for while I cannot blight you, you may refresh me. (154)

Jane in this formulation is a mind, almost disembodied, as later she will be seen by him as a spirit, a "wild, free thing looking out" of the body that is its "slight prison." In the violence of his desire to hold onto her, he seems to Jane like "a furnace" to which she is mere stubble, but his need to make her ethereal acts as her defense and combines with his genuinely valuable knack of seeing beyond the surface to come to her rescue: "Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it--the savage,

beautiful creature!" he cries. If Jane is essentially mind and spirit, she is reassuringly incorruptible, so he need not worry about harming her; but although he is right about her toughness and integrity, he is wrong of course to imagine he can't hurt her except physically: he can and does. To see her quite clearly as the vulnerable, defenceless young girl she really is would require too much restraint from him--and, to be fair, would ruin the plot--so he surrounds her with a bright haze of supernatural force. He calls her "witch, sorceress"; speaks of "good geni"; says it is "just one of your tricks not to send for a carriage, and come clattering over street and road like a common mortal, but to steal into the vicinage of your home along with twilight, just as if you were a dream or a shade." "She comes from the other world," he cries (264). This theme runs through all his talk with her, and it is partly deliberate self-deception about her invulnerability, partly an acknowledgment of her uniqueness, partly a way of talking about a kind of love that, like Catherine and Heathcliff's, has extraordinary force and involves extraordinary dangers.

One of the things Rochester wants to do with Jane is to travel, but his real goal is not on the map. He talks to her of going to "Paris, Rome, and Naples . . . Florence, Venice, and Vienna: all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you," he tells her:

"wherever I stamped my hoof, your sylph's foot shall step also." It looks as though she will see places undreamt of in her childhood, the great cities of the earth with all their life and excitement; her clothes are bought, her trunks packed and addressed to "Mrs. Rochester, --- Hotel, London." She will never actually get there. But even if they had been able to get away, they could not have gone far enough, and Rochester knows it. Nowhere in this world can he be entirely escape the possibility of exposure and loss, since he has chosen to lie about the existence of Bertha Rochester. And so he resorts to the fantasy that in this novel is the bright other side of its gothic horrors. What he really wants, he expresses in a story he tells Adèle on the way to shop for wedding clothes in Millcote. She must go to school, he says, "absolutely sans mademoiselle; for I am to take mademoiselle to the moon, and there I shall seek a cave in one of the white valleys among the volcano-tops, and mademoiselle shall live with me there and only me." Adèle raises a series of objections: mademoiselle will have nothing to eat, she will be cold, her clothes will wear out. Rochester answers with increasingly fantastic solutions: he will gather manna for her to eat, he will warm her by the fires of the lunar volcanoes, she will wear clouds for dresses and a rainbow for a scarf. Adèle, not satisfied, says, "besides, she would get tired of

living with only you in the moon." To this his answer is perfectly serious and practical, and it shows where fantasy ends and his sense of power begins: "She has consented: she has pledged her word." It is not Jane who has imagined their marriage as a kind of isolation; indeed, she has had enough of such an existence. One has the sense, though she never says so, that the idea of seeing all of Europe with her husband delights her--that it is unnerving precisely because it seems too good to be true. But Rochester puts the image of this solipsist paradise into her mouth: he describes Jane, whom he calls "a fairy," meeting him at the stile and telling him she will make him happy: "I must go with it out of the common world to a lonely place--such as the moon, for instance"; it offers him a gold ring and says, "Put it . . . on the fourth finger of my left hand, and I am yours, and you are mine; and we shall leave earth, and make our own heaven yonder"--nodding again at the moon. Even someone as young and inexperienced as Adèle can tell that this last bit of invention is self-serving, and she calls him "un vrai menteur." But unfortunately, though the fantasy of escape is false, a version of its isolation and loneliness will come true at Ferndean.

The fairy tale of marriage King Cophetua-style and a happy ending in some enchanted landscape is destroyed by the gothic nightmare of Rochester's real marriage. But he

tries to hold Jane to his imaginary bargain, even after the existence of his wife has been revealed. He drops the whimsy and the talk of the moon, but he still proposes a life of seclusion: "You shall go to a place I have in the south of France: a white-washed villa on the shores of the Mediterranean," he tells Jane. "There you shall live a happy, and guarded, and most innocent life" (329). And despite the suggestive word "guarded," she wants to go. Refusing is "an ordeal," a "[t]errible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning!" It is fortunate for her resolution that Rochester makes a false step: he argues that since she has no friends or relatives to care what she does, "no man" will be injured if she lives with him. Jane's mind at once translates this into the real question: "Who in the world cares for you?" She does not reflect consciously on the self-serving style of his thought, but it calls up the very essence of what she has learned as a survivor, the core of her integrity as a human being: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself." This is the minimum without which she cannot live, and it is what she desires for Rochester but can't give him, since right action is not a gift but a duty.

Within the microcosm of Thornfield, compounded of fairy tale, the novel of manners, and the gothic, the

green world of desire is intertwined with and opposed by all that the third floor stands for: memory, entanglement, fear. This symbolizes danger, but it is worth noticing that the real danger to Jane's life comes from the exclusiveness and hostility of the social world, while the danger to her integrity comes from Rochester and from love itself--the daemonic Eros that calls upon both the highest and the lowest in human beings and that relentlessly reveals the truth of the lover's whole moral character. Although the gothic is not "realistic," here as in *Villette* it acts as a kind of reality principle, limiting what Jane can hope for, chastening desire. What will eventually happen to her may be "happy," but it will not be the ending of "Beauty and the Beast" or "Cinderella"--or even *Pride and Prejudice*. Bertha Rochester stands in the way, not only literally but as a sign of something that will not be swept aside, cannot be repressed or ignored--something worse than false pride or hasty judgment. She is the embodiment of irrationality and deception, mad and vicious in herself and an occasion of sin for Rochester; and she is an exaggeration of all Jane fears for herself.¹² Both victim and criminal, deserving pity but inspiring terror, she forces the recognition not only of error but of evil in the world, and not only in the world but in Rochester--and in Jane, who loves him and whose "body and soul rise in mutiny" against law and

principle when they demand that she leave him. At that moment, she sees herself as mad:

I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad--as I am now. . . . They have a worth--so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane--quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs. Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by . . . (344)

When we discover, with Jane, that Bertha exists, we must do some rapid reassessment: primarily of the hitherto fascinating if enigmatic figure of Rochester, whom we now discover to be less free and less powerful than he seemed. It is hardly a complete surprise; we have been carefully prepared from the day of Jane's arrival at Thornfield to expect the revelation of a dark secret, which of course suggests some kind of constraint on Rochester. But his mode of life, which once seemed rather attractively daring, now looks more like weakness and attempted flight, and our belief in his honesty in the things that matter has taken a nasty dent. Jane now finds that Céline Varens, who had appeared in the light of a young man's first real lesson in life, was in fact only the first of a series of mistresses deliberately chosen by Rochester to replace his mad wife; and even she, in answer to his question about the effect of this confession, says, "I don't like you so well as I have done sometimes, indeed, sir." And she thinks to herself that she might well share

the fate of "these poor girls" if she is not careful.

At this point, in fact, there is a reversal of power between them. Before the wedding morning, all the advantage has lain with Rochester: it has been for him to act, and for Jane to be patient--she has had only the traditional feminine power of refusal. In fact, once she has agreed to marry him she is made thoroughly uncomfortable by his sudden high-handedness. Now his need of her is revealed, through the agency of Bertha, to be even greater than her need of him, class and wealth notwithstanding. He pleads with her not to leave him; he loses his temper; he breaks down and cries. Through all of this Jane, though she suffers, is steady and intelligent. She sees, if he cannot, the disaster that awaits them if she lets her desire for him make her faithless to herself. And so she must do what the heroes of romances are so often and so flatteringly asked to do: she must think and act for both of them; she must, in fact, find a way to rescue both of them.

She does this by starting out on her first real journey of exploration, a blind movement away from Thornfield that is given supernatural sanction by her dream-vision of a moon-goddess who bends over her and whispers, "My daughter, flee temptation!" Creeping out of the house before dawn she hears the sounds of morning: "Birds began singing in brake and copse: birds were

faithful to their mates; birds were emblems of love. What was I?" She does not think of their power to fly. Characteristically, her flight takes her northward to the desolate landscape of the moors, where she is set down literally and figuratively at a crossroads. Like the arctic, like the "white valleys" of the moon, the country around Whitcross is empty and inhospitable. "I see no passengers on these roads," Jane tells us: "they stretch out east, west, north, and south--white, broad, lonely; they are all cut in the moor, and the heather grows deep and wild to their very verge." In a perverse way, Rochester's fantasy has come true for Jane: she might as well be on the moon, and all of Adèle's predictions come true as well. Jane does starve and suffer from cold, and her clothes are soaked with rain and splashed with mud. But this is the reality the fantasy sought to deny. There will be no manna or volcanoes or rainbows here, only the natural order that provides food and shelter in plenty for bees and lizards but is a "golden desert" to Jane. Returning to the ordinary, she finds it a landscape of privation and death. She is in the position of one of the travellers in the old tales who has passed a night in faery and then returned to the world of mortals, only to find that a hundred years have gone by and everyone familiar has died: she has returned from the magical world of Thornfield to the dreary reality in which Gateshead and

Lowood are situated, stripped this time of every connection, every possession, reduced to a condition worse than an orphan's--someone might have been ready to take in a lost child, as her uncle did. And she also faces the faery-led traveller's difficulty in making contact with other human beings again: "I might be questioned: I could give no answer but what would sound incredible, and excite suspicion" (350).

At first it seems the end of this journey will be death. Indeed, Jane is only saved from that fate at the last moment by the least defensible and most romantic coincidence of the plot: she follows a light like a "star" and stumbles to her cousins' door just in time to be overheard by the returning St. John in the dusk, declaring her submission to the will of God. The coincidence does not lie in finding shelter, of course, but in reestablishing at a stroke her connection with the world, this time on a firm basis of blood relationship; it is a movement of return that confirms Jane's imaginary kinship with the heroes and heroines of romance whose obscure births must and will be clarified so they can take the places wrongly denied them--and also with the inhabitants of tragedy who move inexorably toward the ends marked out by fate and enforced by their own characters. This kind of plot, which some call mythic, is an assertion of form and purpose in human life and a repudiation of

chance; in the Christian context which is insisted on by Jane's own words at the Rivers' door, it is an assertion of God's providence. But where *Villette*, Brontë's darkest work, allows the possibility that providence may not save the individual life, *Jane Eyre* assumes a benign justice that is worked out on earth.

The relation of the gothic to this assumption is ambiguous and shifting; its concern with the daemonic tends toward ambiguity in any case. Within *Jane Eyre*, one can argue that the effect of the madwoman's existence is to move Jane and Rochester, even against their own will, toward genuine equality and submission to the will of God; the madness itself, though it is hereditary, is associated with Bertha Mason's own corruption--she is "at once intemperate and unchaste"--and the blight of Rochester's life can also be seen, like the destruction of Thornfield, as a necessary step in his mastery of the lessons of humility and generosity. So far even these violent events can be seen as justice. But the intrusion of the problem of evil, particularly in the involuntary form of madness and its twin, passion, darkens the story like a stain. The mind may summon up figures of desire and spin a romantic tale, but the pressure of unhappy reality demands an opposing force, a countermovement toward the diminished good that is all that is really possible. Brontë's gothic is both romantic and anti-

romantic, both psychological and spiritual; through the abandonment of realism it expresses Brontë's fear of a reality devoid of the movement of the spirit: a reality like the moors on which the starving Jane wanders through brilliant sunshine and drenching rain, each alike indifferent to her life or death; like the Villette in which Lucy Snowe must live after Paul's death, in which a busy surface life conceals the death of the heart. Better the darkness, the pain, even the horror that may be involved in human love than that blank.

And so when Jane leaves the moor where she has encountered the essence of unromantic reality, which is a second face of death, she runs at once into the hands of another enchanter. This one is the Ice King himself, in the innocent guise of a beautiful, blue-eyed young clergyman who makes her think of Greek statues and impresses her at once as "either restless, or hard, or eager" under his "harmonious" exterior (375). The story of the last third of the novel is to a considerable extent the story of Jane's growing knowledge of St. John Rivers and of his influence over her. And though there is a sense of danger about him, at first this influence seems benign and all goes well for some time, thanks partly to the warming presence of St. John's sisters, Diana and Mary.¹³ From the beginning Jane draws a distinction between them and their brother: in them she finds compassion, from him she

receives charity. He notices this distinction and accepts it as "just," agreeing to help her "imperturbably" and "coolly." Gradually, as she has the opportunity to observe him, Jane finds that self-control and coolness are the key components of a character she finds admirable, compelling, and more than a little frightening.

St. John is in almost every way a contrast to Edward Rochester, even physically. Jane will later use this fact to tease Rochester into jealous life at Ferndean, where he finds her description "suggestive of a rather too overwhelming contrast" between "a graceful Apollo" and "a Vulcan,--a real blacksmith, brown, broad-shouldered; and blind and lame into the bargain" (482). But the difference in temperament is more important. We have come to know Rochester as impulsive, emotional, sensitive, indirect, passionate--a "feminine" nature, in short, and with the conventional vices of such a nature: sensuality, deceit, seductiveness. Against this is set a pattern of the masculine virtues in the person of St. John: intellect, iron self-discipline, strength of will, asceticism, implacable adherence to his own judgment. "Reason, not Feeling, is my guide," he tells Jane (408). Thanks to his career as a clergyman, all of this potentially egotistical strength is placed at the service of Christianity, so that Jane is forced by her own principles to approve; but she finds it increasingly

chilling nonetheless. One of the purposes of this section of the book, otherwise an apparent digression from the love story, is to give both Jane and us such a dose of St. John's virtue that we will return to Rochester's human corruptibility with relief and pleasure. But the extent to which Jane has fled from Thornfield only to fall into even worse danger in the long-sought north only gradually becomes clear as St. John shakes himself free of his love for Rosamund Oliver and turns the full force of his attention on Jane.

As he does so, the language Jane uses to describe him becomes less literal and begins to take on a gothic resonance that allies him imaginatively with the demonic Bertha Mason, his female opposite. Where she is associated with death by fire and is hotly, madly murderous, St. John becomes associated with death by freezing and with a kind of indirect murder carried out emotionlessly, on principle, and--perversely--in good conscience. He has told Jane that he is "a cold, hard, ambitious man," but she has taken this as a defensive exaggeration meant to deflect her questioning from the sore point of his love for Rosamund Oliver. She begins to change her mind after she has insisted on sharing her inheritance without eliciting any response from him but an insistence that she think carefully and "make an effort to tranquillise [her] feelings"; in particular on the evening when she shows him

the improvements she has made at Moor House and finds him entirely uninterested in them--as uninterested as he has been, at heart, in discovering their relationship. She begins to feel his lack of response as annoying and rather ominous:

Now, I did not like this, reader. St. John was a good man; but I began to feel he had spoken truth of himself, when he said he was hard and cold. The humanities and amenities of life had no attraction for him . . . Literally, he lived only to aspire--after what was good and great, certainly: but still he would never rest; nor approve of others resting round him. As I looked at his lofty forehead, still and pale as a white stone--at his fine lineaments fixed in study--I comprehended all at once that he would hardly make a good husband: that it would be a trying thing to be his wife. (427)

The image of the "white stone" is elaborated and given a negative valence when she reflects that the heroic nature, that of the "lawgiver," is likely to be "at the fireside, too often a cold cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place." She will refer to him in these terms again when he lies down on the heath to await her answer to his proposal of marriage, "still as a prostrate column"; it is the same term she applied to Mr. Brocklehurst ("a black pillar!"--"the same black column which had frowned on me so ominously from the hearth-rug of Gateshead"). This phallic language suggests a metaphoric identity between stone and patriarchal masculine tyranny in Jane's mind. Coldness and heaviness become her chief associations with St. John as he begins to engross her time by teaching her

Hindoostanee; she fears to say no because "you felt that every impression made on him, either for pain or pleasure, was deep-graved and permanent."

Their closer contact soon produces a feeling of oppression and of a kind of sinister enchantment:

By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference. I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by . . . only serious moods and occupations were acceptable. . . . I fell under a freezing spell.(433)

One evening at bedtime, his sisters tease him into kissing Jane good night as an acknowledgement that she is his "third sister." "There are no such things as marble kisses," Jane says, "or ice kisses, or I should say, my ecclesiastical cousin's salute belonged to one of these classes." She identifies it finally as an "experiment kiss," and her response is typical: "perhaps I might have turned a little pale, for I felt as if the kiss were a seal affixed to my fetters" (434). The good-night kiss becomes a possessive ritual, and Jane notes that "the gravity and quiescence with which I underwent it, seemed to invest it for him with a certain charm." It is a symbol of the obedience and stillness he demands of her, so that she tells us "I felt daily more and more that I must disown half of my nature, stifle half of my faculties. . . ." Certainly it is no easy thing to be the object of St. John's experiments: "it racked me hourly,"

Jane says, and she compares his efforts to change her behavior with an attempt to remodel her features into the likeness of his own. He has a use in mind for her and is willing to remake her very soul to suit that use, at whatever cost to her in suffering; and his purpose requires that he destroy her capacity for emotion and liveliness--the feminine qualities for which he has no sympathy and can think of no use--in order to make her a more efficient servant of his cause and a more tireless missionary. As an enchanter, St. John is clearly engaged in turning Jane to stone or ice by repressing her "vivacity": she has fallen under a death spell.

