Threshold Domesticity in the English Gothic Novel

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Introduction

Haunting the Threshold

It is no accident that Virginia Woolf associates the act of leaving and returning home with the spectral. In her essay "Street Haunting," she acknowledges both the supernatural possibilities of leaving home *and* the small magic that makes of ordinary objects and spaces a coherent, solidified self. As we set out into the wintry streets of London to wander, with some purpose in mind yet open to discovery and digression, we not only enter a realm of perceptiveness—we become open to reconceiving ourselves. She begins, "when the door shuts on us, all that vanishes. The shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye."[1] Departing from one's doorstep enacts multiple phenomena in a moment: it means acknowledging the palimpsestic concretization of identity that is created by inhabiting home—and it disrupts this apparent fossilization, exposing the "wrinkles and roughnesses" that evidence infinite possibility. Woolf knows what so many phenomenologists have asserted: the act of habitation is an act of making. "Home" is not only a "retainer of personal narrative,"[2] a container for or representation of meaning.[3] More than that, the "material and imaginative geographies of home are closely intertwined"[4]: in interacting with domestic space, we "'write a room,' 'read a room,' or 'read a

[1] Virginia Woolf, "Street Haunting," 21.
[2] Young, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme," 150.
[3] Luce Giard and Michel de Certeau note: "Indiscreet, the home openly confesses the income level and social ambitions of its occupants. Everything about it always speaks too much: its location in the city, the building's architecture, the layout of the rooms, the creature comforts, the good or bad care taken of it" ("Private Spaces," *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 2, 146). N.B. Henceforth, I will distinguish between vols. 1 and 2 of *The Practice of Everyday Life* by referring to the author (solely de Certeau for volume 1, and either Giard or Giard and de Certeau for the sections I refer to in volume 2).
[4] Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, 9.

house.'"[5] As Michel de Certeau puts it, the small displacements, all our "ways of going out and coming back in," are the "practices that invent spaces."[6] Cynthia Wall writes that "fundamentally, 'home' is a verb, the act and actions of dwelling more than simply living; it is an alignment, a way of positioning oneself in the world."[7]

Even as Woolf articulates the way we both project onto and create the spaces we inhabit, she focuses on the departure from home as the source of renovation. She knows "it is always an adventure to enter a new room for the lives and characters of its owners have distilled their atmosphere into it, and directly we enter it we breast some new wave of emotion."[8] But her account of returning home from a chilly walk is one that sees the domestic as static—that same "shell-like covering," chitinous and layered, apparently re-forms just as it was, when she crosses her threshold:

> Still as we approach our own doorstep again, it is comforting to feel the old possessions, the old prejudices, fold us round; and the self, which has been blown about at so many street corners, which has battered like a moth at the flame of so many inaccessible lanterns, sheltered and enclosed. Here again is the usual door; here the chair turned as we left it and the china bowl and the brown ring on the carpet. (36)

The author of "Street Haunting" is a mature Woolf, perhaps the possessor of a surprisingly stable relationship with domesticity. But just as the act of venturing out from home is one of adventure, possibility, and re-making, I want to suggest that the return home holds just as much space-making power—that in re-entering, bursting in upon our familiar chair, china bowl, and brown-ringed carpet, we might alter them irrevocably. Coming home is an everyday act, a small piece of

[5] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 35.
[6] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 1., 106-7.
[7] Wall, "The Meaning of Home," 4.
[8] Woolf, "Street Haunting," 33-4.

a daily routine. It is not necessarily what we think of as "an event," not always a homecoming. But there is something about crossing your own threshold that invokes the numinous—it's a tiny act of conjuration. Woolf's account of stepping out to "haunt" the streets, aimlessly, yet actively, is the same sort of spatial practice we enact when we return home. After all, "haunted places are the only ones people can live in."[9]

Gothic fiction is fundamentally about questioning the power structures of home: discovering, exploring, and testing them—and the possibility of remaking them. In Gothic novels, more than in other modes of fiction, space and place make visible the power relations that dictate characters' trajectories. The Gothic is a genre situated quite precisely at the crossroads of the domestic and the fantastical. Thus, while the fictionality of any novel makes it a space of possibility, experimentation, and negotiation,[10] the Gothic novel is particularly suited to outlining and experimenting with the power structures of house and home.

This dissertation straddles the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with two chapters on the eighteenth-century Gothic novel and two on the Victorian Gothic. I focus on the way Gothic narratives portray domestic spaces and characters' interactions with them as a means for gaining power and agency, arguing that these key negotiations happen not in the extremes (the towering heights of a gothic castle, or its inner confines), nor in the most "gothic" of moments—but in the repeated, everyday act of crossing the threshold. For marginalized characters—in these texts, the middle- to upper- class white women who make up our cast of Gothic protagonists—"home" is a

[9] De Certeau, 108.

[10] See Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality." Gallagher argues that the nascent novel's special quality, "fictionality," means that novels, or "honest fictions," perform a crucial function: they allow readers the kind of "affective speculation" crucial to surviving in the modern world (338; 346). Novels, for Gallagher, are places to practice skepticism—most notably about the people around us. Her prime example of the way novels foster the "imaginative play" crucial to being enlightened observers of the world relies on our judgment of character: "women especially would need to be able to imagine what it would be like to love a particular man without committing themselves" (346). I argue that novels, particularly Gothic novels, are just as much a center for speculating about the possible consequences of homely structures and spaces.

nebulous thing (and not just when the home in question is a medieval ruin or haunted house). While home is often cast as a place of coercion and confinement—at the same time as the threat of homelessness hangs over characters' heads—the canonical Gothic novels examined here each demonstrate that we can find power (and adventure) in the domestic, even if the structures of law, marriage, and inheritance conspire to define home as a place of social control.

Threshold Domesticity

Feminist scholars have long used images of space to talk about women's place in the world. We read female characters' interactions with the physical spaces and structures of the home—whether they are imprisoned in attics, pacing rooftops, or cast out of doors—as embodiments of the power structures that dictate who is allowed to be truly "at home" in everyday spaces. Of course, as Virginia Woolf famously points out, these images of space and place must be interpreted materially as well as metaphorically. Access to and autonomy within domestic spaces determines not just whose voices are heard, but who survives to develop their talents. For Woolf, the effects of being marginalized manifest in physical symptoms. Artists not allowed the material preconditions for making their art begin to move and act in strange patterns, like the hypothetical "lost novelist" who might have "dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to."[11] Woolf sees the seemingly irregular, pointless, inexplicable patterns of the marginalized—frenetically wandering the moors, mopping and mowing about with no clear destination, even attempting to write from outside the house—as signs of a madwoman. This kind of restless, frustrated journeying—seemingly pointless yet accumulating, outing by outing, into a wayward[12] mode of travel down an altogether new path—is often found in the Gothic, and I will argue that it

[11] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 90.
[12] See Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* for more on waywardness as a mode of resistance.

is not a manifestation of madness (though it may be a symptom of oppression), but a method for gaining traction. Intersectional feminist scholars or feminist geographers might see this mode of movement more as the exploratory treading and retreading of ground that takes place when an experienced feminist mapmaker prepares to survey and redefine the territory. The novels I examine negotiate *home* as both confining and exclusionary, a vexed concept. I argue that this sort of wayward, recursive, and sometimes frenetic activity is a fundamental feature of any successful negotiation.

It is this negotiation between inside and outside, the activity that happens to allow women comfortable entry or free exit, that captures and reflects our ambivalence towards domesticity and (sometimes) helps work through it. This kind of domesticity—domesticity at the threshold—invokes a relationship with home that is always in flux. It is characterized by frustrated, recursive, and sometimes frenetic movement back and forth. In navigating their relationships with the home, female characters—like Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Jane in *Jane Eyre*—almost never make linear progress. They cross and re-cross the countryside, creating networks of homecomings; they linger at boundary-lines and waver back and forth at the threshold of the home; they engage in recursive, ruminative micro-activity. This praxis of return allows characters to re-imagine home and shift its centers of power, but only provisionally. The work of reimagining home must be done again and again at each threshold-crossing.

This dissertation intertwines four main arguments, some of which appear more strongly in certain chapters than others. They are as follows:

1) Threshold domesticity: While we tend to think of the threshold as a place to push through, an either/or, a symbol of going forward[13], or (at times) an interdiction,[14] I claim it as a space that can be inhabited, paced over, returned to as a touchstone, even a space where we can take up residence. Changes in power, points of reversal, opportunities to re-make the domestic, gain agency, or make decisions tend to coalesce at the thresholds of home or a possible home. It is often in leaving—or re-approaching—home that characters are able to re-make it and thus re-structure the power dynamics of their situation. The novels' narrative strategies call attention to these moments in which characters return to, approach, or linger at thresholds.
2) Gothicity: These canonically Gothic novels can be, deceptively, not as Gothic as we think. It is often the everyday domestic that carries the most terror or promises the biggest threat. My "threshold moments" often draw more of the reader's time and attention than the classical heights or vertiginous depths of the Gothic or the sublime landscape, and they often happen in seemingly neutral, humble, or realist structures.[15] Additionally,

[13] Eugenia DeLamotte writes that in the Gothic, "at the threshold, the heroine does not speculate on the intentions of the person who brought her there; rather, she responds to the atmosphere of his house" (19). I do not see these two sets of thoughts as mutually exclusive. While in this dissertation, I do find scenes in which characters use the space of the threshold to explicitly speculate and negotiate their surmises, the series of actions that may seem like purposeless "responses" to an atmosphere are, for me, legitimate ways of gaining traction against a thick, impenetrable atmosphere. Gothic thresholds can often be seen as inherently threatening: "the series of thresholds emphasizes her passage from the daylight world she has known to a mysterious and threatening world she has never seen…the two doors to her chamber suggest the threat of intrusion (DeLamotte, 16). But these metaphorical readings overlook the surprising number of actions that take place within threshold space and the way this space can become one of numinous, extending possibility when the narrative lingers there.

[14] One of the meanings of home, as Wall notes, citing William Pitt, is a place "the King of England cannot enter"—home is safe because "all his force dares not cross the threshold" of even a "ruined tenement" (8). The Gothic, of course, makes this an adage more observed in the breach—or, perhaps, shows us how the structures of home can be a site of institutional (colonial, patriarchal) control.

[15] Of course, Bakhtin's "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" theorizes a chronotope of the threshold. Notably, Bakhtin cites the "chronotope of the castle" as the dominant chronotope in Gothic novels, characterized by the presence of the historical past: "it is this quality that gives rise to the specific kind of narratives inherent in castles and that is then worked out in Gothic novels" (246). This is precisely how we tent to think of Gothic novels. Bakhtin's chronotope of the threshold is associated with "the road" and "encounter," the chronotope of "crisis or break in a life" (248). Bakhtin's example is Dostoyevsky, where thresholds are places of decision. In

many of the most classically Gothic moments are not the most memorable, suspenseful, or key to the text's progress. In *Otranto*, we expect—and retroactively picture—the elaborate interiors of Strawberry Hill. Yet the novel's descriptions are strangely absent, lacking the ornate detail we associate with the Gothic. Similarly, the most classically Gothic moment I can think of is Emily's encounter with the black veil in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, lost in the dark in the depths of the castle—yet for me, the moment in which she burns her father's letters, in their humble residence at La Vallée, is more suspenseful and immediately memorable.

3) Recursive movement and spatial practice: All the modes of movement that Woolf casts as madness, and that many others cast as fruitless—both in terms of narrative structure and characters' physical actions—can be modes of resistance, negotiation, and space-making. Activeness that we may not see as journeys or forward progress—pacing, lingering, even domestic tasks—are valuable in the Gothic novel, the means by which power changes hands. Even the kind of domestic tasks that Simone de Beauvoir would call Sisyphean, "negative work"—making puddings (even though they're only going to be eaten) or tidying (even though the mess will always reappear) can become positive endeavors that lend agency. Above all, the return home—iterated on many scales and at many angles of approach—is an action that can, over time, help characters and readers come to terms with the domestic, though this détente is never permanent.
4) Intertextuality: One approach to the recursive, activity-in-stasis mode of spatial practice can be literal reading and re-reading. Following De Certeau's theory of reading as

Bakhtin's formulation, the chronotope of the threshold seems incompatible with that of the castle: in the threshold, "time is essentially instantaneous,- it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time" (248), while the castle insists on historical time, even if intruding anachronistically into the present.

poaching, as *bricolage*: "to read is to wander through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the constructed order of a city or of a supermarket)" and assimilate it, make it our own (169). Characters also learn to "read" each other and read power relations in the domestic spaces around them. *Jane Eyre*, for example, explicitly rewrites tales of adventure into the domestic realm. Jane's reading of Bewick's *British Birds* and *Gulliver's Travels*—and the intertext of *Pilgrim's Progress*—guides us in seeing Jane's "progress" as every bit as much of a true journey as a sea voyage. Every novel does reading as poaching—novels are by definition heteroglossic, this is what intertexuality is—but in *Jane Eyre* (and *Udolpho*, and *Northanger Abbey*), characters also do it, showing us how on the diegetic level.

It this interplay between "threshold domesticity" on the levels of story and discourse that I follow with most interest. I track "threshold domesticity" as a spatial practice of characters within the story—moments when they practice recursive activeness in their largescale journeys or their embodied activeness, including acts of reading, re-reading, and re-analyzing. But I also track a similar tendency in each novel, on the level of narrative discourse. I track places where the narration slows or suspends itself, recurs in eddies or overt repetitions, indulges in unusual detail or invests tension and suspense in seemingly-mundane moments. These two patterns often converge at the threshold of a home or prospective home, story-time and discourse-time mapping onto each other to invest the threshold space with the possibility for change.

Voyaging Out (or Staying In): Feminist Critiques of Home

It is often the overlap and friction between at home and abroad, dwelling and travel, that can make the home what it is—in some cases a trap, and in others a refuge. James Clifford's concept of "dwelling-in-travel," a phrase that breaks the dichotomy between home and

adventure, or its mate, travel-in-dwelling, [16] expresses the entanglement of these two supposedly separate spheres—and shows us how the domestic can become, for some, a place of activity and empowerment. Traditionally, the domestic has been a vexed realm for feminists. The concept of dwelling, since Heidegger and then from de Beauvoir to Irigaray, has meant a gendered dichotomy between "building" (privileged by Heidegger) and "preservation" (or husbanding). Iris Marion Young offers a succinct overview of these phenomenological debates about home, writing (in 1997), "it is difficult even for feminists to exorcise a positive valence to the idea of home." [17] Today, is the opposite true? While feminists have in some ways moved beyond embracing the dichotomy Heidegger engendered, it is often still difficult (especially when discussing Gothic literature) to exorcise a negative valence seemingly inherent in the domestic.[18] Susan Fraiman calls this domesticity's "bad rap."[19] Her project in *Extreme Domesticity* acknowledges the characters who are "unable or unwilling to take 'home' as a given" (14) and also works to "decouple" the domestic from an "axiomatic equation" with either sentimentality or conservative family values (3; 6). Her "shelter writing" privileges the kinds of activeness I will discuss here, the "daily labor, uses, and meanings that might further inform" our reading of everyday domestic spaces and objects like Mary Barton's curtains (7-8). For Fraiman, though, "shelter writing," with its "attention to the minutiae of domestic interiors and behaviors," is aligned with the realist novel (9). Fraiman defines "the gothic house" as the stand-in for "a domesticity that can kill" (33), the alternative to Bachelard's "felicitous house" (18-19; 33).[20] I take my cue from Fraiman but argue that the Gothic is exactly where we work out what a

[16] Clifford, *Routes*, 36.
[17] Young, 134.
[18] See recent conversations in the 2022 "Home" special issue of *Australian Feminist Studies*.
[19] Susan Fraiman, *Extreme Domesticity*.
[20] See Bachelard, 19, for "felicitous space."

felicitous house truly looks like. For me, the Gothic house *is* the house—as Fraiman points out, any realist home can be a place that "imprisons rather than shelters women; that keeps them in thrall to norms of marital femininity" (18). Gothic literature magnifies, literalizes, and dissects the workings of these homes, and as I will argue, Gothic novels contain just as much of the "felicitous" home as realist ones do—and they are particularly well-suited for examining the false images of domestic felicity that often cover over violence and confinement.

Maria DiBattista and Deborah Epstein Nord's *At Home in the World* (2017) offers "a portrait of women writers not as housebound, in either a literal or a figurative sense, but as authors of stories that are resolutely anti-domestic—stories of restlessness, wandering, adventure, and homelessness."[21] They argue that in these stories, "True Home might be created on ship-board, in a school, or in a nation conceived only in the mind," adding that the act of departing might "matter more, perhaps, than the destination" and concluding that "adventure inheres not just in setting sail but also in seeing one's own home in retreat" (42). This approach to seeing "the voyage out" as part of "domestic fiction" seems to rely on dwelling-in-travel. But what about travel-in-dwelling? My argument pursues the possibility of adventurousness within the context of home, rather than moments of "voyaging out" found in domestic novels.

The Gothic Mode in Fiction

Gothic novels operate through their imaginative access to alternate worlds, using the supernatural—or the idea of supernatural possibility—to unsettle the familiar, destabilize the linear, and undermine traditional foundations. Avery Gordon calls this revelatory effect of the supernatural "being haunted," a participatory, active state of being that "draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality

[21] Maria DiBattista and Deborah Epstein Nord, *At Home in the World*, 14.

that we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition."[22] When we are haunted, we see the world slant and discover how "that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (8). The modus operandi of the Gothic is to alternately discover and re-cover, reveal and obscure the "seething presence" that permeates everyday spaces and practices.

Robert Heilman concludes that "in the novel it was the function of the gothic…to enlarge the sense of reality and its impact on the human being."[23] Julie Park puts this another way: "Gothic fiction…treats and presents space as the medium through which stories emerge and take place."[24] For Park, the architecture of the Gothic invokes the literal and metaphorical abilities of the camera obscura: "dark, enclosed spaces with strategically placed apertures for projecting and reframing reality" (8). Both home and Gothic fiction, "like the camera obscura," made possible "the process by which individuals accessed their interiority and in doing so laid hold of the private domain of their own identities" (6). The Gothic as a genre has a peculiar ability to maintain simultaneous contradictions, indulge reversals and paradoxes, and encourage a sense of possibility. Imaginative access to the supernatural allows both readers and characters to cultivate a skeptical stance and look beyond their own narrow reality. But engagement with the supernatural is only one reality-expanding component of the genre. The Gothic imaginatively enlarges the scope of characters' worlds, enacting the intimate negotiations of marriage, seduction, and property in a heightened setting—the imagined sixteenth century, the larger-than-life castle, the journey across mountain ranges, the breathless flight from country to country. The Gothic doesn't just expand our sense of reality and possibility; it is constantly shrinking and re-

[22] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters,* 8.
[23] Robert Heilman, "Charlotte Brontë's 'New' Gothic," 108; qtd in Sedgwick "Coherence," 4.
[24] Julie Park, *My Dark Room: Spaces of the Inner Self in Eighteenth-Century England,* 225.

expanding the knowable world, playing with readers' sense of space, place and scope so that the epic and the intimate are shown to be essentially indistinguishable. Laundry lists become sinister scribblings, respectable gentlemen are revealed to be conniving villains, and the hushed steps taken between abbey passageways are afforded more narrative space than months of crossing the Alps. This paradoxical approach to space, structures, and scope is what has made the Gothic a site where we can wrestle with our relationships to the House and feel out the boundaries of what counts as home.

Gender and the Gothic

For many Gothic novels, expanding our sense of reality means imagining beyond the narrow bounds of the patriarchy. Margaret Doody argues that "it is in the Gothic novel that women writers could first accuse the 'real world' of falsehood and deep disorder."[25] Certainly, Richardsonian domestic narratives center around the hypocrisy of the patriarch's house, enfolding their protagonists in layer upon layer of custom and proscription and making the reader feel the limits of benevolent patriarchy. But one could argue that the Gothic—in Austen, Radcliffe, or even Lewis—is first to expose these failures of the House as inherent to its structure. In the eighteenth-century Gothic, the everyday violences of home and marriage are compared, if obliquely, to war, to kidnapping, to the barbarity that takes place *elsewhere*. Of course, just as Austen's *Northanger Abbey* "brings the Gothic home" to contemporary England, collapsing the distinction between foreign, melodramatic violence and everyday patriarchy, a text like *Northanger Abbey* also demonstrates that this is what the Radcliffean Gothic has been doing all along. The opportunity to set feminist critiques at a distance—abroad, in a different era, or in a haunted and supernatural alternate universe—often provides cover when the Gothic mode

[25] Margaret Doody, "Deserts, Ruins and Troubled Waters: Female Dreams in Fiction and the Development of the Gothic Novel," 560.

brings these critiques to the ostensibly narrowly circumscribed "reality" of domestic life. While many Gothic novels end with a safe return home, a wrapping-up of adventures and soothing of outsized fears, the lingering after-image of the Gothic castle remains.

The looming structures of Gothic stories, whether literal Gothic fortresses, labyrinthine abbeys, or imposing manors, have always been stand-ins for the dynamics of status, gender, and personhood. The changing and contradictory nature of gothic spaces—from the dizzying heights of a Gothic entry hall to the claustrophobic nested closets found above it—allows Gothic narrative to play with the slippery boundaries between the physical and the metaphorical, the real and the imagined, the familiar and the threatening. Critics have long accepted that the haunted castle, a defining Gothic trope, "may be read as a complex metaphor for the structure of cultural power (whether private or public, sexual, political, or religious) and for the gender arrangements such institutions both found and mirror.[26] Critical interpretations of this premise abound—often, until recently, following Ellen Moers's distinction between "male" and "female" Gothic as the basic subgenres of all Gothic fiction.[27] Many critics define the nature of Gothic fiction as, at heart, the depiction of a female character's negotiations with domestic space. For Diane Hoeveler, "the ideological trajectory of the female gothic novel can be more accurately read as the need to privatize public spaces."[28] In another variation, "the central task of the gothic novel" involves "allowing the heroine to purge the infected home and establish a true one."[29] Alison Milbank, in *Daughters of the House*, particularizes Moers' definition of gendered genres within the Gothic, arguing that "the 'female' Gothic plot is implicitly critical of the claims of patriarchal

[26] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 47.
[27] For the "female" Gothic, see Moers, *Literary Women*; Fleenor, *The Female Gothic*; Milbank, *Daughters of the House*; Heller, *Dead Secrets*, Fitzgerald, "Female Gothic and the Institutionalization of Gothic Studies;" Nord, "Commemorating Literary Women: Ellen Moers and Feminist Criticism after Twenty Years;" Wallace and Smith, *The Female Gothic: New Directions.*
[28] Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, xiii.
[29] Ellis, *The Contested Castle*, xii.

control," while "the 'male' Gothic, by contrast, charts not the escape from an encompassing interior, but the attempt of the male will to penetrate that interior."[30] Both "feminine" and "masculine" plots and depictions of the structure of home coalesce around the threshold as a site for remaking the home, a place where the plot turns from flight to refuge and back—or a place to linger, reveling in the power of penetrating the home's boundaries.

By 1995, Anne Williams had already concluded that "it has become commonplace to link the physical structures of the Gothic to gender relations."[31] Whether focused on the protagonist fleeing a corrupted home, attempts to penetrate ostensibly safe domestic sanctuaries, the creation of subtle domestic power through a triumphant companionate marriage, or the plight of generations of women locked in attics and towers, Gothic fiction abounds with images of good and bad homes and houses.[32] Many Gothic novels of the eighteenth- and nineteenth- century leave readers with the sense that there are two kinds of homes. One provides a source of power for all who inhabit it, a kind of home in which the shared or isolated spaces are neither claustrophobic nor restraining, where quotidian domestic tasks are not a trap or a shackle. Then there are the homes and houses that are places of captivity and suffering, sites that make it worth escaping into the wilderness. Kate Ellis, in *The Contested Castle*, argues that Gothic fiction ultimately works to manifest the idea of "*home* both as 'a place of security and concord' and 'a place of danger and imprisonment.'"[33] These narratives, however, though brim-full of examples

[30] Milbank, 11.
[31] Williams, 47.
[32] In "The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny," Maria Tatar shows that, at its heart, the Gothic is a mode driven by "the condition of radical homelessness," reminding us of the double etymology of Freud's term for the uncanny and showing that the house is the original example of both the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich,* and thus the ultimate site of the uncanny. *Heimlich* is not just a term for that which is "familiar," or "congenial," but also means "belonging to the home" (169). Therefore, Tatar argues that "the fantastic draws its very lifeblood from an event that, defying reason, shatters the stability of the world…this new world is situated at the crossroad of *heimlich* and *unheimlich,* at the point where the two words converge in meaning to suggest the sinister and the oppressive (182).
[33] Ellis, x.

of good homes and bad homes, ultimately investigate the strange mechanisms through which homes can be *at once* refuge and prison—or can turn from one to the other in the blink of an eye, in the way of the rabbit/duck gestalt, "*Kaninchen und Ente,*" seen below.[34] Gothic fiction is known for bringing us to the heights of each of these incarnations of home. The territory that examines the extremes of Gothic space and place is well-trod. Sinister doings always happen underground; persecuted heroines are trapped in attics or confined in the innermost closet of a set of rooms. But what happens at the thresholds—in the moments when confinement turns to refuge, domestic peace to stifling prison? How does a locked door change from protection to threat before the turn of the page?

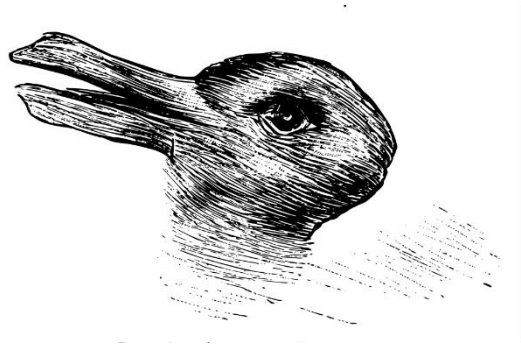

Figure 1. "Kaninchen und Ente" ("Rabbit and Duck"). This illustration originally appeared in the 23 October 1892 issue of *Fliegende Blätter*.

The Gothic shows "home" to be a vacillating, constantly imperiled concept, playing out this transformation of "home" again and again, repeatedly performing it in different iterations across the course of any narrative. Rather than focusing on the extremes—architectural or ideological—I attend to the switch-points, the interstices, the boundaries, moments of return or departure, and the spaces that are traversed again and again. It is in these moments that we can see what happens to make the domestic what it is to us—how we create (or reject) the trappings of home at each encounter. Ellis sees what happens at the threshold of home as a repeated and active praxis. She concludes, "the safety of the home is *not* a given, nor can it ever be considered permanently achieved. At best it must be restored by women's *activity*" (xvi).[35] Some versions of

[34] "Kaninchen und Ente" ("Rabbit and Duck"), the earliest known version of the duck–rabbit illusion, from the 23 October 1892 issue of the German weekly *Fliegende Blätter* (https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.2137#0147). This image is in the public domain.
[35] See also Fraiman, *Extreme Domesticity*.

this active occupation of territory might include Woolf's mopping and mowing on the moors, Isabella Thorpe's zigzagging trajectory through the streets of Bath and excited rereading of horrid novels, or the power and ease that can come with collecting, improving, redecorating, and nesting. The imaginative site of the domestic is one of constant questioning and remaking. Whether this means surveying from the threshold, reading and reinterpreting accepted structures, or remapping the world as we walk through it, the deceptively active nature of the pause at the threshold is one of the key components to naming and uncovering the seething power invoked when creating one's own home.

The characters appearing in this dissertation do more than simply obtain a room of their own in the metaphorical house of the patriarchy; instead they negotiate and re-negotiate their access to power and their ownership of the spaces they pass through, although their revision of domestic traditions is often limited. "Threshold domesticity" functions in multiple ways in these novels. First, it identifies the threshold and the moment of re-entry into the home as a crucial site of power, in which the home can be flipped, either violently or through productive micro-activity and artistic imagining, from refuge to trap and back. Threshold domesticity also functions at a larger scale, in a praxis of repeated return to home that is iterative and never complete. This approach to negotiating domesticity through liminality and while embracing ambivalence also involves moments of active pausing and inactive, stifling voyaging. Often the pause at a threshold or boundary is paradoxically and subtly full of action in these narratives, in small recursive movements or in frantic or expansive imaginative remapping and rewriting. Novels that engage with domesticity in this way—that recognize and seek to represent the simultaneous sense of dread and empowerment home provokes—often linger, narratively, in these key

moments, while rushing through more typically "eventful" plot points.[36] The narrative structure itself often wavers, moves recursively, and coalesces around in-betweens and boundary-lines.

Architectural Plan

If I were to sketch an architectural plan of the shape of this dissertation, as Frederick W. Hilles does for *Tom Jones*[37], the result would be much less symmetrical, with dubious proportions. After the vestibule of this introduction, we encounter the foundation of the house: an examination of *The Castle of Otranto*, decked out in deceptively simple Strawberry Hill white. Chapter two comprises a first floor hodgepodge of drawing and dining rooms (Gothic novels of the 1790s), bringing together spaces for *The Monk*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *Northanger Abbey*, with a haphazard hallway tracking Wollstonecraft's *Maria: or, the Wrongs of Woman*. Chapters three and four each focus on a single Victorian text—the third story, naturally, for *Jane Eyre*, and the (exorcized) grenier for *Villette*. Finally, we exit through the gardens at the back of the House via the small bit of wilderness that is *Cereus Blooms at Night* (observe how the cereus vine has begun to climb, clinging to the crumbling windows of the third storey).

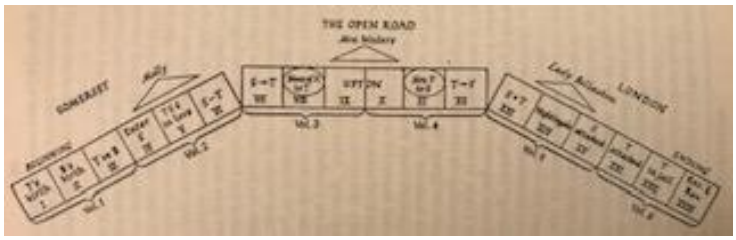

Figure 2. Plan of Fielding's *Tom Jones*, by Frederick W. Hilles.

Chapter one, "Mapping Inescapability: Formal and Spatial Paradox in *The Castle of Otranto*" argues that in inaugurating the Gothic mode (1764), Walpole's "move to the interior" includes more dimensions—and less gothicness—than we think. I examine Walpole's formal strategies, particularly the careful gaps and scalar oddities of his visual descriptions and

[36] See Sayeau, *Against the Event*, on alternatives to "eventfulness" in narrative.
[37] From Hilles, "Art and Artifice in Tom Jones," in *Imagined Worlds*, 1968.

depiction of interiority, concluding that two coexisting patterns underpin the novel. It is easy to focus on *Otranto*'s most outsized objects and most melodramatic events, but the novel's rhythms coalesce around thresholds and in everyday moments of lingering and indecision. *Otranto*'s castle is inescapable—the novel's world scarcely imagines anything beyond it. While the novel shows us ways that its female characters could work to escape from *Otranto*'s structures of primogeniture and confinement through their practical domestic knowledge of the spaces they inhabit, ultimately it revokes the halting methods demonstrated at the novel's thresholds and in its near-escapes, showily seeming to reinscribe the same familial and power structure in its abrupt final paragraph (while purposefully leaving readers unsettled with the status quo).