This becomes explicit when he asks her to marry him and accompany him to India, a course of action Jane sees as equivalent to a death sentence. This is one journey she is not at all anxious to undertake, leading as it would not to freedom but to a kind of erotic slavery in the fatal heat of the tropics. "I felt as if an awful charm was framing round and gathering over me," she says: "I trembled to hear some fatal word spoken which would at once declare and rivet the spell." In an attempt to ward off the moment of choice, she cries, "Oh, St. John! have some mercy!" But mercy is not an attribute of the warrior saint. And at this point St. John uses what he seems to regard as his most fearful weapon: his certainty that his own will expresses the will of God, and that Jane's

refusal of him constitutes a kind of blasphemy. "It is not me you deny," he tells Jane, "but God" (446). He begins to demand that she submit herself not to God but to him, which he sees as the same thing; and he insists that she marry him though he will not even pretend to love her, a proposition Jane finds really blasphemous. The extent to which he has misjudged her character shows in the casualness with which he tells her, "you are formed for labour, not for love." Attaching so little importance to love himself, he expects this rational proof of God's intentions for her to sway her in his favor, but Jane hears it as the deadly selfishness it is. The one thing her relationship with Rochester has settled forever is that she is capable of inspiring love, and so she is not vulnerable to an attack on her self-esteem as a girl without experience might be. If there is any doubt that St. John misunderstands her as completely as John Bretton misunderstands Lucy Snowe, and for much the same reasons, it is removed by the list he gives her of the qualities he is looking for and believes he sees in her: "Jane," he says, "you are docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant, and courageous . . ." (440). There is only one false quantity in this list, but he places it first and values it most: above all, he wants a woman to be docile. But this is just where Jane has surprises in store for anyone who pushes her too far, drawing on the strength

that Rochester called "the hitch in Jane's character" and had the good sense to fear. St. John has not cared to extend his study of Jane's potentially useful traits to her emotional life, so he continues to make false steps and to be startled and angry at the results. When she insists that she will give him her energies but not herself, he asks, "Will [God] accept a mutilated sacrifice?" With this appeal to the authority of the Father he expects to overbear Jane's reluctance, but to his astonishment he only succeeds in stiffening her resistance. This is the kind of argument she has learned to reject from her childhood, the sort Brocklehurst used to mask his own selfishness; and despite the "iron shroud" she feels tightening around her, she actually begins to take heart:

I had silently feared St. John till now, because I had not understood him. He had held me in awe, because he had held me in doubt. How much of him was saint, how much mortal, I could not heretofore tell: but revelations were being made in this conference: the analysis of his nature was proceeding before my eyes. I saw his fallibilities: I comprehended them. . . . The veil fell from his hardness and despotism. Having felt in him the presence of these qualities, I felt his imperfection, and took courage.

St. John's attempt to make himself into a false god is doomed to failure from this moment. But his ability to "torture" Jane by withholding his affection almost wins the day for him in spite of her understanding of what is happening. "If I were his wife," she tells us, "this good

man, pure as the deep sunless source, could soon kill me: without drawing from his veins a single drop of blood, or receiving on his own crystal conscience the faintest stain of crime. . . . He experienced no suffering from estrangement. . ." (448). It is not hypocrisy that is in question, but simple "pure" coldness that gives his conscience the sunless clarity of ice. Eventually Jane's terms for him shift from images of stone to those of ice itself. "And you will not marry me?" St. John asks her, and she comments to us: "Reader, do you know, as I do, what terror those cold people can put into the ice of their questions? How much of the fall of the avalanche is in their anger? of the breaking up of the frozen sea in their displeasure?"

With St. John's courtship, Jane has finally entered into the "death-white realms" that fascinated her as a child, and she is in considerable danger of being trapped there. Despite her fear, she almost yields to his insistence and to a moment of uncharacteristic gentleness in him; but they are watched by the "May moon shining in through the uncurtained window, and rendering almost unnecessary the light of the candle on the table," and Jane is saved by the sound of Rochester's voice calling her name across the miles from his own open window at Ferndean. This acts as a kind of counter-charm, breaking forever the spell St. John has been so carefully wrapping

around her. As in the earlier scene with Rochester, their positions are suddenly (and this time even more completely) reversed, and she simply dismisses him:

I broke from St. John; who had followed, and would have detained me. It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play, and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must, and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. (458)

After all her struggles with the idea of duty, which St. John has made into a weapon against her, she is freed in an instant--by the supernatural device that underlines the unbreakable relationship between Jane and Rochester and seems to give God's sanction to it, following as it does Rochester's prayer for death. Jane herself does not regard it as supernatural:

"Down superstition!" I commented, as that spectre rose up black by the yew at the gate. "This is not thy deception, not thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature. She was roused, and did--no miracle--but her best." (458)

This comment adds the sanction of the mother-goddess Nature to that of the Father, and the counter-spell is complete.

St. John departs, baffled, for Cambridge and then for India, and we see him no more. But the summing up of the novel's last pages ends with Jane's valediction to him, and in the praise she gives him and the fulfillment of her expectations of India we can see how nearly fatal a temptation he was to her. Now that he is safely far away,

extending the benefits of his virtues to the benighted and no doubt grateful heathen, Jane grants him some of the divinity he was so anxious to claim: he is Greatheart, an apostle, a "high master spirit" whose ambition, tellingly, is "to fill a place in the first rank of those who are redeemed from the earth." But he is also approaching his true goal and home: death. It is left to us to wonder whether his "pilgrim convoy" of Indian converts ever love his "sternness" as little as Jane did, and to be grateful --as she must be--that he failed to take her with him.

His final effect on Jane, like that of all the gothic manifestations in the story, is to call forth her strength while showing us how much such strength is needed in this world and how much there really is to fear. Nothing, the story tells us, is quite what we would hope it to be: childhood is not sheltered and innocent but powerless against abuse; death is everywhere, even among the young; independence is lonely; escape from one set of problems confronts us with another; love, in which self may be forgotten, is also an occasion for the most ruthless selfishness; even self-sacrifice in a good cause may only feed someone else's hunger for self-aggrandizement. It may well be that there is no far country, however fantastic or romantic, in which one can avoid these truths.

Once Jane has mastered St. John, however, she is in a position to take the initiative into her own hands for the

first time. Her inheritance, coming to her from the same West Indies that were Bertha Mason's home, has given her a new control over her destiny. Now the movement of return to order and ultimately to the life-affirming joy of the comic ending, which began with her escape from the solitude of the moors to the safety of Moor House and her true family, can be completed. Jane sets out once more for Thornfield to find Rochester and to "accomplish the will of Heaven." Though she still speaks of leaving England, we have no real expectation of such an outcome. And as before, the green fecundity of Thornfield's hills greets her:

. . . the coach stopped to water the horses at a wayside inn, situated in the midst of scenery whose green hedges and large green fields, and low pastoral hills (how mild of feature and verdant of hue compared with the stern north-midland moors of Morton!) met my eye like the lineaments of a once familiar face. . . . "My journey is closed," I thought to myself. (461)

We are ready for explanations, for resolution, for dreams to come true.

But what we get is another visitation from the gothic. Jane's dreams do come true at Thornfield, but they are the nightmares of her last nights there before her disastrous wedding day: dreams of loss and destruction. She had dreamed of the hall in ruins, of Rochester disappearing down a "white track," of a child that "almost strangled" her, of falling.¹⁴ What these images mean is

not a question answered in the novel, although a few pages later she uses the metaphor of a child again:

I looked at my love: that feeling which was my master's--which he had created; it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle; sickness and anguish had seized it; it could not seek Mr. Rochester's arms--it could not derive warmth from his breast. Oh, never more could it turn to him; for faith was blighted--confidence destroyed! (321)

Now the dream images are made literal in the burned house, Rochester's absence, and Bertha's fatal fall from the battlements. It is all a reminder that Jane's fulfillment will only come at the cost of another woman's life, that the choices of the past still live in the shape of the present, and past betrayals may be forgiven but cannot be undone. Jane's faith in Rochester, if she is to recover any, must now be an act of will, continually renewed against the weight of memory and fear. There has been a fall indeed.

For the moment, instead of finding a romantic reunion and the removal of all obstacles, Jane must leave the now-ruined hall behind forever and face yet another journey. This one is to Ferndean, a place which is rather like a diminished Thornfield. It too has something of the fairy tale about it, "deep buried in a wood" and all but abandoned to unimproved nature. Once more Jane approaches Rochester's dwelling at nightfall, this time feeling lost on a "grass-grown track" that seems to go on forever. She looks for another path, but can't find one: "all was

interwoven stem, columnar trunk, dense, summer foliage--no opening anywhere" (469). There is a nightmare sense of obstruction, darkness, and decay that only slowly dissipates as she finds the house and on the doorstep Rochester himself, groping his way through the rain only to stand aimlessly until he is called in by a servant. It is not the meeting Jane had imagined: "It was a sudden meeting," she says, "and one in which rapture was kept well in check by pain. I had no difficulty in restraining my voice from exclamation, my step from hasty advance" (470).

Only when she follows him inside, takes the candles to him in the servant's place, and begins to talk with him once more does the old relationship begin to be re-established and the mood lighten. The delight of their relationship for us, as for them, has always been in their conversations together; once the dialogue begins again, the comic spirit which has been absent since Jane's wedding morning (and whose absence has made such heavy going of her stay in the north, for us and for Jane) also quickly returns. She finds the best way to deal with Rochester's pain and depression is to tease him and keep him off balance, just as she did to hold him at arm's length during their engagement; but this is not the only source of our amusement. Almost at once they fall into the true Brontë style of lovers' interchange. She is

independent now, Jane explains, and when asked how, says, "My uncle in Madeira is dead, and he left me five thousand pounds." Rochester's response is the first recurrence of his old voice and manner: "'Ah, this is practical--this is real!' he cried: 'I should never dream that.'" The moment is slight and fleeting, but it is a sign of healing to come and a source of real satisfaction to us. It is not long before the old game begins again, and he exclaims, "You mocking changeling--fairy-born and human-bred!" (478). But this time he at least acknowledges her human breeding, and it is the last time he says such a thing; the supernatural force now in his thoughts is God, and the mysteries of judgment and mercy. From this point on, a quiet joy suffuses Jane's narration and the "happy ending" is assured.

And so they are married and the shadows disperse. There can be no doubt that the marriage is a very happy one and that, surviving beyond expectation all they have had to face, they are fortunate and blessed. There has been considerable discussion of Rochester's "castration," but of course Brontë has been careful to preserve his potency and to assure us that though wounded and depressed, he is not a broken man:

His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour as ever: his port was still erect, his hair was still raven-black; nor were his features altered or sunk: not in one year's space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be quelled, or his vigorous prime

blighted. . . . The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson. (470)

His first response to Jane's familiar voice is to seize her with his "muscular hand," and his first worry is that she may now expect him to "entertain nothing but fatherly feelings" for her. Later he compares himself to the lightning-split tree at Thornfield, and Jane replies, "You are no ruin, sir--no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots . . ." (485). And indeed it is on the occasion of their first child's birth that we are told his sight has returned in one eye. Their union is fruitful and they are happy. Romance seems to be in control of this outcome.

And yet the feeling it produces, particularly on the first reading, is disappointment. This is not quite what we had expected and hoped for; Rochester's crippling throws too serious a light on their reunion and is too permanent to be merely another obstacle to be overcome. It is not what Jane once dreamed of, either: she will never now, it seems, have the chance to see Italy or the south of France--much less Nova Zembla or Lilliput--or to enjoy the confident, fearless love a romantic girl imagines. The last trip of hers we are told about is to London with her husband, to see an oculist. Perhaps "God had tempered judgment with mercy," but the judgment is stern nevertheless. It is conceivable, this ending

suggests, that in a world where young men reserve their admiration for women like Bertha Mason and Blanche Ingram, only crippled marriages are possible--"happy," capable of being slowly healed, but never all that one desires.

"Unreal" and unspeakable, the gothic lies at the center of Brontë's romance like an unanswered question or a locked door: the madwoman stands across the path of fulfillment as the sign of a hidden flaw in the very heart of the relations between men and women.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹This discussion of what a long-dead writer "knew" and "felt" is not a naive use of the so-called "intentional fallacy," but simply a way of talking about a set of conclusions drawn from letters, biographies, novels, poems--whatever evidence suggests that such a person as Charlotte Brontë once existed and had the usual qualities of a human being. That evidence, though pitifully inadequate, ambiguous, and distorted, is nevertheless better and more complete than the evidence available to me about most of the people I know. Post-structuralist theory spends a good deal of its time demonstrating to us that we are all fictional constructs, not only to each other but to ourselves; and that point once acknowledged, it is easier to communicate one's construct of another person in the old-fashioned discourse of narrative than in the technical language of theory.

²Judith Newton makes an important distinction between the power to control, which she sees as "a particularly masculine form of power," and power conceived as ability, competence, and energy, which is the kind of power sought and realized in women's texts (xv). Where Brontë is interested in power--and she is a shrewd observer of power differentials between her characters and how they come

into play--she is careful to portray women who want this kind of power for themselves, rather than the rich marriages, elaborate households, and servants of naive romance. Other, more "masculine" sources of power like birth and wealth are noted, and she never underrates their importance; but even in male characters the admiration goes to instrumental forms of power: Rochester's energy and intelligence, St. John Rivers' force and discipline, Dr. John's skill, M. Paul's scholarship and ability to inspire others.

³Feminists, for instance, fault Brontë's novels (especially *Shirley*) for not being revolutionary enough and "settling for" marriage as an ending. For example, Judith Newton on *Villette*: "the element of class protest . . . is never developed. . . . Brontë's overt analysis, once again, is simply inadequate to the intensity with which she captures the experience of social and economic inequities" (118). This kind of reading makes her considerable insights only half conscious and seems to me to diminish unfairly the credit we give Brontë. Thus Lucy's marriage to Paul would have been only "a private fantasy" and so must be "sacrificed to Brontë's sense of possibilities" (124). The last part of this is very shrewd, but I get no sense that--as Kate Millett and others have suggested also--Brontë sees that marriage as anything other than desirable, or Paul's drowning as

anything other than a tragedy. In Brontë's own time, of course, the hostile criticism was all the other way and blamed her for portraying women as passionate, as wanting their own way, as being able to love more than one man. Between these two poles complaints of every kind have been made. Richard Chase, for instance, blames Brontë for creating Rochester as a "symbolic embodiment of the masculine élan" and then "castrating" him. He concludes that Jane is too cowardly for the real thing: "The noble, free companionship of man and woman does not present itself to her as a possibility" (107). Hence the catastrophe and a conclusion he obviously regards with scorn. What seems to be bothering him is Brontë's revision of the fairy-tale ending in which the prince is clearly in charge. And so it goes. The structures of Brontë's novels are unusual and reflect a split between the concerns of realism (especially about character and situation) and those of romance; but I would argue that neither this nor their inclusion of contradictions makes them fundamentally less unified than, say, a Shakespearian romance.

⁴John Maynard has done a splendid job of explaining the "yoking of opposites" Brontë achieves in the figure of the de Hamal/Nun, suggesting both suppression and sensuality with "the implication that each is fostered by the other."

⁵See, for example, Judith Newton and Kate Millett.

⁶For a discussion of Brontë's use of the opposition between cold and heat in the novel's symbolism, see Tony Tanner.

⁷The incident in the red room has been extensively discussed by feminist critics and interpreted in a variety of ways--especially in its ambivalent figuring of Jane's female identity. See for example Gilbert and Gubar, Rich, Rowe, and Moglen.

⁸One such possible allegory based on Milton is discussed in an interesting short article by Alan Bacon.

⁹This is noted by Adrienne Rich in her brilliant 1973 essay "Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman." My discussion of the novel owes a great deal to her insights and takes many of her conclusions as givens on which my own speculations are based: for instance, that the novel is a *Bildungsroman*, that the men Jane encounters represent temptations and dangers, that the female characters are equally important.

¹⁰Gail Griffin argues persuasively that Rochester undergoes a process of feminization in the course of the novel that is also a process of humanization.

¹¹Robert Heilman's fine 1958 article is devoted to showing the way Brontë contributes to and transforms the gothic by "compelling . . . a radical revision of the feelings exacted by stereotyped romance" (83). Though he is not thinking there in terms of gender, he has his eye

on the same release from the predictable and the oversimple that I am trying to describe here.

¹²Feminist critics, following the lead of Gilbert and Gubar, have tended to identify the madwoman with Jane's own unacknowledged sexuality and with the effects of Victorian repression, but to say that Bertha is Jane (as some have done) seems to me too simple an equation. There is both sympathy and repulsion in Jane's feelings toward Rochester's wife, but it seems that our response is meant to include both fear and a distinction between her and Jane: between "mad" self-indulgence and a "sane" adherence to principle.

¹³Adrienne Rich points out that these two "bear the names of the pagan and Christian aspects of the Great Goddess" (103).

¹⁴For discussions and interpretations of these dreams, see Baer and Homans.

Chapter 4

Doris Lessing: The Quest for Unity

One went to the door of the Beloved and knocked.
A voice asked, "Who is there?"
He answered, "It is I."
The voice said, "There is no room for Me and Thee."
The door was shut.
After a year of solitude and deprivation he returned and
knocked.
A voice from within asked, "Who is there?"
The man said, "It is Thee."
The door was opened for him.

- Jalaluddin Rumi

I stood upon a high place,
And saw, below, many devils
Running, leaping,
And carousing in sin.
One looked up grinning,
And said, "Comrade! Brother!"

- Stephen Crane

Doris Lessing has written from the beginning of her career about people who are divided against themselves and about the social contexts that both cause and reflect their fragmentation. Her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), is the story of a white farmer's wife on an African farm and the inexorable combination of repression, alienation, and racial hatred that ends with her murder at the hands of her black servant. There is no villain in this novel, and no hero; only a small group of

people no more than half-conscious of the reasons for their own actions or the nature of the links that bind them together in a common fate. It was praised by the *New Statesman* as "an extremely mature psychological study" and was the beginning of her formidable reputation as a realistic novelist. The five novels of the *Children of Violence* series and *The Golden Notebook*, perhaps her most famous single novel, followed in what could be seen as the same realistic mode, enlivened by a certain amount of formal experiment. So the books she began to publish in the seventies, starting with *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, startled the critics considerably. They include a second five-novel group (the *Canopus in Argos* series) that Lessing described as "space fiction"--not really science fiction, because not interested in speculation about science or technology, but a form of fantasy (or rather forms, since the five books are not of the same kind)--and several *sui generis* novels not easily classified, but also with a substantial component of fantasy. These were then followed by books once more in the realistic mode. The reaction to her experiments with genre have ranged from interest through bewilderment to a kind of fury: Pearl Bell, in reviewing 1985's *The Good Terrorist*, dismissed Lessing as overrated and sneered, "She is an avatar of the intellectual yearning for belief à la mode" (*New Republic*, 28 Oct 1985). Bell was not the only one who saw the

shifts of genre in Lessing's fiction as signs of a move away from her commitment to social commentary toward a kind of fuzzy-minded religiosity,¹ an abandonment of realism that was equivalent to a betrayal of truth. The reaction betrays the extent to which serious speculation about nonrational modes of thought falls under a kind of intellectual taboo, from which many others have also suffered (C. G. Jung and R. D. Laing, for instance, in whose work Lessing has been interested--and whole genres, like fantasy, science fiction, and of course the gothic romance).

Beneath the highly varied surface of Lessing's books, however, is the same set of persistent interests and ideas, and the shifts in genre serve not so much to indicate a change in the content of her work as to highlight the radical shifts in perspective she has found it useful to make. One theme that reappears many times in her books is that of her first novel: fragmentation and wholeness, division and unity. She approaches it on every level. On the personal level, it appears as the question of consciousness and its place in the whole self; but the fragmentation of the psyche she explores is not only a question of conscious and unconscious mind, but of compartmentalized thinking, repression, illusion, and madness--both real madness, like Mary Turner's inability to imagine a human being inside black skin and the

neurotic dislocation that results from close contact with a humanity she must deny, and the quite different, potentially valuable "breakdowns" of the later books that look like illness but represent a healing process in which false barriers are swept away.

Such experiences can be described using the external perspective of a normative omniscient narrator, which is "realism," or from the perspective of the mind[s] in question, which is "fantasy"; in most of her early novels Lessing used the first, with which most of her readers were comfortable, but in the sixties she began also to do the second and so lost some of her readership, as Iris Murdoch did about the same time when she became too obviously gothic and "fantastic" in her narratives. One of the responses not only to the gothic but to any but the most wish-fulfilling of fantasies is fear, generally translated by reviewers into dislike and negative valuation. The reasons for such fear form part of the subject of *The Four-Gated City*, the last of the *Children of Violence* series and the novel I want to look at here. Published in 1969, it marks the midpoint of her career to date and also an important turning point in her use of genres. The greater part of this long and complicated book is realistic in mode but pays close and sympathetic attention to its characters' experience of madness, or what their society defines as madness. But to the end of

the realistic narrative Lessing attaches an "appendix" which moves the action into the future, as far as the year 2000--a "science fiction" or speculative coda that has the effect of shifting the whole novel, in retrospect, away from the conventional realism with which its themes of madness, "fantasy," and social breakdown have already shown discomfort. *The Four-Gated City* was also, until this year, the only one of Lessing's novels really to make use of the gothic, which is not nearly as central to her way of writing as it is to Murdoch's or the Brontës'. This is partly because her interest is less in personal experience itself than in the connection between personal experience and social reality, or in the personal as an expression and component of the political. *The Four-Gated City* also makes this connection quite explicit; it had been present in the previous *Children of Violence* novels and especially in *The Golden Notebook*, but had, Lessing thought, gone unnoticed along with her use of form:

The way to deal with the problem of "subjectivity," that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvellous possibilities, is to see him as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience . . . into something much larger: growing up is after all only the understanding that one's unique and incredible experience is what everyone shares. . . .

But my major aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment, a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped.

As I have said, this was not noticed. . . .
(Preface to GN 32-33)

Thus a central concern of Lessing's work is with the interplay between the one and the many, between the individual and "the collective," and this theme is consciously reflected in the forms of her novels. The analogue to personal fragmentation and breakdown shows up as the tension between individuals and social groups at the next level of generality, and as politics themselves-- in the widest possible sense of all interactions between groups, whether of class, race, culture, or nationality-- as the circle widens. The fragmented individual is created by his society and is then reflected in the fragmentation of that society we call politics because personal and political are in fact the same thing: each group (and any one individual belongs to many groups) is made up of individuals, whom it has helped to train or "indoctrinate," and who nevertheless act out of an illusion of autonomy, uniqueness, and simple unified selfhood. To make us aware of this identification between parts and whole, of the absolute interdependence of things we prefer to think of as separate, is one of the points of all Lessing's work.

One way to achieve this recognition is to alienate us from our usual categories, and this is where "space fiction" and fantasy come in. They operate clearly and

consistently on the basis of "alien-ation," taking up perspectives that are normally unavailable to us and therefore require a readjustment in our ideas about what we see. "Alienation" is also an old word for madness, which has the same dislocating effect and is often experienced as violence. In *The Four-Gated City*, Lessing places the perspective of madness at the heart of a realistic political novel which finally locates the real insanity in the "normal" outside world while the madwomen of the Coldridge household are shown to be engaged in a vital attempt to get in contact with the reality that outside world denies. The fantasy of the apocalyptic future with which the novel ends is the proof--not logical, but narrative--of the sanity of their attempt. It is a novel of inversions. And it uses an inconspicuous inversion of the governess plot of *Jane Eyre* to tell its story.

The form of this novel, like that of *The Golden Notebook*, is related to these inversions and is part of a deliberate attempt to undermine our confidence in our own expectations--to alienate us, as it were, from conditioned patterns of thought. *Children of Violence* is a series that comprises four novels before this one, all set in Africa, all about the same length, each divided into four parts and each of those parts also subdivided into four parts. The image of the city in the desert, the ideal

city of some imagined golden age with its four gates facing north, south, east, and west, gives its title to the last novel but also appears in the earlier books; the series was, Lessing says, carefully planned. *The Four-Gated City*, then, is the fifth book--a much longer one--in a series dominated by the number four; it too is divided into four parts, each of which is subdivided into four parts. To this the future history "appendix" adds a fifth element that stands as the conclusion to a series of four, as the whole novel is the concluding fifth to a series of four.

There is a repeated play in this on expectation and surprise, on the intrusion of an alien and unaccountable element into a rigid structure, that is echoed in the themes of the novel itself. On the political level the madness of Lynda Coldridge will intrude in this way on the "normal" political novel that tells her husband's story, take it over, and replace it as the center of interest; on the social level Lynda in her basement apartment will also replace, for both Martha and us, Mark and his upstairs study as the active center of the household, which in Martha's eyes functions as a kind of collective organism--the "brain" of this complex is not upstairs, where one might expect it, but down below where most people see only rampant emotion; and on the psychological level the image of the ideal city, a dream of the perfection of human

society, unites Mark Coldridge the rich Englishman with Martha Quest the ex-communist and with many others, of all persuasions, who read of it in the book he writes. It is not an image of politics, but of wholeness--an image by which actual societies are illuminated and judged.

The four-gated City of the title, as defined by Mark Coldridge and Martha Quest, "had been planned as a whole . . . not grown into existence, haphazard"; it is a city of gardens, fountains, and parks whose center may be anywhere, may even be in some of its people and not in a particular place at all (140). But the most salient fact about this mythical place is that it no longer exists--has in fact never existed. Mark and Martha disagree in their mutual fantasy only about the cause of its destruction. It could be said that the destruction of the city is the necessary precondition for imagining it, that its nonexistence is its whole point. The expectation for such a city is that it lie in the past, in an undefinable and irredeemable past which we call "myth." But part of the novel's significance lies in the breaking of forms and in a suggestion that, unlikely as it seems, this city may just as well lie in the future; it is certainly a goal for Mark and Martha, rather than a starting place.

Some of this ambiguity about where we should place our dreams, reflected in the "breakdown" of the formal expectations Lessing has set up only to destroy, is also

reflected in her treatment of the governess plot that intrudes so surprisingly into the realistic curve of the first four books. Its appearance is unexpected in so political a novel, and is even more unexpected as the final chapter of the story we have been following. Martha Quest, the protagonist of the series, is (like Jane Eyre) the heroine of a *Bildungsroman*, as Lessing tells us in her "Author's Notes" (655); that being so, the quest her name keeps us conscious of is necessarily for a kind of completion or wholeness. In the earlier volumes she has been through a process of self-education that includes elements normal--even prototypical--for her generation, the children of the most violent century in history: marriage, motherhood, war, political activism, and love. All of this she leaves behind in Africa when she comes to London, the heart of Empire, the "home" which is not home, the imaginary city which is all too real in ways she has not expected. As she wanders the streets of this city of illusions and disillusionment, moving from class to class as she crosses the river, entering new and foreign states of mind as she walks, without eating, for miles with her suitcase in her hand, nothing seems less likely than that this ex-communist, still-Marxist independent woman will end up in the house of a rich man, nominally his secretary but actually a combination housekeeper-companion-nanny-mistress, the one who "holds things together." When she

does, it is easy to miss the connections not only with her earlier life but between the two stages of her London experience, trained as we are to expect "action" to be the focus of a narrative--what happens, what is done. Yet the "governess" stage and the wanderings of the waif are part of the same development, an evolution that hardly appears at all in the actions Martha performs.

The real action of *The Four-Gated City* is a journey away from Martha's external life, from the drama of childbirth and love affairs and political organizing, and into the crucible of her own mind, where the apparently random and rather uneventful years in London have their true shape. It is a movement reflected externally rather in her withdrawal from "action," in her apparently passive role as holder-together, than in anything she does. If we expect dramatic events--as of course we do--we will be disappointed, for what happens? Martha tries to stay free, then gives in and takes the job with Mark Coldridge; there is a "bad time" after Mark's brother defects to the Soviet Union; the children grow up, showing the stress of the bad time but surviving; Martha's mother comes for a visit; there are a lot of parties, at which people do a lot of talking; the bad time ends; Martha slowly comes to understand the experience of Mark's mad wife, Lynda. The really big event--the apocalypse in which Britain is destroyed--takes place off stage between

the end of the novel proper and the beginning of the appendix. There is a great deal of movement and development here, but its most important parts are internal and, in important ways, invisible.

Nevertheless Martha Quest is a genuine explorer, not of landscapes but of "abnormal" states of mind; and it is here that the novel really begins to depart from the realistic expectations set up in the first four books. She has sought understanding as most of us do, through action in the world, but she will find it waiting inside herself behind a door labeled "madness."

Although madness is a common gothic motif, at first there is nothing particularly gothic about Lessing's treatment of Martha's experiences. That quality grows only slowly as her quest takes her farther in. She finds first, walking through a still-foreign London, that if she eats little, sleeps little, and walks long enough,² she can enter a "space" in her mind that is normally inaccessible, a space where the individual Martha is replaced by "nothing but a soft dark receptive intelligence" and she is able to perceive in ways that are new and valuable to her (38). Aside from this rather ascetic approach, there is one other way she can reach this impersonal place: through sex with Jack, who is engaged in a struggle with time and death and has chosen sex as his weapon:

Sex, with Jack, was never . . . the simple satisfying of a need . . . Sex was the slow building up, over hour after hour, from the moment of meeting the woman he was to make love with, a power, a force, which, when held and controlled, took both up and over and away from any ordinary consciousness into--an area where no words could be of use. (61)

It is because Jack had been stripped of normality by his experience of war and death until he "understood, and communicated, through the body" rather than the mind, that he is able to offer through sex a kind of transcendence of ordinary boundaries. But the experience is hard to hold on to. Martha sees him as mad, wounded not only by war but by a violent father until he is incapable of being serious about anything but sex, which is a ground on which he struggles against the approach of his own death. It is as though this obsession, this specific madness of his, somehow makes it possible for him to reach and to take others to a realm of the mind not available to the sane. Sex with Jack is the easiest way for Martha to approach the wordless place she wants to explore, and with him she reaches some points of understanding she will later find it hard to remember:

This time, when her mind finally clicked off, went beyond the pictures and the voices, she did not retain any memory of it; was aware again only as she made the slow descent. The different rhythms disengaged and she entered normality: which was, she understood now, a condition of disparateness. She had never really seen before how the separate parts of herself went on, working individually, by them-

selves, not joining: that was the condition of being "normal" as we understand it. (64)

This experience of daemonic Eros serves Martha as a door to the intellectual understanding--elusive and temporary though it may be--of whole internal realms that had been unconscious and inaccessible to thought. One of her gains from the time with Jack is to understand that neither she nor anyone else is a simple unity; another has to do with not only the universality but the connectedness of our apparently separate emotional experiences. This insight is passed on by Jack in an unusual moment of eloquence. He has been thinking about his father, whom he still hates for the beatings in his boyhood that have left permanent scars on his body, though the old man has been dead for years. When he allows these memories to surface, he is filled with an energy of hatred that is not only like but part of the erotic energy he must build up and contain in order to reach the sexual level he is aiming for. And he articulates for Martha a sense that this emotion is not his "own," not the personal possession we usually imagine our emotions to be--an observation that will be echoed in her own experiences much later:

Martha, do you know what I've discovered--making love? I understood what hating is. You say all your life, I hate, I love. But then you discover hatred is a sort of wavelength you can tune into. After all, it's always there, hatred is simply part of the world, like one of the colours of the rainbow. You

can go into it, as if it were a place. . . . But it's like a thousand volts of electricity. (60)

So there is more than one "place" in the mind that can be reached through the erotic, or through physical "stripping down," and they may be places we share and not private landscapes at all. It is all very interesting, but none of it seems particularly frightening and certainly not "gothic"; that will come later. And one of its sources late in the novel is the fate of Jack himself, who eventually gets "tuned in" to a negative wavelength permanently. Martha loses touch with him while she is living in the Coldridge house, and when she looks him up again he has been ill, recovered, and now spends his time "breaking in" girls to be prostitutes, in a sadistic parody of his former role as sexual explorer. The erotic path he was following has become completely demonized, and he seems frighteningly unaware of the change. Martha thinks of him sadly as the victim of a kind of possession: "It was probable that some time while he had been ill the old Jack had simply died, or gone away, and this new person had walked in and taken possession" (406).

Meanwhile, as she and Jack are making love during her early days in London, Martha has a series of visions that upset her: first of a kind of Eden or golden age, in which a man, woman, and children are surrounded by wild animals "as tame as housepets," a picture which evokes in

Martha a bitter sense of loss; and then a prophetic image of herself in what we will later recognize as Mark Coldridge's house with herself as a middle-aged woman surrounded by "half-grown people . . . tortured and hurt." The accuracy of this apparently anomalous flash of foresight is a sign of how far she has been able to get, by way of the erotic, into her own mind; only many years later will the experience be repeated, after a slow and painful process of self-discovery. But at the moment it is not at all obvious that this is the point of her relationship with Jack, the reason it is important. She accepts the job with Mark Coldridge, and there seems to be a complete shift of ground.

But the appearance is deceptive. When Martha moves into the Coldridge house, she is not like Jane Eyre entering into an essentially private relationship. Without knowing it, she is placing herself in a relationship with the whole spectrum of British politics by working for Mark, whose brother soon becomes a communist (as Martha had been a few years earlier), a defector, and a cause célèbre. What is more, everything she had thought she was leaving behind is waiting for her in Radlett Street, and she must live through it all again indirectly, through the Coldridges: politics, motherhood, love; and most of all the exploration she began with Jack.

The political ugliness that surrounds Colin Cold-

ridge's defection, including the persecution of the Coldridge family by people caught up in the anti-communist scare who in only a half-dozen years will have shifted their ground again, is only a replaying on the larger, political scale, of the reality Jack had described, "tuning in to hatred." The object of the hatred shifts (later the hysteria will be aimed at homosexuality, then at drugs, then at teen violence), the people displaying it change about; it is, in a sense, quite impersonal. And the people who display political hysteria at one time later pick up an old friendship or family relationship as though nothing at all had happened, as though the part of themselves that had felt that emotion had no contact with the other parts of themselves. The madness of such behavior is not, of course, madness at all; it is normality. But it is precisely to this normality that Lessing wants to attach terror. And so the central person in the Coldridge house is not Mark--this is not a romance --but his mad wife Lynda, who lives in the basement apartment.

Lynda is no Bertha Mason. Her existence, far from being a secret, is one of the first things Martha learns about the household and is the fact that makes her own services necessary. Her husband does not hate her, but loves her--painfully, since one part of her illness is that she cannot bear to be touched. She is not hideous or

threatening, but pale, thin, and beautiful when she is not too ill to care for her appearance. Her violence, which never goes further than words, gestures, and a few broken objects, is aimed largely at herself; she talks of killing herself and bites her nails so badly that she always wears long gloves on social occasions to hide them. She is very strange and at first rather frightening because she talks about hearing voices and says brutally honest things. In one of her first encounters with Martha, she says:

I know there's a devil. He talks to me. . . . Don't tell them I said so. I keep quiet about what I know. I have to, you see. . . . Look at [Mark]. He wants me in prison. He doesn't want me to have my freedom. He wants me cured. (124-125).