Chapter two, "Home and Anti-Home in the 1790s Gothic" includes analyses of threshold moments in *The Monk* (1796), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *Maria* (1798) and *Northanger Abbey* (1817, but written in the 1790s). While *The Castle of Otranto* gives the sense that the eponymous castle is the only place in the novel's world—at once church and dungeon, ancestral seat and intimate home—the novels of the 1790s construct a delicate, complex balance between the domestic and the carceral, as Gothic spaces expand beyond castles into the related realms of creepy abbeys, crumbling ruins, and bastille-like prisons. Home and anti-home become two (or more) separate spaces, strung out across the landscape of the novels, and characters' movements between these two extremes constitute their vacillation between extremes of agency and vulnerability. I argue that these 1790s novels function to tease apart the exploitative, confining domestic situation from the ostensibly productive routines and structures of "true" home—and they reveal that the power structures of this "true" or traditional domesticity are often the actual source of the danger its protagonists face.

Chapter three, "'Dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight': Threshold-Crossing and the Iterative Return in *Jane Eyre*" re-maps the structure of the 1847 novel as less a linear pilgrim's progress towards a final home than a series of recursions characterized by Jane's essential move, the "coming home." I argue that Jane negotiates her relationship with domesticity by returning, again and again, to prospective or past homes, so that there is no longer a logic of "home" and "anti-home"—every prospective home must always be re-made at each return to the threshold.

Chapter four, "'Scouting the Paradox': *Villette* and Domesticity Unmoored" argues that *Villette* (1853) represents another shift in the Victorian domestic imagination. While most critics see the novel's gothic apparitions, including the ghostly nun, as representing Lucy's repression of her desire for a real home—a kind of self-burial—the gothic moments in the novel actually represent the very *object* of her desire, the version of traditional domesticity that Graham Bretton and Polly Home stand in for. I argue that the novel's ambiguous ending treats M. Paul and the prospect of marriage with him, not as an end in itself, but as a portal that allows Lucy to build her own "third way," neither a life of suffocating domestic tradition nor one of complete loneliness.

Each novel included here is its own road map, inclusive of suggested patterns and rhythms of travel, for coming to terms with home's vexed and vexing status. While I do see a line of continuity from *Otranto* interrogating the gothic anti-home, to the 1790s novels that send characters ricocheting between home and anti-home, to Brontë's attempts to master home through constant re-making or by unmooring home from traditional domesticity, my argument here is not a historical one. Rather, what follows is somewhat halting and recursive in itself, a series of possible examples for how Gothic fiction does the work of imagining and reimagining

the structures and movements that help us create home: through recursive, critical, repetitive activity at the threshold.

Chapter One

Mapping Inescapability: Formal and Spatial Paradox in *The Castle of Otranto*

> *I will detain the reader no longer, but to make one short remark. Though the machinery is invention, and the names of the actors imaginary, I cannot but believe that the groundwork of the story is founded on truth. The scene is undoubtedly laid in some real castle. The author seems frequently, without design, to describe particular parts.* The chamber, *says he,* on the right hand; the door on the left hand; the distance from the chapel to Conrad's apartment*: these and other passages are strong presumptions that the author had some certain building in his eye.*
>
> —Horace Walpole, "Preface to the First Edition," *The Castle of Otranto*

"The Beauty of Studied Irregularity": *Otranto* and the Ungraspable

The Castle of Otranto (1764) at first seems full of decisive, outsized physical acts. The events of the story are both grand in scope and dramatic in effect. Sudden flights, slamming doors, and frightened servants abound—not to mention the novel's opening move, the "tremendous phaenomenon" of a giant helmet falling from the sky and crushing Otranto's last male heir.[38] Characters inhabit a world of vast spaces and complex architecture—and, of course, larger-than-life objects and apparitions. The supernatural enlargement and animation of Alfonso's statue and portrait initiates and drives the plot, but also literalizes a larger quality of the novel. Events, objects, and settings in *Otranto* are heightened in scope and impact—often literally big—yet difficult to fully grasp. Just as characters can only glimpse pieces of Alfonso's living statue and portrait (a partial gigantic foot, the lone helmet), readers experience even the showiest plot points only briefly and broadly. On closer investigation, each of the most memorable aspects of the story seems disconcertingly empty. Scenes are melodramatic without motivation or character development, settings are oddly devoid of description, characters express

[38] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 18.

extreme emotion without a view of their interiority. However, the outsized objects and architecture, sensational events, breathless journeys, and exaggerated personalities that characterize the novel on the surface are systematically and subtly undermined at every turn. The novel's discursive patterns and techniques create a deeper narrative structure completely unlike the broad strokes one could read on the surface.

Two distinct, co-existing patterns underpin the novel. One works through overt and dramatic aspects of the story, while the other arises out of the novel's smaller "events" and its pattern of narratological choices, particularly its manipulation of time and narrative attention. Viewing the story's progression through its broad strokes leads to a similarly broad and simplistic ideological takeaway. The version of the novel created by attending to melodramatic acts, physically showy scenes, and large-scale settings becomes a story that revolves around Manfred. This zoomed-out view casts the novel's essential plot as one of divine retribution and return to the status quo, in which Manfred is rightfully punished for incestuous desire and the taint of his illegitimate inheritance. This allows readers to interpret the novel as the story of a tyrant's fall from power. This view of events is both narratively satisfying, creating decisive closure, and ideologically conservative, allowing a neat return to patriarchal domesticity. In this story, the ideals of the castle—strictly gendered domestic structure and the traditions of aristocratic inheritance—are fundamentally sound, once purged of the influences of Catholicism and upstart false heirs.

At the same time, the smaller-scale movements and rhythms of the novel on both the story and discourse level reveal a more recursive narrative structure characterized by stagnation, repetition, and instability. These subtler narrative choices create a parallel commentary—both complex and ambivalent—about domestic security, inheritance, and domain. This version of the

novel interrogates the relationship between action and agency in ways that attend to the realities of living within a castle (and an intimate political structure) like Otranto's. The finer-grained story beneath the overt plot is characterized by oscillating and eddying patterns and lingers at the thresholds and margins of Otranto's physical domain. Momentary or iterative delays in narrative forward movement, as well as literal scenes of delay and indecision within the story, draw attention to the hypocrisies and paradoxes of patriarchal domesticity. These scenes and patterns identify an alternate pathway out of the domestic trap that is *Otranto*'s narrative situation—the possibility of small steps out of the carceral domestic through intimate knowledge of the patriarchy's structures and ideologies. This covert pattern reveals that the overt plot of satisfying upheaval and decisive closure actually relies on stillness and cyclical reinscription, not just for the women involved in the domestic situation, but at all scales and for all characters.

The novel is expressly meant to be big—to include only the most crucial and dramatic events and omit anything extraneous. Walpole himself, in the guise of critic and editor, praises his work for containing "no bombast, no similes, flowers, digressions, or unnecessary descriptions." In his words, "everything tends directly to the catastrophe."[39] This assessment holds true in terms of the "everything" of overt plot and the elements for manufacturing terror and pity—fuel for the catastrophe of the novel's story. Walpole's self-praise also, however, holds true for the "everything" of narrative discourse—the complicating layer of techniques that expose the quieter, ongoing domestic catastrophe that is ultimately reinscribed at the end of the novel.

[39] Preface to the first edition, *The Castle of Otranto*, 6.

The Castle of Otranto has often flummoxed critics,[40] precisely because of the ways Walpole is both right and wrong that the novel eschews figurative language and flowery descriptions. Readers come away from the novel feeling as if it is full of bombast, interminably long and digressive sentences, and exaggerated events. However, the novel is surprisingly devoid of description. Analyses of the novel almost always try to grapple with this paradoxical reading experience, struggling to describe the "insane mishmash"[41] of "crowded incidents"[42] and "frenetic pace" of the novel.[43] Even the basics of the plot are deceptively ungraspable: "the facts emerge piecemeal and are hard to remember even shortly after a fresh reading."[44] The most generous takes on the novel run to chaotic contradiction: "after all, Walpole was only mucking about, wasn't he? Or was he making a substantial, if displaced, contribution to Whig supremacism at his time?"[45] Most scholars of the Gothic find the novel lacking on both aesthetic and thematic grounds. Fred Botting concludes, "in failing to offer an overriding and convincing position, *The Castle of Otranto* leaves readers unsure of its moral purpose," diagnosing the novel's "cardinal sin" as its "uncertain tone and style, between seriousness and irony."[46] Leslie Fiedler also pinpoints this dichotomy (or confusion) between play and seriousness. He argues that the novel attempts to solve its formal problems by "passing off the machinery of horror essential to the form as mere 'play,' 'good theatre,' which demands not credence but the simplest suspension of adult disbelief," casting a genre with "high-minded ends" as "really no more than a

[40] For more readings of the novel, see Dent, "Contested Pasts;" Watt and Thompson, *The Literal Imagination*; re: art/architecture see Morrissey, "'To invent in art and folly': Postmodernism and Walpole's Castle of Otranto," and, more recently. Reeve, "Gothic Architecture, Sexuality, and License at Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill" and Uden, "Horace Walpole, Gothic Classicism, and the Aesthetics of Collection."
[41] Another scholar is reduced to using the term "higgledy-piggledy" (Bernstein 47).
[42] Brown, 27.
[43] Botting, 51.
[44] Brown, 24.
[45] Punter, 304.
[46] Botting, 53.

lowbrow amusement, a literary vice.[47] It is this "machinery" of the Gothic that readers at first find obtrusive, exaggerated, and melodramatic—at once farcical and extreme.[48]

To pinpoint the sense of dichotomous frenzy the novel conveys, it is helpful to start with its formal choices. As most readers remark, "the style of writing itself works against reason and propriety."[49] The novel's plot pivots are disconcerting, and even the reassuring dénouement is accomplished "with such speed, and so many convolutions," that the affective reading experience, more than the story itself, "stretches the bounds of credulity."[50] Susan Bernstein works through her analysis of *Otranto*'s contradictions by beginning with tropes emblematic of the Gothic mode:

> The exaggerated and mechanical repetition of architectural features in Gothic literature, described conventionally and consistently, installs the very structure of the genre…It is not coincidental that Michel Foucault should choose Ann Radcliffe as an example of the figure of the author, her work demonstrating the author's function of creating a sphere of 'sameness' indicated and made available by the list.[51]

Even as Bernstein cites these components of the genre as beginning with Walpole,[52] she cannot sustain this characterization of *Otranto* as "mechanical" or producing sameness, despite its seeming proliferation of objects. Bernstein decodes the novel through its known connections to Strawberry Hill and Walpole's personal aesthetic: "the mansion presents a peculiar mélange of authenticity and phoniness," showcasing "Walpole's love of irregularity, surprise and mystery."[53] The experience of reading the novel can produce these two responses at the same

[47] Fiedler, 137.
[48] For discussions of the Gothic's relation to theatre, including theatrical use of space, see Leslie Fiedler, "The Substitution of Terror for Love" in *The Gothick Novel: A Casebook;* Crochunis, "Writing Gothic Theatrical Spaces;" and Allard's "Spectres, Spectators, Spectacles: Matthew Lewis's The Castle Spectre." See also Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, esp. "The Aesthetics of Astonishment," for genre features of melodrama.
[49] Botting, 51.
[50] Botting, 51.
[51] Bernstein, 48.
[52] Bernstein, 48.
[53] Bernstein, 46.

time—that it is mechanical, repetitive, and undifferentiated, *and* a surprising, unpredictable mélange. We know that "one of [Walpole's] favorite words in relation to Strawberry Hill was 'sharrawaggi' or want of symmetry,"[54] which "indicate[s] the pleasure in the reified independence of signifying elements…the monstrous presence of details and pieces that cannot be assimilated into a whole."[55] Upon a second reading, *The Castle of Otranto* begins to seem full of *pieces* of things—a foot the only glimpse we get of the living portrait, a snatch of the courtyard, yet no Gothic description looking up at the castle's exterior. The novel insists that some things are ungraspable and can only be assailed in small, practical, piecemeal ways. In *Otranto*, as we will see, the practicalities of domestic space are the way to resist the all-consuming, invisible workings of patriarchal inheritance and control over home's domain. The patriarchy, like every outsized Gothic object in the novel, is too big to be grasped as a whole—it can only be broken down into little pieces and resisted in everyday ways.

For a novel that gives the impression of being crowded with plot points, objects, and architecture, the physicalities of its storyworld are oddly *not* described "conventionally or consistently." Critics often overlook this fact of the novel or are unable to reconcile it with the novel's aesthetic of excess and exaggeration when they do characterize the level of description.[56] The novel's relationship with description is a good exemplar for the way it navigates other components of narrative, including formal narratological technique, depiction of interiority, characterization, and the invocation of physical space.

Spatial Metaphor in the Gothic

[54] Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann, 25 February, 1750, The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence, 127. See also Lytton Strachey: "he liked Gothic architecture, not because he thought it beautiful but because he found it queer" (39) and Reeve, "Gothic Architecture, Sexuality, and License at Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill."
[55] Bernstein, 47.
[56] See Yang and Healey, 77.

In spatial analyses of the Gothic, "characteristically, the metaphorical is given more weight than the literal, the psychological more than the historical, and the hidden and symbolic more than the ostensible."[57] As Yang and Healey argue, "Gothic landscapes are fertile ground for understanding the repressed and dispossessed in society"[58] due to the Gothic mode's affinity for "what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (3). Many readings of home in the Gothic focus on the use of space as primarily symbolic and ideological.[59] However, there has always been a strain of feminist Gothic criticism that recognizes in the Gothic's centering of "home" a negotiation of material realities[60]. Susanne Becker acknowledges that "in the feminist Gothic, horror, the 'supernatural,' the radical doubt, is closer to home; not the creation of a weird world, but a very specific background composed of aspects of the contemporary and familiar domestic life."[61] Becker believes Gothic spaces, particularly houses, "signify…the desire and possibility for mobility that has always been at the core of feminine Gothic writing" (20). The Gothic novel also offers a way to negotiate and explore these desires: "the house as most important (inner) space in the 'Female Gothic romance' repeats the gendered external power structures and thus becomes the *Bewährungsraum*—the

[57] Baldick and Mighall, 218. On space in Gothic Fiction: Varma, *The Gothic Flame*; Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*; Tatar, "The Houses of Fiction," Bernstein, *Housing Problems*; Becker, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fiction.* Recent studies of the Gothic and natural/non-human scale include: Packham, "Oceanic Studies and the Gothic Deep;" Bowers, "Haunted Ice, Fearful Sounds, and the Arctic Sublime;" and Roberson, "Sea-Changed" on the sea-burial as a Gothic topos akin to the traditional topos of the castle.
[58] Yang and Healey, 8.
[59] Theories of Gothic space, whether at the scale of the castle or the smaller scale of interior corridors, doors, and thresholds, struggle to keep the material in mind. Discussion of thresholds in the Gothic is almost always singularly focused: Gothic works "have to do with the exploration of the threshold, with that realm—the 'fatal bourn' of course comes to mind—from which it is, or might become, impossible to return (Punter 2019, 311). On threshold as death, see also: Sanguineti, "With Light Step Through the Threshold," and Berenstein, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions*: "the house of fiction is not only marked by the openings to its surroundings but also by its separation from them and becomes, in this sense, a metaphor for containment. (Becker 19) .For Gothic interiors: Luckhurst, "Corridor Gothic;" Morrison, "Enclosed in Openness."
[60] Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," in centering access to and autonomy within domestic spaces, applies as much to the Gothic mode as to the more realist novels she cites.
[61] Becker

space of probation or trial and success—for a female subject."[62] This space of trial and success is an active one:

> There is a metaphor from feminist semiotics that aptly summarises the related potential of the neo-Gothic subject: the idea of 'the transformation of woman and the feminine into verbs at the interior of those [Master] narratives that are today experiencing a crisis in legitimation' (Jardine 1985, 25). Women-as-verbs suggests mobility, a textual dynamics from within: a characteristic move of feminist neo-gothicism. (Becker 46)

While Becker doesn't consider *Otranto* part of the feminine Gothic, surprisingly, *The Castle of Otranto* is very much concerned with women-as-verbs. [63] Margaret Doody notes "that the first writers of the Gothic novel in English were women does not seem a mere coincidence. The only notable exception is of course Horace Walpole whose *Castle of Otranto* (1764) gives us the trappings of the Gothic story without its essence" (552). I agree that *Otranto* draws showy attention to its Gothic "trappings." I will also argue that, at the same time, and partly because of the emptiness of its giant Gothic objects and tropes, the novel does just what Becker describes: explores the possibility for female mobility. *Otranto* is truly a closed space for trial—its characters never escape the castle, they only move about it in cyclical patterns until foiled by the swift dénouement. But within the space of the novel, *Otranto* attends just as much to material concerns as it does to its Gothic trappings.

Otranto's Form: Scale, Gaps, and Fineness of Description

Paradoxically, the most shocking parts of *Otranto*'s plot—the largest events (and objects) of the story—are often characterized by odd, elusive gaps in explanation and observation. Each big plot point leaves readers with the disconcerting sense of not quite being able to grasp an

[62] Gunzenhäuser, 22.

63 On space, inhabitance, and movement in the Gothic: Auerbach, "Proprioception;" Aguirre, "Numinous Spaces;" Westover, *Necromanticism*; Lowczanin and Malecka, *Gothic Peregrinations*; Lacôte, "Gothic Architecture, Castles and Villians;" Mehtonen and Savolainen, *Gothic Topographies*.

image or emotion associated with the event in question, even while it clearly drives the plot and motivates characters. What complicates this sense of gaps is not just that the most memorable aspects of the story are *told*, never quite shown—but the discourse itself seems to insist on the act of telling but not showing. However, both on the level of description and in terms of point of view and discursive focus, the narrator *does* occasionally show us detail on the edges and within minutiae of these grand events and images, which serves only to draw attention to our inability to grasp the whole. This pattern—insisting on a literally broad view of events while allowing brief bits of description—certainly helps create the mystery of the novel, literally leaving things readers can't see or know, and making the story seem to jump swiftly from plot point to plot point. But in this case, the novel is doing more than creating gaps to promote suspense. After all, once the supernatural spin on the basic plot is established, the actual plot is quite predictable, just happening within the framework of animated statues and fated lightning strikes. Through showing us a grand, monolithic view of incomprehensible events, and occasionally giving a tantalizing half-sentence of detail, imagery, or insight into interiority, *Otranto* very purposefully creates an affective and aesthetic sense of confusion and dislocation that goes beyond any usual tool for creating mystery. These gaps create in readers a sense of being unmoored from scope and proportion: they can neither grasp the monolithic events and ideas that drive the novel, nor connect the glimpses they get of disconnected parts of the whole to the whole itself.

Cynthia Wall notes the way *The Old English Baron* "quietly smuggle[s] interior detail into the early Gothic novel in revising *Otranto*. But when we look for the "giant *things*"[64] *Otranto* is so famous for, we realize we have never actually seen them. For the most shocking event in the novel—and the moment that initiates the entire plot—the helmet of the opening

[64] Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 204.

scene is not just difficult to picture, but purposefully outlined through both characters' and the text's inability to describe or grasp it. In the opening action of the novel, there is a lot of reported looking at the helmet, reacting to the helmet, and talking about or around the idea of the helmet. But readers rarely see an image of it or hear the babble of discussion around it. The fact of the helmet is so huge that it can best be expressed through capturing its ungraspability. The first we hear of what has happened—the first we hear that any event has yet taken place in the novel—is a servant announcing the calamity through his speechlessness. He comes "running back breathless, in a frantic manner, his eyes staring, and foaming at the mouth," and to convey the news of Conrad's death, "he said nothing, but pointed to the court."[65] This is instinctively understood by the cast of characters awaiting the wedding. They are "struck with terror and amazement" by the servant's visceral reaction and physical state—and as the scene continues, it seems to matter less what has befallen Conrad (whom the story soon forgets almost completely), but that something has happened that can't be captured or related. When the servant is made to speak, he can only repeat, "Oh, the helmet! the helmet!" (18). This refrain is soon taken up by "a volley of voices," who can only respond to Manfred's inquiries in a similar manner: "Oh, my lord! the prince! the prince! the helmet! the helmet!" (18). The idea of the helmet—even the word itself—takes on the object's hugeness, both in the minds of spectators and for readers.

The affective and aesthetic experience of readers comes to mirror the experience of being in the presence of a huge, incomprehensible object that has just fallen from the sky. We literally cannot fully see the helmet—and we rarely even hear about the object itself. Taking center stage in the scene is the idea of the "helmet!" and all its affect—and of course it is the existence of the helmet and its implications that create the entire plot of the novel moving forward. But this

[65] Walpole, 18.

opening scene functions not just to create a sense helplessness or smallness in the face of grand events, but to initiate the idea that the driver of events, in whatever incarnation, is too immense to even be fully perceived. This subtly primes readers to perceive the double pattern of the novel—to question what can and can't be fully grasped, and to ask how the parts of an indescribable whole can (or can't) be used to accurately see the whole. In the same way that readers only see parts of the helmet, and through certain characters' eyes, characters can only see the parts of the patriarchal domestic structures that affect them, and may misattribute the workings and outcomes of events in the pages to come.

The opening scene does show us small glimpses of the helmet in a few different ways. Readers accompany Manfred into the courtyard as he goes "himself to get information of what occasioned this strange confusion" (18). So far, we have heard a "confused noise of shrieks, horror, and surprise" and seen the servant foaming at the mouth after his encounter—and now Manfred, who we will later learn is the only character in a position to understand the significance of the helmet, finally sees the object:

> The first thing that struck Manfred's eyes was a group of his servants endeavouring to raise something that appeared to him a mountain of sable plumes. He gazed without believing his sight. (18)

Along with Manfred, readers are allowed to picture the "mountain of sable plumes."[66] This language is comparatively descriptive and evocative—the description of the helmet that most captures what it might be like to look at it. Even when Manfred sees the helmet for what it is, it is not described, just named for what it is. The helmet appears in focus for one sentence:

[66] See Bernstein, p. 55, for an alternate account of the helmet's plumes. Bernstein argues they are themselves an "empty signifier," but I am interested in the stylistic differences between description of helmet and plume—one practical and repetitive, almost stuttering, the other in figurative and evocative language.

> Shocked with these lamentable sounds, and dreading he knew not what, he advanced hastily—But what a sight for a father's eyes!—He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers. (18)

Both the sight of the body and the image of the helmet are noted and commented on, rather than described. The helmet's only characteristic is its hugeness. It is even named twice—just as the servants and spectators had impulses to repeat the idea (the word) "the helmet!"—to name it when they couldn't talk about it—here, the object is conceptualized twice, as if the observer is trying to get a grasp on it: "an enormous helmet," "a casque" that is "an hundred times more large" than any other. Both "helmet" and "enormous" are repeated as concepts, in different terms, as if in an attempt to encompass the object from multiple angles. We do see, again, the "proportionable quantity of black feathers." Again, the description of the helmet's plumes is the closest we get to imagery or detail. Neither description of the feathers is quite imagery, but together they are enough to allow the reader to fill in the gaps and construct a partial image or impression.

We can't quite do the same for the helmet itself. Later, we'll learn two more facts about its appearance: as Theodore remarks, it resembles the helmet "on the figure in black marble of Alfonso the Good"[67] but it is composed of steel, not marble (21). In its description of the helmet, the novel creates a gap through trying to approach the incomprehensible object from both sides: the large-scale view that can't be grasped, only named and repeated ("the helmet!") and the small-scale description of one part—the sable plumes, presumably drifting and glinting in the breeze of the courtyard. As a whole, the helmet is impenetrable to analysis. But the slightly more

[67] Walpole, 20.

detailed view of the most visually interesting component, the plumes, gives us a concrete image to grasp onto that only emphasizes the lack of a parallel depth description for the whole object.

In "The Reality Effect," Roland Barthes distinguishes description from "the general structure of narrative," which, under structuralism, should be "essentially *predictive*, schematizing to the extreme."[68] Description "has no predictive mark;" it "does not contain that trajectory of choices and alternatives which gives narration the appearance of a huge traffic-control center, furnished with a referential (and not merely discursive) temporality.[69] *Otranto* breaks this rule in that very sparse descriptions *do*, through their unique engagement with domestic space and place, contain the trajectories of choices and alternatives that shape and convey both character and plot. This is exactly what Wall argues most early eighteenth-century novels do—they conjure up objects and the features of spaces just when the plot needs them, "depending for their very existence on a character's immediate action."[70] I argue that Otranto does this far more often, and with more meaning (particularly for character development) with the things of domestic interiors than with Gothic objects like the helmet. One can say that *Otranto* is profoundly lacking in detailed description—but at the same time, it occasionally indulges in moments of classic "futile" detail, not in the way Wall describes (the "relatively few set pieces of description"[71] that Otranto entirely lacks), but in tiny snatches, vividly pictured, in the space of half a sentence. The novel is able to convey predictive and thematic information through its approach to visual description. The choices to refrain or indulge in description mark, and create, both odd indulgences and disconcerting elisions. These moments of brief indulgence

[68] Barthes, 231.
[69] Barthes, 231.
[70] Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 140.
[71] Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 124.

in description as well as pointed refusal to describe also flag and work in parallel with the novel's changing levels of focalization and varied approaches to interiority and narration.

Otranto's Form: Focalization

The Castle of Otranto, Walpole's "new species of romance," is usually not taken seriously as such. While critics agree that Walpole initiates the Gothic, less attention has been paid to the novel as an experiment with an entirely new kind of writing, particularly in terms of the novel's formal approaches to narration. This, however, is what Marshall Brown claims for *Otranto* in *The Gothic Text*. For Brown, "Walpole's greatest originality lies in the parts of his book to which the least attention has been paid, and in which the least appears to happen."[72] Brown conceives of the Gothic as a jump forward, a new conception of what the novel can be as a form. Before Walpole, Brown argues, there were the kinds of early novels that took place "outside, on the open road" (his example is *Tom Jones*) and another set of novels, like those of Richardson, in which "interiors function primarily as places of confinement and moral darkness" (28). "When Walpole took a novel and cast it into dramatic form," he argues, "one effect was to displace narrative onto internal spaces" (29). Brown aligns this "move to the interior" with a corresponding focus on interiority in narration.

Terry Castle's "The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*" finds in Radcliffe a similar nascent exploration of interiority, in which description (especially description of the landscape) is entangled with consciousness. In a "a new, all-consuming and increasingly irrational cognitive practice," descriptions of "sensory experience" inevitably result in extended passages of "absorption in illusion."[73] This Radcliffean version of the emerging novelistic focus

[72] Brown, 30.
[73] Castle, 133. See also Phillips, Distraction: Problems of Attention in Eighteenth-Century Literature, esp. "Fixated Attention: The Gothic Pathology of Single-Minded Focus" and "The Politics and Poetics of Fixation."

on interiority is often cited as the "narrative discovery of consciousness."[74] In Walpole's writing, however, this flirtation with depicting interiority is far less coherent.

Brown brilliantly observes that "Walpole doesn't explore forms on the surface and then, separately, the interesting things beneath; rather, he explores the interesting things by exploring forms.[75] He goes on to argue that Walpole makes an extraordinary and concerted leap in the realm of narration technique by almost single-handedly integrating the technique of psycho-narration into the English novel.[76] Brown's single-minded focus on the use of psycho-narration (or reported thought) in the novel glosses over both the explorative quality of Walpole's experimentation with this technique and the—fascinating—narratological messiness and inconsistency that it creates.

Brown's generalizing analysis of the use of psycho-narration in *Otranto* makes it seem a as a singular, sweeping formal move.[77] The novel's approach to third-person narration is actually very like its overall aesthetic—a mishmash, a chaotic collection of different techniques employed in ways that are unusual, even as we can draw lines from *Otranto* to the development of more subtle gradations of third-person narration in later novels. Brown's claim that psycho-narration "becomes all-pervasive in *The Castle of Otranto*"[78] loses the precision and flexibility of examining this type of narration through the vocabulary of focalization, which still isn't quite

[74] Brown, 32.
[75] Brown, 22.
[76] Though he does acknowledge that "it would be inaccurate to claim that Walpole invented psycho-narration" (Brown, 34). Brown defines psychonarration as "the direct transposition into third-person narrative of the immediate thought processes of the characters (31), following Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds* (34).
[77] This not only glosses over the intricacies of the agglomeration that is Walpole's approach to narration, but has caused confusion among later scholars. Bender, in "Sound in The Castle of Otranto" (2020), mischaracterizes Brown's observation as a claim that *Otranto* consistently used free indirect discourse: Citing Brown, he remarks, "it is no accident that the sonic Walpole of *The Castle of Otranto* was the first British writer to employ sustained free indirect discourse in rendering mental states" (Bender 2020, 35).
[78] Brown, 31.

expansive enough to easily capture the many slightly different ways *Otranto* approaches third-person narration.[79] Brown also maps the use of psycho-narration very directly onto what he characterizes as a sea change in interest in character interiority, thought, and feeling. Perhaps an increase in reported thought, rather than simply direct speech, is a step on the way to depicting interiority with the complexity achieved in Austen—but I want to draw attention to the way this technique paradoxically ends up drawing attention to what is withheld.

The sense that the reader is never really seeing anything fully—object, architecture, or ghost—is one way *Otranto* produces gaps and creates the disconcerting affective experience of reading the novel. The most obvious mechanism is the dichotomy of visual description, the emphasis on "telling" about an immense concept or object, combined with very occasional, very brief glimpses of a small part of the ungraspable whole in slightly more detail. Just as the novel subtly creates the reader's experience through what seems like jerky control of level of description, it also uses focalization in a way that might at first seem scattered and blundering, but works subtly to create the reader's experience in the same way.

The novel begins with a quite strategic approach from the narrator—the introductory paragraph almost exclusively introduces Manfred and his situation with facts and surmises that could have been "remarked by his family and neighbours."[80] It is difficult, at first, to definitively detect the presence of a narrator who has access to character interiority. One would be forgiven for reading the first paragraph of the novel and expecting that the narrative will be primarily

[79] Mieke Bal's additions to Genette's account of focalization allow more flexibility, but for clarity, I'll use Genette's language in what follows.
[80] Walpole, 17.

externally focalized,[81] or internally focalized through the perspective of any bystander or member of the community. The novel does often default to this "zoomed out," external approach to narrative perspective, often sticking to easily-observable, physically big external actions over fine-grained details of characters' interior lives. However, even in the strategically objective first paragraph, we begin to see a few subtle interjections from the omniscient narrator, seamlessly integrated into the style of narration, that give us glimpses into characters' personalities and motives. Even these are sometimes doubly interpretable: comments like "Hippolita, his wife, an amiable lady" or that the family "did not dare" to question Manfred could still be the general opinion of members of the neighborhood, drawn from external observation of affairs. The narrator is at first carefully ambiguous about whether certain judgments or characterizations might be from a wiser (and better-informed) point of view or are still external observations grounded in appearances and gossip.

The final sentences of the paragraph begin to suggest the presence of a knowing mediator who hints at but does not divulge the truth behind the neighborhood's speculations. First, we are directly told that Manfred's "tenants and subjects," apparently collectively, "attribute[e] the hasty wedding to the prince's dread of seeing accomplished an ancient prophecy" (17). Then, their (collective) thoughts are reported: "it was difficult to make any sense of this prophecy; and still less easy to conceive what it had to do with the marriage in question" (17). Then, the paragraph concludes with an observation about the community that is subtly not focalized through their perspective: "Yet these mysteries, or contradictions, did not make the populace adhere the less to their opinion" (17). There is still no definitive indication that the narrator

[81] In Genette's terminology, viewing the characters from the outside—whereas access to any character interiority would be zero focalization. Bal adds that in Genette's external focalization, the focalizer is extradiegetic. In either formulation, Otranto contains both internal and external focalization, and does use psychonarration (reported thought), but it is the relative use and ways of switching between these techniques that is harder to describe.

knows better than the populace or knows whether their surmises are likely to be well-founded—yet there is a hint of a voice, of an ironic outside judgment.