This does not seem so much honest as twisted or demented, especially since we have just been told how very much Mark wants her to recover and come back to him, but it is another statement that will look different from the perspective we develop over the course of the narrative: Mark does, of course, want her "cured," not understanding --as he will never understand--what kind of destruction that would entail. At this point, though, he is simply "sane" and she is mad, and therefore alarming. Gradually one becomes used to Lynda, as Martha does, and she begins to seem more pathetic than frightening, especially as her fundamental good will becomes apparent. For a long time her presence in the house seems interesting but incidental, and she is just one of the people--all wounded in some

way, all having a difficult time--that move on and off the stage and carry the action forward.

Meanwhile, Martha has a series of experiences that force her from time to time to pick up the project of self-discovery she had begun in her first weeks in London. In between times, she is preoccupied with Mark, with the children, with the "bad time," with holding things together. To us, as to her, it seems at these times that this must be the real plot, this bustle of living. The first major break in the flow comes near the center of the novel, when Martha's mother announces that she is going to come for a visit--which clearly means she intends to come to live with Martha. Half of Martha's early life had been spent trying to escape from her mother, trying to escape becoming her mother; now she finds herself lying in bed, not getting up, not able to remember her past:

She lay in a half-dark, in a kind of half-sleep, like a thing waterlogged. Yet she could not say she was unhappy. She was calm. But she could not get out of bed. . . .

Whole areas of Martha's life had slipped away. She lay, half listening to Mark, trying to remember the simplest things. Her childhood had gone, except for small bright isolated events. . . .

Her father's long illness; her mother--ah yes, here it was, and she knew it. She had been blocking off the pain, and had blocked off half of her life with it. (216)

This confrontation with herself does not end quickly or easily. She is forced to isolate herself in her room and "work" at recovering her past by bringing into conscious-

ness the fear and pain she has avoided; and as she does so, and considers what she is doing, she makes several discoveries. One is that there are far more "disturbed" people around her, and always have been, than she has ever admitted. Incapacitating mental illness is not a rarity, but something she has simply refused to pay attention to because it was so easy to file away under labels that made it irrelevant to her own experience--which it no longer is. A second is that she is beginning to understand some of what Lynda says, has been saying all along, and it is not incomprehensible or irrational but simply expressed in a kind of shorthand that requires experience to translate. And a third comes when she makes a short but intensive study of psychology and goes to consult a psychiatrist--Lynda's own, Dr. Lamb. She finds that "these practitioners of a science, or an art, agreed about absolutely nothing" (223), and she also begins to realize that their function is to control what they often confess they do not understand by channeling or disposing of emotional energy, sometimes through therapy, sometimes through violent means like shock treatment or ice baths, and most frequently by dispensing drugs. Part of what Lynda has been saying is a warning about this machinery of containment. She is moving, without being conscious of it, toward the perspective of the basement, the alienation that is the habitat of Lynda and her abnormal friends. At

the same time she has been cut off by the twists of politics from a large part of the outside world, and the atmosphere of the house is quietly becoming more like that of the isolating gothic structure in which the nature of reality comes into question.

When her mother finally arrives, the ogre of her youth transformed by time into a querulous, unhappy old woman, we find that yet another of Martha's central experiences is not as "personal" as it seems. Her mother, too, has been dreading the visit while appearing calm, has been for a while unable to get out of bed, has been "engaged in a fight with a cold rejecting hating demon to which she gave the name Martha" (243). The visit, inevitably, goes badly, and Mrs. Quest returns to Zambesia where she will die within the year. Just before she goes, Martha says to Dr. Lamb:

. . . what's wrong with us all--because it's not just me. You fight your parents--everyone does--you have to do that. If you don't then you're sunk. . . . What is the fight? Who's fighting what? Why is it that we all of us have to get out from under awful parents who damage us? Because what are they? She's a pathetic old woman. (283)

This is of course the central question of the novel: "what's wrong with us all?" Are we caught up in a demonic machinery of role-playing and transformations in which we turn into what we hate and fear? Are we incapable of recognizing the real enemy? Are we the real enemy ourselves? This is the question of evil--of "what's

wrong"--that is the province of the gothic, asked here in the terms of realism but leading toward Martha's descent into the basement, the apparent hell through which the road out will lead her.

Mrs. Quest's departure happens at the end of Part Two, the very center of the novel. After this there follows another time of external worries, but the period of introspection has had its effect. Martha has not only been moved closer to Lynda, closer to a perspective on the world that is usually labelled as "mad," she has also been given a lesson about the illusions of selfhood. As the following years go by and the children grow into adolescence, her recognition that what she was fighting in her mother was not so much a person as a role, a role she must now inhabit herself, is reinforced by reliving her youth in their own: one "had to be, for as long as it was necessary, screaming baby, sulking adolescent, then middle-aged woman . . ." (356). She develops the insight of the middle-aged matron into other people's behavior. And one night she discovers that she can hear their thoughts: first Mark's, then those of his nephew, Paul. Startled, she asks Lynda whether she can do the same, and Lynda exclaims, "Oh, you do? I was waiting for you to . . ."

From this moment, their partnership in the quest is a fact, though it takes more years during which the

children, Francis and Paul, reach adulthood and become independent before they can push it beyond this stage. This is also the end of Martha's ability to think of such phenomena as alien, belonging to others who can be locked away literally or figuratively behind diagnostic labels. And the force of this experience for us is similar, if milder. It is no longer easy to tell in this novel who is mad and who is sane. One may not share Martha's experiences in just this form or anything very close to it, and yet . . . there are resonances. Perhaps the easiest to recognize is the communicability of hatred, an aspect of human psychology perfectly well known outside the covers of novels; how, after all, does one explain those periods we have all lived through, are all living through, in which the objects of hatred change and yet the hatred goes on? To talk about this in terms of "wavelengths" and "tuning in" is a metaphor used provisionally by the characters, a way of talking about something that defies exact description, and it is hardly adequate to the task; but then, what would be? We are left wondering about such questions in growing uneasiness and perhaps distress, rather as Martha is--hoping, perhaps, it will all turn out to be nonsense.

Eventually Lynda, whose life consists of periods of minimal coping with ordinary life interrupted by episodes of breakdown and illness in which she is often forced to

retreat to a dependency on drugs, has a "bad time" that Mark is not available to help her through, and Martha goes down to the basement to stay with her for the first time, not just to visit. And now, prepared by the whole of her London experience to understand what she is seeing and hearing and not to wall it off behind a barrier of fear, she finds herself participating in Lynda's "madness"--and discovering it's not madness at all. Lynda's voices are quite real--the overheard thoughts of others like the ones Martha has begun to hear, perceived through a new and unacknowledged sense which a lifetime of punishment (disguised as treatment for delusions) has not been able to destroy. And she has explored, as Martha has, some of the places in the mind that seem to be the common property of anyone who can reach a certain receptive state. But she has been damaged not only by the incredulity of others but by shock treatment and drugs, so that she is unable to manage her own experience. And some of these places are dangerous, both disturbing and addictive "wavelengths" like hatred. The genre of the novel is now a matter for debate based not on the way in which it proceeds but on one's judgment of the "truth" or reality of the experiences it describes;³ it is the assumption that any interest in such things must imply some kind of naive "belief" in them that lies behind criticisms such as Pearl Bell's. But Lessing is too canny to let us take such an easy out in

good faith; not only does she anticipate such reactions and build them into the fiction--Mark Coldridge, for one, refers to these ideas as "that nasty mixture of irony and St. John of the Cross and the *Arabian Nights* that they all (Lynda, Martha, Francis) went in for" (652), and he has very nearly the last word--but she acknowledges the speculative nature of this development formally by adding her "fantastic" Appendix to the narrative. We are asked by this fiction to think, not to believe.

In the process of discovery it is Martha, the stronger--because less gifted--of the two, who must push further into the realms they have located. She isolates herself in an empty apartment for three months in order to explore and map the unknown territory inside her head, and it is here that Lessing draws on the language of the gothic as well as its themes. Martha encounters the wavelength of "the self-hater," the part of the mind that does nothing but criticize the self in an agony of loathing and that turns everything dark and ugly; she realizes that it is here that Lynda, without guidance or help, has been trapped nearly all her life, listening to a torrent of self-abuse. This is a very hard place to get out of, and it leads to other places equally frightening; to the "opposites," for instance, in which every powerful impulse if pushed far enough dissolves into its contrary: the tortured into the torturer, love into hate, courage

into terror. She finds out why Lynda had said the devil talked to her:

The self-hater had become, logically enough, the Devil, and commented, or exclaimed or jeered, or criticised her every move, thought, memory. . . . It was at this stage that Martha was conducted through the Stations of the Cross by the Devil. She knew nothing of this ritual . . . From the moment when Pontius Pilate washed his hands to the time when she, Martha, who was also the Devil, prepared to be bound on the Cross, because of the frightfulness of her crimes, she was as it were whipped through the ritual by the hating scourging tongue of the Devil who was her self, her hating, self-hating self. . . .

Man understands the Devil very well. The Devil has taught him all he knows. (550-551)

Martha emerges from her journey of exploration a bit shaken, having "sent herself over the edge"; the "central fact" is that if she had been observed at any point during her journey by the authorities who rule on our mental health, she would have ended in a madhouse, believing herself to be as mad as the self-hater said she was. She also understands the mechanism by which dictators and power-seekers control others, by embodying the self-hater for them. It is uncomfortable knowledge, not only for her but for us if we recognize any part of it as truth, as within our own experience. This is no doubt one of the unacknowledged reasons Lessing met with such negative responses to this book. The novel has worked very hard to get us inside this altered perspective, to make us see how frightened we are and that "what we fear is ourselves." Not others, whose similarities to ourselves we deny--

communists or fascists or criminals or perverts--but ourselves. And if this is the case none of our usual solutions, which involve coercing or converting others, will get us out of the increasingly desperate position we are in; Lessing suggests that only a kind of expanded consciousness that in our normal state we regard as mad offers any way out. R. D. Laing, whom Lessing read with interest, wrote in 1967, two years before this novel was published: "If I could turn you on, if I could drive you out of your wretched mind, if I could tell you I would let you know" (*Politics of Experience* 190). This novel tries to tell us, to drive us out of our wretched minds, and although it can only hope to succeed partially it is a very frightening book.

The theme of madness as developed in the governess plot is not the only gothic element at work. Side by side with the story of the two "madwomen" in *The Four-Gated City* and reinforcing its impact is that of an even more gothic character: Jimmy Wood, Mark Coldridge's partner. Their factory designs and produces machines, and Jimmy is the "scientific genius" responsible for much of this work. At first, unlike Lynda, he seems eccentric but harmless; but as she grows more understandable, he becomes more and more ominous. From the first it is obvious that there is something missing in him; he reminds Martha of "some sort of machine" who feeds on talk, which he gets largely from

Mark. Confronted with the political problems of the "bad time," he simply doesn't understand them, and he tells everything he knows--including Mark's phone number--to the hostile reporters besieging the Coldridge house. His wife becomes so unhappy in her marriage that she has a breakdown, for which she feels guilty because she is forced to confess to her mother and sister that Jimmy is a good provider and kind to the children; "she could only weep that sometimes she thought Jimmy wasn't all there, but of course it must be her fault . . ." (228) Quite early on, Martha wonders about Mark's relationship with him:

She had once said to Mark that if someone came to Jimmy and asked him to design an improved instrument of torture, he would at once do so, the ethical aspects of the thing being dismissed with that vaguely embarrassed grimace which he offered to Mark's political and personal problems. Mark said yes, yes, very likely, he was like that. Mark did not, then, expect "honour" from Jimmy. (214)

But no one really takes Jimmy seriously. He looks insignificant, with "soft baby's hair on his overlarge head" and a continual nervous, meaningless smile and thick glasses. He begins writing science fiction and is quite successful, taking his plots from works on the occult and alchemy, imagining mutant powers and apocalyptic wars. Meanwhile he works at the factory and gets his needed talk from Mark and the years go by. Only one small, early incident suggests--in retrospect, for it is given no

emphasis at the time--that Lynda, at least, may take his work seriously: during a period of upset she comes upstairs and smashes a picture of her young self that stands by Mark's bed. Then:

she went into the study. On a long table against one wall stood Jimmy's models of possible electronic machines. One of them was a development of existing machines that could chart the human brain in terms of electric impulses. These machines she systematically smashed. Then she went downstairs again, locking the door into the basement behind her. (195)

Lynda, we understand, must conceal her "voices" from the doctors if she is to be allowed any freedom; she has reason to fear the intrusion of machines. But it later turns out everyone has too.

In fact, years later at the time Martha is about to spend her three months exploring her mind, we discover what it is Jimmy has actually been working on with the help of Mark who had never bothered to notice what he was up to:

He had discovered that Jimmy had for the last ten years been supplying machines, designed by himself, whose function was to destroy parts of the human brain by electric charges. These machines were developments on those already in use for legitimate purposes. Jimmy's had all kinds of interesting possibilities, and he was selling them to the research institutes and departments of hospitals where they were being used at the moment on animals. He had also perfected (on request) a development of this machine to be used by governments, to destroy the brains of people they felt to be dangerous, and who were weak, helpless, or unknown, and could vanish without protest . . . Asked if Jimmy thought it was a good thing for human beings to be made zombies, or treated in this or that way, without (presumably) being asked, he might reply: "But if you stimulate

that area--look on the model, Mark, there--it seems likely that function will superimpose on function X--do you see, Mark?" (532-533)

All this comes out just as Martha is about to encounter the Devil inside her own head. Jimmy Wood is, in fact, a "pure" scientist, like Victor Frankenstein. What he teaches Mark is that "there are people who cannot be judged morally" (581). Shortly after this time, Lynda begins to have visions of a post-holocaust Britain "like a poisoned mouse lying dead in a corner."

Jimmy certainly does not cause the disaster, which is chemical or radioactive or both, not electronic; he is, after all, not very important. He is just one small part of the great web of "normal" behavior that has made the end of human life a real possibility in our century. Mark breaks with him, but when he needs scientific advice about where to locate possible survivors of future disaster, he buys it from Jimmy. Why not? He's perfectly rational and a "scientific genius." And Mark Coldridge, "a man of integrity if there was ever one," has worked with him for nearly twenty years without paying any attention to what he was doing; the extent of the good man's complicity with the moral cripple is hard to overestimate. "If Jimmy Wood was arrested tomorrow," thinks Martha, "on charges of almost pathological indifference to any ordinary ideas of decency, then Mark would be (or should be) arrested with him. But of course Jimmy would not be arrested, nor

suffer in any way at all, because he was merely 'contributing to human knowledge'" (533-534). Such is the ability of the normal human mind to separate and divide, the "condition of disparateness" that is "being 'normal' as we understand it." As the women demonstrate for us the sanity of madness, Jimmy stands for the madness of sanity, and the circle is complete.

The gothic is only one of the voices in what Bakhtin would call the heteroglossia of this novel, and only one of its forms of fantasy; it operates as an undercurrent of terror, helping to motivate our understanding and direct our attention. The Appendix, though it might more accurately be called apocalyptic future history than the gothic (like Shelley's *The Last Man*, rather than *Frankenstein*), nevertheless operates in some of the same ways. The grimmest imaginative touch in the novel is allowing the catastrophe we all fear but prefer to think of as a "fantasy" to happen to the protagonists of a realistic novel; in effect, it is a little like letting your hero be killed in the middle of the story. But the likelihood of such an event's actually happening has been carefully prepared by realistic means, for instance through Mark Coldridge's study which documents the potential for such events as Chernobyl; and it is in any case a cultural cliché. Far more fantastic is the development in such people as Martha and Lynda of a

mechanism for warning and survival, so they and Mark and Francis are still around thirty years later to create the documents which tell us of the disaster and its aftermath. Which is more unlikely, that the human race will develop a new sense, or that it will come to its senses? This plot leaves us, as one must assume Lessing intended, very conscious of grasping at straws, especially as we are likely to share Mark's skepticism; and the final ironic inversion, the final turn of the screw, is that the disaster is all too plausible, while the escape from it is all too obviously a fantasy.

Notes to Chapter 4

¹Lessing took some ideas from Sufism about the inducement and possible uses of "abnormal" mental states, and this was regarded as a kind of fashionable "conversion" to sixties-style mysticism. Had she searched out and credited sources for the same ideas in the Christian mystics, as for instance Iris Murdoch did with Simone Weil and St. John of the Cross, her use of them might have been more kindly received.

²This mechanism for inducing trance states is not an invention of Lessing's. Bruce Chatwin, writing about the life of the nomad, describes it as follows:

In Islam, and especially among the Sufi Orders, *siyahat* or "errance"--the action or rhythm of walking--was used as a technique for dissolving the attachments of the world and allowing men to lose themselves in God.

The aim of a dervish was to become a "dead man walking": one whose body stays alive on the earth yet whose soul is already in Heaven. A Sufi manual, the *Kashf-al-Mahjub*, says that, towards the end of his journey, the dervish becomes the Way not the way-farer, i.e. a place over which something is passing, not a traveller following his own free will. (179)

³Northrop Frye points out in the *Anatomy* that, while criticism will eventually need some theory of plausibility, it "can never be justified" in establishing a theory of reality.

Chapter 5

Iris Murdoch: Ideas of Form

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? . . .

Think

Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.
These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

- T. S. Eliot
"Gerontion"

There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

- "East Coker"

W. H. Auden, who wrote a fair amount himself about the nature of art, expressed in *The Dyer's Hand* a certain reserve about the theorizing done by artists. "I am always interested in hearing what a poet has to say about the nature of poetry," he says, "though I do not take it too seriously. As objective statements his definitions are never accurate, never complete and always one-sided. . . . But, taken as critical admonitions addressed by his Censor to the poet himself, there is generally something to be learned from them" (52-53). Most critics have commented on the difference between Iris Murdoch's theoretical statements about the novel and the novels she has actually

written. She consistently uses "fantasy" as a term of disparagement, meaning the wish-fulfillment fantasy of daydream and its conscious elaborations, and calls dream "the enemy of art and its false image." She calls for increased realism in the novel and connects it with the artist's duty to be truthful: "Strong agile realism, which is of course not photographic naturalism, the non-sentimental, non-meanly-personal imaginative grasp of the subject-matter is something which can be recognized as value in all the arts . . ." (*The Fire and the Sun* 79, 84). Yet her novels, though primarily realistic in mode, have strong elements of the fantastic. In "Against Dryness," she tells us: "Literature can arm us against consolation and fantasy and can help us to recover from the ailments of Romanticism." Yet some of her novels are gothic romances. She worries about the temptations of form:

Our sense of form, which is an aspect of our desire for consolation, can be a danger to our sense of reality as a rich receding background. Against the consolations of form, the clean crystalline work, the simplified fantasy-myth, we must pit the destructive power of the now so unfashionable naturalistic idea of character. (15)

And yet her novels offer the pleasures of form, if not perhaps its consolations, in an uncommon degree; they are highly patterned, complex, dance-like, in certain ways almost mechanical.¹ Her characters include, over and over again, certain recognizable types: enchanter, failed

priest, emotional terrorist, philosopher, the existential (and therefore hopelessly uncomprehending, self-blinded) man.² Her plots are full of improbable coincidences, violence (someone always dies), doublings and repetitions, chains of unrequited love, uses of the pathetic fallacy, symbolic landscapes; though no one of these taken alone is fantastic, the cumulative effect is very far indeed from naturalism. More unforgivably, in the eyes of some critics, the novels are by no means free of Romanticism. Romantic fantasy may be the enemy Murdoch combats, but the enemy is for that reason omnipresent. And so those who accept her critical pronouncements as simple descriptions of her own work have been baffled and sometimes enraged by the elaborate and artificial forms of her novels.

They have been particularly unhappy about her use of the gothic romance, that most despised of all romantic genres, as a source for some of her own plots and settings. Elizabeth Dipple tells us that she "lost much popular support and even many of her serious readers" in the early sixties, during the period which followed "Against Dryness" and saw the publication of her most unmistakably gothic novels: *The Unicorn*, *The Italian Girl*, and *The Time of the Angels*. And even Dipple, one of Murdoch's most intelligent and sympathetic critics, is apologetic about the gothic influence. "*The Unicorn* and *The Time of the Angels*," she tells us, "in spite of their

heavy gothic tone, are important books, but they require of the reader work of a new sort which will become central to Murdoch's mature style, and for many readers their stylized mode and claustrophobic tone are simply not acceptable" (134). She, like most other critics, ultimately treats the gothic as a kind of way station on the road to Murdoch's "mature style," though she acknowledges that Murdoch's gothic is "not just a literary exercise but a device for the transmission of serious religious ideas."

The fact that Murdoch uses the gothic at all indicates that we must take her qualification of the term "realism" ("of course not photographic naturalism") seriously. Her idea of the equally undesirable opposite to the crystalline, oversimplified mythic novel is the shapeless "journalistic" work which does approach a kind of photographic naturalism, but she has much less to say about the dangers of such an approach; perhaps its major hazard is simply dullness, the inability--lacking form--to contain meaning. But she does not seem to think of formlessness as a temptation, from which I think we can conclude it is not a temptation to her. It is the brilliantly contrived writer-centered tour de force that must be resisted, precisely because it is her natural form and what she does best, and so she sees with great clarity the ways in which it may distort or even pervert the truth

she is trying to tell; and this artistic battle of conscience, which she is doomed to lose, is the source of an anxiety in her critical essays to get at the truth about the novel. Her Platonism shows in her certainty that there is a truth, that there is somehow a right way to make a novel and that therefore other ways are more or less wrong, less valuable, less truthful--flawed by errors that are in the final analysis moral rather than aesthetic. "Perhaps in general art proves more than philosophy can," she says in her reply to Plato; and in an art taken so seriously as a source of knowledge there can be no such thing as a purely aesthetic choice. Her ideas presuppose a hierarchy of value among existing novels at the top of which must be, in theory if not in fact, an ideal exemplar of the genre; and yet the model to which she most often refers is not a novel at all, but the plays of Shakespeare. If there is somewhere a Form of the novel, it seems according to her assessment to be very poorly represented in the multitude of actual, existing novels--especially among those of the twentieth century. This too is a source of anxiety and perhaps of experimentation in her work, a search for the correct balance between the form necessary to art and thought and what she sees as the shapelessness of reality. The end of the search is by its nature beyond our reach, since perfection is not a human quality, but the search itself is necessary and desirable;

her idea of art as a central moral activity rests on this paradox.

Murdoch's criticism is thus primarily concerned with the ultimate questions about her chosen form--a kind of metaphysics of the novel--and her conclusions present us with a fascinating contradiction. Art itself is supremely valuable, "the great general universal informant," more educational than "its rivals, philosophy and theology and science"; the "careful responsible skilful use of words is our highest instrument of thought and one of our highest modes of being" (F&S 85-87). Yet even the greatest work "may be less perfect than it seems," is incomplete, "colludes" with sophistry and magic. The greatest optimism about the nature and ends of art is combined with the deepest pessimism about the claims that can be made for any actual example of it; art is an arena in which both our hopes and our fears come true. And so, perhaps inevitably in the thought of so careful a student of the Greeks, she describes it as being ruled by a daemon--and the daemon's name is Eros. In 1986, Murdoch published *Acastos*, two Platonic dialogues, the first of which is called "Art and Eros." In this dialogue perhaps the most eloquent speaker is the young Plato himself, who begins his attack on art by agreeing with Deximenes, "a cynical man," and declaring: "Yes, art is erotic, all art is erotic." He explains his choice of this term as meaning

"something which can be either bad or good" and goes on to clarify his idea:

Yes. Let us call it Eros. Art comes from the deep soul where a great force lives, and this force is sex and love and desire--desire for power, desire for possession, sexual desire, desire for beauty, desire for knowledge, desire for God--what makes us good, or bad--and without this force there is no art, and no science either, and no--no man--without Eros man is a ghost. But with Eros he can be--either a demon or--Socrates.

This argument about art is also an argument about human nature, and so there is an analog to the critical essays and their central paradox in not only the form but the content of Murdoch's novels. Like the artist, her characters are animated by the daemon Eros; seeking freedom and truth, they follow their desires to ends that are always disappointing³ and sometimes disastrous. As Plato's words suggest, Murdoch sees human beings as creatures of limited consciousness forever subject to the ambiguous force Plato called Eros and Freud libido, forever plagued by gods and demons, steeped in illusion, able to think only in words and images about a "transcendent" reality to which words and images are inadequate, and therefore always the fools of false ideas that pander to their own desires. Elizabeth Dipple has done ample justice to the way in which Murdoch's view of human nature represents both tough-minded honesty and a "morally and philosophically stringent" demand on her audience. But in looking at her affinity for gothic elements not only in

her openly gothic middle novels but throughout her career, it may be more useful to look at how frightening a view it is.

If our sense of form is only "an aspect of our desire for consolation," we are in trouble with more than art. We are in trouble, in fact, with the whole apparatus of thought that makes us human, which relies absolutely on its ability to produce and manipulate forms, categories, hierarchies, images and ideas. Even chaos is, as an idea, a form. If reality is significantly but indefinitely random--or even just unmanageably complex--any idea we may conceive of it is bound to be false. This is particularly troublesome in the moral area, where the problem is multiplied by the existence of unconscious motives and energies. The larger analog to the problem of the ideal but unwritable novel is the problem of the good itself, which in Murdoch's universe is absolutely "real" but equally absolutely unreachable and perhaps unknowable as well. Its reality means that the question of right action--"What ought I to do?"--is inescapable, and so are the consequences of choice; but the choice must be made by creatures inadequate to the task and is always most likely to be wrong in some way. In fact, most human choices are a nearly indistinguishable muddle of right and wrong, based on a similar muddle of good and bad impulses which arise from the same central source and are related to each

other in confusing and terrifying ways. Their consequences, not surprisingly, are often disastrous. In such a universe, it is a duty to destroy false consolations, but the hope one can truthfully offer to replace them is austere indeed.

As a view of the human condition this is hardly unusual; it has obvious sources and connections in Plato, in Christianity and other religions, in psychology, in science. What is unusual is Murdoch's rigor, the way in which she keeps the problem in the foreground of her work, her insistence on asking "last questions," and her refusal to compromise by allowing us to imagine we have found a comforting answer to the problems she identifies. The gulf between her work and the great nineteenth-century novels she admires lies partly in this refusal of an answer (especially a religious answer), in her assertion of the "blankness" or "invisibility" of the good, in her insistence not only that the self must die but that it must die "for nothing." The moral demands her work makes on us are daunting; the fates met by many of her characters, who fail under even greater demands, are terrifying: death is perhaps the cleanest of them. She reveals the desire for the good, which she reminds us that we all feel, as no guarantee of success or even progress; as perhaps, given our corruptibility and tendency to self-delusion, the occasion for our worst failures. Eros is

double and all desire is suspect. What we most desire is therefore also most to be feared--even the good, whose face is, to the egotistical self, the face of death.⁴

If the gothic marks the intersection of fear and desire, it should be obvious from all this why Murdoch finds it a useful and congenial mode of expression. In her novels the gothic family resemblance shows up partly in her selection of plots and settings (for instance in violence, isolation, incest, and madness, in landscapes suggestive of myth or dream, in the use of the double and of religious and quasi-religious figures--in this universe "failed priest" is a category that has wide resonance), and partly in the way her characters and narrators talk about what is going on (often in terms of magic, of metaphysics, of gods and demons, of portents, of monstrosity, of terror or awe, and of legend). They are constantly fabricating explanations for what is happening, almost always false or misleading but nevertheless containing many moments of lucidity and truth. And so the gothic terminology functions on the surface as an aspect of characterization, a set of illusions her people indulge in to shift responsibility away from themselves (for instance by seeing another character as an enchanter or demon, or by imagining that fate is at work rather than their own choices). But at the same time Murdoch's use of gothic structures suggests that some of their worst fears are

justified, though not in the ways they have imagined. Magic is not real, but the human desire to believe in it is and the result may be an enchantment as hard to break as a real spell; the magician's power may exist only in the minds of his victims, but those minds give consent even as they resist and grant him power against their own conscious wishes. The devil is a myth, but every man and woman is demonic not only potentially but actually and unpredictably. Four centuries of increasingly scientific thought in the west have brought the death of God, but we have not been released from the bonds of good and evil; we have merely lost our sense of a spiritual framework that could give shape to our struggles and of a divine audience to provide us with significance and distribute rewards and punishments. All that, Murdoch suggests, we must see as a false form, "an aspect of our desire for consolation." In her expression of our position as she sees it, the gothic, with its daemonic imagery and its ability to delineate the ways in which the spiritual and the psychological are the same, is a central technique, which she uses to keep open the question of how much freedom we really have.

One way of tracing its role in Murdoch's work is to compare one of the middle novels, unarguably gothic in atmosphere, with one of the later novels generally regarded as "mature" and realistic in the nineteenth-century tradition, in order to see to what extent the same

elements persist, and how Murdoch deploys them. For this purpose I want to look at *The Unicorn*, first published in 1963, and at *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), perhaps the most "social" and densely realized of her recent novels. They are very different in texture and approach (for one thing, *The Philosopher's Pupil* is twice as long as the earlier book), but they have some interesting things in common, and I want to suggest that these things represent continuing interests in Murdoch's work rather than an accidental resemblance between two particular novels.

The Unicorn proclaims its relationship to the gothic by using the governess plot indelibly inscribed in the conventions of women's gothic by *Jane Eyre*, but from the beginning it treats the convention ironically. Murdoch uses a governess entering the sinister isolation of a "castle" as her first center of consciousness, but she denies us the cozy warmth of easy identification with her heroine by avoiding the first-person narration Brontë used and by first showing us Marian Taylor making a fool of herself. She is engaged in realizing that her desire for a romantic unannounced arrival at the great country house where she is to take up her new post has involved her in a kind of logistical farce: there is no transport to get her there from the station, and she is merely an object of curiosity to the local men. In fact, her half-acknowledged expectations are based more on the fantasies

encouraged by romantic fiction than on the real situation she is in, and this not only will continue to be characteristic of her but will turn out to be true of almost everyone else she encounters. Marian is not so much striking out a new path (like Jane Eyre) as fleeing from an unhappy affair, and she is "ready for adventure" and hoping for a taste of high life. The first few pages, which sketch in her background, establish quite clearly that although likeable enough she is not going to be a figure of clear-sighted integrity, nor is she young and silly enough to be a counterpart of Catherine Morland, who provides the comic misapprehensions in Austen's mock-gothic *Northanger Abbey*. Instead she occupies from the first an ambiguous middle ground and Murdoch, as self-effacing narrator, keeps us guessing about how to judge her thoughts and actions.

Murdoch sets this realistically mixed, anti-romantic figure against a background that is deliberately and unrealistically vague in its human referents. The novel takes place in an unnamed country, tentatively identifiable as Ireland only because the local people speak English, the surrounding sea is cold, and Marian's job has been advertised in an English paper. The nearest settlements are called Greytown and Blackport. The name of the house itself is Gaze Castle, though it is a "big grey forbidding" nineteenth-century house rather than a castle.

No one ever comments on the unlikeliness of this name, nor is it explained, but the literal way we are to take it is underlined by the incident that closes the first chapter: Marian uses her new bird-watching glasses to look at the only neighboring house, Riders, and finds herself "looking at a man. He was standing on the terrace and looking straight into her eyes with lifted binoculars trained on Gaze" (17). It is perfectly clear that not realism but Murdoch's wish to direct our attention is behind such details as names; this becomes more obvious by the end of the third chapter, when Gerald Scottow begins referring to Marian as "Maid Marian."

The sense of symbolically significant detail is intensified by what we are told in the first few scenes about the landscape which contains Gaze. It consists of a beautiful but deadly sea "that kills people," of "great cliffs of black sandstone . . . said to be sublime," of treeless empty land which is rocky near the coast and a dangerous bog inland, of a deserted village, of an upland called "the Scarren" marked by megaliths and dolmens. Gerald Scottow, the ambiguous "manager" of Gaze who picks Marian up at the station and later turns out to be a kind of jailer, describes it as "beautiful but dreadful," and tells her:

. . . you should see those rocks in May and June. They're absolutely covered with gentians. Even now there's far more vegetation than appears at first

sight. Weird little flowers you'll find if you look, and carnivorous plants. And there are the most curious caves and underground rivers. (12)

These descriptions and her reaction to Scottow himself, which is a mixture of sexual desire and fear, combine to produce in Marian an irrational attack of panic, which is renewed when she finds the nameless man at Riders staring back at her.

All of this rather traditional gothic scene-setting could still be destined for ironic use, as the product of Marian's exaggerated and romantic imagination. But interestingly it is not. At this point in the plot it is only rumor that the sea is dangerous--and in fact we discover later that Peter Crean-Smith, the absent master of Gaze, has returned from a fall down the cliffs quite alive, though somehow damaged--but it does eventually claim its victims. So does the bog, which nearly kills the novel's second center of consciousness and Marian's male counterpart, Effingham Cooper. Although when the characters see something as a symbol they are usually mistaken (as when Marian sees a seal as an ambiguous portent "with its head of a primitive sea-god" but can't tell whether it is a warning or an invitation), the first chapter is full of actual portents that are ultimately fulfilled. Scottow speaks of an earlier disastrous flood, and it is repeated later in the novel; he warns Marian of the sea, and both the Crean-Smiths are ultimately drowned

in it; Marian in her panic imagines Scottow and the boy Jamesie Evercreech to be "dreadfully alien and even sinister," and this apparently irrational reaction later turns out to be justified when she discovers that Scottow has seduced and "broken" Jamesie; she feels for a moment "completely isolated and in danger," and she is in fact walking into a claustrophobically isolated house where a story is underway that will end with two murders and two suicides. These foreshadowings are elaborated throughout the first half of the novel as the details of the situation at Gaze are revealed to Marian (and of course to us): the local people believe that if Hannah, the lady of the "castle," steps beyond her garden she will die, and they think something will happen after seven years have passed. When she eventually does run out of the garden, it is straight to the cliffs and her death. So the gothic device of the portent seems to be in use quite seriously in this novel.

When Denis tells her of these local legends, Marian completes the shape of the story she is being offered by saying, "But it is the end of seven years now! . . . Something has happened. I have come." From this point on, she attempts to create a role for herself in the drama she has wandered into, and so makes it clear to us that one power of these portents lies precisely in the fact that people believe in them. That is a real power, the

power of the self-fulfilling prophecy. But certain parts of their completion, in particular the second flood, lie beyond human control and represent Murdoch's deliberate use of the pathetic fallacy, in itself a romantic form. Thus although her treatment of the gothic as part of the characters' imaginary scripts for themselves is ironic and "realistic," the irony is played out against an equally gothic backdrop that seems quite serious and "fantastic." In this way Murdoch disarms our judgment and keeps us as off-balance as the characters are, suspended between interpretations of the actions we are watching.