By the second paragraph of the novel—in which the calamity of the helmet is already being introduced—the omniscient narrator is reporting or adding insights from characters' unspoken thoughts. Hippolita faints "without knowing what was the matter, but anxious for her son," and Manfred is "less apprehensive than enraged at the procrastination of the nuptials" (18). For most of the novel, these are the kinds of glimpses we get into characters' interiorities—facts reported by the narrator, slipped in amongst other observations.[82] Under Genette's conception of the term, where focalization is a concept for answering the question "who knows," this counts as internal focalization on a character (the "who speaks" and "who sees" in this case are both still the omniscient narrator). In *Otranto,* these instances constitute what I see as a broad, big approach to focalization, in which the narrator *tells* readers the most significant internal attribute of a character in a given moment.

Throughout the novel, we continue to be given glimpses into characters' thoughts and motivations. Eventually, we briefly follow even Manfred's thoughts, emotions, and motivations rather closely (31; 35-6), but the narrating voice is almost always that of the omniscient narrator, and most often in this mode of "telling" only the biggest elements of a character's thinking, very briefly. At the same time, the omniscient narrator occasionally interjects a comment that calls attention to a pattern of suddenly *withholding* knowledge about characters. In these instances, the narrative *could* divulge the information at hand, as it does elsewhere. But, especially towards the

[82] Compare with, for example, the opening paragraphs of *Fantomina* (1725). Just as this is a good example of a thorough description of space, it's also an example where the entire scene is focalized through Fantomina, tracking her opinions and surmises—most of this text is internal focalization, even with the presence of an omniscient narrator occasionally making comments.

beginning of the novel, the narrator is careful to withhold Manfred's true motivations and his interpretation of the supernatural events of the castle—even if, in the same scene, his other thoughts are revealed. For example, as Manfred is taking in the presence of the helmet, the narrator suddenly becomes careful to hedge any commentary on Manfred's logic. The passage begins with the same straightforward reporting of the highlights of Manfred's thoughts that has been the predominant mode of representing interiority so far:

> Manfred, more enraged at the vigour, however decently exerted, with which the young man had shaken off his hold, than appeased by his submission, ordered his attendants to seize him, and, if he had not been withheld by his friends whom he had invited to the nuptials, would have poignarded the peasant in their arms. (20)

However, as Manfred's emotions escalate, his thoughts are suddenly made strategically opaque: when we learn that the marble helmet of the church statue is indeed missing, "Manfred, at this news, grew perfectly frantic; and, *as if* he sought a subject on which to vent the tempest within him, he rushed again on the young peasant" (20; emphasis mine). Even within the same sentence, the narrator presents a clear understanding of Manfred's state of mind and then pretends to speculate as to his motives:

> the folly of these ejaculations brought Manfred to himself: yet whether provoked at the peasant having observed the resemblance between the two helmets, and thereby led to the farther discovery of the absence of that in the church; or wishing to bury any fresh rumour under so impertinent a supposition, he gravely pronounced that the young man was certainly a necromancer. (21)

The narration moves from directly reporting what Manfred thinks ("the folly of these ejaculations brought Manfred to himself") to a more distant mode that's not quite telling, but observing or speculating from an outside vantage point. This abrupt jump draws attention to the information that is suddenly withheld here, which is useful in plot terms, to drive suspense and curiosity in readers—but also helps construct an affective reader experience of confusion and

uncertainty. Sources of important information are proven changeable and capricious, leaving readers to navigate an obscure labyrinth of disclosures and omissions that don't seem to follow any organizing principle.

Just as the discursive approach to the fallen helmet scene centers the incomprehensible, almost imperceivable nature of the huge object and the calamitous event it stands in for, the novel's approach to interiority often emphasizes its inaccessibility. Prefacing many of the rare places where the narrative *does* dip into the moment-to-moment thoughts of a character are statements like "the passions that ensued must be conceived; they cannot be painted"[83]. The novel's discursive practices thus show a stylistic tendency to use indescribability as the primary tool for increasing or expressing suspense and pathos. At the same time, the narrator does occasionally and unobtrusively slip into describing the indescribable, creating a more unpredictable approach to storytelling.

This overt and inconsistent withholding of information creates what at first seems like a haphazard approach where the narrator may choose to reveal or withhold information merely for the sake of preserving the central mystery of the plot. It also draws attention to the novel's tendency towards narrative choices that privilege plot over verisimilitude, characterization, or narrative consistency. The disparate and contradictory approaches to using an omniscient narrator can make the story's unfolding seem deceptively jerky or uncoordinated. At the same time, a certain kind of narrative *consistency* contributes to readers' sense that the story is being told through a distant, coarsely focused perspective without fine gradations either in terms of plot or characterization. The tone and idiom of the narrative voice remains static through every level

[83] Walpole, 53. Also, "words cannot paint the astonishment of Isabella" or "words cannot paint the horror of the princess's situation" (23; 27).

of narrative attention or focalization. Even when the discourse briefly slips into describing the indescribable or revealing interior thoughts of a character, the narrative voice almost never adapts or changes, remaining in control of the telling even when disclosing more information or detail. Because of the predominance of this mode of broad, overt focalization that privileges *telling*, the novel can at first seem very broadly or even crudely sketched in terms of point of view and perspective.

However, *Otranto* plays with gradations of focalization just as it does with visual description. There are instances in which we get finer-grained glimpses of characters' thoughts (still relayed by the omniscient narrator), instances in which we *see* through a character's eyes with or without knowing what they know, and instances that so closely follow a character's thought patterns that the intensity of focalization approaches free indirect discourse[84].

One instance of a slightly closer lens on a character's thoughts appears when the narrator relays Isabella's reaction to the discovery of the helmet in the opening scene. The narrator paraphrases her reactions and reasoning on several points related to the situation, even offering a backwards-looking explanation for how she has formed her opinions of Manfred:

> Isabella, who had been treated by Hippolita like a daughter, and who returned that tenderness with equal duty and affection, was scarce less assiduous about the Princess; at the same time endeavouring to partake and lessen the weight of sorrow which she saw Matilda strove to suppress, for whom she had conceived the warmest sympathy of friendship. Yet her own situation could not help finding its place in her thoughts. She felt no concern for the death of young Conrad, except commiseration; and she was not sorry to be delivered from a marriage which had promised her little felicity, either from her destined bridegroom, or from the severe temper of Manfred, who, though he had distinguished her by great indulgence, had imprinted her mind with terror, from his causeless rigour to such amiable princesses as Hippolita and Matilda. (19)

[84] Almost always, the language cues aren't differentiated enough to really detect FID—the "voice" of narration remains the same, no matter the closeness of internal focalization—creating the distance that contributes to the sense of gaps and a "big," zoomed-out approach to characterization and interiority throughout the novel.

Here, the narrator provides more of Isabella's detailed, successive thoughts than the novel has yet shown for any character. While the narrator steps outside the moment to provide explanatory commentary about Isabella's past and motivations, most of the observations seem to follow Isabella's own train of thought (from Hippolita, to Matilda, to her own situation), though paraphrased by the narrator, not in her idiom. We are allowed to know what she knows with more detail and precision than in other instances, though in terms of both "who sees" and "who speaks," the omniscient narrator still mediates.

As we've seen, finer-grained visual description sometimes happens when the narrator focuses in on a character and briefly allows us to see through their eyes. Just before we see the situation in the courtyard through Manfred's point of view, we briefly dip into his perspective for half a sentence before being interrupted with commentary from the narrator:

> "Shocked with these lamentable sounds, and dreading he knew not what, he advanced hastily,—but what a sight for a father's eyes!—he beheld his child dashed to pieces." (18)

We do experience the sight of the helmet through Manfred's eyes—first perceiving "something that appeared to him a mountain of sable plumes," then tracking his advance towards the helmet along with his shock and dread, then trying to grapple with the existence of the helmet and noting the "quantity of black feathers" (18). Yet we're quickly pulled back out of his perspective to track him as he looks at the helmet, rather than seeing the helmet alongside him. Instead, we retreat to external focalization as Manfred "fixe[s] his eyes" on the object, "seem[s] less attentive," "touche[s]" and "examine[s] the fatal casque" (19). Then, before understanding the significance the helmet holds for Manfred, we revert to seeing the scene with our knowledge restricted to that of bystanders who can't guess why Manfred is behaving oddly (19).

These moments in which we glimpse the interior lives of the characters—either resting for a moment in their perspective or following their thoughts as mediated through the language and filter of the narrator—are both brief and rare.[85] Their rarity and their difference from the novel's main approaches to interiority help create readers' sense that the novel sees the world either through a single, distant point of view that tends toward omission and somewhat arbitrary restriction of knowledge, or through tiny scraps of closer individual experience, still mediated through the somewhat distant and officious voice that controls the text. It is perhaps even more jarring, then, to come upon one of the few instances of sustained internal focalization on a single character. These moments are the only instances in the entire novel that employ a different approach to narration and briefly allow a character's voice to overpower the narrator's.

In Isabella's first panicked flight of the novel, we follow her, step by step, from the moment she reaches the stairs after exiting Manfred's gallery (25) to her escape through the castle's subterraneous trap door (29). We track both her thoughts and her movements with a level of detail the novel hasn't yet allowed for more than a few sentences. The entire passage of her flight is long, maintains this same fineness of narrative attention consistently, and is entirely focalized through Isabella (with the possible exception of the sentence in which the narrator comments, "words cannot paint the horror of the princess's situation" (27)). Readers follow Isabella's logic step by step and see her remember specifics of the castle's structure as she thinks of them:

> As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she recollected a subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of St. Nicholas. Could she reach the altar before she was overtaken, she knew even Manfred's violence would not dare to profane the sacredness of the place; and she determined, if no other means of deliverance offered, to shut herself up for ever among the holy virgins whose convent

[85] vs. Brown, a big innovation, uncomplicatedly

> was contiguous to the cathedral. In this resolution, she seized a lamp that burned at the foot of the staircase, and hurried towards the secret passage. (26)

This passage also contains some of the most vivid description of the novel, though it is visceral rather than visual:

> An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. Every murmur struck her with new terror… (26)

The passage even occasionally reaches particularities of emotion and experience that are far more distinct and individualized than the typified and often melodramatic expressions of big feelings the narrator offers (such as terror, horror, and despair). The focus on depicting events detail by detail can sometimes yield a more particularized description of specific, individualized experience calibrated second-by-second in reaction to environment and situation. We see not just Isabella's terror, but also smaller emotions like "a kind of momentary joy" she feels when seeing even a gleam of light (27). Even when still in more distant, broad language and framing, this sustained, detailed attention to Isabella's interiority often attempts to depict each thought and action completely:

> In one of those moments she thought she heard a sigh. She shuddered, and recoiled a few paces. In a moment she thought she heard the step of some person. Her blood curdled; she concluded it was Manfred. Every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. (26)

But at the height of her panic and indecision, the narrator is drawn closer and closer to her perspective, enough that the novel slips into a moment of free indirect discourse:

> That lady, whose resolution had given way to terror the moment she had quitted Manfred, continued her flight to the bottom of the principal staircase. There she stopped, not knowing whither to direct her steps, nor how to escape from the impetuosity of the Prince. The gates of the castle <u>she knew</u> were locked, and guards placed in the court.

> Should she, as her heart prompted her, go and prepare Hippolita for the cruel destiny that awaited her, she did not doubt but Manfred would seek her there, and that his violence would incite him to double the injury he meditated, without leaving room for them to avoid the impetuosity of his passions. Delay might give him time to reflect on the horrid measures he had conceived, or produce some circumstance in her favour, if she could—for that night, at least—avoid his odious purpose.—*Yet where conceal herself? How avoid the pursuit he would infallibly make throughout the castle?* As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind… (25-6; underlining is mine for emphasis)

The description of Isabella's flight begins by reporting her thoughts and actions in aggregate, condensing her trip down the staircase into one phrase. Then, the narration focuses in, following her individual thoughts and reporting her reasoning in language that still sounds like the formal idiom and convoluted sentence structure of the narrator. Her logic is paraphrased, in loftier language and from a more distant explanatory or almost euphemistic stance: "that his violence would incite him to double the injury he meditated" is surely a worry that would not be phrased in this way as a passing, panicked thought (25-6).

The next sentence sounds more like what might be Isabella's own internal speech: "Delay might give him time to reflect on the horrid measures he had conceived, or produce some circumstance in her favour, if she could—for that night, at least—avoid his odious purpose." Finally, we slip into definitive free indirect discourse: "Yet where conceal herself!" (26). The narrative discourse has focused down to the finest level, where story and discourse time are almost the same, and Isabella's thoughts are represented as closely and tonally accurately as is possible. We soon retreat to a slightly more distant view of Isabella's thoughts, and when the passage ends as Isabella exits through the trap door, the novel immediately turns back to dialogue and to occasionally reporting small pieces of characters' interiority with much broader levels of detail and complexity (29).

This dichotomous approach to focalization and narrative perspective sometimes gives the impression of being a haphazard or hurried way to communicate the most essential parts of the

story. These disconcerting forays into close depictions of interiority fit with a narrative approach that prioritizes plot and suspense, where the feelings and thoughts of characters are only occasionally necessary to maintain the necessary anxiety and pity in the reader. While the brief periods of internal focalization appear infrequently and thrust the reader into a mode that they haven't come to expect from the discourse of the novel, they work to purposefully create a sense of mismatch in scope and depth of information and affect, not just in service of the plot. The pointedly opposite approaches create a parallel structure to the gap-defining approach to visual description and detail—the distant and typified view of events, punctuated by occasional glimpses of subtler gradations of thought and feeling, only serves to demarcate what readers can't access. This emphasizes the novel's careful, almost manipulative control of the story. In the first chapters of the novel, readers are taught to attend to these patches of controlled access to characters' inner lives and track how and when they appear. Though rare, these moments of even semi-sustained internal focalization become rarer and less deep as the novel progresses and as characters have fewer and fewer choices available to them. Knowing that the level of the story *could* zoom in to the level of such fine-grained tracking of character motivation and thought also makes readers suspicious of all the other instances in which we now know that this kind of insight and attention is being purposefully withheld.

Characterization Through Active Dwelling

It is commonplace, especially in the Gothic, to view characters as types, psychoanalytic symbols who interact with Gothic spaces in heavily metaphorical, often Freudian terms. [86] The Gothic's focus on the interior—both of the house and the mind—has created the mantra, "what

[86] Some psychoanalytic Gothic criticism with a bearing on characterization: Fincher; Halberstam; Perry; Day; Baldick and Mighall. See Williams, *Art of Darkness*: "Instead of using Freud to read Gothic, we should use Gothic to read Freud" (243).

really haunts them is what drives them on the inside."[87] But to exclude the literal and overlook the power represented in physical, everyday interactions with space is to lose the fundamental complexity of the Gothic and the mode's ability to be both things at once. Brown is right that in creating the Gothic mode, Walpole has, in some ways, "displaced the center of human concern from behavior and action to the private resources of the mind and the emotions."[88] Behavior and action, however, remain at the heart of the Gothic, and not just for metaphorical purposes, but to demonstrate the intricacies of real power relations.[89]

One effect of the pattern of unequal dips into characters' consciousnesses is that it attracts readers' attention to and expands the narrative time spent in these moments. Almost always, this means drawing out and magnifying a character's interaction with space and place (as in Isabella's flight through the subterranean labyrinth on her way out of the castle) or their attempt to fit outsized new ideas into the scope of their world (as Manfred does in his encounter with the helmet). The parts of the novel that feature closer depiction of characters' movements and physical surroundings are also opportunities for moments of deeper characterization than is common, or at least easily apparent, in most of the novel.

Before examining the deeper and less noticeable way *Otranto* uses space to create character, let's highlight the overblown, typifying approach of the novel's "showier" layer of its two-part pattern. *Otranto*'s smaller physical movements and patterns the novel uses to define characters with more gradation often go unnoticed in comparison to the exaggerated use of physical shorthand to create sweeping, obvious, or overstuffed symbolism and metaphor. This

[87] Brown, 31.
[88] Brown, 32.
[89] Characterization and/or interiority in the Gothic: Sedgwick, Alcala, Henderson, Orr, Phillips, Tatar, Auerbach (Amanda), Castle, "The Spectralization of the Other;" Howells. For the relationship between character psyche/identity and scale in *Otranto*, see Campbell, "'I am No Giant': Horace Walpole, Heterosexual Incest, and Love Among Men."

shorthand of physical occupation of space is often taken to its largest, broadest extreme, creating the kind of soon-to-become cliché association in Gothic literature between physical structure (architecture) and scarcely-masked hidden meanings. Architectural "nether parts" are "explored in a panicked defense of chastity;"[90] subterraneous passages between church and castle hint at Catholicism's insidious influence on home life. Theodore "indulge[s] his curiosity in exploring the secret recesses" of the caves to which he retreats and "ha[s] not penetrated far" before he encounters Isabella and offers to "conduct [her] into the most private cavity of these rocks" and "at the hazard of [his] life, to guard their entrance against every living thing" (69-71).

However, this approach to space is included almost cursorily, and often used for comic relief. The novel itself is aware of its own melodrama and almost farcical reliance on larger-than-life metaphor. Emotional and moral statements are phrased in physical terms to an almost comical degree. Servants, affrighted by evidence of Otranto's ancestral curse, vow to never again venture to "open a door that is shut" (33). Even as Jerome piously scolds Manfred for his sins, the novel can't resist a punny jab: "the judgments so recently fallen on thy house ought to have inspired thee with other thoughts" (47). This is part of the characteristic Walpolean Gothic that so irritated early critics—the seemingly unconscious juxtaposition of seriousness and play.

For *Otranto*, the seriousness lies not in the metaphorical resonance of certain spaces, but in the details—those details of space that are implied, rather than described. The novel certainly invokes the "subterraneous labyrinth" as terrifying, a descent into unknown depths, an architectural double-entendre that can quickly turn sinister in the Gothic, especially when read through the lens of feminist criticism. Following Sedgwick, Clemens sees "moments of crisis" as associated with "violent breaking, disruption, or transgression of boundaries: doors, walls,

[90] Booth, 205.

locked drawers…violence, pursuit, and rape occur in these lower depths, yet they are also the realms where valuable discoveries are made."[91] (Clemens 7-8). In *Otranto,* these traditional rules of gender, power, and Gothic space are skewed and sometimes subtly inverted. The novel's second pattern, visible when attending to the finer gradations of detail and narration, belies the exaggerated broad strokes of the first.

The subterraneous labyrinth in *Otranto* turns out to be a place of escape as well as the place where we see the most agency and interiority from Isabella, in the entire novel. The threat of rape[92] is made in the family portrait gallery; Isabella is saved, in part, by a closing door (29) rather than one violently being penetrated. Rather than the "violent breaking" or transgression of boundaries like doors, *Otranto* sees an opening door, or the creation of a door where there is none (as when the portrait steps out of his frame) as freeing, at least for Isabella and Matilda. The only "violent" or abrupt interactions at physical thresholds in the beginning of the novel are acts of power and exclusion, in which doors are shut. Matilda, Manfred, and Theodore all get doors (or trap-doors) slammed in their faces: Matilda is shut out by Manfred at the very start of the novel; Manfred, in a quick reversal, is then barred from entering the gallery by the ghost/portrait/castle in a move that gives Isabella more time to escape. Theodore, in a characteristically bumbling attempt at chivalry, blundering in the dark, allows the trap-door of the subterraneous passage to fall shut, when it could have served as his escape.

At first glance, just as the novel eschews unnecessary description and fine delineation of setting, it also takes a broad approach to characterization. Early on, big movements, emotions, and actions become associated with certain characters, establishing them as exemplars of

[91] Clemens, 7-8.
[92] See Booth, "Anachronism, Heterotopia, and Gender in Anglophone Gothic," 204.

character types. Hippolita swoons, Manfred rages, and even the servants exhibit stereotypically exaggerated reactions. The novel often seems to operate through or borrow from melodrama or farce—sometimes both at the same time. At first glance, characters seem to react and behave in exaggerated, uncomplicated ways. But even the most cliché emotional expression often covers over or stems from a more interesting way of interacting with the world.

In his "Preface to the First Edition," Walpole expounds upon his own powers of characterization:

> The characters are well drawn, and still better maintained. Terror, the author's principal engine, prevents the story from ever languishing; and it is so often contrasted by pity, that the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions. (6)

As Berenstein says in response, "Anyone who has read *The Castle of Otranto* would be hard pressed to ratify this description."[93] Berenstein focuses on the digressive nature of the novel, and like most critics gives no attention to the characterization in *Otranto*, citing the use of typified and two-dimensional characters as in line with the Gothic's origins in the romance. But as I will show, in *Otranto*, characterization, physical space, and discursive manipulation of time are linked together to create a subtle kind of characterization that helps construct the novel's ideological framework, especially regarding ways that female characters may negotiate domestic structures. In *Otranto*, the novel's machinery *seems* exaggerated and mechanical, but is functional in flexible, intimate, closely observed ways—often hidden under bombast.

Characters' actions and thoughts are presented almost exclusively in association with their physical movement within the architectural features surrounding them. Physical space is not just more closely depicted at the same time as closer characterization happens—the spatial often works as a shorthand for reflecting character personality, motivation, and ways of thinking.

[93] Bernstein, 53.

Furthermore, even in the storyworld, characters themselves implicitly understand their world and their place in it in terms of their relationship with and movement through the physical spaces they occupy. When Hippolita swoons, for example, in her first action of the story, it is the result of what first seems a mysterious, almost instinctive understanding of events. She faints before there is any hint of what has happened to her son, solely based on her knowledge of the physical castle and what it's like to inhabit it. That the servant has returned without having "staid long enough to have crossed the court to Conrad's apartment" (18) seems to have special significance for Hippolita, who becomes "anxious for her son" and faints "without knowing what was the matter" (18). This comes across as an almost supernatural motherly instinct or the kind of predictive emotional sensitivity common in melodrama—but the few details included hint that her instinct could be based on insider knowledge and experience of the castle. The sparseness of the rest of the scene calls attention to the few facts included—the physical condition of the servant and the knowledge that he hadn't had time to cross the courtyard.

This is a little different from Sedgwick's insight on Gothic surfaces and characterization. In "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel," Sedgwick finds that the surfaces of Gothic architecture are more than they appear, that while "Gothic conventions about writing give primacy to surfaces, they by no means exclude depth but admit it in certain slippages,"[94] creating what Sedgwick calls a third dimension that is neither surface nor depth. Sedgwick extracts a useful example of this quality of Gothic surfaces from *Udolpho*: "How casual the slippage between surface and depth can be—that is, how readily a third dimension can be assimilated to the notion of 'surface'—appears in the odd solution to a persistent mystery in

[94] Sedgwick, 260.

Udolpho. How have invisible strangers infiltrated Château-le-Blanc?"[95] This crucial plot development relies on the physical attributes of the castle's literal surfaces: "the chateau turns out to be riddled with passages, all masquerading indetectably as walls."[96] While Sedgwick sees "the repetitiveness and fixity inherent in the Gothic presentation of character as "represent[ing] a powerfully consistent working out of a dialectic inherent in fictional writing," despite their tendency to "ma[ke] Gothic characters seem devitalized or two-dimensional."[97] The mode of characterization exemplified in Hippolyta's swoon, however, subtly provides dimensionality and indicates the presence of Hippolyta's complex interior life. We are not given access to Hippolyta's interiority—we never see through her eyes, or know what she knows, and the narrator is strikingly spare in reporting her thoughts, but the evidence of her spatial knowledge is telling.

Everywhere in *Otranto*, melodramatic exaggeration draws attention to surfaces—external behavior and bodily affect, physical objects, the underdescribed basics of the castle's architecture, almost obscuring the intimate, close detail of the everyday life within the castle that is not covered over by flashy surfaces, but which is an essential part of them. Thus, this type of characterization does not lead us to read into, decode, or plumb depths that lie beneath the physical and the everyday—it asks us to consider the way characters interact with, mobilize, and manipulate the physical realities of both castle and patriarchy, as well as the intimate knowledge of both that certain characters have gained through prolonged contact with the manifestations of castle/patriarchy. Underneath many of the aspects of the novel that constitute characterization

[95] Sedgwick, 268 note 14.
[96] Sedgwick, 269 note 14.
[97] Sedgwick, 256.

lies this shorthand, a framework that conveys both plot and characterization in terms of the physicality of the castle.[98]

Kate Flint's analysis of the everyday in realist novels applies perfectly here: "to explore someone else's everyday—and this, after all, is what fiction can offer us—is to catch them off guard; to witness the mundanity and associative confusion of their thoughts."[99] (409). She continues:

> It is precisely from one's habitation of the everyday that a special kind of heightened attention can develop, whether to the particularities of everyday existence, to the specificities, histories, and associations of material objects, to the engagement of the senses with the world that surrounds one, to sudden, unsought-for epiphanies and the accidentally miraculous, or to the mind's ability to travel back to the past, or forward in speculation, giving a temporal flexibility to the presentism and sameness of the ordinary moment.[100]

This is the key to the ideological implications of *Otranto*'s discursive moves. If the "story" of *Otranto*, its basic plot and most memorable events, suggests that the only domestic ideal is threatened, tainted lines of aristocratic inheritance, the novel's characterization (along with other features of its discourse such as chronotope, visual description and figurative language, and approach to narration and interiority) exposes the domestic, everyday systems of the patriarchy and sees the everyday as a way to paradoxically disturb the functioning of the domestic status quo.

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[98] Compare: "*Udolpho* engenders a human as well as a spatial matrix whereby scene and setting have a continuous, cumulative effect on the flow of the narrative. Circumscribed within the boundaries of the novel, picturesque views become indispensable agents through which the communal intuitive perception of the characters and the links between past and present, between sensibility and virtue, are defined and developed. Radcliffe's strategy, therefore, is not merely to contrive a succession of landscapes in which, as Walter Scott remarks, the characters 'are entirely subordinate to the scenes in which they are placed' but rather to animate these tableaux with the collective picturesque vision of the characters so that the series of views, the 'tour' itself, becomes an integral part of the kinetic energy of the novel (Kostelnik 31); See Walter Scott, *Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists* (London, 1887), p. 563.

[99] Flint, 409.

[100] Flint, 410.

Active Stasis, Threshold Moments, and Micro-Journeying: Patterns of Character Movement in *Otranto*

Characterization goes hand in hand with navigation and knowledge of Otranto's castle and landscape. Hippolita's most salient quality—almost her only quality—is her deference to and care for her husband. This characteristic is conveyed through her willingness, or assumed willingness, to be physically placed within or relocated outside the castle at his whim. Scenes in which she appears most often involve her being relegated to her chamber or banned from Manfred's territory within the castle. Whether she is being prevented from visiting her husband in his room or from leaving her room, or obediently refusing to participate in discussions about her marriage, her actions and duties are often framed through the terminology of domain and place. Manfred, attempting to discuss the divorce alone with Jerome, says explicitly: "If you have aught to say attend me to my chamber; I do not use to let my wife be acquainted with the secret affairs of my state; they are not within a woman's province" (45). Even the language used to describe Hippolita (in the rare instances in which she is described either by the narrator or a character) emphasizes her submissiveness through the metaphor of physical movement and bounded territory. Jerome "dread[s] Hippolita's *unbounded* submission to the will of her Lord," confident, like Manfred, that it will be easy to "withdraw her from [the world] entirely" and send her to a convent (58; emphasis mine).

This pattern of characterization continues: each character is, largely, a type rather than an individualized or finely drawn personage—but when they are individuated or portrayed more specifically, it is almost always through movement and relationship to space and place. Hippolita is the long-suffering wife, berated for her sterility, yet still disproportionately loyal to her husband, the unreasonable tyrant. Even Matilda and Isabella are distinguished only by their

familial relations—they have the same characteristics and behave in the same ways, and they even repeat very similar scenes. They are often referred to in tandem ("the ladies" (19), "the young ladies" (21), "both these lovely young women" (23)),[101] foreshadowing their exchangeability and the use of their marriages as currency, which will clinch the plot (97). The two young ladies become individuated only in terms of where they go, not how they think or act. For instance, Isabella follows Matilda's actions in the first scenes of the novel, only showing signs of her own motivation and thought through her decisions about where to move her body in response to events. She stays behind with Matilda "to avoid showing any impatience for the bridegroom, for whom, in truth, she had conceived little affection" (18), and then flees in reaction to Manfred's overtures. The women come to be differentiated only because of their relationship to Manfred. Isabella is summoned to the gallery and welcomed inside—while just previously, Matilda's attempt to enter there was met with a door slammed in her face (22). We only hear about "the timidity of her nature" when Matilda is sent to the physical threshold of her father's domain, knowing she will be excluded.

Manfred is delineated more carefully than usual at certain points in the story—almost exclusively through his patterns of bodily movement and interaction with the physical environment. He begins the novel impatient but in control, sending people on journeys throughout the castle (18). As he is thrown from his secure position by the appearance of the helmet, he slowly begins to direct the movement around him less and less. His own patterns of motion, and his relationship with the physical environment around him, begin to reflect his uncertainty and loss of power. At first, he still plays what seems his typical role in the castle,

[101] See Orr, "Repetition, Reversal, and the Gothic: The Pirate and St. Ronan's Well" for a discussion of doubles and repetition in Scott's Gothic novels.

slamming doors, barring entry to his family, directing where people sit (23), shutting doors "impetuously" (23), and sending servants here and there. But quite quickly, he loses control over the spaces he inhabits. The door to the gallery is "clapped-to with violence by an invisible hand," "resist[ing] his utmost efforts" when he tries to pursue Isabella (25). He starts his characteristic pattern of movement, pacing, which happens more and more frequently as his situation unravels. He becomes more uncertain as the story reaches its climax, his body mirroring his indecision and panic, until even the representation of his thoughts starts to take on the form of his pacing and wavering.

By the time Frederic arrives in search of his daughter, Manfred's feelings are depicted with the same rhythm as his footsteps: he is "earnest to know what was become of Isabella, yet equally afraid of their knowing; impatient to pursue her, yet dreading to have them join in the pursuit" (65). This stylistic move, where a character's thoughts and path through a Gothic castle run in parallel, aligning more and more as the tension of the story increases, is not uncommon in Gothic fiction. But this almost always happens when presenting the thoughts of the protagonist in flight (as when Isabella descends the staircases of Otranto, and we sink deeper and deeper into her interiority as her thoughts become more and more specific (25-6)). In future Gothic novels, it is rare for this particular confluence of thought, bodily movement, and narrative tension to happen with the villain or tyrant as its subject. More interestingly, when applied to a male villain, this technique always occurs in a moment of stasis or suspended motion, as with Manfred's pacing here.[102]

The lead up to Matilda's death is when both Matilda and Isabella display the most agency over their own actions, and when Isabella even takes charge of Manfred's movements and

[102] See later discussion of *The Monk* for another example.

speech in addition to Hippolita's and Theodore's.[103] Manfred is described as not even having ultimate control over his bodily movements, himself believing that "heaven directed [his] bloody hand" (100). He sees himself as having less and less agency as he sees *Otranto*'s prophecy coming true—and the novel spends less and less time describing his movements and actions, allowing more mentions of the ways Isabella and Matilda direct their own placement (and, very temporarily, begin directing the movement of others).

Both Matilda and Isabella, though devoid of almost any other characteristic, show a keen and detailed knowledge of the intricacies of the castle and a practical determination that makes escaping it possible. Isabella's original flight from Manfred is successful because she has intimate knowledge of the castle and is able to quickly employ this knowledge to effect her escape (the locked trap-door "opens with a spring, of which [she] know[s] the secret" (28)). Theodore, who is "unacquainted with the castle," persists in projecting a chivalric story onto their encounter at the trap-door, yet simply delays Isabella's flight with his platitudes. Isabella and Matilda are the ones who rescue him, at multiple points in the novel—and always at the same time as he is professing to want to rescue them, yet waffling and delaying action. Both Isabella and Matilda reference specific parts of the castle frequently in their speech and reported thought, and scenes focused on them allow readers more detailed access to the castle's interior than any other.

When we take into account narrative time as well as focalization and delineation of detail, we can see that characters' movements create a pattern of stasis, return, and delay that invests narrative energy into the moments preceding escape—especially Isabella's and Matilda's detailed practical plans for escape—while highlighting the power structures that make attempts

[103] Walpole, 102.

at escape from the castle into fleeting, iterative attempts that only result in being more firmly enclosed within its walls. The finer-drawn map of character movements through both the castle and the rest of Manfred's territory recreates this eddying pattern of movement multiple times within the larger pattern of cyclical return to the heart of the castle. The novel creates a pattern of periods of stagnation or stasis that still contain smaller movements—movements that *might* be able to lead to a true escape, if it weren't for the interference of *Otranto*'s male characters.

At the brink of each near-escape, the storytelling lingers in a way that seems excessive if it were simply functioning to create suspense. The biggest actions of the plot are Isabella's escape and her subsequent flight and recapture, culminating in her eventual escape from Manfred's influence after Matilda's death and the fateful lightning strike. However, the narrative discourse devotes very little time to actual moments of escape. Isabella's initial escape, for instance, is relayed in one swift sentence: "Saying this, she descended the steps precipitately; and as the stranger hastened to follow her, he let the door slip out of his hands: it fell, and the spring closed over it" (29). This is the last we see of Isabella for quite a while—and it follows pages and pages tracking her every move as she escapes towards the trap door. The culmination of the most suspenseful and most finely-portrayed passage of the novel in this almost matter-of-fact half-sentence ("she descended the steps precipitately") is almost jarring, even as it serves as a useful hinge for turning to Theodore's point of view. The relative ease with which Isabella finds the trap door and exits the castle, combined with Theodore's long-winded speeches on the difficulty of helping her and his unselfish devotion to doing so, creates a sense of anticlimax but also highlights these stances as two altogether different approaches to escaping tyranny: chivalric rescue versus practical physical movement. It's as if the incestuous tyrant and escape plot are

merely the background for negotiating how to be in these spaces, and who gets to decide who leaves, when, and how.

Later, when Matilda helps Theodore escape, the same pattern of interruption, truncated chivalrous speeches, and unnecessary cyclical delay has grown. Theodore thwarts Matilda's purpose with protestations of love and more courteous speeches, while Matilda must keep interrupting him with practicalities. After her first instruction to "fly" (66), she tells him to leave six more times:

1	"Fly; the doors of thy prison are open: my father and his domestics are absent; but they may soon return. Be gone in safety; and may the angels of heaven direct thy course!" (66)
2	"Still thou art in an error," said the Princess; "but this is no time for explanation. Fly, virtuous youth, while it is in my power to save thee: should my father return, thou and I both should indeed have cause to tremble." (66)
3	"I run no risk," said Matilda, "but by thy delay. Depart; it cannot be known that I have assisted thy flight." (67)
4	"Forbear, and begone," said Matilda. (67)
5	"…but once more I command thee to be gone: thy blood, which I may preserve, will be on my head, if I waste the time in vain discourse." (67)
6	"…but ask no more; I tremble to see thee still abide here; fly to the sanctuary." (68)
7	"Go! heaven be thy guide!—and sometimes in thy prayers remember—Matilda!" (68)
8	Theodore, regardless of the tempest, would have urged his suit: but the Princess, dismayed, retreated hastily into the castle, and commanded the youth to be gone with an air that would not be disobeyed. (68)

Finally, Matilda gives him specific directions based on her knowledge of the castle and its people, directing him with almost military precision:

> And the Princess, preceding Theodore softly, carried him to her father's armoury, where, equipping him with a complete suit, he was conducted by Matilda to the postern-gate.
>
> "Avoid the town," said the Princess, "and all the western side of the castle. 'Tis there the search must be making by Manfred and the strangers; but hie thee to the opposite quarter. Yonder behind that forest to the east is a chain of rocks, hollowed into a labyrinth of caverns that reach to the sea coast. There thou mayst lie concealed, till thou canst make signs to some vessel to put on shore, and take thee off. Go!

After "[flinging] himself at her feet" once more, Theodore finally leaves. Like Isabella, he has immediately, almost automatically, fallen in love with the person who helped him escape Manfred's domain.

In the middle space of the novel (before closure shuts down possibility), *Otranto*'s castle functions as a Deleuzian *espace quelconque*, "a perfectly singular space which has merely lost its homogeneity—the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts—so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways; a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible." [104] Possibility sparks at the outset of the novel when Conrad's death cancels the wedding. For Isabella, but also for everyone in the world of *Otranto*, the structures of marriage and male inheritance are made temporarily vulnerable, less inevitable. At first, Isabella and Matilda begin moving through the castle in ways they hadn't before, creating unusual links between the castle's various spaces (and thus, their traditional metaphorical resonances). Characters converge and diverge through what seems like outrageous coincidence, and their meetings enact a destabilization of the roles their character-type should play in a romance (such as the gender inversion of rescue scenes). Characters' roles, including their characteristic paths for moving through the castle, are in flux. In the end, this realm of possibility must be shut down, and it is actually this opening up of the possible, the new journeys within the space of the castle, that allows the misunderstanding that makes Manfred kill Matilda—because *he* thinks he knows the spaces in which she might go and those that are normally socially barred to her.

[104] Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Continuum, 2005)., Deleuze 113.

Symptoms of this unmooring from rigid patriarchal systems appear in the physical tendencies of other characters. Even Hippolyta gets one moment of exceeding her passive role, in a brief rebellion expressed in her determination not to be moved after Matilda has been stabbed:

> Hippolita, scarce more alive than her daughter, was regardless of everything but her; but when the tender Isabella's care would have likewise removed her, while the surgeons examined Matilda's wound, she cried,
>
> "Remove me! never, never! I lived but in her, and will expire with her." (101)

Her last act of the novel is one of spatial resistance—before she is shuffled off to live out her life in a convent.

In the final pages of the novel, Matilda is briefly able to direct her own movements before her death. Even though "Theodore and the monks besought her earnestly to suffer herself to be borne into the convent," she prevails, forceful enough that, "placing her on a litter, they conveyed her thither as she requested" (100). Isabella, in the flurry of movement surrounding Matilda's death, is the one taking charge of the movements of others: she "t[akes] upon herself to order Manfred to be borne to his apartment, while she "cause[s] Matilda to be conveyed to the nearest chamber" (101). Manfred is relegated to passive actions that don't affect the situation—he "follow[s] the litter in despair" and "dashe[s] himself on the ground" (101).

But once Matilda is dead, "fate presses onward to its work," and the narration turns almost exclusively into passive voice. In the middle of the courtyard where Conrad's body was first discovered, Manfred is caught by his ancestral prophecy. The clap of thunder and "the clank of more than mortal armour was heard," the image of saint Nicholas "was seen," and "the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force" (103). Events are presented ever more quickly, and the final explanations are rushed, the essential information behind the prophecy, driver of the whole plot of the novel, revealed in a few paragraphs. The stories of both

Ricardo, Manfred's ancestor, and Victoria, Theodore's grandmother, are each founded on coincidence and fate, seeming difficult to grasp, yet characters are so stunned by events, and by the supernatural thunder-clap and the demolition of half the castle, that no one, not even Manfred, requires proof of the castle's new ownership.[105] The "daughter of which Victoria was delivered," Jerome's wife and Theodore's mother, is not even named, and the "authentic writing" left to prove her identity is meaningless: Manfred declares, "the horrors of these days, and the vision we have but now seen, all corroborate thy evidence beyond a thousand parchments" (105).

The narrative is rushing to a conclusion, removing agency and action from all characters, even in the narrative voice used to describe them. The final dispositions of the remaining characters are left for one last, sparse paragraph, conveyed from a distant point of view, and summing up a large period of time in a few sentences:

> The Friar ceased. The disconsolate company retired to the remaining part of the castle. In the morning Manfred signed his abdication of the principality, with the approbation of Hippolita, and each took on them the habit of religion in the neighbouring convents. Frederic offered his daughter to the new Prince, which Hippolita's tenderness for Isabella concurred to promote. But Theodore's grief was too fresh to admit the thought of another love; and it was not until after frequent discourses with Isabella of his dear Matilda, that he was persuaded he could know no happiness but in the society of one with whom he could for ever indulge the melancholy that had taken possession of his soul. (105)

All suspense and intrigue is over—the novel no longer takes pains to produce terror *or* pity in the reader. Manfred has been overthrown as a tyrant, and part of his castle symbolically destroyed—but the remaining characters retreat to the structure that is left. Isabella has escaped a quasi-incestuous union with Manfred, but her marriage (mentioned briefly, obliquely, and from Theodore's point of view) is still oddly entangled—both she and Theodore are the last remaining

[105] "The castle represents desubjectification: within its walls one may be 'subjected' to a force that is utterly resistant to the individual's attempt to impose his or her own order" (Punter and Byron 262).

heirs of Alfonso, however distantly related. Her marriage is not a triumphant comeuppance and rebuke to Manfred, but an opportunity for Theodore to indulge in his chivalric view of the world.

Mapping Inescapability

If one were to map the novel considering *broad* plot points, actual exits from the castle rather than micro-movements, character trajectories would create a series of linear movements out beyond the confines of the castle—never reaching beyond Manfred's actual domain—and then swooping inevitably back to the heart of the castle, again and again. On the largest scale, Isabella and Theodore iteratively reach farther and farther from the center of the castle—yet each flight from the site of power only creates a correspondingly swifter and more permanent return to the central structure. The characters who venture farthest from the castle are those who will, by the end of the narrative, become most inextricably tied to it. The narratable parts of the story are all about this inevitable return, whatever the scale. In the world of the narrative, places beyond *Otranto*'s borders are unreal, unreachable, almost mythical. Sites at first described as beyond Manfred's reach or so definingly separate as to be withdrawn from the world entirely turn out to be inextricably connected with the castle and its familial structure and tangled inheritance. The altar of St. Nicholas's church, presented as the goal of Isabella's flight and a haven beyond Manfred's reach, is proven a permeable and temporary refuge. The convents themselves are not only connected to the castle subterraneously, but we eventually realize they were founded by Manfred's line as a crucial step in his nefarious accession to power. Even the far-flung travelers referenced in the family's history are pulled back into the patriarchal demesne as part of the narrative's action. By the end of the novel, we realize that every major player in the plot turns out to be centrally connected to *Otranto* and its legacy. This journeying out, then being drawn back in is part of Gothic suspense, the tension of flight and capture, movement and confinement

that will become characteristic of the Gothic. In other works, however, it will sometimes lead to escape velocity, even for the most disempowered characters.

Closure, Inheritance & Domestic Ideology

A predominant theory of the Gothic, whether from a psychoanalytic, social, or formal perspective, is that it is a mode that grapples with the unresolvable.[106] This makes the issue of narrative closure particularly fruitful. Elizabeth Napier posits that Gothic fiction has an "inclination towards fragmentation, instability, and moral ambivalence,"[107] and thus fails because it can't reconcile itself. Haggerty, too, is interested in what he sees as a fundamental paradox of the "Gothic novel": if Gothic is a mode of liminality and fragmentation, how can it be represented in the closed form of the novel? He writes, "the imagery of a nightmare is at odds with the objective and social terms of novelistic discourse; the unstructured nature of a dream contradicts the durational and structural demands of the novel; and the terrifying aspect of a nightmare is mediated or may even be rendered ridiculous by the novel's matter-of-fact quality."[108] Haggerty answers Napier, arguing that the Gothic does not fail, even if it cannot achieve narrative closure or resolve its contradictions. A corollary to Haggerty's argument might be that, in embracing fragmentation and irresolution, the Gothic does not fail—but neither does the novel. Multivocal, hungry, fluid as the form of the novel is,[109] it is perhaps the ultimate pairing with the mode of the Gothic, and the best place to study both novel theory and Gothic forms.

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[106] Brewster, 316.
[107] Elizabeth Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-century Literary Form*, 5.
[108] Haggerty, 3.
[109] See Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," on heteroglossia and the novel's tendency to subsume and incorporate other forms.

It is no wonder, then, that even in *Otranto*'s dry, decisive ending which seems the definition of conservative closure, we can see hints that we shouldn't take the "moral" of the story at face value. The abruptness of the ending and the distant voice of the final paragraph function to discomfit readers and destroy any sense of satisfaction in the neatness and predictability of the dénouement. The final paragraph zooms out and out, moving from the moments after the final event of the novel, to the morning after, to an indeterminate and vague period of time after narrated events. This paraphrase of what might be the crucial plot point in another story—the decision to marry—only leaves Isabella even more decidedly invisible, both within the grammar of the paragraph (she is the object of one brief thought, never a subject) and in terms of the final moves of the plot. The last action she takes is interrupted: she "was accompanying the afflicted Hippolita to her apartment" (103) and then she disappears from active participation in the narrative entirely, only referred to again in the final sentence. This first Gothic novel ends by folding its secondary pattern of smaller events and subtler movements into the larger pattern, ending at a distance, on a grander scale.

The foremost feature of Otranto, the castle,[110] is that you cannot escape it. A subtle feature of *Otranto*, the novel, is that you can't quite escape its world, either. In exorcising the spectre of incest and Catholicism from the story and enacting a swift, ostensibly happy ending, the novel brings its domestic mores up to date with those of Walpole's readers. While they may have read the ending as a satisfying one, with Manfred properly punished and a true male heir discovered, this closure (accomplished in the space of one short paragraph) doesn't just restore the status quo—it updates *Otranto*'s situation to look more like that of its readers. This could be

[110] Again, it is never fully visually described as in the kinds of set pieces of description we will come to consider a defining aspect of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel.

comforting. But it also has the effect of hinting that they can't separate themselves from this foreign, medieval past as much as they'd like to think. As the world of *Otranto* comes rushing to meet the reader's world in the novel's swift dénouement, readers are not left to exit the distorted world of *Otranto* with the end of narratability, but like *Otranto*'s characters are themselves sucked into the whirlpool logic of the novel, left wondering whether the plot continues on their side of the page. In this way, even the Gothic novel that critics most often see as conservative, presenting a definitive vision of the true "gothic home" in Fraiman's terms[111] (and the true, Bakhtinian chronotope of the castle), still offers a light at the end of the tunnel—the hope of a way out.

[111] "The house that imprisons rather than shelters women; that keeps them in thrall to norms of marital femininity; that hides domestic violence, exploits female labor, and thwarts female ambition; that binds some women in domestic service to others at the expense of their own households"(18)). *Otranto* certainly is all of these.

Chapter Two

Home and Anti-home in the 1790s Gothic

> *Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavouring to recal her scattered thoughts!*
>
> —Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria*

Thus begins Mary Wollstonecraft's only foray into Gothic fiction. *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria* (1798)[112] engages with Gothic discourse purposefully and with self-awareness, carefully situating itself in relation to the Gothic tropes and stylistic impulses it invokes from the very first line. The novel's first move is to draw a distinction between the techniques and purposes of the Gothic and Wollstonecraft's own aims in inserting readers into the (implicitly all too real) world of her protagonist. Wollstonecraft casts Gothic scenes and images as artistically "conjured up," full of fantastic and imaginative description, meant to absorb and move readers in a pleasurable way. Maria's situation, on the other hand, is insistently physical and grounded in her literal and social position in the world. In immediate contrast to Gothic dreams, castles, and chimeras and the lofty language Wollstonecraft uses to describe them, her plight is at first described with unusual simplicity and directness: she sits in the corner of her cell.

Wollstonecraft is fundamentally a writer of nonfiction, and *Maria* is certainly more of a philosophical novel than a true Gothic novel. The work is often more treatise than novel. But while Wollstonecraft distances her mental asylum from the apparently airy Gothic creations

[112] Begun in 1796, published posthumously.

found in fiction, *Maria*'s political aims could not be accomplished without its Gothic slant. Maria's "mansion of despair" might seem like a more realistic prison than a ruined European castle, especially to Wollstonecraft's contemporary readers—but it creates the same aesthetic experience as any traditional castle and serves as a site for exploring the horror that can be found in any abode. It is actually *Maria*'s most novelistic elements and its most stylish, descriptive scenes that become the most persuasive. These are places where Wollstonecraft manages to *show* the plight of woman, taking a break from outraged invectives, but more importantly where the novel also gets to the heart of how physical and metaphorical domestic spaces, just like the physical and metaphorical Gothic, can expose some of the truths and workings of the structure of the patriarchal household.

Wollstonecraft chose to embed her argument within the framework of a Gothic novel, and did so quite painstakingly, working on the novel through revision after revision and explicitly studying to transform herself into a novel-writer.[113] It must have been important to her that Maria's story should be bookended or compared with Gothic tropes of confinement, oppression, and neglect. Set in this Gothic frame, the central story of the novel—Maria's separation from her husband—conveys a completely different set of ideological implications than the same story inset into a novel of a different genre. In fact, as Gary Kelly notes, the main plot of *Maria* could easily have been lifted out of another eighteenth-century novel, with the only difference its genre and ideological implications: Mrs. Fitzpatrick's episode in *Tom Jones* is a (picaresque) source for the same basic plot.[114] *Maria*'s Gothic frame therefore does a lot of the

[113] See Kelly: "She herself reviewed almost nothing but fiction, in order to help herself to become a better novelist." (204) and Godwin (*Memoirs): "*She tried 'several forms, which she successively rejected', and 'wrote many parts of the work again and again'"(72).

[114] See Kelly, 210 and *Tom Jones*, book 11 ch. 4, for the Mrs. Fitzpatrick episode. In *Tom Jones*, Mrs. Fitzpatrick's story of being literally locked up by her husband serves as a warning to Sophia Western—not so much a fullhearted indictment of the power a husband has over his wife, but a caution not to imprudently marry an Irishman.

novel's persuasive and ideological work. Just as in the more canonically Gothic novels of Radcliffe or Lewis, Gothic reflections and distortions of domesticity can do what realism cannot—make characters, and readers, question the everyday.

An "Effulgence" of the Gothic: The 1790s

While my argument in this dissertation is not a historical one, I have attempted to touch on examples from a few key eras of "the Gothic" in English fiction. Many of the genre's quintessential texts, those that have remained canonical, come from what some view as the genre's peak, in the 1790s. Robert Miles's analysis of the 1790s Gothic begins with acknowledging that the critical commonplace that there *was* an explosion of the Gothic in the 1790s shouldn't be taken for granted. However, he soon shows, after a detailed and well-evidenced survey, that this story of literary history holds up,[115] that there is a "dramatic upsurge" in what we would call Gothic or terror fiction, peaking around 1800.[116] In this chapter, I'll focus on the pre-1800 Gothic novel, which Miles calls more "ideologically inflected" than overtly political (compared to later Jacobin and anti-Jacobin Gothic texts in the era of *Caleb Williams*). *The Mysteries of Udolpho* serves here as my example of Radcliffean Gothic, representative of the pre-1794 wave of novels, which Miles characterizes as centering around Burke's "idealization of chivalry as a culturally transcendent force," while *The Monk* is one example of how "after 1794 a new sense of modernity emerged as the inrushing of an unrecoverable chaos."[117] Miles accepts that "during the 1790s Britain seemed closer to chaos, revolution, and violence than at any other time in recent history, save perhaps for 1780,"[118] though he concludes

[115] See Fig. 1, "Publication of Gothic novels, 1770–1800," in Miles, "The 1790s: the effulgence of Gothic," 43.
[116] Miles, "Effulgence of Gothic," 42.
[117] Miles, 54.
[118] Miles, 56.

that the motivations behind the rise of the Gothic in the 1790s are more complex and multifarious than a simple reaction to the French revolution. I agree with Miles that Hazlitt's version of an explanation is more subtle and expansive.[119] Hazlitt observes that Gothic fiction is "undoubtedly" a reaction to the general cultural feeling supposing the "tottering state of all old structures at the time." While *Northanger Abbey* is often cited as an example of the way the English Gothic novel is tied up in anxieties about the French Revolution,[120] it is also perhaps the defining example proving that Gothic fiction is almost always doing more—*Northanger*'s allusion to revolution and violence is intrinsically interwoven with its deeper anxieties about the "structures" of gender and domestic life. Even before *Northanger*, the 1790s Gothic is always already equally concerned with the everyday, personal "mansion of despair"[121] as with the castles which Miles links to "the Gothic foundations" of the constitution.[122] The chaos and uncertainty of the period allows the idea that any "old structure" can become questionable. For me, the difference between *Otranto* and the 1790s Gothic novels discussed here is that from *Otranto*'s publication to the era of Radcliffe, the Gothic novel has stopped "working within" the structures of domain and inheritance it critiques. In *Otranto*, the closure ostensibly reinscribes primogeniture, though leaving readers uncomfortable with this pat ending[123]—but in *Udolpho* and even *The Monk*, both inheritance and home are made complex and uncertain.

Walpole's Inheritance: Late-century Gothic and Home

[119] See Miles, 43 and Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, 73.
[120] See particularly the scene in which Eleanor and Catherine talk past each other about the "shocking" something that "will soon come out in London" (p. 77, ch. 14).
[121] Wollstonecraft, 69. All references to Wollstonecraft in this chapter are to *Maria* unless otherwise specified.
[122] Miles, 44.
[123] Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Men,": "Who can recount all the unnatural crimes which the laudable, interesting desire of perpetuating a name has produced?" (43).

Maria is actually strikingly similar to other Gothic novels of the late eighteenth century—at least in its treatment of the structures of home and the routines of inhabitance that can produce or infringe on personal agency and identity. *The Castle of Otranto* creates the sense that the eponymous castle is the only place in the novel's world—at once church and dungeon, ancestral seat and intimate home. After *Otranto*, the Gothic novel expands out from Walpole's generic tendency towards Aristotelian unity of time and place. While still tending towards melodrama and occasional farce, the genre novelizes itself, expanding in complexity of both plot and characterization and incorporating impulses from poetry to landscape description (to philosophical-political treatise, in the case of Wollstonecraft) and swallowing or re-telling familiar non-Gothic stories to twist them to the Gothic's ends. Gothic spaces expand beyond castles into the related realms of creepy abbeys, crumbling ruins, and bastille-like prisons. The Gothic novels of the 1790s—the height of the eighteenth-century incarnation of the genre—construct a delicate, complex balance between the domestic and the carceral. Home and anti-home become two (or more) separate spaces, strung out across the landscape of the novel, rather than Walpole's trick of incarnating home and its antithesis in the same structure.

The eighteenth-century Gothic novel's trajectory from *The Castle of Otranto* to *Northanger Abbey* charts this experiment with teasing apart the exploitative, confining domestic situation from the ostensibly productive routines and structures of "true" home. Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis both enact this tension in bestselling novels of the late century, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Monk* (1796). Often seen as opposites, representing terror vs. horror, flight vs. confinement, "male" vs. "female" Gothic—these two strains of Gothic sensibility actually negotiate the movement, or wavering, between home and Gothic anti-home in

a similar way, though to different effects. Both uncover a sinister aspect of familiar domesticity, though only *Udolpho* gestures at its redemption or at the redeeming qualities of the anti-home.

Like *Otranto,* the novels are slightly off-center in their plotting. The biggest and most Gothic events and structures are actually divested of description, suspense, and narrative time. While we may think of the trajectory of these stories as following the journey out from home to a terrifying anti-home (and sometimes back), both novels' discourses coalesce around thresholds and at the points of departure or entry, rather than at the heart of either. *The Monk* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* do not focus on their respective Gothic edifices (crumbling castle or sepulchre). Instead, the novels finely delineate the margins of true domestic space, the place the protagonist assumes is safe, impenetrable, and pure. This is where the narrative attention is weighted, with entry (and sometimes exit) from the apparently true home the site of not just the novel's engagement with space, power, and domesticity, but also where true suspense is created and where readers engage most with the interiorities of the characters. We think of the Gothic elements of the Gothic as the most important features of its world—but like *Maria,* even these canonically Gothic novels take place more in the repetitive decision to enter or exit some structure, iteratively defining and redefining the domestic's power and social significance—not at the heart of the historical, underground, or confining edifice.

In *Otranto,* the most intense Gothic moments—and the moments that give most access to characters' interiority—are those that involve the center of the immense structure at the heart of the story's Gothicness. The peak of suspense and uncertainty in *Otranto*'s plot is Isabella's flight from the portrait gallery, down central staircases, and into the bowels of the castle. But in novels like *Udolpho* and *The Monk,* suspense and interiority are strangely dislocated, de-emphasizing the most stereotypically Gothic moments, locations, and acts. At the threshold of the original

home, and sometimes upon re-entering the Gothic edifice, characters often reach ideological decision points or places of negotiation, allowing us to think and re-think the power structures and routines of home and family. These moments are almost over-invested with meaning and artistic description, the rare places in a novel where the reader experiences time at the same pace as the character.

It is at these thresholds, rather than in the bowels of the Sepulchre of St. Clair or at the heart of the castle of Udolpho, that "time thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" and "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."[124] For Mikhail Bakhtin, the advent of the Gothic novel meant an entirely "new territory for novelistic events," staging "the specific kind of narrative inherent in castles" (246). Bakhtin's Gothic castle holds "the traces of centuries and generations…in visible form," manifesting them "as various parts of its architecture, in furnishings, weapons, the ancestral portrait gallery, the family archives and in the particular human relationships involving dynastic primacy and the transfer of hereditary rights" (246). The Gothic castle is "saturated through and through with a time that is historical in the narrow sense of the word…legends and traditions animate every corner of the castle and its environs through their constant reminders of past events" (246). In the supernaturally and historically haunted castle of *Otranto*, this vision of the castle as central chronotope makes sense. It's easy to see what Bakhtin might have meant by "the specific kind of narrative inherent in castles" when thinking of *Otranto*, with its living portrait, giant symbolic helmet, and threat of incestuous inheritance. This seems like Bakhtin's idea of the kind of narrative that having a castle in a novel must create—one concerned with ancestral history, past violence, inheritance and dominion.

[124] Bakhtin, 86.

But in the world of *Udolpho*, despite its medieval setting, and even that of *The Monk*, with all the secrets that lie beneath the abbey, the crucial moments in the thrust of the story take place away from this history, in the most familiar, everyday locations of each novel. *Maria*, despite its dubious claim as a true part of the Gothic as a genre, shows us this dynamic in a relatively simple microcosm. Through *Maria*, we can see what the form of the novel brings to an impassioned political argument. Its opening Gothic elements are implicitly paired with the single most novelistic episode, which takes place in Maria's husband's house, directly before her departure. The relationship between the Gothic frame of the novel and this domestic focus at its center is not merely dressing up a treatise on marriage and domestic structures with the appeal and interest of a Gothic element—it's in fact the same relationship we see in other, more fully Gothic novels. By the end of the eighteenth century, the "kind of narrative inherent in castles" is always already tied to the present, the everyday, formed out of the dark side of a domestic situation. In many of these 1790s novels, allocation of narrative time, description of the physical world, and access to character interiority coalesce at the thresholds to allow revelations about the structure and nature of domestic norms. This is also where characters may gain power through their knowledge of the physical house and household routines—though, as in *Maria*, often that power is fleeting, dwelled in at the crux of the novel but gone before the final pages.

Maria: "Wrapped up in myself"

The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria, though arguably only superficially Gothic, embraces and simplifies the home/anti-home mode of Gothic engagement with space and place. It seems like the asylum and the physical setting of the novel are its only claims to Gothicness. But the insane asylum in which Maria finds herself at the start of the novel is itself just another well-

imagined Gothic abode—the counterpart to a corresponding domestic scene of confinement at the heart of the novel. The asylum is described briefly, and after the abrupt opening lines, which bring us back down to earth from lofty Gothic ideas of chimeras and castles, showing us Maria in the corner of her cell, we almost immediately move to a Gothic description of Wollstonecraft's own. The asylum, part of which Maria can see through the "small grated window" of her cell,[125] is described almost exclusively in terms of its physical evidence of the passage of time. Maria sees:

> a desolate garden, and…part of a huge pile of buildings, that, after having been suffered, for half a century, to fall to decay, had undergone some clumsy repairs, merely to render it habitable. The ivy had been torn off the turrets, and the stones not wanted to patch up the breaches of time, and exclude the warring elements, left in heaps in the disordered court.[126]

Like any Gothic structure, the asylum's description mirrors and manifests its protagonist's state of mind and situation. It is a manifestation of neglect—the place where Maria will be left to be forgotten forever. But the emphasis on the asylum's age and disrepair serves another of the common purposes of the Gothic structure: creating that "specific kind of narrative inherent in castles" that Bakhtin says is the distinctive narrative to be "worked out" in the Gothic novel.[127]

For Bakhtin, the "castle" is the defining element of the Gothic genre because it is the place where the narrative often slows to get in touch with the remnants of the past, where time thickens and readers become lost in a character's thought after thought. Time does slow for Maria as she looks out at the asylum after her arrival, as the confinement prompts a resurgence of memory. Alone in her cell, "the retreating shadows of former sorrows rushed back in a gloomy train, and seemed to be pictured on the walls of her prison."[128] However, this is not the

[125] Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria*, 70.
[126] Wollstonecraft, 70.
[127] Bakhtin, 246.
[128] Wollstonecraft, 69.

thickening of time that Bakhtin describes—where time becomes visible for the reader. In this instance, the physical setting—the literal walls of her prison—concretize the past for Maria and "space becomes charged" with meaning, but readers are not yet treated to the kind of chronotopic engagement with the past that happens in the portrait gallery in the castle of *Otranto*, as Alfonso steps out of his painting. Here, we see Maria slipping into reminiscence and losing track of time—but we do not experience it along with her, yet. We watch Maria from the outside as, "for a considerable time" she "only regarded the blue expanse" and "contemplated this scene she knew not how long; or rather gazed on the walls, and pondered on her situation" (70). The asylum's walls and ruins, its evidence of fruitless and meager repair over years, does make it akin to a castle, "saturated…with time," but it is not a history of wars and inheritances that the structure invokes.

For Maria, the asylum becomes the site of her personal history—literally, the setting where she recounts and records her story. *Maria*'s only overtly Gothic elements are its setting in the asylum, the confinement of its heroine, her persecution, and her association with madness. But the conditions at the asylum are not centered in the progression of the plot or in terms of the level of attention and detail the novel devotes to this location. The asylum is where the novel begins *in medias res*—but chronologically, it is the lull between acts in Maria's story, the setting in which she tells her tale. The crux of the novel, surprisingly, comes at the center of Maria's inset story, not the moment she's sent to the asylum or the moment she escapes it. This set of scenes is a foregone conclusion by the time readers see it enacted—we know Maria will end up sent away as a madwoman, not happily married. But this hinge of the story, the set of scenes in which Maria decides to forsake her marriage and conspires to leave her husband's house, is the one in which the physicalities and practicalities of space are most closely attended to.