Gaze itself extends our sense of the story as simultaneously symbolic and realistic in its approach. It is surrounded by water/bog/darkness/cave imagery which readily lends itself to psychological interpretation as a symbol of the unconscious mind, into which the characters sink and in which they are drowned; but it is also the appropriate mythological background for a drama of blood sacrifice and redemption. The people there are also mythological figures realistically treated, and it is easiest to see in a brief summary what an oddly-assorted lot they would make in a novel of social realism. They include the wise old man in the form of the philosopher-scholar Max Lejour (especially conspicuous to those who have learned from other Murdoch novels to expect some such character); the sado-masochistic homosexual master/slave

duo of Gerald Scottow and Jamesie Evercreech; the sketchily drawn sinister housekeeper Violet Evercreech, who is very much like the figure of Mrs. Danvers in Daphne DuMaurier's *Rebecca* and therefore need not be much developed; the equally sketchy hunter/knight figure of Pip Lejour, Max's son, seen at one point by Effingham as "some slim archaic Apollo, smiling, incomprehensible and dangerous," whose dismissal from Gaze by Gerald Scottow near the end of the novel is described by the narrator as "the defeat of a man by a beast"; the ineffable Hannah Crean-Smith, Gaze's mistress and prisoner, described by Max as being perhaps, like the unicorn, an image of Christ and perhaps "a Circe, a spiritual Penelope keeping her suitors spellbound and enslaved"; innocent, humble Denis Nolan, the book's second Christ figure, still a virgin at thirty-three, who descends not into death but into guilt when he drowns Hannah's returning husband; and, immanent in his absence, Peter Crean-Smith himself, the offended husband, crippled like Vulcan in some way we are never allowed to define, Hannah's "executioner," functioning (as Dipple points out) as "a negative god figure . . . an instrument of necessity . . . the just judge." There are, as even this brief description may indicate, many doublings of function and significance in this strange gallery of characters. Only Marian and Effingham seem to be ordinary daylight figures from the outside world, but

the distinction between them and the others is gradually and deliberately broken down as they are involved in Hannah's "story." Marian, like Hannah, submits to the demonic Gerald Scottow, becomes "faithless," comes to see herself disturbingly as "Hannah's equal, her adversary, an inhabitant of the same world" (214). Effingham's last experience at Gaze is an even more disconcerting encounter with Peter Crean-Smith, lying dead and shrouded in the drawing room:

He felt then, like a sudden chill, a sense of ghoulish curiosity which he recognized as such almost before he knew its object. What had really happened to Peter when he fell over the cliff? In what way was Peter maimed or disfigured? Effingham breathed hard. . . . He felt a stirring in his hand, a desire to whisk off the sheet and see what lay beneath. But again he could not. Perhaps he feared to see, not some terrible disfigured face, but laid thereupon, like a hideous mask, the likeness of his own features. (256)

Not only are all these characters deliberately identified with one another, they change their shapes throughout the novel according to the point of view we are offered. They exist as real people but are also the carriers of each other's psychic projections as they play out their games, taking on and putting off the roles of god, demon, victim, murderer, saviour, betrayer, wise old man, and questing soul. Both the violence and the spiritual danger that are essential to the gothic are present in full measure at Gaze Castle, which is actually a much more dangerous place than, say, Udolpho.

What makes it dangerous, of course, is not simple villainy like Count Montoni's but the obsessive desire of its inhabitants to give their experience shape and significance and to find or create a figure to embody this significance. It is this desire that invests Hannah Crean-Smith, the center of everyone's gaze, the unicorn, *princesse lointaine*, Christ-substitute, Circe, and false god imprisoned in her upstairs room at Gaze, with the quite real power to affect the behavior of everyone who knows her, and in some cases even people who have only heard about her, like Max Lejour. Hannah turns out to be Marian's only "pupil," but she asks primarily not for instruction but that they read French poetry together and that Marian love her. There is no Rochester in this plot, for the figure of Hannah swallows up other possibilities. She dominates Gaze as thoroughly as Bertha Mason's presence dominates Thornfield, but far more openly--her existence is no secret, but on the contrary the object of everyone's fascinated speculation. It is not her identity or history that is mysterious, but her meaning, about which everyone has a different theory.

She has some traits in common with Bertha Rochester: she is an adulterous wife, she has attempted to kill her husband, she is a prisoner, her husband seems to hate her; eventually she throws herself to her death off the cliffs of Gaze, as Bertha leaps from the battlements of Thorn-

field. She also represents a similar mixture of guilt and victimization. But the feeling with which she is regarded is entirely different. Where Bertha, the mad wife, arouses feelings of horror and disgust, Hannah Crean-Smith awakens fascinated love and a kind of moral confusion in those around her, both men and women. Everyone falls in love with her. The identical reactions of Marian and Effingham, of Gerald and Violet show that it is not a question of gender Murdoch is exploring but a reaction found in all human beings: where Bertha Rochester reflects an uneasiness about female sexuality and the relations between men and women, Hannah Crean-Smith represents a kind of spiritual temptation that cannot be distinguished from a spiritual opportunity. This is underlined when her ambiguous role is passed on at the book's end to Denis Nolan, now guilty like her of the death of Peter Crean-Smith and determined, as she was, to "extinguish" this act by containing it within his own suffering. The "gaze" that turns human beings into magical or demonic objects is not male in Murdoch's thinking, as current feminist film theory would have it, but human.

Hannah's power is not in herself; for most of the novel she does nothing, except suffer the half-enforced, half-voluntary imprisonment that follows her quarrel with Peter and his fall. This mysterious passivity moves the others to an essentially spiritual struggle to understand

and react to her. She is not a madwoman, but she has the abnormality of the saint or the great sinner, and this calls up in turn previously dormant ambitions and obsessions in the others, who cannot take their eyes from her. In all this it is not Hannah, the actual woman, who is being contemplated with such intensity--she is opaque, oddly invisible--but her story, the form or pattern she represents to each of the others. This form, like our sense of the characters themselves, is continually being sketched for us, broken, then reshaped as we hear from each of those who surround Hannah and as events change their perceptions. The history of her adultery, her husband's fall over the cliff, and her seven years of imprisonment at Gaze is filled in gradually as Marian Taylor converses with the inhabitants of Gaze and Riders, and then as the center of consciousness shifts to Effingham Cooper, who has already been captured by Hannah's image. We are offered a series of luminous images of her, their significance underlined by the novel's title. To Denis Nolan she is "the soul under the burden of sin" who has made peace with God, to Effingham Cooper a medieval legend, "the castle perilous toward which he had now all his days been faring"; to Max Lejour she is a scapegoat, an "image of the significance of suffering" engaged in the Christ-like attempt to quench suffering by refusing to pass it on to others; to Violet

Evercreech she is "a murderous adulterous woman"; to Marian she is first a mystery, then a challenge--a prize for which she must wrestle with Gerald Scottow--then an adversary, then the source of her own blood guilt.

As the plot is worked out to its violent end, Marian and Effingham create ever more elaborate versions of her. Marian, who has developed a plan with Effingham to save her by kidnapping her and removing her from Gaze, is aware of the uncertainty of her own motives but tends like the rest to blame it on Hannah: "Hannah was a provoker of dreams," she thinks; "her many shadows fell round about her in the fantasies of others" (136). She fears the consequences of her own interference:

That she was on the brink of some terrible act of destruction had at moments occurred to her, but without in any way affecting her resolution. It did at those moments seem possible that the sudden violence might produce, not the vanishing of the dream and the reassuring appearance of the ordinary good world, but some shapes yet more Gothic and grotesque. (141)

This is yet another of the prophecies that come true in the novel. The kidnapping plan does indeed go wrong, partly through a series of accidents and partly because of the ineptness of the kidnapers, who quite obviously are so mesmerized by the drama of Hannah's situation that they don't believe they can change it and in fact don't really want to. The attempt leads to an escalation of the tensions at Gaze, to Gerald Scottow's seduction of Hannah,

to what Marian calls the "end game" and the four deaths that close the novel. As this seemingly inexorable process continues, powered by the actions of everyone involved in the plot, Hannah tries to respond as she had seven years before, with a refusal to act at all except by remaining at Gaze and suffering silently. Marian, feeling caught up in the "further pattern of magical events" she had feared, provides for us the "more Gothic" metaphor for the situation, one which will absolve her of responsibility by investing Hannah with all the power:

"Oh, Hannah, stop it!" said Marian. It was a bitter cry. The enchantment was beginning again, the first words of the spell were being hoarsely murmured; . . . This was a spell which had absorbed the old one; it was a higher, more majestic, more terrible spell. She almost wanted, like someone in the presence of a moving, whispering enchanter, to freeze Hannah to stone before her own wits should be stolen away. (218)

This is Marian's abdication of choice. It has turned out to be too hard to know what to do, even what to think about Hannah, and although the wish expressed here is for resistance ("to freeze Hannah") the actual gesture is her surrender to the language of magic and romance. Now Hannah is an enchanter; in the next scene she will become "a queen"; only she is empowered by these images to make choices, while Marian pictures herself as a servant and onlooker. When Scottow shuts himself in with Hannah, everyone sees the Demon King confronting the Captive Queen and this time no one even tries to interfere. So strong

has the pattern of imagery become that it takes a real effort of will even for us to ask what a thoroughly unromantic character might have done in Marian's place. (How would Miss Marple have handled Gerald Scottow?) When Hannah shoots Gerald behind the locked bedroom door and brings "the day of judgement upon them," she finally fills the vacuum created by the others' hushed expectancy, in which we have been encouraged by the gothic atmosphere to participate. Marian herself has moved so far from seeing Hannah as a real person that when at Jamesie's urging she releases her from her locked room, she doesn't even speak to her. In this charged atmosphere, the deadly sea is Hannah's only way out.

Effingham is even more reluctant than Marian to see Hannah as simply a person. Despite his long "devotion" to her, which he likes to think of as a kind of courtly love, and despite the fact that he experiences a revelation of what selfless love means when he is sinking into the bog--perhaps even because he is distracted by this revelation, which he cannot hold onto--he fails Hannah and abandons her. This makes it necessary for him in his turn to create a pattern that will distance her and make her both guilty and harmless. He works out an elaborate Freudian psychodrama that casts Hannah as his own mother who has failed him by losing the symbolic chastity which inspired his courtly love for her, and consoled by this

"explanation" he transfers his love temporarily to Alice Lejour and tries to deny any "real" relation to Hannah. After her death he tells Alice, "I feel that perhaps it was all inevitable and we were all something in Hannah's dream" (266). He is careful to avoid learning too much from what has happened, since that would involve the pain of admitting the true extent of his own failures. As he waits for the train to make good his final escape, his mind is filled with a series of contradictory fantasies in which he obscures the reality of the now-vanished Hannah:

With the image of Hannah he had not made his peace and perhaps he never would. It haunted his dreams and shifted before his waking eyes, sometimes piteous, sometimes accusing, always beautiful. . . . It was rather as if she had attempted to kill him, a beautiful pale vampire fluttering at his night window, a *belle dame sans merci*. . . . She had been their nun and she had broken her vows. . . . Hannah had been for them an image of God; and if she was a false God they had certainly worked to make her so. He thought of her now as a doomed figure, a Lilith, a pale death-dealing enchantress: anything but a human being. (267-8)

Here this language of fantasy is clearly ironic, a sign of how much Effingham wants to escape the reckoning that would accompany an image of Hannah as human like himself, neither more nor less. But some of the same language has been used earlier by Max and Denis and by Hannah herself, and is beginning to take on a kind of authority from them; it reminds us that Murdoch is generous with her characters and that even the most foolish of them is likely to see and articulate some part

of the truth. And Effingham is by no means a fool. In her last interview with Marian, constructing her "new spell," Hannah has also referred to herself as a false God, a "secret vampire," an unreal object of contemplation. "Just like this landscape," she says. "I have made it unreal by endlessly looking at it instead of entering it" (219). If Effingham clings to illusions about Hannah, they have at least the excuse of being also her own interpretations of herself; if he persists in gazing at her, rather than entering into the reality of her life, he is only following her own example in making of herself a kind of work of art. And behind the surface talk of death and reality and magic and religion is the tragic form of the plot itself, which reinforces Effingham's description of its action as "this dream of death, this enactment of last things."

The great unanswered question of the novel is whether the tragedy was quite gratuitous, or as inevitable as Effingham wants to think; this is almost the same question one is forced to ask about Hannah herself. Is the suffering she enacts meaningful? Or is it a form of self-indulgence and spiritual hubris? Both possibilities are kept before us in the conversations--even debates--that make up the bulk of the novel. The gothic imagery clustered so thickly around her makes the question inescapable, while the disjunction between the tragic form

of the plot and the ironic comedy of the characterizations makes it impossible to answer. Murdoch has provided a perfectly clear exposition of the way Hannah's story is differently invented by each of the characters in order to satisfy personal needs; but the fact that it is subject to such use, even by Hannah herself, does not necessarily prove it to be meaningless. We are not allowed a simple judgment on her. Instead she is left, finally, a thoroughly daemonic figure; above all an erotic figure, the source of the same dualities as Eros itself. Marian sums it all up for us as she watches Denis Nolan, who has "become" Hannah, climbing the hillside away from Gaze:

And as she watched the climbing figure, and thought, with a last effort of the imagination to reach so far away, of Denis there alone, going onward, with his fish in his hand and his clear knowledge of what he had done, she remembered the story about his having fairy blood; and she did not know whether the world in which she had been living was a world of good or of evil, a world of significant suffering or a devil's shadow-play, a mere nightmare of violence.
(263)

The illusion Marian is clinging to is that the world of Gaze, of Hannah, and of Denis is different from the "real" world, the "ordinary good world," and is therefore far away even though she is still standing in it. It might be a comfort to her to imagine the events of Hannah's story as a meaningless shadow-play, provided they could be confined to some other world of past, abnormal

experience; this is the same impulse that makes Effingham think of Hannah as "anything but a human being."

Isolating and accepting one of the interpretations of Hannah we have been offered in abundance throughout the book would be another way of ceasing to think about what has happened. There is an obvious allusion here to our temptation as readers to think of the world of the novel as discontinuous with "real life," as merely fantastic. The dissatisfaction we are made to feel with both Marian and Effingham, the "normal" stand-ins for us in the book, is meant to push us into the kind of discriminations they are unable or refuse to make. Neither half of Marian's simple dichotomy can explain what we have just experienced; Gaze is neither "a world of good or of evil," neither all "significant suffering" nor "a mere nightmare." We must make an attempt to judge each action as it occurs, without being enchanted by the form of the story, whose final shape we may in any case predict wrongly.

The good and evil done by and to Hannah are inextricably mixed, but not necessarily indistinguishable, and she is one type of the human condition as Murdoch sees it. That is why she has doubles all over the landscape, depending on which pattern we are using her to embody at the moment: as a contemplative, Max Lejour; as a false god, Peter Crean-Smith; as a Christ figure and fellow murderer, Denis Nolan; as a demon-enchanter, Gerald

Scottow. Like her, Marian longs to submit to Gerald; like her, Pip Lejour keeps a seven-year vigil and ends it with his suicide; like her, Effingham has a vision of absolute good but finds it "too hard for him." Patterns and stories form around her like crystals in a solution because she represents, among other things, our need for form--and our inability to get it right. She is nothing much in herself but acts as a kind of burning glass, focusing both creative and destructive energies that are connected at the exotic level, and Murdoch's use of the gothic is an indicator to us to look beyond the surface.

The tightly focused gothic form of *The Unicorn* intensifies the theme of attention (here not the loving attention required to perceive reality accurately, but the related and more frightening idea that one may become what one chooses to look at) by isolating the characters like specimens in a controlled environment. Isolation is one of the standard motifs of the gothic, inherent in the castle or great house, and accompanies its interest in psychological abnormality and crime. (Sherlock Holmes once commented on this point to Dr. Watson, who had just admired some country houses: "You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation, and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there. . . . They always fill me with a

certain horror" ("The Copper Beeches").) Murdoch uses the same technique in her other indisputably gothic novels, *The Italian Girl* and *The Time of the Angels*, in which she also makes explicit an interest in madness and in the motif of incest that is only present in *The Unicorn* by implication. (Hannah and Peter Crean-Smith are cousins; Gerald is Peter's lover before he is Hannah's.) But when she moves away from the gothic toward a more social and Dickensian novel she retains not only the romantic vocabulary so useful in the ironic representation of her characters' fantasies, but also many of these gothic structures.

No one would call *The Philosopher's Pupil* a gothic novel. This is not only because of its comic ending, which after all is not unusual in women's gothic, but because of its rich and complex delineation of the social life and history of Ennistone, the fictional English spa town in which it is set. Its whole atmosphere is comic rather than gothic, despite the occurrence of violent and terrible events, and Murdoch achieves this partly by using a detached, rather fussy third-person narrator who is only slightly involved in the plot and embodies the voice of Ennistone itself. (Indeed, "Ennistone" is his pseudonym for the town. He calls himself Nemo, "N," and the town "'N's Town,' or, let us say, 'Ennistone.'") It is he who gives us a tour-book account of the town, the spa, and its

history back to Roman times, as well as filling us in at regular intervals on the life and ancestry of each character who steps on stage. He adds the final touches with a tongue-in-cheek version of traditional closure, giving us an account of everyone's activities up to the "moment" of his narrative, and ending: ". . . how on earth do you know all these things about all these people? Well, where does one person end and another person begin? It is my role in life to listen to stories. I also had the assistance of a certain lady." N is a central anti-romantic force in the novel. The characterizations are also more comic than those in *The Unicorn*, and Murdoch avoids the earlier novel's use of foreshadowing, its isolated and frightening setting, and its emphasis on death. There is violence and death in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, but there is also rebirth, redemption, and what Margaret Drabble called "exhilaration and joy."