Most of Maria's "memoir" consists of analytical summary of the different stages of her life along with philosophical and political interjections. Up until this point, even the most frank allusions to married life are summarized from a distance, rather than truly described. However, the section in which Maria finally decides to separate from her husband is truly novelistic in its close portrayal of events. Rather than giving an overview of weeks of Maria's life, or reflections on her feelings and conclusions about her life, this crucial series of scenes takes place almost in real time—and in specific rooms, complete with details of household objects and daily routines.

The first hint of a physical setting comes when Maria, after declaring herself free from her marriage, takes off her ring and puts it on a table (143). This piece of furniture, conjured into the story by the specificity of this act, soon leads to the materialization of specific rooms and objects[129] and Maria's interaction with them, as she makes the transition into leaving her husband. When she realizes her husband has offered her body to a friend for the loan of five hundred pounds, Maria begins to recount actions second by second: "I rose deliberately, requested Mr. S—— to wait a moment, and instantly going into the counting-house, desired Mr. Venables to return with me to the dining-parlour" (143). A pen appears for Mr. Venables to lay down, and Maria notes that she shuts the door upon re-entering the dining parlour. This begins a new pattern, not quite of description, but of the acknowledgement of space and an insistent

[129] A perfect example of the way, in some eighteenth-century novels, rooms and their features "arise strictly when called on by the plot—but not quite along the old playwright's rule that a gun introduced in the first act has to go off in the last," as "action…calls into being the various architectural features of doors, windows, staircases" in novels like *Pamela* (Wall 123; 142). While Wall argues that this phenomenon in which domestic interior spaces are more "implied" than described tapers off as the century progresses, Wollstonecraft's novel seems to be purposeful in its decision to invoke description only in order to "fi[t] action within carefully chosen contours" (Wall 124). In Wollstonecraft, most of the novel does not even allude to implied spaces. The rare "set pieces of description" (Wall 124) are meditations on the outdoors (see, for example, the description of the view of the asylum from Maria's cell (70) and the lavish, affect-laden account of her return to her original home after marriage (134). The unusual attention to interior domestic space in chapters 11 and 12 of *Maria* creates a system of resistance based on the domestic. Maria's only triumphs in the novel are thus marked by the presence of rooms, doors, windows, and tables, in a way that goes beyond the early eighteenth-century's use of implied spaces for characterization or action.

underlining of the way that domestic space materializes power. After Maria declares she is leaving the marriage, Venables "bade me 'leave the house at my peril'…he threw the letter in the fire, which I had incautiously left in his hands; and, quitting the room, locked the door on me" (144). It is the physical house that he forbids her to leave—and the scene, now populated with door and lock, soon delineates a window.

Readers follow moment by moment, even tracking some minute bodily movements for the first time in the novel. Yet Bakhtin's "artistically visible" thickening of time doesn't quite occur until Maria is alone with her thoughts:

> I rose, and shook myself; opened the window, and methought the air never smelled so sweet. The face of heaven grew fairer as I viewed it, and the clouds seemed to flit away obedient to my wishes, to give my soul room to expand.
>
> … The lustre of these bright picturesque sketches faded with the setting sun; but I was still alive to the calm delight they had diffused through my heart. (144)

This is still not true description—yet it links the specifics of Maria's location and spatial orientation with her thinking. Later that evening—specifically "towards midnight" (146)[130]—we follow Maria to her study, adjoining the bedchamber. After standing firm against her husband's orders to come to bed with him ("for that was the best place for husbands and wives to end their differences," he says) she collects herself:

> I sat musing some time longer; then, throwing my cloak around me, prepared for sleep on a sopha. And, so fortunate seemed my deliverance, so sacred the pleasure of being thus wrapped up in myself, that I slept profoundly, and woke with a mind composed to encounter the struggles of the day. (146)

The sublime moments Maria experiences in the aftermath of her declaration of freedom (before she actually exits the house) are similar-yet-different to the productive, yet static, musings we

[130] One of the only specifications of time of day in Maria's inset story.

will see from Emily in *Udolpho*. These feelings of freedom and communion with the self are associated with thresholds of the house—windows, moments of transition—in both novels. Emily's reveries will become literally poetic. But here, we find one of the most poetic turns of phrase in *Maria*, which, like most of Wollstonecraft's prose, is lofty and intellectualized, persuasive and passionate, but not so succinctly incisive: "wrapped up in myself." In both of Wollstonecraft's novels, the final impetus is to be with the lover and the story ends tragically, as the heroine sacrifices her own needs and serves him (Darnford in *Maria*, Henry in *Mary*). In *Maria*, pinned in between the Gothic opening lines and the dismal ending, the heroine finds this moment, at the crux of her story, where she would have been enough for herself. Deliberately using space to her advantage, using the sofa as a refuge in the more public space of the study rather than risking the bedroom, Maria is both wrapping herself up in safety using the social power of domestic space and embracing her decision to live, from then on, on her own. This is the most hopeful moment in the novel, before everything turns wrong—and even though readers know what must happen next, we are still indulged with the same level of description and investment of novel-time for the next several scenes, as we linger in this moment of possibility.

The final hours of Maria's inhabitance in her marriage are full of the logistics of her movements within her husband's house, between rooms associated with gendered domestic tasks and roles. We see events with a much more proportional investment of time than at any other point in the novel and are grounded in the physical rhythms of the household, noting rooms, hour to hour developments, and habitual domestic arrangements. These scenes set up a complex relationship between the kind of practical, physical tasks emblematic of female "accomplishments" and the workings of Maria's mind, intellect, and the sublime exercise of her

soul. They are also threaded through with the discourse of mental and bodily expansion, as Maria, for a moment, feels she has room to breathe.

Throughout this episode, we are almost bombarded with little details of the couple's domestic life, to an astonishing degree for a novel that otherwise ignores the everyday. We get a glimpse into what daily life must have been like for a large part of the novel, though until now, it never rose to the level of narratability. Maria as first-person narrator mentions each time Mr. Venables attempts to put her back in her place using the little routines of the house. She recounts his injunction "not to expose myself to the servants, by obliging him to confine me in my apartment" but finally locks her in, using the little comforts of the house to smooth the way: "ordering tea to be carried into my little study, which had a communication with my bed-chamber, he once more locked the door upon me, and left me to my own meditations" (145). Maria knows the rhythms of the household well enough to surmise his intentions at each small step: she recalls that at one point, "two or three messages were sent to me, probably for no other purpose, but to enable Mr. Venables to ascertain what I was about" (145). He attends to mundane household tasks with unusual thoroughness in order to keep track of her, but Maria is able to go about her business as usual. She can also see that she has power over him, since he keeps attempting to use these insignificant aspects of their domestic life to check up on her:

> He went down into the kitchen, and the cook, probably by his desire, came to me, to know what I would please to order for dinner. Mr. Venables came into the parlour again, with apparent carelessness. I perceived that the cunning man was overreaching himself; and I gave my directions as usual, and left the room. (149)

Maria goes along with the usual patterns of her day, but uses her everyday pastimes as an escape and a source of energy and renewal, even freedom. She does not physically resist and follows through on her usual movements within the house, "passively follow[ing] him up stairs" (145) and continuing to do sewing when she's too distracted to read (149). Mr. Venables begins to

think that since she's continuing her usual patterns, she'll go back to normal without following through on her resolution to leave him. He tries to treat her marital disgust as a "pretty farce" and comments that "this was the plague of marrying women who pretended to know something" (147). This discourse about the kind of woman Maria must be continues and becomes an integral part of the power struggle between them. The morning after Maria's night spent on the sofa, we get a glimpse into the usual patterns of their day:

> A clerk brought in the letters of the day, and I, as I often did, while he was discussing subjects of business, went to the *piano forte*, and began to play a favourite air to restore myself, as it were, to nature, and drive the sophisticated sentiments I had just been obliged to listen to, out of my soul.
> Pausing for a moment, I met Mr. Venables' eyes. He was observing me with an air of conceited satisfaction, as much as to say—'My last insinuation has done the business—she begins to know her own interest.' Then gathering up his letters, he said, 'That he hoped he should hear no more romantic stuff, well enough in a miss just come from boarding school;' and went, as was his custom, to the counting-house. (148-9)

Venables asserts several theses about the kind of woman Maria is, in order to try to put her in her place. First she is derided as a "woman who pretend[s] to know something," then a schoolgirl, merely exercising her feminine accomplishments. But she performs all these everyday tasks, allowing him to think them silly or shallow, while retaining their deeper usefulness for herself alone. She is still "wrapped up" in herself and using her accomplishments as resources for resistance, able to both consolidate her power and screen it from him through these everyday (feminized) tasks and routines.

Maria and Venables move around each other in the house and Maria takes advantage of his ownership of certain (masculine) spaces to know where he is, and even his state of mind, as she plans her departure. Tracking his movements in and out of the counting-house, she is able to pack up and leave without his notice, "seem[ing] to breathe a freer air" as soon as she is out of sight of the house after turning a corner (150). From here, the narrative attention progressively

zooms out until it has returned to the level of detail of the rest of the novel, without the fine delineation of time and space seen in these few scenes in the house. This is in fact the beginning of the end for Maria—her next step is to try to lean on a supportive network of women that she had already assisted in gaining independence to avoid relying on friends who "might inform [her] tyrant" of her whereabouts (150). But just like Mrs. Fitzpatrick in *Tom Jones*, even after she escapes her locked room inside her husband's house, she is unable to find a place to live without her attempts getting back to her husband.

This central set of scenes enacts the dynamic that the first two sentences of the novel set up, first invoking Gothic style and overblown imaginings, and then grounding us in our heroine's physical reality. On a macro level, we begin with the Gothic setting in the asylum and its entanglement with the past, its perhaps exaggerated version of women's confinement—and pair it with its corresponding practical origin, the scenes in the marital household. Ultimately Maria's hope for autonomy in domesticity is lost—her moment "wrapped up in herself" in her own study, with her own thoughts of freedom, is revoked, both when she's committed to the asylum and at the end of the novel where she sacrifices her agency in favor of the now-undeserving Darnford. But the Gothic frame allows us to see the structures of marriage and household as the true source of Maria's oppression, and to see the possibilities for resistance that nonetheless lie within the details of these structures. The inset nature of Maria's story means she is recounting these scenes while she is physically at the asylum, imprisoned, reflecting on them weeks later. This revisiting of the domestic situation is much like the way she literally revisits her original home after time away—time for reflection, and the comparison to a different sort of confinement, makes her see her home anew, even to the extent that she "could have kissed the chickens that pecked on the common; and longed to pat the cows, and frolic with the dogs that sported on it" as she "enter[s]

the dear green lane" and sights "several favourite trees" (134). In *Maria*, the comfort of home, and the power that can be found in the everyday activities that define its daily routines and most mundane delights, is only ever recognized after the fact.

This least Gothic of 1790s Gothic novels demonstrates a pattern that other, canonically Gothic novels follow in terms of narratological discourse: the parceling out of description, interiority, and story-time directs readers to attend to moments and types of movement or dwelling outside the borders of the novel's Gothic edifice. At thresholds and upon departures and returns, these novels slow and stutter, allowing characters—and more often, readers—to negotiate their re-inhabitance of the domestic, exposing and denaturalizing our ideas about home. Along with the level of description and slowing of narrative-time to almost match story-time, characters become "wrapped up in themselves"—an alternative to literal escape or control that the Gothic posits as a skill that characters can build over time, through successive iterations of these threshold moments, which they can eventually bring back into their original domestic power structure. Exerting their own mind on the location is what, over time, produces characters' agency and ability to move, and even to take control of the spaces they occupy.

"The Ravisher Stept On": Penetrating the Threshold in *The Monk*

In the following sections, we'll narrow in on these moments of activity—maybe not productive per se, maybe not active in the usual sense (as they include analyzing stories, pacing, contemplation, and mental or metaphysical remapping). These threshold moments appear at the edges of the great houses, castles, and abbeys, but also at the borders of what is supposed to be considered true "home." First, we'll consider Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) as an example of the way the displacement of suspense creates the ideological thrust of the novel—and the way

intertextuality, as well as use of narrative time and fineness of physical description, situate the novel's ideological center at Antonia's threshold, not in the underground vault where she is eventually killed. Ambrosio, the titular Monk, collects his narrative of penetration around one drawn-out scene of breaking and entering, undoing locks and bolts one after another and lingering at the threshold to savor the moment when his victim's refuge turns into imprisonment. Radcliffe's threshold moments are more complex, serving as hinge-points of a narrative structure that pairs flight and stasis to an almost disconcerting degree. In both novels, whether the main action is penetrating a supposedly safe domestic space or fleeing from broken home to broken home, that instantaneous flip between home-as-refuge and home-as-entrapment happens upon repeated departures and re-entries, through repetitive, recursive types of movement and thought.

Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* presents a world in which women commonly have little control over their movements, on a small or a grand scale. They are sent to be immured in convents or locked in underground cells, enduring extreme suffering while confined in Catholic institutions or attacked while immobilized in their own homes. The dénouement of the narrative, in which both Antonia and Agnes are held against their will in the labyrinthine depths of the abbey, epitomizes the tendency of the Gothic to place scenes of suffering in "underground spaces in which imprisonment and live burial take place."[131] But in the novel's most drawn out, closely observed, suspenseful moments—central both narratively and thematically—power and vulnerability are created at the threshold of the everyday home and its social rules, not in outlandish (and, to English readers, foreign) castles and abbeys.

Of course, in *The Monk*, the power created in the threshold moments belongs to Ambrosio, not the heroine. His is a story of an orphan conquering home—and woman—through

[131] Sedgwick, *Coherence*, 23.

force. Ambrosio may be in one sense a marginalized character, since his abbey life means he is kept on the outskirts of "home" until he penetrates Antonia's. Perhaps my own definition of the difference between a feminine and masculine Gothic novel depends on who is allowed to make use of threshold moments and for what purpose. Though Ambrosio's threshold moment here is the means through which he victimizes Antonia and later takes her underground—the ideological outcome different from the rest of the texts in this dissertation that largely empower female protagonists—the form of the threshold moment is the same.

The hinge-point of each of *The Monk*'s doubled plots is a *failure* of the bonds of domesticity—in Antonia's case, the breach of the literal borders, doors, and locks of Elvira's home. The narrative comes to a standstill here, fascinated by the successive breaking of locks and opening of doors. This prolonged threshold moment expands, footstep by footstep, as Ambrosio seems to savor his deliberate exercise of power. This is the most suspenseful scene in the novel, overtaking even Antonia's murder in terms of the level of tension and the amount of narrative space devoted to close, repetitive description.

Antonia's rape is described euphemistically and takes place in the space of a few sentences, in a scene bracketed by her pleas to return home[132] and swiftly followed by her murder (391). The surprisingly anticlimactic underground scene, as even Antonia knows, is merely the consequence of the earlier betrayal. She fixates on her removal from home, even in her pleas to Ambrosio before and after the rape. When she first wakes to find herself under the monk's power in the vault, she begs, "Let me return to the House, which I have quitted I know not how" (382). It is this moment, this gap in her awareness and understanding during which she was taken out of the house, that she thinks sealed her fate. Ambrosio's entry into her house is the

[132] Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, 383-4.

last uncertain moment of Antonia's story, with everything after playing out in predictable plot points.

The novel takes time to build up to the act of housebreaking, insistently hinting, again and again, at the importance of the coming scene. Elvira and Ambrosio even use the same metaphor to describe the event as a point of no return. Ambrosio, just before his decision to enter the house, "beh[olds] the precipice before him" (265), framing this action as his crucial moment of temptation. Elvira, in turn, dreams of Antonia in the same terms just before waking to discover Ambrosio in her daughter's room: "a frightful dream had represented to her Antonia on the verge of a precipice. She saw her trembling on the brink" (301). Even Antonia, just before "the moment destined to be fatal to her arrived," has a sudden sense of doom, reluctant to go to her own bedroom alone, feeling "that all her prospects were blasted" (296). This repetition of forebodings draws out suspense leading up to the house-breaking scene, enlarging the narrative space afforded to this moment and building it up as a climax.

Ambrosio pauses in the street below Elvira's house before beginning his entry. What follows is a passage marked by shorter sentences with an unusually repetitive, simple structure, immersing readers in this series of actions and thoughts. The passage never names Ambrosio. First, as he departs the abbey in the dead of night he is "the lustful Monk" (298). Then, when he first steps into Antonia's bedroom, his epithet changes: "The Ravisher stept on" (299). The housebreaking steps, including hesitations and inner trepidations, pile up phrase upon phrase, beginning to minimize our sense of Ambrosio's personality (diminishing him into a pronoun) and instead focusing on act after act of architectural penetration: "He reached the House," "He ascended the steps," "He reached the door," "He ventured to lift up the Latch" (298-9). One wonders if this is the sort of moment that makes *The Monk* the favorite novel of a John Thorpe—

the grammar, in addition to the slowing and zooming in of the narrative, seems designed to put the reader in Ambrosio's place, inviting us to revel in the sense of inexorable power Ambrosio finds in each step forward.

Beginning this series of grammatically repetitive violations, Ambrosio pauses in the street below Elvira's house: "He stopped, and hesitated for a moment" (298). The narration pauses here for a long paragraph as Ambrosio "reflect[s] on the enormity of the crime" and the possibilities of apprehension and consequences. This pause is marked by an almost frantic flurry of excuses and suppositions as Ambrosio moves from thought to thought in disjointed appositive phrases: he thinks to himself that while Elvira is already suspicious, "she could do no more than suspect; that no proofs of his guilt could be produced; that it would seem impossible for the rape to have been committed without Antonia's knowing when, where, or by whom;" and that he is too celebrated to have his reputation shaken by the accusations of "two unknown Women" (299). As the narrator lets us know, most of Ambrosio's assurances are fabrications; he is shoring up his image of his own past, strategically reconfiguring his own place in the world to tell a story of a man so "firmly established" at the heart of the city's institutions that he cannot possibly be questioned (299). After this flurry of mental activity, Ambrosio concludes that "He should proceed in the enterprize" and begins his journey towards the innermost chambers of the house. In a sinister "threshold moment," the Monk's active pause before entry prepares him to re-make the home he will enter.

Having convinced himself that he can enter unobserved and without consequence, Ambrosio begins his step-by step penetration through the barriers of the house. The minute cataloguing of doors, latches, and bolts as the monk breaches them is striking. We note not just one but two sets of stairs; Ambrosio breaches two doors and we are told of each latch, each bolt.

It is as if, with each successive step, each barrier that gives way surprisingly easily, Ambrosio's actions are solidified and his purpose made real for him and for readers. We see only what he sees as doors "fl[y] open," "resis[t] his efforts" briefly, and then the moment when the final "Bolt fl[ies] back" (299). Each of these components, detailed and described as they fail, do not just become penetrable as he passes through them—they re-fasten, "of [their] own accord," after him, (299) shoring up his place in the house, becoming his own safeguards and, from the perspective of the home's inhabitants, turning from protections to confinements.

This pivotal housebreaking chapter opens Volume III of the novel and begins with an epigraph from *Cymbeline* (281). This reference previews what is to come: Ambrosio's covert entry into Antonia's bedroom as well as her subsequent rape. It also places the coming scene amongst a genealogy of allusions, indicating that the actions of this chapter will reverberate through the narrative and are part of a tradition of epic, almost mythical scope. The quote functions in multiple ways. First, Lewis is quoting Shakespeare's own intertextual reference to the rape of Lucretia: "Our Tarquin thus / Did softly press the rushes, ere He wakened / The chastity He wounded."[133] In the context of *Cymbeline*, alluding to the classical world's prototypical rapist draws a parallel with a crucial difference. Iachimo does not intend physical harm to Imogen; he only means to stain her spotless reputation by entering her space. In quoting this particular moment in the play, however, Lewis hints at Antonia's fate. This is literary reference as another mode of producing terror, a tool for suspense that overinvests the coming scene with even more meaning, even before we arrive at the crucial moment.

More tellingly, the Shakespeare reference frames Ambrosio's housebreaking as the latest in an intertextual string of narratologically pivotal scenes in which a deceiver creeps into the

[133] Lewis, 281; Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, II.ii.

heroine's bedroom as she sleeps. In *Cymbeline,* and in its sources for this scene, story II.9 in *The Decameron,* and, even earlier, the thirteenth-century *Le roman de la violette,* this entry into the heroine's most private space sets into motion the stakes and plot of the rest of the drama. In each of these source texts, the heroine is set off on a series of adventures and ultimately proves her worth. Lewis's scene sets up a far different series of scenes in which Ambrosio gains entry into Antonia's house, again and again, until he kidnaps her. The allusion also highlights the off-center hinge of *The Monk*'s incarnation of the plot: Lewis leaves the actual rape until many chapters later, leaving an odd span of the novel in which Antonia is still in between, not yet violated, but not pure since she's been removed from her carefully controlled home.

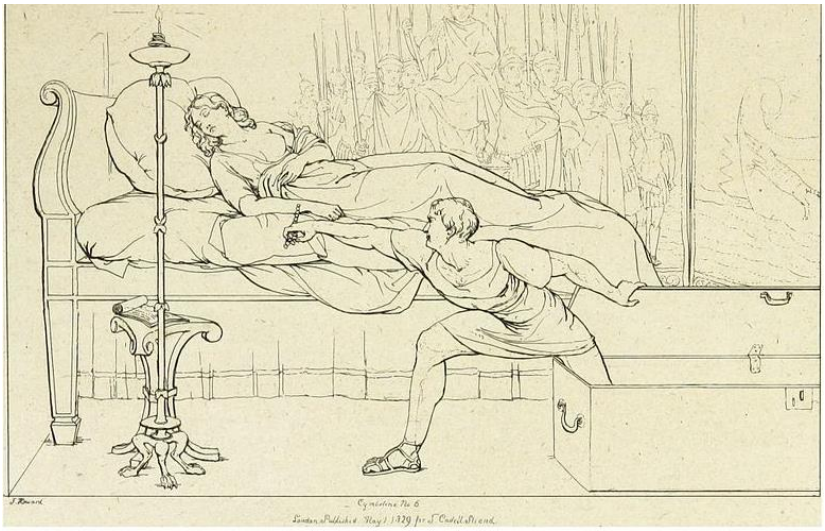

Figure 3. Cymbeline. Iachimo's Attempt on Imogen.

In both Boccaccio's and Shakespeare's[134] versions, the moment of penetration into the home's interior is at the same time the moment the intruder (literally) emerges from his own cramped enclosure: he has confined himself in a trunk in order to access the bedchamber (in *Le roman de la violette,* it's a barrel, the ur-trunk). Ambrosio's situation is obliquely similar. The

[134] Frank Howard, "Cymbeline no. 6. London, Published May 1, 1829 for T. Cadell, Strand," in *The spirit of the plays of Shakspeare [Shakespeare], exhibited in a series of outline plates illustrative of the story of each play*, (London: T. Cadell, 1833).

moment of his housebreaking is the first true moment he steps out of his bounds as a monk, leaving the cloistered life. His transgression is not just in penetrating into the women's home, but it is also his emergence from his own confinement within walls and norms.

The decision to transgress the boundaries of Antonia's domestic situation is simultaneously a final departure from his cloister, an exit from his own confinement and shelter within the conventions and institutional practices of the abbey. Just before this scene, we learn that Ambrosio is *famously* cloistered, that "since the moment when He entered the Abbey, He has never been on the outside of its walls."[135] This aspect of his legend is only revealed once he has first visited Antonia and Elvira, beginning his step-wise journey out of his cloistered state. *The Monk* posits the physical and social shelters provided Antonia as always already penetrable—but so is the abbey itself. Even this ostensibly sexless enclave is, of course, where Matilda is able to first seduce Ambrosio and where he eventually returns to imprison Antonia. His metaphorical exit from a life of enclosure, working in tandem with his successive entries into Antonia's house, is more a reproduction of his own encounter within abbey walls than a reversal.

This ability to *use* his confinement as a way into his victim's life is a twisted version of what often happens in the Radcliffean, flight-based mode of the Gothic, in which a female character finds safety, paradoxically, by further locking herself in when she's confined or using a castle's labyrinthine passageways to escape her persecutors within it. The image of the exit from the trunk in *Cymbeline* literalizes what Ambrosio does here metaphorically, exploiting his cloistered position to gain Antonia's and Elvira's trust (262). In the weeks leading up to the housebreaking scene, Ambrosio makes a series of visits to the house in which he successively intrudes into more and more private rooms. This symmetrical exit from the life of the abbey and

[135] Lewis, 251.

entry into Antonia's private life implies that the world of *The Monk* is a zero-sum game: escaping confinement naturally leads to a set of circumstances where the only apparent choice is to imprison someone else.

The Monk mostly focuses on images of women in stillness—carted about almost like statues, moved from father's house to someone else's,[136] stolen, entombed. But when power changes hands, it happens through acts of unauthorized entry (whether this is Matilda penetrating the abbey or Ambrosio violating the boundaries of Elvira's home). These powerful scenes are comprised of moments of small, repetitive activity—like Ambrosio's series of locks and bolts, like his successive entries into Antonia's home before finally taking her. *The Monk*'s threshold moments exclusively turn apparent refuges into penetrable, unsafe places—or rather, they reveal the built-in chinks in institutional edifices that prioritize centralizing power in the name of control and protection.

The displacement of the actual rape in favor of prioritizing the housebreaking scene might imply that the issue at stake in *The Monk* is the failure of Elvira's household (and of her motherly efforts to protect her daughter). A traditional reading of the moral issues at hand might be that Antonia's removal from her home is a result of the Catholic institutions that create monks with ambiguous social status and intentions—that it is Elvira who allowed him to visit her daughter in the first place, though she barred other young men like Lorenzo. Even worse, it is Elvira's unwanted pregnancy and abdication of motherly duties that leads to the incest aspect of the plot and possibly even produces the kind of son Ambrosio becomes. This would be a comforting interpretation for English readers in the eighteenth century—it's not that the

[136] Rosario's story of his sister, "Matilda," recounts the trajectory of a young girl to and from the only possible *places* she can occupy: her "Father's House," living as "a Domestic to the Consort of her Beloved," or "her Grave" (56-7).

protections of patriarchal domestic structures (physical and social) are fragile, ready to be twisted to nefarious purposes when anyone with power wishes to—it's that Elvira's household is insufficiently domestic, missing its patriarch and tainted by Catholicism. But we can also read the emphasis on the housebreaking scene as an exposure of the reality of structures that make these boundaries seem like real protection and power. In this reading, *The Monk* provides a way to decode the social norms that make Antonia's rape possible and that underlie the ideology behind Ambrosio's motivations—the comforting fiction that there is an easy binary between purity and fallenness, safe domesticity and imprisonment or exposure, home and anti-home.

The Mysteries of Udolpho: What Was Behind That Black Veil, Anyway?

> *"Oh! I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world! Are not you wild to know?"*
>
> *"Oh! Yes, quite; what can it be? But do not tell me—I would not be told upon any account."*
>
> —Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

This exchange between Isabella Thorpe and Catherine Morland captures an essential strangeness of the experience of reading *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Emily St. Aubert's encounter with the black veil, one of Gothic fiction's most famous moments, is in the end all about negative space.[137] The image we take away from the text is that of Emily, lost in the depths of the castle of Udolpho, horror-struck, gazing and gazing at what lies beyond the veil and dropping out of the narration into a faint. The resolution of this mystery is not only less important than the possibilities it presents—not only a disappointing anticlimax—but the truth behind the black veil is actually *forgettable*.[138]

[137] This gap is all the more noticeable, compared to Walpole's similar tendency, since the rest of *Udolpho* is so descriptive.
[138] Just like Antonia's actual rape scene in *The Monk*.

Of course, part of the novel's point is its deflationary ending: melodramatic supernatural possibilities diminish into everyday domestic violations just as Emily is returned home to pastoral La Vallée, ready to forget the horrors of Udolpho. But re-readers of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* may notice other peculiarities of the experience. The novel is not quite as Gothic as we remember it to be. Its villain is not as uniformly cruel—in fact, he is absent for the great majority of the narrative.[139] We spend very little time in the eponymous castle, instead dwelling on the sights, sounds, and anticipations that characterize Emily's many journeys between different kinds of homes. Terry Castle sees the novel as, on second glance, a "disconcerting textual hybrid" that spends far more time as a "bizarre quasi-travelogue" than a narrative of flight and confinement.[140] The novel, like Emily herself, wants to dwell in "poetical interpolations" through epigraphs, interspersed poems and ballads, and Emily's own meditations on the sublime landscape (xiii). Radcliffe "is inclined to bring the plot to a standstill" (xv) and skip over what should be the most suspenseful scenes. For the reader, this creates a "sense of interrupted flow, of having to respond subliminally to constant changes in textual format" (xiv) and a disconcerting tendency to misremember the real shape of the narrative.[141]

Part of what creates this reading experience of constantly adapting to different modes of storytelling is that Udolpho enacts Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror on the level of narrative discourse, not just style. The dislocation, sense of skewed weight, and odd blanknesses in the novel can be explained in the same way that Radcliffe does when defining

[139] See Johnson, "The Sex of Suffering," on Emily's problematic "concord" with Montoni.
[140] Castle, Introduction xiii; ix.
[141] Many readers observe a distortion of time in the novel—some see this in terms of movement (Flaxman thinks the novel is characterized by a sense of "kinesis in stasis"(25)), repetition (For Albright, the novel has a tendency for "dwelling in repetition"(52)), or in terms of blanknesses, suspensions, and lacunae (Mackenzie, 416). Albright argues that all the novel's postponements, interruptions and "hesitations in a curious way, 'propel' the narrative, but not linearly. They instead make suspensions productive" (64). Albright also makes a brilliantly-observed argument about the way time and the seasons literally do not "add up" in the novel (35).

terror, horror, and the sublime. In "On the Supernatural in Poetry," she famously declares, "terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them."[142] This is just what we have seen in *Maria* and *The Monk*—though we may add that terror, at least in these late eighteenth-century novels, seems to occur at the margins of Gothic buildings and tropes, while horror happens at their heart, in the most stereotypically Gothic settings.

At the heart of the Gothic anti-home (subterranean vault or mazelike castle corridor), we are given moments that compare interestingly with the threshold moments in which active pausing, contemplation "wrapped up in one's self," and repeated small movements create suspense, thicken our sense of time, and allow a character's interior processes to expand. Moments like Emily's first sight of the black veil, or like Antonia's rape scene in the underground tunnels below the abbey, close down possibility, feeling, and analysis instead. They abruptly eject readers from the narrative, excising all the novelistic elements that create verisimilitude and the ability to experience the story along with a character. In these moments, readers and characters diverge, description cuts out, and time doesn't slow or thicken—it skips. What we think of as the most Gothic spaces in a novel host moments of horror, not terror—blanknesses in the narrative where information or affect is obtrusively withheld from readers. This creates a mystery for readers, an unthinkable horror, indescribable and unnarratable—a blank they may try to fill in with supposition—but it is not suspense, not the species of tension we experience elsewhere when we are steeped in the moment-to-moment interiority of a character.

[142] Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," 168.

Plot-wise, the most important moments of Gothic novels (Mme Montoni's death, for example) do happen at the heart of the castle or in Sedgwick's metaphor-imbued underground spaces. But narratologically, these events are dis-privileged. The novel is truly centered elsewhere—with concerns about the nature of home and how to physically occupy it. At the threshold, possibilities expand. Even though often characterized by dread or anxious rumination, thought patterns that seem only to go in circles, or insignificant tasks or movements unnecessarily repeated, these scenes contain the same quality that Radcliffe describes as terror—they "awake[n] the faculties to a high degree of life" rather than "contract[ing], freez[ing], and nearly annihilat[ing] them" as moments of helpless horror do. The narrative, as well as the characters, recoils from revisiting the objects of horror. What makes novels like *Udolpho* disconcerting to read is the way they are fascinated with returning again and again to the same performance of anxiety, paranoiac prediction, and analysis that happens away from the horror of the kind of historical violence or supernatural apparition that characterize the chronotope of the castle. These everyday moments, often taking place at the borders or margins of "home," are where characters can negotiate their inhabitance or transgression of the rules of the world.

Udolpho operates differently from either *Otranto* or *The Monk*. In *The Castle of Otranto*, we remember the big Gothic and supernatural tropes—the giant helmet, the dramatic flight down the castle's stairs—even if, on closer inspection, these elements have less substance behind them than we remember. But in *Otranto*, these big Gothic moments are actually what drives a plot fueled by history and supernatural events. In Radcliffe's supernatural-explained version of the Gothic, we tend to forget the most spooky supernatural moments and the plot itself—we come away with a sense of the novel's and Emily's tone and affect, more than remembering what happened. In *Otranto*, Isabella's flight *is* described, as well as her escape (though not her actual

exit through the trap door). In *The Monk,* Antonia's rape is in the text, even if the description is weighted toward the many scenes leading up to it. But in *Udolpho,* there is no actual event underlying or coming after the suspense. It's not just that the wax figure isn't seen in the black veil scene, but that by the time it's revealed, we don't care—there was no supernatural and apparently no danger, after all. This creates *Udolpho*'s unique sense of being about nothing, of consisting almost entirely of anticlimax, pastoral reverie, and landscape description.

But, as any reader knows, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is overflowing—if not with memorable or linear plot points, with everything else that makes up a novel. In addition to the overall sense of anticlimax, the novel simply overwhelms readers, eschewing any orderliness of setting, plot, or timeline so that no reader can quite escape with a complete grasp of what has happened, and when, and where. *The Monk*'s narrative shape, while it lists unexpectedly towards certain events and sections of the novel, is in effect quite linear. Ambrosio descends into depravity, more and more, and loses control of his life, chapter after chapter, until his fall is complete. The overall shape of the story is like his housebreaking: a series of steps, pushing forward with inexorable progress. The housebreaking scene itself is a kind of kinesis-in-stasis[143]—but it's repetitive, never recursive or winding. The narrative shape of *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* however, resists linearity almost as one of its fundamental aesthetic—and ideological—values. We think of Gothic plots as essentially based on flight or confinement, but *Udolpho* is essentially about moments of departure and return, even more than it is about journeying.

On the largest scale, the novel tracks the journey of Emily St. Aubert away from home and back. But this basic adventure-and-return plot is replicated and multiplied throughout

[143] Flaxman's term, 25.

Emily's travels, each time with differences in both scale and tone. Emily's first journey out, a contemplative holiday with her father, turns into a series of desperate searches for shelter and aid, then becomes a return to an empty house in mourning. She reluctantly sets out again to take up residence in Toulouse with her aunt, beginning a series of less and less welcome journeys that eventually begin to seem like forced marches and that Emily retroactively labels near-kidnapping. Emily's journeys, when physically mapped across Europe,[144] present the novel's ideological tensions as a set of two extremes. On one geographical end is La Vallée, on the banks of the Garonne in Gascony, and at the other, Udolpho itself, the apparent anti-home, looming and crumbling in the Apennines. Emily traverses the ground between these two points again and again, creating smaller loops and doubling back on previous paths. Emily's paths coalesce to create a geographical and narrative core, slightly off-center, surrounding the double foci of the convent of St. Clair and Château-le-Blanc.

The grand view of the map of Emily's journeys at first seems to emphasize how far the (geographical and ideological) territory of Udolpho is from that of La Vallée. But by the end of the novel, we realize that St. Aubert's secrets lie literally closer to home—Udolpho is the pretext for journeying, the red-herring destination that will train Emily to question the power structures that truly lie behind her family history and apply them to the destination that seems a peaceful stop on the way home. We can also see just how much Emily has criss-crossed the continent in her travels, creating looping paths between sites, especially those closest to home. La Vallée is paired not just with Udolpho on a grand scale, but with multiple journeys to and from Toulouse and St. Clair. Udolpho, too, enacts a mini-cycle of departure and return—though, as I will

[144] This dissertation contains several sketches, diagrams, or rough maps, after the tradition of Franco Moretti (see *Atlas of the European Novel* and *Graphs, Maps, Trees*).

discuss, Emily's journey to and from the Tuscan cottage only destabilizes our ideas about what it means to leave or return "home," and which place is which.

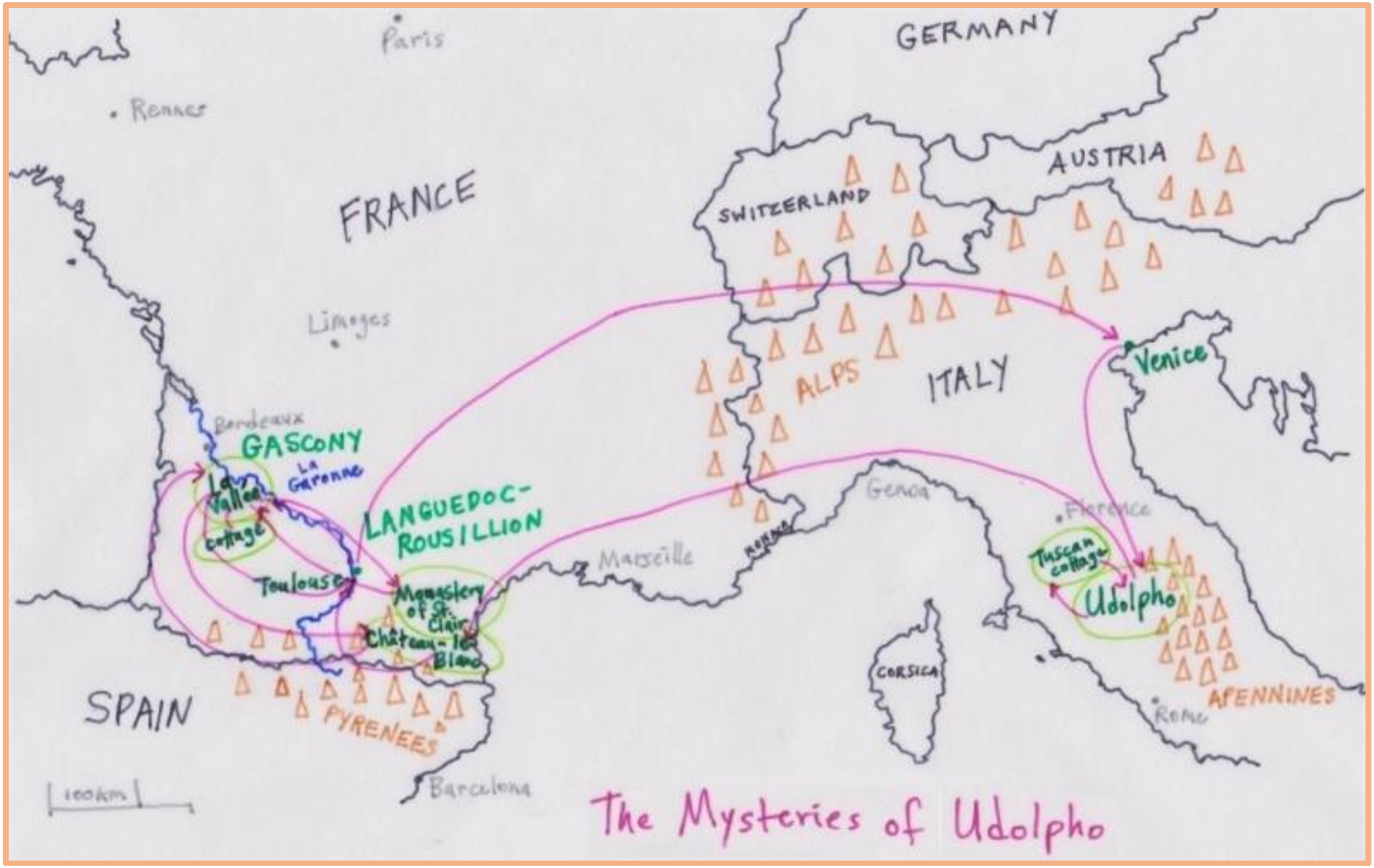

Figure 4. Sketch: Emily's movements between locations in the novel: La Vallée in Gascony, the Monastery of St. Clair(e) and Château-le-Blanc in Languedoc-Rousill(i)on, Udolpho in the Apennines.

La Vallée and Udolpho seem on the surface to be held up as complete opposites in terms of security, order, and domestic ideology—one a shrine of companionate marriage and empathy, the other a haunt of thieves, a place to lock one's wife away. But as the novel progresses, it carefully dissects these surface-level assumptions, creating touch-points that link both locations and their current state to the happenings at Château-le-Blanc years ago. The violence of the Marchionness's story is geographically and narratively associated more with La Vallée and Monsieur St. Aubert's secrets than with the dramatics of Udolpho. While the set piece of Emily's glimpse of the black veil is ultimately undermined by the novel's final revelations, the first set piece—strikingly similar—in which Emily, burning her father's papers, catches a glimpse of something shocking[145]—is borne out by the story. The novel holds up the purported dangers of Udolpho against the sentimental, patriarchal practices at La Vallée through comparisons like these. It also re-situates violence within Emily's original domestic idyll through its careful, odd allocation of narrative attention. The novel spends more time and narrative energy thinking about La Vallée and what it means to leave or enter a dwelling, and by extension a society, than emphasizing the horror of Udolpho or the villainy of Montoni.

What actually happens at Udolpho—all the most dramatic escapes and moments of peril—tends to become strangely invisible, or at least uneventful, when one actually considers the way events are presented, rather than what the nature of the event would usually imply. This telling dislocation of narrative attention is perhaps most obvious in Emily's final escape from Udolpho, a scene that should be full of tension. It is a brief episode, strangely divested of emotion. It's also quite anticlimactic, especially because of its placement amongst Emily's other departures and returns in the novel's third volume.

[145] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 104.

The opportunity for escape is unexpected—the departure sequence begins with a strange mixture of dialogue and narrative paraphrase that almost leaves Emily's perspective out entirely:

> "Follow me," said he, "as you value your lives; we have not an instant to lose!"
> Emily enquired what had occurred, and whither they were to go?
> "I cannot stay to tell you now, Signora," replied Ludovico: "fly! fly!"
>
> (449)

Emily's reactions are similarly muted and parenthetical as she is rushed down steps and through passages, "supported" by Du Pont (449). The only moments of suspense are almost comical. When it appears Emily's dog has followed them, barking, Emily voices almost mechanical alarm, though we have no glimpse into her thoughts or emotions:

> "This dog will betray us!" said Du Pont, "I will hold him."
> "I fear he has already betrayed us!" replied Emily.
>
> (450)

There is some true suspense in Ludovico's masterpiece of a threshold scene—though again, the suspense is drowned out by farce. We track each moment and exchange as Ludovico tries to convince the guard to abandon the gate, the fate of Emily and Du Pont wavering alongside the guard, back and forth, over the literal threshold.

The exit from the castle is accomplished in a few pages: soon "they [pass], without interruption, the dreadful gates" (451) and then gain the road (452). Emily is "so much astonished by this sudden departure, that she scarcely dare[s] to believe herself awake" (452)—her only reaction. Once on the road, "they now trave[l] leisurely, and in profound silence," Emily "musing" on the melancholy beauty of the scenery (453). No one, not even Emily, is apprehensive that they might be followed, and even their lack of money and baggage provokes only a few inquiries. Almost as much time is devoted to cataloguing the reflections of each escapee as is spent describing the escape itself. Annette, for example, contemplates gleefully "the bustle in which Montoni and his people must be, now that their flight was discovered," while

Ludovico congratulates himself on having "rescued his Annette and Signora Emily" (453). The free indirect discourse from the servants here, on rather cheerful and triumphant subjects, takes us even further away from Emily's thoughts (not represented with any free indirect discourse in this scene), sucking even more drama out of the event.

This anticlimactic escape is not just uneventful and rather matter-of-fact—it follows a much more tense departure from the castle that seems to have used up all the narrative energy and all of Emily's capacity for terror. In an episode that "critics have never known what to make of,"[146] Montoni sends Emily out of the castle to a cottage in Tuscany for her safety. Castle uses this Tuscan cottage interlude as an example of *Udolpho*'s inexplicable generic instability, an instance where Montoni acts in Emily's best interests and the setting turns away from the Gothic. The trip does at first seem "amusingly incongruous,"[147] and it's hard to see why the narrative should spend two whole chapters in this interlude and take such pains to describe the journeys to and from the cottage. Each journey, from Udolpho to the cottage and back, takes up more narrative space than the entire escape from the castle. Even more oddly, these journeys are also more suspenseful and emotional for Emily, even though the cottage itself turns out to be disconcertingly idyllic.

Compared with the escape from Udolpho, here, Emily's feelings are detailed almost exhaustively. On her journey away from the castle, she begins seeing horrors in the landscape itself, dwelling for paragraph upon paragraph on the "hollow moan" of the wind, a stream described as a "gleaming torrent, hoarsely roaring," the "sulphureous crimson" clouds (406). As she walks, "Emily now breathe[s] with difficulty, and [can] scarcely support herself," not from exertion, but from suspense (406). We are told directly that "the dread of what she might be

[146] Castle, xi.
[147] Castle, xi.

going to encounter was now so excessive, that it sometimes threatened her senses," and she begins to think the journey will have "no end," that the idea of a cottage is a cruel fiction from her captors (407).

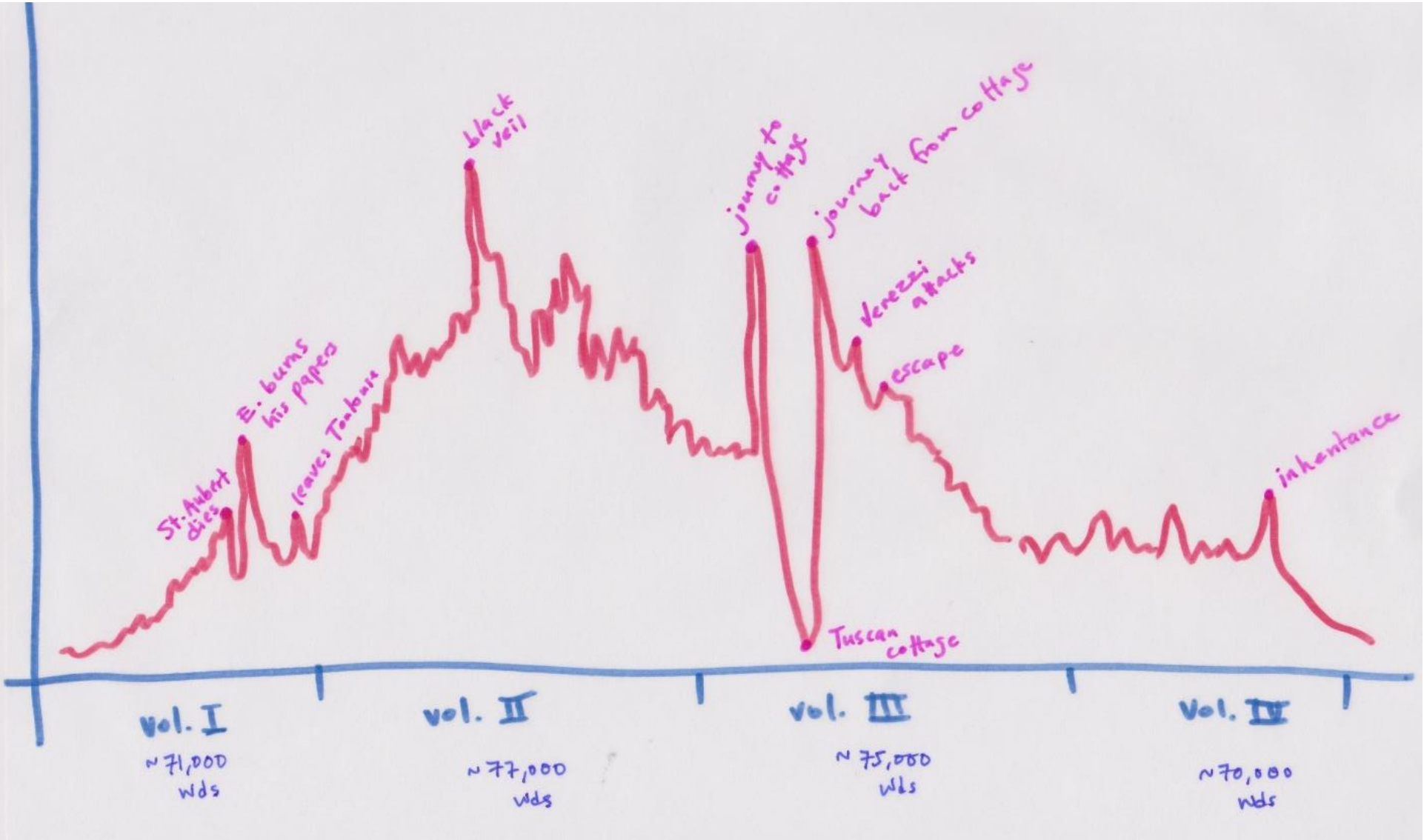

Figure 5. Sketch: Narrative Tension in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Emily *is* led to believe that she might have a real reason to be afraid. As Bertrand and Ugo escort her away from the mountains, we are provided with one of Udolpho's many inset stories. Bertrand retells a murder he has committed, only barely screening his involvement by attempting to pretend it's a story he has heard secondhand. Emily fears that the story might be "pointed against herself, and that these men had been commissioned by Montoni to execute a similar kind of *justice*" (404). But this is not at all the case. We find out later that, in this instance, Montoni really is acting in Emily's best interests—almost paternally whisking her out of harm's way until the battle is over. The suspense this entire episode raises in Emily and in the reader is for nothing, having no effect on the plot. These chapters whip Emily's anxiety into a frenzy, and then drop her right back where she started, just as safe as she was before.

So why is this story included in the novel? The dialogic mode of telling—almost like an educational dialogue to teach a philosophical concept—points to some of the story's function. Emily's state of fear, rumination, and paranoia allows her to teach herself to read this story right—and to analyze other situations with a sense of critical skepticism. This interlude gives Emily practice reading behind the official story, deconstructing the discourse of male sentimentality, and believing that she might know better than Bertrand when he tells one side of a story so confidently (confidently enough that he seems to believe it himself). The interjections from Ugo are left without interpretation or comment from either the narrator or Emily, but are enough to show even the most naïve heroine a second way to read events:

> "They quarrelled about a lady, that the Signor liked, and she was perverse enough to prefer the gentleman of Milan, and even carried her whim so far as to marry him. This provoked the Signor, as well it might, for he had tried to talk reason to her a long while, and used to send people to serenade her, under her windows, of a night; and used to make verses about her, and would swear she was the handsomest lady in Milan—But all would not do—nothing would bring her to reason; and, as I said, she went so far at last, as to marry this other cavaliero. […]"

> "What then, the lady had promised to have Signor Orsino?" said Ugo.
>
> "Promised! No," replied Bertrand, "she had not wit enough even to tell him she liked him, as I heard, but the contrary, for she used to say, from the first, she never meant to have him. And this was what provoked the Signor, so, and with good reason, for, who likes to be told that he is disagreeable? and this was saying as good. It was enough to tell him this; she need not have gone, and married another."
>
> "What, she married, then, on purpose to plague the Signor?" said Ugo.
>
> "I don't know as for that," replied Bertrand, "they said, indeed, that she had had a regard for the other gentleman a great while; but that is nothing to the purpose, she should not have married him, and then the Signor would not have been so much provoked. She might have expected what was to follow; it was not to be supposed he would bear her ill usage tamely, and she might thank herself for what happened. (404-5)

We are given no hint as to how Emily views the way the men "talk reason" in this story, since she is distracted by the news that Bertrand is a murderer. But the idea that this story might have real implications for Emily's own safety is belied, again, by farce: Bertrand keeps slipping up and referring to the main character of his story as "Bertrand," eliciting an astonished interjection from Emily each time. In truth, this story is just what Bertrand and Ugo intended it—a distraction from the tedium of the journey, merely an entertaining tale with no bearing on their current situation. But the story's placement is important for Emily. She allows herself to question the marital arrangements of men, and the narratives they create, while she is in a state of extreme anxiety—and perhaps this practice at "reading" will, subliminally at least, stay with her in her next adventures. This story is one of the last things that happens before Emily spends her next chapter at the Tuscan cottage, where she will enact the routines and thought patterns of sensibility[148] just as she and St. Aubert did at La Vallée—and perhaps test her skills for analyzing the stories that are told her.

[148] See Claudia Johnson's essay on the "stories" of male sensibility sprinkled through *Udolpho*, in which she argues that the novel is a critique of sentimental manhood and St. Aubert's hypocrisy.

Emily's stay at the Tuscan the cottage is absurdly idyllic: the food is apparently remarkable ("grapes of such size and flavour, as Emily had seldom tasted"); the cottage "embowered," covered in flowers, surrounded by "pastures of verdure," encircled by a "purling stream" (411-12; 413). The descriptions become ever more extravagant, extending comma upon comma, until so extreme they seem a bit disconcerting:

> The turf, that grew under the woods, was inlaid with a variety of wild flowers and perfumed herbs, and, on the opposite margin of the stream, whose current diffused freshness beneath the shades, rose a grove of lemon and orange trees. This, though nearly opposite to Emily's window, did not interrupt her prospect, but rather heightened, by its dark verdure, the effect of the perspective; and to her this spot was a bower of sweets, whose charms communicated imperceptibly to her mind somewhat of their own serenity. (414)

What's more, the cottage is almost a copy of her father's home. She "could almost have fancied herself again at La Vallée" (411). The pastoral life reminds Emily of better times, though she does not notice just how similar her life now is to what it was before her adventures began. She falls into her old habits, spending days contemplating nature through her window. She starts taking her old wandering walks, though she is not allowed to leave the confines of the cottage unsupervised.[149] She walks "followed by Bertrand, who allowed her to choose her own way" (418) in a mocking parallel with her father's careful monitoring at home.[150]

Even as she composes verses and makes sketches of the cottage's delights, reverting to her old pastimes at home in La Vallée, Emily is still vaguely paranoid during this episode. She finds herself distrusting parental authority, other people's accounts of their personal histories, and is especially suspicious about inheritance, paternalism, and the origins of property. Emily

[149] Radcliffe's epigraph for this chapter is from Thomson, *The Castle of Indolence*, describing a poetic pastoral version of kinesis-in-stasis: there is "nought around but images of rest" though even the streams, "though restless still themselves, a lulling murmur made."

[150] Johnson would remind us that St. Aubert is diligent about monitoring not just his daughter's steps, but her mental wanderings—he wants to curb Emily's sensibility, much as Henry wants to correct Catherine's Gothic imagination in *Northanger Abbey*.

mistrusts her hosts, especially their authority over their daughter Maddelina, who Emily automatically treats as the subordinate of a tyrranical family structure, like Emily's own with Montoni, rather than drawing any comparison between the cottage family and St. Aubert. She is also disturbed by the cottage's history of ownership. It "had been purchased for them by Montoni, in reward of some service, rendered him, many years before," making Emily think "Marco, whose service, thus rewarded by Montoni," must have done something criminal, and thus Emily thinks she has "too much reason to believe, that she had been committed into his hands for some desperate purpose" (416). Emily has subconsciously learned to see the inheritance or gift of property, not as the natural benevolence of a patriarch, but as grounds for suspicion. When Maddelina explains her father's past, saying "my father did the Signor a great good, for my mother has often said to him, this cottage was the least he ought to have had," Emily immediately translates this "great good" done for Montoni as a certain evil (415).

Emily does not seem to see her confinement at the cottage in the same way as she views her imprisonment within the castle. She is not allowed to leave unaccompanied—but she takes up all her old habits and enjoyments, living no differently than she did at La Vallée. In fact, this may be the point of the Tuscan cottage episode. Deliberately set next to Emily's uneventful escape from the Gothic castle, with so much narration devoted to the fears surrounding the trip to and departure from the cottage, readers are meant to see what Emily cannot absorb—that the pastoral life she longs to return to places her within exactly the same circle of control she experiences at Udolpho.

The return to the castle is described step by step, with more and more detail as Emily approaches its borders—and almost the same level of anxiety as when she left it. On her actual entry, the footsteps of the porter, the sound of the bolt, negotiating of the gate, and Emily's re-

entry across exposed courtyards are detailed exhaustively (428). But almost immediately after her re-entry, Emily finally has an episode where she is able to use her superior knowledge of the castle against her pursuers, and turn the rooms she has been confined to into true refuges from harm.

Emily at first slips into her former role, trepidatious about the dark passageways leading to her room, and when not met by Annette, becomes completely helpless: "the prospect, that presented itself, of passing the night in darkness, in this place, or in some other equally forlorn (for she knew it would be impracticable to find her way through the intricacies of the galleries to her chamber), drew tears of mingled terror and despondency from her eyes" (430). Almost immediately, Emily is presented with the novel's most legitimately dangerous situation. She hears Verezzi and Bertolini talking, and "the conversation seemed to concern herself…she discovered, that they were disputing about her, each seeming to claim some former promise of Montoni," who eventually rids himself of responsibility, "saying he left them to settle [the dispute] as they could" (431). When the light is dropped and only Verezzi is left "pursuing" Emily, "he, less acquainted with the passage, was obliged to proceed through the dark, with caution, lest he should fall down a flight of steps, such as in this extensive old castle frequently terminated an avenue," while Emily is able to move fast enough to keep out of earshot (431). Throughout this whole episode, darkness is Emily's savior, since she is still able to navigate the corridors swiftly and quietly while her pursuer cannot. Interestingly, it is her horror of the room where she saw the black veil that stops her from going into the light. She still thinks of obtaining a light as something "so important to her safety" (432). However, just as she contemplates the horror of the room with the veil and declares to herself that she would rather forgo the all-important light rather than come close to the veil again, she realizes Verezzi is still nearby. She

finally escapes him when, "like an intoxicated person, he followed pertinaciously the one idea, that had possessed his imagination," to catch Emily in her chamber, "forgetting, that, in darkness, she could easily elude his search, even in her chamber" (432). Though Emily still tells herself that light is safety, and darkness confusion, her instinctive fear, even of something readers would know to be less dangerous than Verezzi finding her alone, keeps her safe in darkness (430-31). Though the veil is not what Emily thinks it is, it still represents patriarchal abuse of power. Her outsized fears have (inadvertently in this case) still warned her away from over-trusting the conventional. Here, Emily has not thought through the apparent paradox that darkness will protect her, while the light she instinctively trusts ought to be mistrusted—but her own actions begin to reinforce this realization.

After this scene of re-entry into the castle, it is soon time to be done with Udolpho, as if she has learned all she needed to through dwelling in it (or through living in the Tuscan cottage *and* in Udolpho). While still professing to believe in the safety and sanctity of the moral-domestic code of St. Aubert and La Vallée, (trusting she will find safety in other people, rather than thinking she must use her knowledge and create her own path out of danger, seeing the familiar paternal authority and pastoral landscape as safe), Emily has begun acting as if she does not believe it. It is as if living with fear and uncertainty for a time has allowed Emily to begin seeing the hidden danger that may lie within the laws of marriage and property, though she won't explicitly acknowledge them.

The novel follows a pattern of proposing new possible refuges for Emily and almost immediately revealing them to be places of manipulation and control, if not physical violence—though Emily most often feels the effects of the failure of home in her departures and returns, as if she can only process and fully realize what has happened to her while on the move. Emily's

many returns and departures may cumulatively train her to act as if the real source of violence is often not where she thinks it is. The large strokes of Emily's journeying create a sense of expansive yet unproductive movement. The narrative sweeps across borders and mountain ranges with ease while Emily is dragged along, allowed less and less initiative and input into her movements as the novel goes on, feeling the effects of her lack of autonomy but never consciously recognizing the power structures that create her situation.

It is only the reader, not Emily, who is permitted to experience the novel's lopsidedness of narrative attention, the fluctuation in level of detail, and the unexpected pacing of events. By not matching action with narration, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* creates a sense of wrongness for readers—the genre, pacing, and priorities of the story are not quite what we have been led to expect. The novel's form teaches us to read what Emily can't.

Emily might not end her journey having made a conscious realization about the traps and pitfalls of domestic life. She has, however, tried out forms of movement within, through, and between domestic spaces: repetitions and iterative leaps forward, productive and unproductive pacing within the castle or zigzagging back and forth across Italy, both danger and safety in nested enclosure, and return upon return to domestic spaces and their stories. In the end, all the repeated returns allow some revelations for Emily. Her time in and out of Udolpho, circling around and around Château-le-Blanc in her travels, and finally visiting and returning to it allows her to uncover the basic truth of her father's origins and relationships to marriage and the home. These iterative spurts of movement and revelation do not seem to build up to any net forward progress, at least in terms of Emily's outlook and life decisions. However, Emily ends up repeating two of the fundamental patterns of her life at La Vallée once she returns there to marry Valancourt—and I would argue all her apparently unproductive practice in negotiating space and

power has let her make both these patterns of activity her own. Once reclaimed, they are modes of resistance, even as the novel's conservative closure masks them, allowing an interpretation where Emily simply comes full circle once restored to her father's home, replacing St. Aubert with Valancourt.

Throughout her journeying, Emily starts employing a kind of movement that takes her out of the pattern of being dragged to and fro at Montoni's behest. While she never quite creates forward motion of her own as she traverses Europe, there is power in her characteristic meditative pauses along her journeys, in between the various domestic situations she is brought to. These "poetical interpolations" constitute another of Terry Castle's generic instabilities[151]—readers are often yanked out of the narrative, sometimes quite abruptly and perhaps too often, to indulge in a poetic or descriptive escape. These moments often happen when Emily is literally crossing mountains, paused on a height contemplating the sublimity of the scene before her rather than thinking about what lies behind or where's she's going. She indulges in the "wonderful mixture of solitude and inhabitation, of cultivation and barrenness" she finds in the mountains and writes sonnets as she "travelled among the clouds, watch[ing] in silent awe their billowy surges rolling below" (165). These moments of sensibility and imaginative production take Emily out of the plot of flight and confinement, out of narrative altogether. They're vertical leaps up out of the kinds of movement she can't control—miniature escapes she is practiced at creating.[152] Of course, they're also exactly the indulgences in sensibility that St. Aubert spends the first half of the novel warning her against (while indulging in them himself).

[151] Mackenzie might characterize this as one of Udolpho's "blanknesses;" or in Flaxman one of the times when "nothing happens."

[152] Compare to *Otranto*, where Isabella and Matilda repeatedly help others escape, not through reverie but through practical domestic knowledge. The practical has very little place in Emily's world—but this ability to walk, and think, by herself, is one inculcated in her days at La Vallée—her own domestic habit.