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to find in it many of the same gothic elements that were in *The Unicorn*, here domesticated, diffused throughout the novel, and treated in an unobtrusive and sometimes comic style. The landscape of Ennistone, for instance, though apparently quiet and even rather dull, very soon takes on the symbolic resonance of the coast around Gaze and even has similar features. Its central landmark is the Baths, where much of the central action takes place, with their

hot springs and fountains and steaming pools, their associations with Roman times, and their suggestion of the irrational and erotic, which N helpfully makes explicit for us at once. He tells us in the Prelude that they were the site of goddess-worship, including a cult of Venus; that the waters "were said to cure the 'sad distempers' and 'strange maladies' which attend imprudent love"; that it is thought "the spring is in some way a source of a kind of unholy restlessness"; that the tiny geyser found in one of their gardens is known locally as "the Little Teaser." This area is called Diana's Garden; the smaller baths are called "the stews"; during the course of the novel a masque called *The Triumph of Aphrodite* is revived, rewritten and staged by the youth of Ennistone. Here we have a comic version of Gaze's water symbolism and erotic tension, extended to a more serious dimension by the underground complex that leads to the source of the hot spring far below:

The Baptistry is used as a store-room, and the great hot bronze doors, studded with pseudo-nails, which guard the access to (as we say and imagine) 'the hot spring itself', are locked against all except 'authorised personnel'. Even to glimpse these doors, through which steam eternally seeps, is a rare treat for citizens managing to peer in from the promenade. (21-22)

This part of the Baths is suddenly brought into focus near the end of the novel when Tom McCaffrey enters it and attempts to reach "the source" in a most extraordinary

scene that is an obvious allegory of a descent into hell (or perhaps, given the goddess-worship associations, a descent to the Mothers), a near-fatal exploit from which he ascends with a renewed ability to think and act.

In another of the baths, in a private room, the novel's philosopher (John Robert Rozanov) meets his death. And yet another major scene involves the near-drowning in the neighboring sea of one of the book's few unambiguously good characters, Zed--who happens to be a dog. Like Gaze's cold sea and underground caves, the waters of Ennistone represent a symbolism of unconsciousness, death, and rebirth that ties all the characters together.

The McCaffreys' house, Belmont, owes something not only to Shakespeare but to the gothic castle. In fact, it has "Strawberry Hill Gothic" windows and a turret and is "a sulky house full of its own moody thoughts." Alex McCaffrey has dreams "in which she lost her way in the house and came upon rooms she did not know existed where some other form of life was proceeding, or had proceeded recently and ceased. Not that there were dead people there, but dead things" (34). Belmont also has a "folly" in the garden called the Slipper House, in which Rozanov's granddaughter Hattie lives for a while a life even more isolated than Hannah Crean-Smith's, accompanied only by her maid Pearl. The quiet emptiness of the Slipper House and the foxes who live an endangered life in Belmont's

garden bring a quality of the wild and archaic into the very center of conservative little Ennistone, and suggest the similar qualities slumbering within its citizens.

The *dramatis personae* of this novel, despite its deceptively realistic surface, include some oddities and some familiar types. Murdoch herself, of course, sees no inconsistency between realism and oddity; in one interview she said, "I think real people are far more eccentric than anybody portrayed in novels. Real people are terribly odd, but of course they keep this secret. They conceal their fantasies" (Bellamy 137). This is unarguable. The discrepancy is with the set of literary conventions called "realism," which prescribes characters who are not so much real as normal, and the avoidance of fantasy except in certain heavily stereotyped circumstances (sexual and romantic "dreams" for instance). But quite aside from the eccentricity of most of the characters (an impression that comes partly from having their fantasies revealed to us), the dominant figure of John Robert Rozanov is a particularly fascinating avatar of a standard Murdoch type and a close conceptual relative of Max Lejour, another (though less celebrated) scholar and student of Plato; he is also similar to Hannah Crean-Smith in being the center of everyone's attention and speculation, another kind of enchanter. A certain ironic kinship to Murdoch herself is suggested by the inclusion among his publications of her

own *Nostalgia for the Particular*, described as his "seminal work." Although he has achieved considerable fame as a philosopher, he is "tired of his mind" and finds consciousness a burden and a curse. We discover late in the book that he has fallen incestuously in love with his own granddaughter. Clearly he has failed at philosophy (if to succeed at philosophy means becoming wise) as a priest might fail at his office, or as Hannah failed at containing the evil at Gaze within herself; his failure implies a question, never articulated by him, about the uses of philosophy and its status among the forms human beings impose on reality. If that failure were less horrifying and "gothic"--if it did not include incest, tyranny, emotional terrorism, a desire to commit murder, and finally suicide--the question would lose its edge. His return to Ennistone motivates the entire plot and his death, like Hannah's, ends it.

The other characters are almost equally odd. Hattie Meynell, Rozanov's granddaughter, is another *princesse lointaine*, prisoner, and sexual victim. She is half-woman half-child, so fair that her hair is nearly white, socially awkward; the Ennistonians tend to see her as somehow unreal. Father Bernard Jacoby is a half-Buddhist homosexual Anglican priest who meditates and regards himself as a magician; eventually he leaves the church and goes to Greece to live in an abandoned chapel and preach

the gospel of his own "true religion" based on "the absolute denial of God." No one in this book has fairy blood, but three of the main characters are gipsy women named Ruby, Pearl, and Diamond (now known as Diane). Ruby and Pearl are servants to Alex McCaffrey and Hattie Meynell, respectively, while Diane is a former prostitute and George McCaffrey's mistress; the women are cousins, or perhaps sisters or half-sisters--even they don't know which. Something of the story of Denis Nolan is recapitulated more ironically in Tom McCaffrey, who enters characterized by "unquestioning faith in life, [a] capacity for joy . . . [and] vast indomitable self-satisfaction" (118); "he felt unfallen and did not yet understand how wickedness began" (214). When he encounters Rozanov, he is given a lesson in these matters and is involved in guilt and rage. And his brother George, the "philosopher's pupil" of the title and arguably the book's central character, carries with him a dark little circle of violence and obsession that provides much of the novel's occasion for the language of evil and the demonic.

In fact, the opening scene shows us George trying to murder his wife Stella by pushing their car into the canal, where he hopes she will drown. He frequently dreams, we are told, of drowning her; later he will imagine himself drowning babies in the Infants' Pool at the Baths and will do his best actually to drown John

Robert Rozanov. This first attempt, like all of George's actions around this time, has a queer half-conscious quality that makes it impossible to tell what he "really" wants: after pushing the car in he scrambles down after it and pulls the emerging Stella, "like a dream of a child being born," up on to the quay. Then he kicks her, shouting "You bitch! You bitch!" Does he want Stella dead or alive? Does he want to commit murder or preside over a rebirth? Is he sane?

The never-answered question of George's madness seems at first like an anomaly against the placid background of Ennistone life. Surely this violence indicates an abnormal state of mind, whatever it might be labeled in a clinic, the label "mad" or "sane" serving largely to distinguish between sickness and crime for those who must deal with the results of George's actions. In the "abnormal" conditions of readership, of course, that includes us; engaged as we are in paying attention to George, we are caught up at once in an effort to reach some judgment about him. And the language of his fantasies is distinctly gothic. It is raining hard, and on the windshield of his car "little demonic faces composed of racing raindrops" appear and disappear. George and Stella are quarrelling, and as he becomes more enraged the names he calls her and the malice he attributes to her become more fantastic: "you're a devil," he

says. "If I'm mad you made me so . . . you reduce me to a gibbering puppet and put me in your pocket . . . You're a leech, a flea, a blood-sucking parasite . . . You've been sent by the devil to torment me. . . ." When he begins pushing the car toward the canal he experiences "a vast feeling like sex, like a sense of duty," and as the car goes in he howls like a dog. He sees what we later find out is Father Bernard on the bridge and interprets this figure in accordance with his own obsessions: "he looked toward the iron bridge and saw that there was a figure on it, a tall figure in a long black coat. It's the devil, thought George, the devil come at last to--" (6).

This is the old game of projection and self-absolution we grew to know at Gaze, and George uses the same metaphoric, quasi-mythical language--this time a language of hatred rather than love--to inflate Stella into a bogeyman large enough to blame for anything he may do. But she is really only a surrogate for the true enchanter of the piece, and the immediate trigger of George's attack on her is her too-accurate statement of this fact. She says, "You're crazy with fear because Rozanov is coming," and George at once hits out at her and throws the car into a skid toward the edge of the canal.

It is some time, while others of the rich cast of characters are being introduced, before we get an account of George's relations with Rozanov. He had been his

student, was discouraged by Rozanov from studying philosophy on the grounds that he was not good enough, felt "annihilated" by this rejection, pursued Rozanov unsuccessfully and desperately like an abandoned lover. Indeed he is obviously in love with John Robert--not sexually but spiritually and intellectually--and is consumed by the deadly hatred that accompanies unrequited passion. If he has thought of Stella as sent by the devil, Rozanov is the devil himself, or rather a kind of evil god; George will do anything to get attention from him, merely to exist in "Rozanov's eyes, where his reality subsisted" (137). He confronts the unwilling philosopher with a series of escalating accusations, as he did Stella:

Why did you stop me from doing philosophy? . . . You ruined my life . . . You destroyed my belief in good and evil, you were Mephistopheles to my Faust . . . You have stolen me from myself . . . I prostrate myself. Caliban must be saved too . . . You said that in a lecture. Have you forgotten? . . . I've craved for your presence. John Robert, you must help me. You stole my reality, you stole my consciousness, you're the only person who can give them back to me. Salvation is by magic, you said that once. I beg you, I beseech you. It's a matter of salvation, it's a matter of living or dying. (144-145)

This extravagant language, which is characteristic of George, has seemed to be part of his madness, his own personal distortion of reality. But already by this point in the novel there are clues that this sort of "magical" thinking is not confined to him, may in fact be something people do quite regularly if not usually so extremely. As

in *The Unicorn* a network of connections is being made between the characters that will confuse any attempt we make to identify them as being of different kinds, fundamentally unlike: sane and mad, moral and immoral. To some extent this is done, as in *The Unicorn*, with the the gothic device of doubling or even tripling characters and plots: the three gipsy women, the three McCaffrey brothers; two sets of mistresses and servants (Alex/Ruby, Hattie/Pearl); two innocent young creatures, Adam McCaffrey and his dog Zed--and Adam's dead cousin, George's son, Rufus; philosopher and priest; shaman-priest (Jacoby) and priest-by-example (William Eastcote); the philosopher and his pupil.

A list of this sort might seem illusory if our attention were not drawn to such pairings by the fact that George McCaffrey actually has a double. This seems at first to be merely another of his paranoid fantasies, but later becomes something quite different. Its first mention comes just before his disastrous interview with Rozanov and is linked in his mind with John Robert:

And yet, how could he not hope, in spite of everything, that John Robert would undertake his salvation after all? Was it not significant that the philosopher had returned to Ennistone? Why had he returned? There were meanings in the world. He had seen his own double in the Botanic Gardens. Perhaps it was just someone very like him, but that had meaning too. Twice now he had seen this double, capable of anything, walking about and at large. Once, talking to someone in his office, he had seen through the window a man fall from a high scaffold-

ing. He had immediately apprehended that man as himself. (137)

The next mention of his double also immediately precedes an interview with Rozanov; it involves the memory of a violent brawl George once witnessed in London, and ends with the realization that "if he ever saw the face of that man he would fall down and die" (219). The emotion is rather like the one that keeps Effingham Cooper from looking at Peter Crean-Smith's body. In this interview George begins by apologizing to Rozanov for their last encounter, but proceeds almost at once to an apparently random stream of personal attacks that are the less forgivable because they contain an element of painful truth. We have been told that Rozanov can hardly bear his own thoughts; George begins, "I remember you used to talk about seeing thoughts like Melville's whale far below. What's in the sea now? Monsters?" He twits Rozanov with the failure of his philosophy, with his long-ago envy for the "better families" of Ennystone, with his age. Along the way he says, suggestively: "We're alike, you know. We're both demons, you're a big one and I'm a little one, the big ones make the little ones scream. You hate me because I'm a caricature of you. Isn't that so?" (222-223) One is reminded of the demon faces George repeatedly sees in raindrops as they are driven across windows, and of the first thoughts the narrator has ascribed to

Rozanov:

Now every morning as he assumed the burden of consciousness he reflected upon its strangeness: the mystery of mind, so general and so particular. Why do thoughts not lose their owners? How does the individual stay together and not stray away like racing water-drops? How does consciousness continue, how can it? Could the curse of memory not end, and why did it not end? (130)

Or as N asks in the last paragraph, "Where does one person end and another person begin?"

This use of the double, like George's tendency to describe other people as possessing the demonic traits he fears in himself, seems ironic and anti-romantic; the obvious psychological explanation is that George has split off and objectified a fantasy self who is "capable of anything" and will bear the blame for his intended crimes. For that reason it is a bit of a jolt when George's apparently mad belief that he has a double is confirmed by one of the book's few unbiased and, one would think, absolutely reliable characters, George's nephew Adam. He is speaking, moreover, to William Eastcote, who is also a truthful and unbiased person, and the comment is simply part of a casual list of interesting things Adam has seen lately:

"I was up on the common with Zed. We saw a white horse all by itself. . . . It was a pony more than a horse. I saw Uncle George coming out of the library, but he didn't see me. Once, I saw Uncle George being in two different places at the same time. . . ."

"Perhaps there's someone else who looks like him."
"Perhaps." (293)

Once again the gothic structure is retained, though it is treated in such an understated way that it would be easy to overlook. But from this point on it is noticeable that Rozanov himself becomes more demonic and more like George as we learn more about him. He had seemed unquestionably a "great man," since everyone seemed to think him so; whatever his current difficulties with philosophy, he is "incapable of inventing a social fib or telling a direct lie," uncompromising, apparently fearless. George's obsession with him seems to be Rozanov's misfortune, not his fault; his dislike for George is certainly understandable, even if his method of dealing with him--annihilating him by withdrawing his attention, refusing to think or speak about or to him--shows a certain arrogance and lack of compassion. But the "great man" interpretation stands only as long as his fantasies are concealed from us. Once we are told of his own obsession with Hattie and watch him trying to control her, to marry her off to Tom McCaffrey so he will be in charge of her sexual initiation, becoming jealous of Pearl and disposing of her with a sublime indifference to the pain this causes her and Hattie, mistaking Tom's bumbling for enmity and "corruption," the image of the wise old man is shattered. George was shrewder than he knew when he asked whether there were monsters in that sea. We remember that George is not the only person to fall in love with John Robert

and get nothing but pain in return; the same thing happens to Alex, to Pearl, to Father Bernard, to Tom, and to Hattie, and in each case except that of Hattie, his own nemesis, Rozanov turns the others' love to the use that suits his own convenience, without response and without compunction. The extent to which he consciously or unconsciously encourages it in order to have this power at his disposal is not clear. In fact, he is a monster of coldness, just as George has been described earlier as a monster of violence. The resemblance becomes more complete as Rozanov broods over Hattie: he finds himself dreading the thought that she "would escape from her watchdog and dance about free. Could he bear it, and if not what could he do? Sometimes, waking at night in half-nightmares, it seemed to him that the only solution was to kill her" (215-216). When coldness fails him, violence moves in to take its place.

The final ironic merging of the philosopher and his pupil takes place in Rozanov's room at the Baths, when the desperate George arrives to find him sleeping and drowns him in his private pool; except that Rozanov, intent on suicide, has already swallowed a lethal dose of some drug and may perhaps have been dead or at least beyond saving before George ever reached him. The situation poses, as N tells us, "some interesting medical, legal and indeed philosophical problems." Whose deed is this violent

act? At the moment of Rozanov's death, are he and George somehow the same person? After the death, which appears to the authorities to be an accident, George suffers from hysterical blindness for a while and emerges a calm, gentle man "enacting the part of one who after many years in prison emerges not exactly repentant but full of stoical wisdom" (575). Rozanov the philosopher had been "perhaps a stoic" (134).