The second pattern that Emily reinscribes once back home is the quite literal patterns of movement that she associates with pastoral domesticity. Emily's last return to La Vallée ends her journeying, apparently allowing her to leave behind the experiences and stories of violence she's accumulated. She and Valancourt work to recover the family property: "Emily purchased of Mons. Quesnel the ancient domain of her late father" and spend time there every year, "at the birth-place of St. Aubert, in tender respect to his memory" (672). The young couple "wander together over the scenes, so long inhabited by the late Mons. and Madame St. Aubert" and vow to "imitate" St. Aubert's philosophies and practices. Emily almost literally follows in her father's footsteps, around and around his grounds, new husband in tow. In an image that again evokes her stay (under guard) in the Tuscan cottage; she is content in her wandering pastoral walks, unbothered by her need for an escort if she can stop and write a line of poetry from time to time. Emily certainly has not rejected the discourse of companionate marriage and quiet domestic routine under the supervision of a patriarch—but this time, she is the one leading Valancourt around her ancestral home, encouraging him to step into her father's routines and pastimes. In this scenario, she plays the role of St. Aubert, allowing herself all possible indulgence in sensibility, directing the pattern of her domestic life, and consolidating power and property to distribute and allocate as she pleases. As Albright observes,

> Radcliffe gives us no scene of Emily as a mother, surrounded by her children. They and the future they represent are certainly implied, for we must assume that the generations will flow outward from Emily, presumably neat, untangled, Burkean lines now…the narrative stops at this point, with Emily embodying the future like a reservoir of potential energy, but the emphasis is on the here and now, the rich, thick, extended, spectralized, present.[153]

[153] Albright, *Writing the Past*, 61.

The novel does end with the pronouncement that "the bowers of La Vallée became, once more, the retreat of goodness, wisdom and domestic blessedness!" But its final image is of Emily and Valancourt "wandering together" on idyllic walks through their various properties, circling and returning to favorite haunts (672)—not quite the productive, Burkean lines of inheritance we should be led to expect. Even the literal inheritance of land and property is noticeably multiplied and scattered in the final page of the novel. We hear about no less than six separate "dispositions" of land and fortune in the last two pages of the novel,[154] five of which are made by Emily and Valancourt parceling out the inheritances they are entitled to. Perhaps this profusion of bequests and gifts represents a subversive rebellion against the power of inheritance. Perhaps Emily now knows that she can exert influence over others by controlling what property they own or have temporary access to (after all, it is easy to reward Valancourt's brother for good behavior, if at his death it will return to the elder brother). Either way, Emily is still behaving as if she knows the manipulative practicalities of "domestic blessedness," whether she can articulate them and allow herself to acknowledge them, or not.

Northanger Abbey: **"Foundation and Probability"**

Though published in 1817, *Northanger Abbey* is at heart a novel of the 1790s,[155] but looking forward and presaging some of the techniques and concerns of the nineteenth-century

[154] 1) Valancourt "resigns" to his brother "a part of the rich domain, the whole of which, as he had no family, would of course descend to his brother, on his decease" 2) "The estates, at Thoulouse, were disposed of" 3) "Emily purchased of Mons. Quesnel the ancient domain of her late father" 4) "having given Annette a marriage portion, she settled her as the housekeeper, and Ludovico as the steward" 5) "The legacy, which had been bequeathed to Emily by Signora Laurentini, she begged Valancourt would allow her to resign to Mons. Bonnac" 6) "The castle of Udolpho, also, descended to the wife of Mons. Bonnac" (672)

[155] *Susan* composed 1798-9, completed 1800, revisions in 1802; in 1803 Austen submits MS to Crosby; in 1809 attempts to get the copyright back; 1816 Henry re-purchases it, (titled *Catherine*); pub. posthumously in 1817 as *Northanger Abbey*.

novel. In Austen's version of the Gothic, home and anti-home collapse back into each other, using the same tools and techniques at thresholds as in *Udolpho*. *Northanger Abbey* reiterates what *Udolpho* posits: that real, everyday villains should be at the center of any narrative—not supernatural or absurdly manaical murderers, but gentlemen of property who don't lock up their wives but exploit them, nonetheless. Catherine's realization of this truth is grounded in the physical and spatial, as we will see. It is also the result, not of Henry's teachings, but of her own activity: the activeness with which she reads Gothic tropes into her surroundings as well as her own patterns of actively inhabiting domestic interiors.

Reading *Udolpho*: Intertextuality and Novel-Reading in *Northanger Abbey*

Of course, *Northanger Abbey* is the novel which best lends itself to my argument that reading—a certain kind of reading—is akin to the recursive spatial practices that allow one to take control over the territory at hand. The novel employs this technique on both levels. It is, of course, a *bildungsroman* centered around Catherine's lesson about novel-reading (though most readers will conclude it is Henry Tilney who in the end gets served the lesson). But the novel itself also employs its source texts (including importantly, more genres than just Gothic fiction) using the same methodology it ultimately recommends for Catherine.

The novel tracks Catherine as she learns to "read" Gothic novels like *Udolpho*, certainly—but the novel contains a host of characters who read and mis-read not just Gothic fiction, but literature of several genres. The novel's characters show us a range of (variously wrong) ways to interpret and use what they read. Right reading, in *Northanger Abbey*, is not *extraction*, the ability to pull out witty quotes and cliches to map onto events (as Henry does, however playfully). The first chapter bombards us with such didactic extracts—from Pope, Gray,

Thomson, and Shakespeare[156]—with which Catherine has been dutifully supplied by her mother (who again, at the end of the novel, "prescribes" a didactic passage from *The Mirror* as an antidote to what she misdiagnoses as Catherine's malaise upon returning home[157]). But we know that Mrs. Morland is a sympathetic character because of the reading practices she embraces outside her motherly duties: Catherine tells us "she very often reads Sir Charles Grandison herself; but new books do not fall in our way" (26). Mrs. Morland, very sensibly, reads and re-reads one of Jane Austen's own favorite novels. Barbara Benedict points out Austen's criticism of the new trend in the literary marketplace emphasizing turnaround time and extracts over comprehension and enjoyment. She argues, "Catherine's preference for fiction exposes the gender bias of a literary culture that packages male sentiments—by Pope, Gray, Thompson, Shakespeare—for female consumption."[158] This is exactly Austen's point. It is another way in which Catherine proves her worthiness: she loves stories, not quotes and moral maxims, and is only driven to read extracts once she realizes it is the proper thing for a young woman to do.[159] Austen's famous defense of novels[160] is key to her recipe for "right reading." But it is not just that novels are the works "in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language" (22).

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[156] Austen, 7, vol. I, ch 1.
[157] Austen, 166, vol. II, ch.15.
[158] Benedict, "Reading by the Book in *Northanger Abbey*," n.p..
[159] Austen disparages the respectable (male) periodical the *Spectator* in the same passage as her famous defense of the novel. She accuses this periodical of "so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation which no longer concern anyone living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it" (22). It is not just the outdated, elitist pages of the *Spectator* that Austen censures; she insists that it is absurd that "the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens" (22), while the stories told in novels are looked down on.
[160] Austen, 22, vol. I, ch. 5.

Novels are not for quoting; they're for re-reading—and more importantly, for *pleasure*. The kind of reading that counts as "activeness" means the ability to read without an end in mind, purposelessly, for entertainment and to feed appreciative conversation, not for boiling down into simple maxims.[161]

Austen was, of course, far from ashamed to be called a novel-reader; she even re-read novels she *disliked*. For example, in an 1807 letter to Cassandra, Jane writes, "We are reading Clarentine, & are surprised to find how foolish it is. I remember liking it much less on a 2d reading than at the 1st & it does not bear a 3d at all."[162] In a circulating library culture that encouraged fast reading of new titles, the Austens were unusual in their propensity to read novels three or more times.[163] Even Mr. Austen read Gothic novels—in a letter in 1798 Jane mentions him reading *The Midnight Bell*, one of the "horrid" Northanger novels.[164] Another letter contains an unequivocal statement from Austen aligning herself and her family with, not just novels, but circulating library novels at that: "as an inducement to subscribe Mrs. Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature &c &c—She might have spared this pretension to *our* family, who are great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so."[165] Significantly, this statement comes in the year 1798, the same year in which Austen was writing *Susan*, later to become *Northanger Abbey*. Note that for the Austens, novel-reading was famously a collective activity for the whole family, participatory and social.[166] And, of course, a

[161]We might think of Godwin's plea to the public on the publication of *Maria*: to, as Janet Todd puts it, read with "warmhearted sensitivity rather than fastidious criticism" (Todd, Introduction, xiv; see Godwin's Advertisement for *Maria*).
[162]Austen, *Letters*, #50: 125-126. 1807.
[163]Erickson, 574.
[164]*Letters*, #9: 15. 1798.
[165]*Letters*, #14: 27. 1798.
[166] See Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*.

novel is not something to be consumed and digested; novel-reading is a practice that's ongoing, and returning to a text (for even a third time) is the best test of its merit.

For Michel de Certeau, reading is one way of "assimilating" the world—it means almost re-writing as you read.[167] *Northanger Abbey* literally reworks more than one source text, assimilating yet revising in just the recursively participatory reading practice that the novel teaches us is empowering. Of course, there is *Udolpho*, lovingly parodied, and the Bath section of the novel finds intertexts in sentimental novels.[168] These source texts are not just touchstones—they are strategic re-visions. As Susan Fraiman notes with regards to *Udolpho*, "Clearly Austen means to mock the improbable plots, extreme characters, and emotional hyperbole of much popular fiction—and to school its avid readers in her own less sensational mode," but "Austen may not reject Radcliffe's scenarios so much as reconfigure them," "shifting the Gothic's motif of sexual exploitation into a more subtle and probable register."[169] A crucial element of *Northanger Abbey* is its reconfiguration of and commentary concerning the "female Quixote" trope—and some critics claim that *Northanger Abbey* is as much a parody of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* as it is of *Udolpho*. If we see *The Female Quixote* as a model for *Northanger Abbey*, then we can resolve some of the apparently disconcerting aspects of the novel's structure: [170] what troubles many readers is the complexity of Austen's portrayal of novel-reading, especially female reading. It is simpler to conclude that Austen merely wanted to parody Gothic novels, rather than simultaneously parody and reclaim them. Yet there is a precedent for this kind of complexity in *The Female Quixote*: as Gilroy claims, "Arabella's

[167] De Certeau, "Reading as Poaching," 168.
[168] See Glock, "Catherine Morland's Gothic Delusions: A Defense of *Northanger Abbey*," for an account of the Bath intertexts.
[169] Susan Fraiman, Introduction to *Northanger Abbey*, ix-x.
[170] See Schaub, "Irony and Political Education in *Northanger Abbey*," 2 and Glock, 33-4. Glock argues that many readers find Catherine's behavior in the Bath vs. Northanger sections of the novel incompatible.

investment in romances is an escape from reality, but also a comment on it."[171] Austen approaches Catherine's novel-reading with even more nuance, but her approach has its roots in Lennox's careful undermining of her own narrator's assertions.

For example, when Arabella is contrasted with her cousin Miss Charlotte Glanville, Lennox shows readers that some of Arabella's outmoded literary ideas about the world are more honest and honorable than Charlotte's contemporary views. Charlotte is constantly jealous of Arabella and tries to exploit her foible in order to humiliate her, behavior which Arabella cannot understand, as the heroines of romances are always kind to other women, never manipulative or petty. While Charlotte seems to be the reasonable female, an example of what Arabella should be, Lennox undermines her as a model of feminine intelligence. Gilroy points out that "in the encounters between them, the reader is often first encouraged to find Arabella ridiculous but then prompted to revise this opinion as she displays her superior intelligence and generosity" (xxiv). Arabella is always careful to hide Charlotte's faults—her ignorance, selfishness, and vanity—while Charlotte is ever ready to exploit the faults of other women (much like Isabella in *Northanger Abbey*). In a revealing statement, Charlotte displays both her stupidity and her selfishness when she comments on another woman, saying "She is very particular in a great many Things, and knows too much for a Lady, as I heard my Lord Trifle Say one Day."[172] Charlotte is under the power of the men around her, and takes her opinions from them, while Arabella, though she is deluded about the realities of the world, finds a way to empower herself and other women.

[171] Amanda Gilroy, Introduction to *The Female Quixote*, xxxiv.
[172] Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 373.

At the end of *The Female Quixote*, Arabella's clearsightedness must be quelled and her "foible" cured in order for her to marry Glanville and live a normal life. Debra Malina pinpoints the renovation that *Northanger Abbey* makes to the portrayal of a quixotic reader: that "we [readers] are represented in the world of the novel less by Arabella than by those other characters" who are humiliated or amused by Arabella's antics.[173] By contrast, in *Northanger Abbey*, readers are "both beside and above Catherine" (284) and must sympathize with her. Therefore, Catherine can "collaborate with Austen in laying bare the workings of patriarchal society" (273), i.e. we can discover the empowering nature of novel-reading alongside Catherine.

Even the seven "horrid" Northanger novels are, in the end, not a target of Austen's disapproval. She is able to admit the vacuity with which Isabella treats these novels—she, like her brother, views reading as a mere social decoration, and it is important that this list of horrid novels comes not from Isabella but from the unknown Miss Andrews—but she does not intimate that the novels themselves are what create Isabella's superficiality. In fact, the novels that Isabella proposes reading are carefully chosen as positive representations of the Gothic genre, as Natalie Neill discusses. She argues that Austen chose these seven novels because of their popularity as well as their financial and critical success. She also suggests that the seven novels showcase several different types of Gothic fiction, with *Clermont* representing sensibility and romance, while *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, *The Mysterious Warning*, and *The Midnight Bell* are classed as terror-novels, and are all examples of the type of Gothic fiction which pretends to be a German translation, though it is actually written by an English author.[174] *The Necromancer* and *Horrid Mysteries* are true German translations (170). All seven novels were best-sellers, and the

[173] Debra Malina, "Rereading the Patriarchal Text: *The Female Quixote*, *Northanger Abbey*, and the Trace of the Absent Mother," 282.
[174] Natalie Neill, "'The Trash with Which the Press Now Groans': *Northanger Abbey* and the Gothic Best Sellers of the 1790s,"170.

list comprises, as Neill notes, examples from both the "so-called 'male' and 'female' Gothic" genres (171). Many of these titles have been praised, not just by contemporary critics, but by modern ones. Neill herself calls *The Children of the Abbey* "a well-constructed and engrossing romance," while she cites another critic who calls *The Necromancer* "a long-neglected literary achievement" (171). Austen did not choose these novels as examples which would make it easy to prove Gothic fiction valueless: she chose a representative sample of novels her readers would be expected to recognize, and recognize as, if not admirable, at least popular.

That Isabella is the one to mention these paragons of Gothic tradition calls attention to her role as what can be described only as a false female Quixote. Many critics identify Isabella with the Gothic literature she seems to admire: Neill herself proclaims, "[Isabella's] character…can be read as a figure for the popular fictions which Austen parodies" (166). Mathison makes a similar statement, though he qualifies, "Catherine comes rightly to connect Isabella's shallowness with her interest in Gothic novels *only*" (emphasis mine).[175] Yet neither of these conclusions hit the mark. Isabella is clearly meant to be seen as vapid and mercenary, and she is a reader of the Gothic—and these two attributes are clearly connected. However, it is not Isabella's interest in the Gothic that makes her selfish and vacuous—it is not even her exclusive reading of Gothic novels. While it is true that part of the reason we are able to separate Catherine's reading from Isabella's is that Catherine has made an effort to interest herself in other types of literature (she "do[es] not dislike travels" and "can read poetry and plays"[176]), it is because Catherine's love of *Udolpho* is genuine. What truly differentiates Catherine from Isabella is that Isabella is one of the kind of readers who reads only for the social status reading

[175] John K. Mathison, "*Northanger Abbey* and Jane Austen's Conception of the Value of Fiction," 147.
[176] Austen, p. 74; vol. I, ch. 14.

can bring her. When Isabella gives Catherine the list of the next seven novels they should read together, she is just trying to reel Catherine in, making sure they will continue to be friends, which will guarantee Isabella access to James and his supposed fortune. Isabella has chosen her bait well: "Catherine, already preferring story to sentiment, is a willing victim" of Isabella's feigned Gothic obsession.[177]

The true target of Austen's ire is not Gothic novels, but those who use them (or any literature) for nefarious purposes. Isabella is not a figure for the Gothic, but a twisted representation of the female Quixote. Isabella and Catherine are two sides of Arabella; they represent two ways to be a female reader, two ways to use literature as female empowerment. Isabella's method is clever—it almost works. Yet it is revealed to be ultimately faulty, not to mention shameful. Perhaps Isabella has read more than we give her credit for—she certainly seems familiar with the formulas common to female Quixote fiction. Like Arabella, she espouses views found in fiction: she says of her relationship with James, "the very first moment I beheld him—my heart was irrecoverably gone;"[178] she declares, "where people are really attached, poverty itself is wealth"[179] and "of all things in the world inconstancy is my aversion,"[180] and even, "the men think us incapable of real friendship…I am determined to show them the difference".[181] Isabella is playing the role of a female Quixote perfectly, pretending to believe herself the heroine of a sentimental novel just as Arabella sees the world as if it is a romance. But Isabella, unlike Arabella, is just playing a part. She does not believe the sentiments she repeats, but knows that the people she meets will see her in a certain way if she repeats them. She has

[177] Benedict, n.p..
[178] Austen, 82, vol. I, ch. 15.
[179] Austen, 83, vol. I, ch. 15.
[180] Austen, 89, vol. II, ch. 1.
[181] Austen, 25, vol. I, ch. 6.

learned the lesson Charlotte Lennox was trying to convey with Arabella's story—namely that female Quixotes are often able to manipulate those around them, especially the men around them. By manipulating the tropes of fiction, Isabella attempts to empower herself and control the way people perceive her.

Austen offers us an alternative female Quixote in Catherine. Though she is, in a sense, a victim of Isabella's false quixotism, Catherine, a true admirer of the stories Isabella uses as fodder for social climbing, is able to do what Isabella cannot—turn her quixotism into a tool for surviving in a patriarchal world. Catherine is not quite like Arabella—she can check her imagination, and clearly sees the difference between history and the novels she loves. She just does not see why history, as a category of literature, is elevated above the novel. More often than not, when the novel seems to accuse Catherine of being a "bad" reader, it is only highlighting that she is in fact a good one. The most prominent example of this is the scene with John Thorpe, a self-professed novel hater who thinks they "are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since Tom Jones, except The Monk; I read that t'other day."[182] His tirade precedes one of the brilliant moments when readers are allowed to be beside and also above Catherine: in traditional Austenian irony, the narrator refers to "this critique, the justness of which was unfortunately lost on poor Catherine" (32). However ingenuous, Catherine can stick to her own literary opinions when they are challenged by a John Thorpe; she finds more difficulty in opposing a Henry Tilney.

Much of *Northanger Abbey*'s political message depends on Henry and how readers interpret his character and his actions. Like Isabella, he has ties to *The Female Quixote*, representing a strangely ambivalent mixture of Glanville and Sir George. Like Sir George, he is

[182] Austen, 31, vol. I, ch. 7.

familiar with the literature that fascinates his love interest. But his place in the story is that of Glanville—the reasonable young man who must cure Catherine's Gothic delusions in order to marry her at the end of the book. This dichotomy puzzles many readers; Henry's purpose is clearer when one sees his character's antecedents. Henry does not exploit Catherine's Gothic leanings in order to deceive her, as Sir George does Arabella. Neither does he mock Catherine when she is absent, or act humiliated by her love of the Gothic, as Glanville does. So far, Austen seems to have taken the good aspects of Lennox's male characters and left the bad. But Henry is not faultless. Though he does not mastermind an intricate plot to manipulate Catherine using his knowledge of Gothic novels, he does (rather carelessly) talk her into believing the abbey is akin to the castles of Gothic fiction.[183] And unlike Arabella, Catherine does not really believe that fictional patterns will hold in real life—she keeps questioning her own credulity. It is Henry's story that pushes her to imagine the Gothic at Northanger.

These examples, however, are relatively insignificant compared to Henry's real quixotic fault. Jung-hwa Oh makes a more serious accusation about Henry's misuse of literature, saying "this specialist in 'young ladies' ways' believes in the images of women in 'hundreds and hundreds' of novels he has read in spite of his supposed critical ability."[184] Not only does Henry have no ability to imagine Isabella as anything other than a callous seductress (Oh says he has "no sympathetic imagination about female powerlessness and vulnerability in courting rituals" (669)), but he even misreads Catherine. He teases her with gendered cliches: "a taste for flowers is always desirable in your sex, as a means of getting you out of doors"[185]—but Catherine, as we

[183] Austen, vol. II, ch. 5.
[184] Jung-hwa Oh, "Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney: Two Readers in *Northanger Abbey*," 669. Joseph Litvak calls this "a certain opportunistic style of 'male feminism,'" and notes that Henry's modes of reading leave him open to critique and tutelage: "charm itself implies not only the archcommentator's arch penetration of the social text but also his inscription in that text, and thus his possibility of penetration by others (356-7).
[185] Austen, 178; vol. II, ch. 7.

know, is a fan of cricket and baseball. A more troubling bit of Tilney mockery is when he tells Catherine and Eleanor, "no one can think more highly of the understanding of women than I do. In my opinion, nature has given them so much that they never find it necessary to use more than half" (; vol. I, ch. 14). Though he always keeps up an ironic tone, Henry's insistence on applying novelistic stereotypes to all the women in his life is truly a flaw. At least part, if not most, of the function of *Northanger Abbey*'s ending must be to make Henry "overcome his complacent reading" of both novels and of the women and men around him.[186] The climax of the novel with its faux-female Quixote moment—when Catherine reproves herself for ever believing the Gothic has any basis in real life—is Austen's red-herring. In the real conclusion, Henry is the one who must apologize, and Catherine is the one who has handled the situation with the most grace. As Mathison points out, "with her experience of Gothic fiction, Catherine was better able to accept the possibility of such behavior as General Tilney's throwing her out of his house…than so intelligent a man as Henry Tilney himself, or even some critics of the novel."[187]

Novels allow women a place in literature not previously open to them: Catherine tells Eleanor that she dislikes reading history because in it there are "hardly any women at all" and also because "a great deal of it must be invention" though it is very dull.[188] History *pretends* to be true, as Catherine and Eleanor acknowledge. Yet it is written, not found—written by men. If Catherine is a kind of female Quixote, then Austen is telling us that her brand of novel-reading is preferable to the irreproachable Eleanor's love of history. Though Eleanor is presented as if she should be a model for Catherine's recovery, Austen does not allow her to fulfill this role. Eleanor is a complacent—or perhaps just a demoralized—reader. She has options as a female reader,

[186] Oh, 672.
[187] Mathison, 149.
[188] Austen, 74, vol. I, ch. 14.

Austen suggests, for improving her outlook on life, but she does not or cannot make use of them. Susan Zlotnick argues that in *Northanger Abbey* "wise and judicious female reading emerges as a possible antidote to female victimization."[189] Wise and judicious, however, does not mean reading confined to histories; as Zlotnick points out, Eleanor's "striking lack of curiosity" and "defeated sense of the inflexibility of family circumstances" are the by-products of what cannot be a wise reading habit. Zlotnick argues that "in addition to developing Catherine's protofeminist and critical capacities, reading produces more tangible results: it spurs Catherine to action" (288), allowing her to solve the mystery of Northanger Abbey on her own when no one will explain it to her properly. Eleanor, though she is respectable and well-read, is limited in a way that Catherine is not—she has allowed her reading to teach her that women have no place in the real world and have no say in the direction of their own lives.

Reading Spaces: *Northanger Abbey*'s "Good Houses" and Domestic Doublespeak

Even if *Northanger Abbey* is the account of Catherine's realization of what it means to "read rightly," it's still dubious whether, by the end of the novel, Catherine is at the point of being able to read Henry Tilney in any critical way, even if he has received his own readerly comeuppance. Since (before her abrupt eviction from his house, at least) it takes "serious consideration" for Catherine to be able to call General Tilney "not perfectly amiable," and she can only vaguely conjecture that "she would not be surprized if even in Henry and Eleanor Tilney, some slight imperfection might hereafter appear,"[190] we may easily believe that it will take some years of re-reading and assimilation for her to read Henry in any way but quixotically. However, as Zlotnick notes, Catherine's mode of reading "spurs her to action" and is a critical

[189] Susan Zlotnick, "From Involuntary Object to Voluntary Spy: Female Agency, Novels, and the Marketplace in *Northanger Abbey*," 278.
[190] Austen, 138, vol. II, ch. 10.

action in itself. She has learned to read the world—its interior spaces, at least—by the end of the novel. And even before the end of the novel, while she may find Henry Tilney dazzlingly perfect, she *can* read—and see how to revise—his house.

One of Catherine's hardest lessons is interpreting the doublespeak of General Tilney's domestic proclivities. His hypocrisy crystallizes for her when they plan to visit Henry's parsonage and future home at Woodston. The General proposes that he, Catherine, and Eleanor should drop in on some indeterminate day, taking his son "by surprize" for a casual dinner visitation. He insists showily that "you are not to put yourself at all out of your way. Whatever you may happen to have in the house will be enough.[191] Henry and Eleanor immediately understand that this means Henry has to go immediately to "frighten [his] old housekeeper out of her wits" (145). Once fully convinced that this is true, Catherine dwells on the inconsistency: "why he should say one thing so positively, and mean another all the while, was most unaccountable! How were people, at that rate, to be understood?" (145). The *most* understandable example of this doublespeak is the dinner conundrum: Catherine is able to grasp the General's duplicity when she can see how it plays out in everyday household tasks and habits. In the visit that follows, Catherine shows readers her good taste and her promise as the mistress of a house, although she isn't aware of what she's doing. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, going over her future fiancé's abode clinches the romance, a clear signal for readers (and for everyone else involved, except Catherine). Catherine notices and approves the elements of homeliness that matter, even as she is sometimes flummoxed by her disagreement with the General (just as she is when Henry's literary tastes diverge from hers). Driving through town, she "look[s] with great admiration at every neat house above the rank of a cottage" (146). Henry,

[191] Austen, 144, vol. II, ch. 11.

"with the friends of his solitude, a large, Newfoundland puppy and two or three terriers, was ready to receive and make much of them" (146) in a clear sign of Austenian welcome.[192] The General opines, "we are not calling it a good house…we are not comparing it with Fullerton and Northanger," only a "decent," "habitable," "small and confined" one (146). When they come to a "prettily-shaped room, the windows reaching to the ground, and the view from them pleasant, though only over green meadows" (147), Catherine sees a cottage that "bespeaks her schooling in the picturesque"[193] and her natural taste, even though we know that as a faulty heroine, her "greatest deficiency" is in drawing.[194] She asks, "Oh! Why do you not fit up this room, Mr. Tilney?" and notes guilelessly that "if it was my house, I should never sit anywhere else" (147). In a rare moment of social awareness, she belatedly realizes what she has said and refuses to give her opinion on just how she would fit up the room with paper and hangings. But one can imagine the house becoming a place where Catherine and Henry become more equal, with Catherine's genuine pleasure in the rooms and her unstudied good taste, just like her genuine pleasure in reading Gothic novels, giving her the confidence to create her own place.

Of course, Catherine's final realization happens at a threshold of sorts: it is only in being ejected from Northanger that she fully understands its mysteries. As Catherine spends one last night in the Tilneys' home after learning that she will be unceremoniously expelled in the morning, her new understanding of the world concretizes around the same Gothic trappings that first thrilled her:

> Her anxiety had foundation in fact, her fears in probability; and with a mind so occupied in the contemplation of actual and natural evil, the solitude of her situation, the darkness

[192] See Wall's discussion of "that necessary condition for many homes now and most then: a dog or a cat," which surely holds true as much in the eighteenth century as the sixteenth and seventeenth (Wall, "The Meaning of Home," 19-20).
[193] Fraiman, 147, note 7.
[194] Austen, 8, vol. I, ch. 1.

> of her chamber, the antiquity of the building, were felt and considered without the smallest emotion; and though the wind was high, and often produced strange and sudden noises throughout the house, she heard it all as she lay awake, hour after hour, without curiosity or terror.[195]

The only moment of true "horror" in the novel is the epitome of Austenian concerns about domesticity.[196] Eleanor realizes it is likely that "Catherine might not be provided with money enough for the expenses of her journey" and both girls are stunned into silence by the realization of what this might have meant. They both think that Catherine "might have been turned from the house without even the means of getting home; and the distress in which she must have been thereby involved filling the minds of both, scarcely another word was said by either during the time of their remaining together" (158). This brief gap in narratability is immediately followed by a swift, mundane exit from the house: "she darted across the hall, jumped into the chaise, and in a moment was driven from the door" (158). Unlike for Emily, Austen acknowledges Catherine's transformation: *Northanger Abbey* is a true *bildungsroman*, and so Catherine's pacing, once back at home, is noted as evidence of her growth. Catherine spends her time in frenetic movement as she processes her newfound worldliness, "walking round the garden and orchard again and again, as if nothing but motion was voluntary; and it seemed as if she could even walk about the house rather than remain fixed for any time in the parlour" (165). While this is almost like the restless Catherine at the beginning of the novel, it is of a different tenor: "in her rambling and her idleness she might only be a caricature of herself; but in her silence and

[195] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 156, vol. II, ch. 13.

[196] Austen's interpolation of the Gothic horror moment is of course Catherine's attempt to discover a nefarious manuscript, which turns out to be washing-bills (the ultimate in domestic banality). This moment, too, is signaled through Catherine's interactions with domestic objects and spaces. At the height of suspense, Catherine notes that there is "no danger" that her light will be suddenly extinguished in a Gothic manner—but she decides to trim, or snuff it (presumably a common, easy domestic task)—accidentally extinguishing it (116). Similarly, she creates Gothic tension for herself by trying to unlock a cabinet that had been unlocked in the first place, "being herself its fastener," rather than experiencing "something mysterious" (118-9). A perfect spatial metaphor for what Henry accuses her of in his lecture on Englishness (136).

sadness she was the very reverse of all that she had been before" (165). Here, Flaxman's kinesis-in-stasis is almost cast as pathology—but perhaps, it is the physical manifestation of learning through experience—and dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Udolpho abounds with gaps and blanknesses, using changes in point of view to create anticlimax out of crucial plot points, as in the escape from the castle. *Northanger Abbey* employs this technique more sparingly, but to greater effect. Despite the traditional Austenian "hastening together to perfect felicity" (172), it is odd even for Austen to skip the scene reuniting Catherine and Henry. Though the beginning of the chapter in which Henry arrives at Fullerton is already focalized through Mrs. Morland, it is an unusual choice for the narrative to follow her up to the attic to rummage through books, rather than remaining with our heroine in the drawing room:

> Mrs. Morland watched the progress of this relapse; and seeing, in her daughter's absent and dissatisfied look, the full proof of that repining spirit to which she had now begun to attribute her want of cheerfulness, hastily left the room to fetch the book in question, anxious to lose no time in attacking so dreadful a malady. It was some time before she could find what she looked for; and other family matters occurring to detain her, a quarter of an hour had elapsed ere she returned downstairs with the volume from which so much was hoped. Her avocations above having shut out all noise but what she created herself, she knew not that a visitor had arrived within the last few minutes, till, on entering the room, the first object she beheld was a young man whom she had never seen before. With a look of much respect, he immediately rose, and being introduced to her by her conscious daughter as "Mr. Henry Tilney." (166)

This is an exit from the narrative almost as striking as readers' ejection from Emily's interiority in *Udolpho* when we are denied the knowledge of what's behind the black veil as Emily faints away. Turning away from the crucial moment when Henry enters the house is perhaps just characteristic of Austen—but it also privileges the scenes at the Tilney estate as the ones invested with the action and emotion that causes their attachment. From Henry's arrival on, events speed up, explanations are given by the narrator, and we have no more focalization

through either Henry or Catherine. The Tilney estate is the central "home" in the novel: though surrounded by multiple fairly positive examples of domesticity—the Allens, the Morlands—each of these is always put forward as neither idyllic haven nor trap for bored housewives. They are homes that can be re-made by the occupant, just as Catherine's is on her return from her adventures. The Tilney home, in the end, is revealed to be the same—neither home nor anti-home, but both at once, dictated by the man who controls its rhythms and routines.