The moral opaqueness of Rozanov's death is reminiscent of Peter Crean-Smith's near-fatal fall down the cliffs at Gaze, the cause of Hannah's seven years of captivity. No one knows whether Hannah pushed him or not. Denis Nolan says, "Perhaps she does not know now. But there are--acts which belong to people somehow regardless of their will." And Max Lejour also says, "We must just not forget that there was a crime. Exactly whose probably doesn't matter by now." These statements, which fly in the face of conventional morality by denying ultimate importance to the will and to conscious human agency, remind us of the impossible task we share with Murdoch's characters: we must judge the actions we witness, not as agents of justice but as fellow human beings caught up in the same reality as the "actors" we are observing, because we will have to perform actions of our own, for good and ill. But our judgments of others, even of fictional constructs, will always be based on inadequate evidence,

just as our judgments of ourselves necessarily ignore the ground of our actions in unconscious motives and emotions, which by definition we cannot know. And so in Rozanov's death we have a crime without being able to know whose crime it is, and Murdoch has shown us (more successfully in this novel than in *The Unicorn*, I think) why fixing the blame may not matter as much as we expect. We like to think of evil as a matter of will, and so the question of whose will is an important one. This is a fairly optimistic view of the problem, since there is an obvious solution: to change one's mind (or perhaps to restrain evildoers). But the kind of evil shown us in Murdoch's novels is more complicated and less easily handled than that, more a matter of error and illusion than of a conscious act of will. It can be affected by willed acts, particularly by an attempt to perceive reality clearly and with loving attention, but what is required is a discipline and not just a change of heart. Murdoch discussed fiction's unique ability to portray evil in *The Fire and the Sun*, in terms that suggest this:

The *Republic*, like many other great ethical treatises, is deficient in an account of positive evil. . . . A portrayal of moral reflection and moral change (degeneration, improvement) is the most important part of any system of ethics. The explanation of our fallibility in such matters as seeing the worse as the better is more informatively (though of course less systematically) carried out by poets, playwrights, and novelists. . . . Arguably . . . good literature is uniquely able publicly to clarify evil . . . Art can rarely, but with

authority, show how we learn from pain, swept by the violence of divine grace toward an unwilling wisdom . . . (81-82)

This line of thought makes the "clarification" of evil a special province of art, and especially of literature; and the prose genre that takes evil as one of its central concerns is the gothic. Murdoch uses the gothic primarily to explore the nature of evil in individuals who live in a modern culture, that is, a culture which no longer believes in the possibility of a coherent, consentient metaphysic. But the corollary question remains: is evil entirely a human matter, or is it partly a matter of necessity, of sheer accident? Is it, in fact, only a kind of spiritual arrogance that makes us so certain we "own" our own actions?

Many of Murdoch's characters believe themselves to be free in ways they obviously aren't: George McCaffrey, for instance, works hard at believing that "all is permitted" and that he can get beyond good and evil and liberate himself by killing Rozanov, but no one is less free than poor obsessed George. His brother Tom imagines at first that he is free to accept or reject Rozanov's proposal that he marry Hattie but soon finds himself behaving as though under a kind of compulsion simply because this interesting and romantic idea has been suggested to him; when Rozanov changes direction and forbids him to see her, even prohibition acts as further incitement. (This

situation is described by N as a "spiritual illness" with demonic components.) Marian Taylor imagines she is free to rescue Hannah from Gaze, but soon finds herself being co-opted by Scottow and turned into a fellow jailer. And countless Murdoch characters fall violently in love and perform actions which they perceive as willed but which look to us like the symptoms of temporary derangement. All these psychologically "naturalistic" characterizations which take into account the parts of the self not touched by conscious will work against our acceptance of what Murdoch sees as the false existential form that represents human beings as radically free.

But there is a larger analog to these individual cases in the contingent, sometimes arbitrary gothic violence of Murdoch's plots and in their fortunate, magical coincidences. These techniques also suggest the inability of human will to control the outcome of any actual situation. Thus in *The Unicorn* there is a flood at Gaze just as Peter is coming home; the would-be kidnappers are confronted by Gerald Scottow returning early, without apparent reason, from Greytown; in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, the near-drowning Zed is seen and rescued quite coincidentally by George, who is merely going for a swim; there is an inexplicable outbreak of unrelated violence, so that while Tom is in danger of his life beneath the Baths, his mother quarrels with Ruby about the foxes and

falls down the stairs; Tom escapes just in time to arrive at Rozanov's house at a crisis in the relationship between John Robert and Hattie, and so is able to rescue her without a struggle; almost immediately afterward, Rozanov and George McCaffrey have the apparently simultaneous impulse to kill Rozanov, and they achieve their mutual success.

The questions raised by all this are of course philosophical and religious, and so it is hardly surprising that Murdoch's characters spend so much time speculating and arguing about metaphysics. Their talks are, in fact, one of the great joys of reading her novels. When Rozanov comes to Ennistone, his worst discomfort is not having anyone to discuss philosophy with, and he drafts Father Bernard to provide half-fascinated, half-intimidated companionship on a long walk. The philosopher takes the priest over some rough ground, both literally and figuratively, and in the course of this wonderful scene (which is unfortunately too long to quote, except in snippets) the kind of language we have been calling "gothic" finds its true home as the perfectly serious language of metaphysical discussion. They talk about believing in God, about spiritual reality, about whether St. Paul used "demonic energy" to "create Christ," about whether religion is magic, about whether the term "good" has any meaning. It gradually becomes clear both that

Rozanov's own metaphysics, as he represents them to the priest, are bleak and rather horrifying, and that he is engaged in some internal struggle and is trying to decide on a course of action. Again his thoughts show (far more than he would be willing to admit) the source from which George took his dangerous ideas about freedom and the uses of violence. He tells the priest that "There isn't any deep structure in the world. At the bottom, which isn't very far down, it's all rubble, jumble. Not even muck but jumble." When asked what he fears most, he confesses: "To find out that morality is unreal. . . . that it is nothing, a fake, absolutely unreal. . . . God would be needed to guarantee [it], and any existent God is a demon. If even one thing is permitted it is enough. . . . If in the pilgrimage of life there is any place beyond good and evil, it is our duty to go there . . . If the holy even knows of the demonic it is lost" (195-196). It becomes clear to Father Bernard, as it does to us, that Rozanov has some particular "proof" of the vulnerability of morals in mind; we later discover it is his love for Hattie, which he finally tells her about and comes very close to acting on. His rape of Hattie remains psychological, but it is no less real for that. George's ideas, in fact, have always owed more to Rozanov than we at first believed, and N's final comment on George's derangement applies even better to the master

than the pupil: "More often than the 'experts' imagine, purely intellectual ideas and images can play 'deep' parts in human psychology" (575). It is part of Murdoch's deep distrust of our "purely intellectual" love of form that this novel attaches a kind of gothic terror to the process of thought itself.

But this is not a novel like *The Unicorn* in which fear has the last word. After Rozanov's death (which, having come to share N and Stella's rueful assessment that he "was not really quite such a great man as we all imagined," we don't entirely regret), the tangled events in Ennistone are smoothed out not only to calm but to a kind of healing joy. The tragedy of the philosopher's downfall and death is surrounded by a comedy like that of *Wuthering Heights*, but without the ghosts: Tom and Hattie are married, Father Bernard finds a new revelation, Alex McCaffrey recovers from her fall (though she, like her son George, is much more "quiet") and her foxes survive the attack by the city authorities, George is reunited with Stella and is a "changed man"; in fact, there is a rash of weddings and reformations in Ennistone, and everything ends in a blaze of happiness. It is all completely unearned and accidental. But this is the obverse of the gothic terror and another technique Murdoch uses repeatedly. In fact, one could divide her novels into two groups according to whether or not they end with this kind

of glowing reconciliation.⁵ It seems to be an art she has learned from Shakespeare, one that compensates unexpectedly and fully for the demands she has made on us as an audience; if it is a consolation, produced by the collusion of magic with art, it is one that is sometimes necessary if art is to show us reality without making us unwilling to see it, one of those even Murdoch admits occurs "perhaps fortunately for the human race."

Notes to Chapter 5

¹Part of this is due to Murdoch's own interest in the mechanisms of human behavior, of the kind suggested by the title of *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*; part of it comes from her habit of repeating certain situations and actions in many of her novels.

²Elizabeth Dipple, looking at Murdoch's "stock characters" from the standpoint of "a highly sophisticated bourgeois society," comes up with a different, more situational list: "deceiving husband, complacent middle-aged wife, troubled late-adolescent, middle-European Jew, *homme moyen sensuel*, refugee, arty mistress, scholar, would-be walf, Peter Pan boy-woman, honourable soldier, glossy civil servant, witch, demonic girl-child, outsider, secret homosexual, failed writer, dabbler in eastern religions" (86). Perhaps no two persons' lists would be identical; the point is that one feels sure there is a list, and attempting to identify its members is a game dictated by the novels themselves and their deliberate echoes of one another.

³This is true even of the rare "good" characters who see as clearly, perhaps, as is possible, like Brendan Craddock in *Henry and Cato*. The disappointment is not his own, but Cato's and ours when he gives up the life that

has seemed so meaningful and clear to go to India and push his quest beyond the level we are already struggling to understand and Cato to emulate. It is a movement forward that consists as much of renunciation as of hope--even the renunciation of Christ, at least as Cato understands Christ. And it is accompanied by danger: Cato says to him, "I don't believe you've given up theology at all. Theology is magic. Beware." Brendan replies simply, "I know." The disappointment Cato feels at losing Brendan is clearly a mistake, and so is instructive--is, in fact, the whole point of the last scene, Brendan's final lesson to him--but is still real and, I think, shared by us.

⁴Dipple describes part of this identification of the good (or of love) with death as follows: "Because the good is so terrifying, ordinary mortals are put into a strange adversary position to it, and dodge into convenient outlets like immediate and welcome happiness as a means of lulling the mind. To put it another way, the healthy psyche chooses the hope of life rather than dwelling in the absolute of death. Because death is where Murdoch's characters find the true and real to lie, however, it is obvious that she is using the novel to show how ironic the human condition must of necessity be" (167-68).

⁵It isn't a question of gothic or not-gothic; *The Italian Girl*, for instance, though very much a gothic

novel, ends with the same kind of happiness.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Women and the Gothic

There is often a god behind the action of a romance, who expresses his will by some kind of oracle or prophecy which speaks of the ultimate outcome as predetermined.

- Northrop Frye
The Secular Scripture

One of the questions with which this study began was whether women tend to make use of the gothic differently than men, and if so, in what ways. Now that we have looked at some of the landmarks of women's work with the genre, it is time to sketch in a few answers to that question.

However individual they may be, these four writers do share certain traits with each other and with the other writers of women's gothic, and one can begin to see in their work certain qualities that do indeed make women's gothic different from men's. This, like the problem of genre identification touched on in Chapter 1, is naturally not a matter of establishing rules or a literary version of anatomical destiny, but of noting general tendencies to which it would not be hard to find individual exceptions. Perhaps the most obvious in the terms I have been using here is the tendency to place Eros at the center of their works, not as a mechanism of damnation, but in the full

ambiguity of its protean role in human lives. It is this god whose prophecies "speak of the ultimate outcome" for women's heroes and heroines.

Its double nature may help to explain another of their common traits: the tendency to include in their romances, paradoxically, a certain streak of anti-romanticism, which shows up at least as early as Mrs. Radcliffe's books. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for instance, Emily St. Aubert--a sentimental, die-away heroine if there ever was one--is repeatedly exhorted by her father, himself a man who displays considerable emotion on the slightest provocation, to control her tendency to be too sensitive and "susceptible":

As she advanced in youth, this sensibility . . . rendered her a very interesting object to persons of a congenial disposition. But St. Aubert had too much good sense to prefer a charm to a virtue; and had penetration enough to see, that this charm was too dangerous to its possessor to be allowed the character of a blessing. He endeavoured, therefore, to strengthen her mind; to enure her to habits of self-command; to teach her to reject the first impulse of her feelings, and to look, with cool examination, upon the disappointments he sometimes threw in her way. (5)

Although Emily spends a good deal of the next thousand pages vacillating between rapture and terror, this early training actually stands her in good stead, and it is when she most nearly follows her father's advice that things go best for her. The sturdy practicality that introduces such a passage even into the first pages of a novel of

sensibility may also be at work in Mrs. Radcliffe's abjuration of the supernatural. Emily suffers some of her worst moments when she allows herself to be misled by superstition and "the first impulse of her feelings" into giving way to the nervous horror aroused in her by her servant's ghost stories, the effigy behind the black veil, and mysterious strains of nightly music; but though Radcliffe permits us to indulge in similar imaginings as long as possible, she disabuses us at last and points out gently that "had [Emily] dared to look again" at the shape behind the veil, "her delusion and her fears would have vanished together . . ." (662).

Other gothic heroines are more successful at resisting delusion, or operate as even clearer examples of the dangers of an over-romantic imagination. In *Wuthering Heights*, Isabella Linton imagines Heathcliff to be the victim of slander, "an honourable soul," and acts on this error to her own ruin; but Catherine knows better, and tells her: "It is deplorable ignorance of his character, child, and nothing else, which makes that dream enter your head" (89). Charlotte Brontë's heroines are always reminding themselves of the realities of their situation, like Jane Eyre, who asks only for "a new servitude." These novels are thoroughly romantic, but they are also rooted in the realities of women's daily lives. They are far less sensational than *Otranto*, *The Monk*, *Vathek*, or

Melmoth: less violent, less perverse. The terror aroused by Lewis's *Ambrosio* or by the satanic Melmoth is ultimately turned back on the reader, who has been taken inside their experience: it is the fear of a daemonic self, lurking unacknowledged in the depths of the unconscious mind and capable of anything. In women's gothic the same fear exists, the "madwoman in the attic" Gilbert and Gubar describe; but it is accompanied by the fear of a daemonic other. Male violence, villainy, and seduction are one source of this terror. (Joanna Russ's article on popular gothic is appropriately called "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband" (Fleenor).) Another lies in the social structures that encourage male villainy by excluding women, demanding competition, and exalting male tyranny and violence while showing the utmost contempt for everything labeled as "feminine" and "weak," including all the arts of peace and cooperation. This source of fear is particularly clear in Charlotte Brontë's work and in *The Four-Gated City*, where science and business conspire with the military to destroy civilization while those who are part of the birth of a new society are shut up in mental hospitals and drugged.

But the fate of the gothic heroine is often kinder in women's novels than in men's--and for that matter, so is the fate of the villain. Beginning with Walpole, male gothic has always tended toward romance (i.e., the

non-realistic or "supernatural") and tragedy. Lewis's Monk is finally thrown from a cliff by a demon to die slowly and in agony; he has already murdered both his mother and his sister Antonia, who thus join in the fate of Walpole's Matilda, stabbed to death by her own father. Death is the usual reward for the virtues of male gothic's persecuted maiden, all too often at the hands of her lover or a male relative; she is fortunate if, like Goethe's Margarethen, she is rewarded in heaven for the miseries she has endured below. When women like Radcliffe take up the form and center their plots around the adventures of a young woman, the tendency shifts toward realism (in Radcliffe's case, the naturalistic explanation of the apparently supernatural) and comedy. The heroines of women's gothic are survivors. Some, like Brontë's Lucy Snowe, encounter tragedy; others like Catherine Earnshaw die young. Very few, however, are allowed to be tortured and murdered by the villains that threaten them. The most common single dénouement for women's gothic is--marriage. In fact Louisa May Alcott, in 1866, had the effrontery to publish a gothic novella called "Behind a Mask" in which the heroine is the villain and nevertheless ends by getting married, and staying married happily. It is an extraordinary triumph of female optimism over potentially tragic materials.

In fact, where male gothic remains essentially a

tragic form ending in the isolation and destruction of the hero, female gothic is essentially comic--not in the sense of provoking laughter, though a certain quiet humor is by no means unusual, but in Northrop Frye's sense of embodying a mode whose theme is "the integration of society" (*Anatomy* 43). The romantic and tragic do not simply disappear; instead they are put into a tension with the comic resolution. The transcendence that is the final aim of romance and tragedy is set against the worldly fulfillment of comedy and the fullness of being, the solidity aimed at by realism; and Eros, which partakes of both, is used to mediate between them. In the overwhelming majority of cases, it is the comic which has the final loyalty of women's imaginations.

In Radcliffe's early and precedent-setting version of female gothic, for instance, the heroine typically escapes the villain and is united with her true and faithful lover, a somewhat shadowy young man since he is not permitted to display even minor vices, but a fitting reward for a heroine of such extreme sensibility that she is in continual danger of fainting at the slightest shock. Thus Montoni, Laurentini, the bandits, and even Emily's aunt are removed from the stage of *Udolpho* and dismissed into the darkness, while Emily and Valancourt re-establish the family home at La Valée. "O! useful may it be," concludes Radcliffe, "to have shewn, that, though the

vicious can sometimes pour affliction on the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!" So it is that even after villain and hero are combined into one, with all the possibilities of dreadful punishment that conjures up, Jane Eyre marries her Edward, the dead Heathcliff is seen "with a woman" on the moor, and Cathy Linton teaches Hareton to read; and many a heroine of popular gothic clears her lover of the suspicion of murder so he can become her husband. Even in more pessimistic works there is seldom the wholesale slaughter revealed in by Lewis or Hogg or Maturin. Martha Quest survives the disaster that destroys England and plays a part in making a new beginning; George McCaffrey returns to his wife Stella, and his brother Tom gets married; even the nameless heroine of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* escapes--at least for a while--from the terrifying Gilead that has been her prison.

From this it would seem that the gothic plays a more optimistic and integrative role in women's fictions than it does in men's. Women have created memorable horrors--Mary Shelley managed to provide the lasting metaphors for two of our central nightmares in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*--but they have also transformed the male novel of terror and destruction into a genre of terror and surviv-

al, a dark version of the *Bildungsroman*. It may be that this stubborn optimism in the face of fear springs from the long ages of women's enforced humility; that those whose lives are expected to be obscure and without glory may refuse to give away more than they must to darkness and to death. They permit their creatures, as often as the story allows, to taste some real experience of life and fulfillment before the end, so they can say, like the speaker of Edna Millay's "Wine from These Grapes":

Stained with these grapes I shall lie down to die.
Three women come to wash me clean
Shall not erase this stain.
Nor leave me lying purely,
Awaiting the black lover.
Death, fumbling to uncover
My body in his bed,
Shall know
There has been one
Before him.

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