The final paragraphs of the novel take care to revisit characters and tie up their side stories—but Eleanor Tilney's history is told in full. While Catherine's fate is concluded in half a sentence ("Henry and Catherine were married, the bells rang and everybody smiled" (174)), Eleanor is provided a novel's worth of plot in a paragraph. Not only is her marriage the entire key to the novel's dénouement—it is what makes General Tilney relent about Catherine—but Eleanor's story is the source of "that collection of washing-bills, resulting from a long visit at Northanger, by which my heroine was involved in one of her most alarming adventures" (173). These washing-bills, perhaps the most versatile and metaphorically rich objects in the entire novel, are an afterthought in the marriage plot between Eleanor and her unnamed gentleman. The narrator draws our attention to Eleanor, clearly an example of the true heroine that Catherine has been compared to from the first line of the novel, announcing, "I know no one more entitled, by unpretending merit, or better prepared by habitual suffering, to receive and enjoy felicity" (173).

This final narrative feint reminds us again of the realities of Northanger. *Northanger Abbey* initiates a new stage in the Gothic treatment of home, collapsing the easy binary that novels like *Udolpho* and *The Monk* rely on (and deconstruct) in order to express complicated truths about our attachments to and myths about domesticity. Of course, the narrative leaves Catherine safe from, if not rid of, General Tilney's attempts at coercion and control—surely he

will eventually appear to haunt the cheerful parsonage at Woodston from time to time. But Austen does not want Catherine to let go of the Gothic—an ideology of domesticity that prompts her critical reading and her activeness, her need to make home her own, even if that might mean risking a too-Gothic conjecture every now and again. After all, Catherine's "obsession with the Gothic might well be read as the wish for domestic spaces opening onto adventure, for furniture packed with intrigue instead of linens."[197] Home is never a strictly idyllic safe space, and Catherine has learned that treating it as such is as dangerous as seeing Radcliffean threats around every corner. We have come full circle, back to the narrative geography of *Otranto*, where home and anti-home are one and the same. But this time, it is Gothic villainy that lurks underneath the country estate, rather than mundane domestic knowledge and action that rises to the surface to subvert the workings of the castle.

[197] Fraiman, Introduction, x.

Chapter Three

"Dreadful to Me Was the Coming Home in the Raw Twilight": Threshold-Crossing and the Iterative Return in *Jane Eyre*

> *How people feel when they are returning home from an absence, long or short, I did not know: I had never experienced the sensation. I had known what it was to come back to Gateshead when a child, after a long walk—to be scolded for looking cold or gloomy; and later, what it was to come back from church to Lowood—to long for a plenteous meal and a good fire, and to be unable to get either. Neither of these returnings were very pleasant or desirable: no magnet drew me to a given point, increasing in its strength of attraction the nearer I came. The return to Thornfield was yet to be tried.*
>
> —Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre and the Victorian Gothic

Otranto's eponymous castle subsumes the novel's spatial possibilities, functioning as home and anti-home simultaneously, swallowing up every avenue of escape and leaving its inhabitants the possibility of resistance only from movement *within* the structure. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Monk* examine domesticity by setting up, then undermining, a binary between safe domestic spaces and confining Gothic spaces, separating them as two geographically divergent spatial centers heroines are shuffled between, with the function of revealing them to be only superficially dissimilar. Early Victorian Gothic novels like those of Charlotte Brontë posit that any domestic structure—whether housed in middle-class or Gothic architecture—may prove to be dark and confining or a site of power for the marginalized, depending on the movements and activeness with which they are approached and re-approached. In this way, the Victorian Gothic novel multiplies and complicates the home/anti-home dynamic

established in earlier waves of Gothic fiction—and also diversifies and adapts the rules and characteristics of the Gothic mode itself.

In clearly laying out the multifarious nature and possibilities of domesticity, the Victorian Gothic is more contiguous with its predecessors than Victorianists often think. *Jane Eyre* abounds with a bewildering array of possible-homes, each of which transforms between idyllic domestic seat and oppressive anti-home at least once in the novel. This approach to space and architecture extends the ideological work of the eighteenth-century Gothic. Novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* undermine the ability of outward appearances (like creepy architecture or remnants of an aristocratic past) to truly indicate the safety of a physical or social structure, hinting at the possibility that oppression may be located closer to the everyday power structures of a home like La Vallée. In *Jane Eyre*, outward indications, whether architectural or social, are not just deceptive, but ultimately revealed to be meaningless. Thornfield Hall, direct descendant of a structure like Northanger Abbey, can begin as ominous, change into a promising source of companionship and agency, and then be revealed as having been truly Gothic—more Gothic than Castle Udolpho, in fact—all along. Thornfield—and each possible refuge in *Jane Eyre*—codifies and complicates the Gothic principle that ideology maps onto space. Rather than being tasked with learning to see through false surfaces and read the truth of deeper power structures, like Emily, Jane eventually comes to see that there is no "hidden" truth underlying the everyday—that power is *made up of* everyday actions and material realities, and reading it does not take a special talent for uncovering, but a willingness to look closely at what is visible, laid out before her.

Does the Victorian Gothic novel exist?

Scholars of the Victorian Gothic tend to agree that there is something unusually diffuse about the nineteenth-century incarnation of the genre, citing the form's "undecidability" as "an essential aspect of the Gothic form of the period."[198] As the Gothic mode moves into the territory of nineteenth-century realism, scholars argue, the "*unheimlich* blurring of the real with the unreal points to the uncanny as being the key to understanding the instabilities within the Victorian Gothic" (1). Victorian critics also tend to see the period as having a special relationship with the domestic, as uncanniness often stems from a sense of dissonance within the familiar, supposedly comforting structures of family and home life—a literal, not just metaphorical, unhomeliness.[199] Many of the insights about the instability and undecidability of the Gothic in its Victorian context, however, describe the eighteenth-century Gothic as well—at least when we read the eighteenth-century Gothic in all its subtlety. Margaret Carol Davison calls attention to the continuity between Victorian and pre-Victorian Gothic in her discussion of Brontë's intertextual, adaptive use of the Gothic mode and its reception within the tradition of Gothic criticism:

> It was Robert B. Heilman first coined the term "New Gothic" in 1958 to describe Charlotte Brontë's use of what he referred to as "Old Gothic" with its "relatively crude mechanisms of fear" to better flesh out character psychology in the burgeoning realist tradition. Given Brontë's skilful manipulation of the Female Gothic form, however, Ann Radcliffe's use of the explained supernatural to grant expression to her protagonists' anxieties and fears, particularly in relation to sexual propriety and marriage, was probably the primary informing model.[200]

Radcliffe's use of the Tuscan cottage in *Udolpho* is certainly a precursor to the kind of uncanniness future Gothic conceptions of home will find within traditional domesticity. While

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[198] Smith and Hughes, "Introduction: Locating the Victorian Gothic," 1.
[199] In "The Uncanny" (1919) Freud expounds on the basic definitions of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* (homely/unhomely (2)). What is *heimlich* is "friendly, intimate, homelike;" involves "the enjoyment of quiet content," "arous[es] a sense of peaceful pleasure and security as in one within the four walls of his house" (3). Freud even associates a threshold space of sorts with this uncanny return to a home that now seems unhomely: "It often happens that male patients declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *heim* [home] of all human beings…In this case, too, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, homelike, familiar; the prefix ''un'' is the token of repression (15).
[200] Davison, "The Victorian Gothic and Gender," 128.

the Gothic's relationship with the real is heightened and codified in the Victorian era as realism becomes the dominant literary mode, the "uncanny blurring" of apparently real and apparently unreal has been a key element of the generically fluid, deceptive tendencies of Gothic fiction from its very beginning.

Coming from the critical conversation surrounding the eighteenth-century Gothic, one can question whether there are any Victorian novels that ought to count as Gothic. The conversation around the concept of "Victorian Gothic," for me, simply heightens many of the central complexities and ambiguities that have always been at hand in the Gothic form. I argue that while the defining characteristics of the Gothic are so multifarious and fluid, there is more continuity than discontinuity between the two eras. Scholars of the Victorian Gothic sometimes over-emphasize its tendency for subversive critique as unique to the new era, overlooking the long history of uncanny returns and critique of authority and institutions that is perhaps more subtle or oblique in the early Gothic. Others see the Gothic's entrance into the Victorian era as a moment in which "the Gothic" becomes so diluted and expansive that it is "useless as an interpretive framework, simply because it is so large as to be meaningless."[201] In attempting to define what counts as "Gothic" in the nineteenth-century novel, some critics have found that the diverse ways Gothic tropes and forms appear in the increasingly realist, increasingly middle-class novels of the Victorians simply calls attention to "the problems inherent in periodizing a form that escapes anything but the loosest definitions."[202]

In "Locating the Victorian Gothic," Smith and Hughes argue that "the critically commonplace view that the Gothic flourished between *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and

[201] Warwick, "Victorian Gothic," 8.
[202] Warwick, 29.

Frankenstein (1818)…is belied by the Gothic's spectral return in the nineteenth century, in which it underpinned the ostensibly non-Gothic writings of Dickens, Eliot, Tennyson and Hardy."[203] In other words, "Gothic closets may be found…in the generally staid and calm manor house of Victorian fiction."[204] However, reading the Victorian Gothic is more complex than simply discovering the Gothic within the real. The two are woven together, the Gothic serving the function it always has. Martin Willis argues that Gothic moments "offered the opportunity to illuminate invisible relations between characters, and between things, that realism could not do without breaking the generic boundaries of the real. The Gothic, therefore, did not only intervene to highlight realism's limits but also to support the very project of Victorian realist fiction."[205] The Gothic's presence in the Victorian novel may be more elusive, but I would argue that its purpose and nature are not fundamentally different than in its earliest examples. Perhaps more than ever, in the Victorian Gothic, "the Gothic becomes truly haunting in that it can never be pinned down as a single identity, while it returns through various apparitions and manifestations, seemingly everywhere."[206]

I find helpful Willis's subtle distinction between two fundamental approaches to reading the Gothic in a Victorian context. Arguing that in the realist era, there are no truly Gothic novels, rather Gothic moments that are used to support the project of realism, Willis warns against the first practice of "finding the Gothic in numerous works of fiction more usually characterized as belonging to other modes or genres, and then claiming these as newly discovered examples of Gothic's tremendous reach and significance," in other words "to find and privilege the Gothic in places where it is actually subordinated" (16). My argument almost inverts this practice—in this

[203] Smith and Hughes, 2.
[204] Davison, 127.
[205] Smith and Hughes, 7.
[206] Wolfreys, Preface to *Victorian Gothic*, xv.

dissertation, I tend to find Gothic moments and investigate how they are less privileged than they seem. Since I see even early Gothic fiction as often *less* Gothic than it seems, often finding that the showiest of Gothic objects refract readers' focus onto the material and the real, I would argue that just as in the eighteenth-century Gothic, it is as productive to investigate the most showy, attention-getting, or obviously classic Gothic moments and see where they are complex, undermined, or deceptively empty as it is to find the Gothic in places where it acts as an element of realism.

My reading of *Maria* is an example of Willis's second, preferred method (I hope): rather than simply pointing to the Gothic in texts we think of as realist, Willis insists we should be "asking why, and in what ways, the Gothic might work within other textual modes."[207] Though *Maria* is often classified as a Gothic novel—just as Victorian novels are often vaguely categorized as Gothic based on recurring images of confined women or an ominous, if not supernatural, setting—the work's primary mode is that of a persuasive tract, novelized and with realist inset narratives, and making use of the Gothic and its special association with space and architecture. *Maria* is also a good example of how the Gothic can be "seemingly everywhere" because of its fluid nature as a mode rather than a genre.[208] Willis argues that "the Gothic does not turn realist fiction into Gothic writing; rather, "realism assimilates the Gothic mode and makes it part of a larger realist project" (27). This characterization seems apt for *Maria*, as well as for the novels of Dickens, Hardy, and Eliot. It does, however, effectively do away with the "Victorian Gothic novel" as a true category: "to find the Gothic in such a genre is impossible, for

[207] Willis, 16.

[208] Another example of the use of the Gothic in an otherwise more realist work is *The Woman of Colour* (1808), in which there is one isolated Gothic moment, when the heroine marries. Olivia writes, "at the moment when I felt the hand of Augustus, a flash of vivid lightning came from the window over the altar; it was followed by a loud and tremendous peal of thunder (Dominique, 95). Strikingly similar to the lightning strike in *Jane Eyre*, this too presages that the man the heroine is about to marry already has a living wife.

even when it is identified it is only as further evidence of realism itself" (18). Under this view, there are only Gothic elements, not Gothic works, in the Victorian era: "realist fiction introduces the Gothic mode through a variety of Gothic objects—which may be characters, but are also physical sites and immaterial spectres," or the Gothic's "key tropes of secrecy, alienation and monstrosity" (18). Thus, the study of the Gothic in a Victorian context might be a project of realizing the fundamentality of Gothic impulses and strategies—that such things as suspense, secrecy, and even monstrosity have always been both hallmarks of the Gothic and important tools of psychological realism.[209]

Willis's reading of, for example, Eliot, is compelling: he argues that "what Eliot is able to make explicit in her fiction like no other realist writer is first of all that the Gothic mode is part of real experience, and therefore essential for realism" (26-7). In a novel like *Silas Marner*, "it is the villagers who place Marner within a Gothic tradition," while the narrator stands apart to examine and exploit the impact of casting this "alien-looking" outsider[210] as an almost-supernatural other" (Willis 15; 28). This reading of Gothic elements within realism seems fitting for almost every candidate for the title "Victorian Gothic novel," even one like *Wuthering Heights*, which adds a possible supernatural element to its use of the tropes of secrecy and monstrosity. I'm comfortable enough with this—the Gothic is always more mode than genre, defined by its undecidability.

However, if there is one work I would feel safe filing under the category "Victorian Gothic novel," even with caveats about the usefulness of such a category, it would be *Jane Eyre*. A novel like *Jane Eyre* contains so many strong, classic Gothic objects, I would argue, that it is

[209] Caroline Levine "regards suspense and the keeping of secrets as one of realism's exemplary strategies" (Willis 18).
[210] George Eliot, *Silas Marner*, 5.

difficult to approach it with the aim of "uncovering the Gothic where it is subordinated." It is more productive to see *Jane Eyre* as one of the strongest examples of the Gothic mode as employed in the Victorian novel—where the Gothic moments have no need to be promoted or privileged by readers and critics—and instead investigate where they may be complex, slippery, and purposefully empty or subverted. We still ask "why, and in what ways, the Gothic might work within other textual modes…*why* it is found there, what it is employed to do, and under what conditions it achieves this." *Jane Eyre* is a text that flashily draws attention to its Gothicity, and while it uses the Gothic to create many different effects and often transforms or de-Gothicizes spaces, it is not a novel in which the Gothic is subordinated—or even subdued or conquered by the end of the novel. When *Jane Eyre* undermines or makes ambiguous its Gothic moments, this too is a Gothic strategy.

For Alexandra Warwick, the Brontës are part of a new "domestic Gothic" in which "domestic spaces, and the state of marriage or family life that the spaces embody, are terrifyingly ambiguous."[211] The Gothic's increased "undecidability" in the nineteenth century is a result of the mode growing into the physicalities of a new era. In works like *Jane Eyre,* it's not so much a matter of a Gothic closet in the "manor house of Victorian fiction," but a proliferation of structures—the manor house, the crumbling aristocratic home, the middle-class cottage—that are shown to be always-already wholly transformable. The DNA of the Gothic castle has always been part of all these structures—but Victorian fiction openly admits this with new complexity. Gothic elements and approaches still function to expose the threat posed by patriarchal domestic structures—but in the Victorian era, that threat is not the possibility of becoming trapped in one nefarious institution, but the realization that the institution is everywhere.

[211] Warwick, 30.

Periodizing the Victorian Gothic

Whether the Victorian Gothic is a subordinated strain that runs through some of the realist works of the time or a genre in and of itself, it is characterizable as a mode that holds together, distinguished by the strengthening of a few basic tendencies that grow out of eighteenth-century Gothic modes. Most critics can agree that "the most significant overall developments within the Gothic over the course of the Victorian era are its greater domestication in that Britain serves as a site and source of terror," and, in terms of form, "its greater internalisation, which involved its adaptation to convey intense emotions" and portray psychological interiority.[212] Both the greater domestication and the greater internalization take various forms across the Victorian era, and are often if not always associated with nineteenth-century debates on gender and feminism. When considering the novels that are usually discussed as unequivocally Gothic, or at least Gothic enough to deserve the name without debate (usually, with some exceptions, popular, less canonical novels), it is useful to categorize them based on the historical context of first wave feminism as well as their generic tendencies.

Carol Margaret Davison sees three moments that define the Victorian Gothic:

> the 1840s, during a decade of tremendous social calamity and reform and at the height of debate over the Woman Question; the 1860s, in the aftermath of noteworthy legislation relating to divorce; and the 1880s and 1890s, when anxieties were running high in regard to the New Woman Question, the Decadence Movement, homosexuality and imperialism, and when heated discussion was occurring, particularly in the periodical press, about gender roles and identity. (126)

She also categorizes these three sets of interventions into two waves: the mid-century Gothic, "involving an interfacing between the Gothic and social realism," which made use of the

[212] Davison, 126. See also Gilbert Phelps in "Varieties of English Gothic," in *From Blake to Byron*, v. 5 of *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, for more on "psychological states of mind." Phelps sees the Victorian Gothic as "dealing with a range of human experience that had not been rendered in fiction before" (126).

explained supernatural, and the "more fantastic and sensational" Gothic that "combined with other popular cultural forms such as detective fiction, the…adventure novel and science fiction and *did* lend credibility to the supernatural," including both sensation fiction and fin-de-siècle New Woman novels (126). Again, *Jane Eyre* is something of an outlier, or an exercise in ambiguity, if we attempt to classify it under these terms. The novel is perhaps the defining example of the 1840s domestic Gothic—and yet it draws on various intertexts, including those of the boys' adventure novel genre, and its embrace of the explained supernatural is somewhat contestable. *Jane Eyre* reflects the 1840s wave of the women's movement, this brand of feminism, with all its halting progress over decades—but it also looks forward to sensation fiction (through its bigamy plot) and to New Woman novels of the fin-de-siècle. The novels of the Brontës, "arguably the most critically respected manifestation of the Gothic in the Victorian period," are also more than "proto-feminist Gothic fairy tales."[213] *Jane Eyre* in particular is a Gothic *bildungsroman* in ways that previous Gothic novels, including *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, are not. Both kinds of novels entertain the possibility of teaching the heroine how she might gain power within the domestic realm—but for Emily, this means learning to open her eyes to the power structures around her. Jane's task is instead to reconcile herself with herself, defragment her identity and decide how she wants to be, in the world and in the house.

"Eternal Prison-house" or "Abode of Calm Bliss": Domestic Ideology and the Victorian Gothic

Many readers think of the Victorian era as the ultimate site for making use of the Gothic's ability to expose repression, seeing Victorians as the perfect subjects, "monsters of

[213] Davison, 127; 130.

perversity who lived public lives of staid conformity but who came out of the closet nightly to perpetuate the most horrific versions of abuse."[214] It is possible that in the Victorian era, Gothic moments "contested and/or consolidated the boundaries of gendered 'masculine' and 'feminine' identities" in a new, more explicit way.[215] While "interrogat[ing] socially dictated and institutionally entrenched attitudes and laws relating to gender roles, identities and relations" (10) is not a new function of the Gothic, the historical moment of the early Victorian era does provide a fertile ground for literature's experimentation with subversive approaches to gender. Of many factors, the "growing number of working- and lower-middle-class women entering the workforce," "noteworthy legislative changes relating to enfranchisement and such matters as marriage, divorce, child custody and women's property rights," and the Victorian period's "war of words relating to sexuality and gender-related issues" are perhaps the most salient background for *Jane Eyre*'s engagement with gender roles.[216] This novel in particular reflects the dubious, halting progress of women's rights in nineteenth-century Britain[217]—part of the bildungsroman mode is Jane's complicated progress towards a kind of feminism she can live with.

In Victorian discourse, "various social commentaries on the status of women drew on the trope of the domestic sphere as prison that was popularised by radical feminist thinker and Female Gothic novelist Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1790s." [218] A good entry point for the domestic debates in Victorian Gothic literature is the prevailing idea of the home as "the eternal prison-house of the wife,"[219] which, according to Davison, "constituted the driving idea in earlier

[214] Killeen, *History of the Gothic*, 8-9.
[215] Smith and Hughes, 10.
[216] Davison, 125.
[217] *Jane Eyre*'s doubled images of Jane in motion and Bertha in the extremities of confinement reflect a more complex political reality in which the progress of some women often depended on the oppression of others.
[218] Davison, 129.
[219] Thompson and Wheeler, *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them In Political, and Thence In Civil and Domestic, Slavery*, 79.

Female Gothic literature" and "remains central to Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights.*[220] It is worth looking at the origin of this particular articulation of the idea in the 1825 *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them In Political, and Thence In Civil and Domestic, Slavery*:

> Home, except on a few occasions, chiefly for the drillings of superstition[221] to render her obedience more submissive, is the eternal prison-house of the wife: the husband paints it as the abode of calm bliss, but takes care to find, out-side of doors, for his own use, a species of bliss not quite so calm, but of a more varied and stimulating description.[222]

Jane Eyre is an interesting extension of this premise. For Bertha, this metaphor is literally true, though without even the husbandly pretension of calm bliss as a cover. Jane's original relationship with home, however, is more complicated, both psychologically and spatially (as we shall see). Home, for her, is not just a sometime prison, but also a space of exclusion, a state she cannot achieve. At first, Jane is deprived even of the illusion of calm bliss—and in the end, she seeks an active and stimulating site of growth, fulfillment, and constant effort within the home, choosing a life of continually making and re-making her own inhabitation of home rather than either giving in to oppression or trying to escape the institution entirely. Jane's project throughout the novel is to cultivate the "out-of-doors," not-quite-calm, "more varied and stimulating" kind of happiness *inside* the domestic sphere (or rather, inside, in between, and at the thresholds of the homes she works to call her own).

Eve Sedgwick's conception of Gothic space is useful in distinguishing between the dichotomy of prison-house/calm bliss and *Jane Eyre*'s view of home. In *The Coherence of*

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[220] Davison, 129.
[221] By "superstition," Thompson and Wheeler tend to mean religion, specifically the institution of marriage and the function of marriage vows.
[222] Thompson and Wheeler, 79.

Gothic Conventions, Sedgwick observes the way Gothic surfaces and depths work—many of the foulest deeds happen underground, in creepy vaults or rituals of live burial. But she also posits the binary of surface/depth as a sort of fallacy. In gaining power in her (various) domestic situations, Jane is neither uncovering the true, essential prison that is the house, nor making the "calm bliss" façade into a reality. In *Jane Eyre*, there is no "hidden" truth of home, no surface *or* depth. Thornfield, for example, is prison-house, site of active growth, and occasional cliché of calm bliss, each in turn, depending on how Jane chooses to see and act. Home, whatever form it takes, is constantly constructed by its inhabitants, often through repeated acts of return and remaking. While the novel does uncover the horrifying realities of the structures of marriage and property that define domestic relations, Jane's lesson is not to make sure to look under the surface of law and tradition, in case there happens to be a monstrous misuse of power beneath one instance of it, but to learn to read (and eventually create for herself) the material incarnations of power that constitute her life—neither hidden truths nor flimsy distractions. As Toril Moi puts it, the act of reading power structures is not like opening a box to see its contents; it is more like drawing a mechanic's diagram of a machine—getting a "clear view."[223] Under this metaphor, "it makes no sense to think of the machine itself as somehow hiding its own construction or structure" (38), we merely "pay maximal attention" (35) to the structures and actions before us. For me, threshold spaces and moments aren't the boundary between binary states, a necessary step from one truth to the other, but sites of creation, where the sets of repetitive actions that create space as one thing or another are concentrated. This is why homes, in Brontë, are both "terrifyingly ambiguous" and a more realistic, though still Gothic, representation of the material conditions brought about by the laws and traditions of the patriarchy.

[223] Moi, "Nothing is Hidden: From Confusion to Clarity; or, Wittgenstein on Critique," 37.

A classic example of a Victorian Gothic approach to space and place is *Wuthering Heights*'s early window seat scene. Willis writes of this scene, "Lockwood's violence against the spectre of Cathy and his subsequent piling of books against the window are active metaphors for both female oppression and women's limited access to systems of education."[224] *Jane Eyre*, too, occasionally uses both space and Gothic elements in this straightforwardly metaphorical way. Jane's tendency, for example, to gravitate towards window-seats or positions at the margins of rooms is fairly easy to interpret. But in *Jane Eyre*, space, either Gothic or not, becomes a complex site of negotiation that makes readers attend as much to the material realities as the metaphorical implications of the way Jane moves through space. It is often when spaces are ambiguously Gothic that we need to attend closely, while purely Gothic or purely realist interactions with space and place are often feints, meant to draw readers (or Jane herself) to look at or imagine what does not exist, rather than reading the material world with a careful feminist eye.

Comings-Home and Patterns of Return in *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre (1847) is full of flawed, iterative journeys and comings-home. The novel enacts, again and again, Jane's longing for a true homecoming, trying in endless echoes and doubled returnings to find—or rather, create—a refuge fit for its restless heroine. From Jane's doubled return to Thornfield, to the mirrored homecomings she accepts and engineers at Marsh End, to her final arrival at Ferndean, the novel interrogates Jane's strange first pronouncement: "dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight."[225] Elements of this first scene at Gateshead—in which Jane voices her unique dread, not of leaving, nor simply of home itself, but

[224] Willis, 24.
[225] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 7.

of *the return to* home—recur throughout the novel. This almost-lyrical meditation pinpoints the seemingly paradoxical nature of her aversion to chilly afternoon walks. In one phrase, Brontë constructs *the coming home* as an event—at once an everyday ritual and an act imbued with disproportionate social and bodily significance, the object of an unfathomable yearning. It is the act of returning home, the moment when Jane's "nipped fingers and toes" should find relief at a comforting fireside, that "sadden[s] and humble[s]" her (7). The novel opens with a hitch in the daily pattern. The "that day" on which a walk would not take place conjures for readers a thousand previous days, a routine of outings and returns marked by the patterns and rituals that should constitute a repetitive string of small, everyday homecomings. Dreadful to Jane, these comings-home make venturing out of Mrs. Reed's house a chore and not an escape. Each anti-homecoming is for her a re-imprinting of the lesson she learns at Gateshead: that home is never stable; in returning to it one never knows if it will be a safe space. Home is elusive and unreliable for Jane, and her comings-home only accentuate the comfort she *should* find there, the comfort John, Eliza, and Georgiana enjoy at each return from a walk. Jane is driven, instead, to the famously liminal window seat to read about adventures in cold climates, far from home—to an escape free from the necessity of a return that would only reinforce how inescapably homeless she feels.[226]

Jane's repeated comings-home—successive attempts to re-frame her place in the world—structure her journey to adulthood and her effort to come to terms with this primal lack, the simultaneous invocation of longing and dread prompted by the psychological situation of homecoming. The narrative is structured as a series of variously dreadful, flawed homecomings,

[226] See Bachelard on one phenomenon of the felicitous home: "And we feel warm *because* it is cold out-of-doors" (60).

enacted and analyzed almost obsessively as Jane repeats the same acts of return with slight variations in angle and mode of approach. If the novel can be likened to a female "borrowing" of the structure of "Bunyan's male *Pilgrim's Progress*," a tempting comparison,[227] one must come to wonder how much progress is indeed being made. Rather than proceeding from test to test or lesson to lesson, building linearly to an achievement of grace or final arrival at the acknowledged goal, Jane's journey (both narratively and geographically) is a series of swirls and eddies. The novel's plot obsessively reenacts homecomings at all scales and in all kinds of architectural settings, while its narration pauses at thresholds, imbuing the act of crossing the home's boundary with an almost magical capacity for change. The storytelling is not simply "permeated by angry, Angrian fantasies of escape-into-wholeness," as Gilbert and Gubar argue (336), but by repeated trials of this fantasy, sometimes ever-more-successful, sometimes providing productive setbacks, and ultimately allowing Jane to experiment with the kinds of active space-making she wants to engage in when finally presented with her own home. The ever-multiplying departures and returns of the novel—the micro-journeys that cast home in new lights—function through the narrative's awareness of the limits of escape (and wholeness). There is no smooth progression in the series of test homes Jane travels to—no steady move from dreadful to vibrant, cozy home. Instead, each time a character enters or re-enters the domestic space, their actions re-make it, often literally changing the physical features of the house from empty and cold to cozy and warm and back, enforcing a sense of impermanence. The text insists that this moment of threshold-crossing is an opportunity for power to change hands and for control of the house (and everything it represents) to tilt.

[227] Gilbert and Gubar, 336. The argue: "Jane Eyre makes a life-journey which is a kind of mythical progress from one significantly named place to another" (342).

Unlike Emily St. Aubert, whose narratable episode takes her away from an idealized home, or Antonia, who is faced with the flimsiness of her own refuge, Jane's original relationship to home is constituted by a lack: a sense of being not at home. The domestic structures and routines that surround her only remind her that she is out of place. At Gateshead, she is "a useless thing," an "uncongenial alien,"[228] aware that she has "less right to be here than a servant" (24). The novel's first chapter piles up epithet upon epithet: Jane is "a discord," "a heterogeneous thing," (15). Later, she is labeled a "castaway" by Mr. Brocklehurst (66) and then by St. John (414). The novel begins on the day that Jane's passivity gives way to her rage and she first expresses that burst of fruitless activity (caused by the direct violence of "tyrant" John Reed, but associated with the gothicity of the Red Room) that provokes Mrs. Reed into sending her away. Being dragged to the Red Room, she "resisted all the way—a new thing for [her]" (12). The apparent fruitlessness, or even hysteria, of Jane's physical movements here end up amounting to a powerful self-assertion and the impetus for her escape from Gateshead, since the incident prompts Mrs. Reed to get rid of her. As Jane matures, she will use her experiments with leaving and returning to different domestic situations not just to learn how to create a home for herself where she is centered, not marginalized, but also to calibrate the restlessness that as a child she either represses or explosively releases.

"Double Retirement" and Spatial Practice in the Window-seat Scene

Although Jane wanders from domestic space to domestic space through the course of the novel, she is at first only able to recreate incarnations of the unsettled, liminal position established in the novel's opening scene as the only space she can occupy: the "double retirement" of the curtained window seat at Gateshead. Jane's first action in the novel is to

[228] Brontë, 16.

embrace her own exile and "mount into" the window-seat to engage in her first recourse, the imaginative travel and productive-yet-stationary activity of reading (7). This threshold space hosts the novel's second threshold moment, accompanied by the ruminative activeness that I see as the characteristic pattern of the threshold. This first action foregrounds a key strategy for Jane: the ability to inhabit the margins and stagnations of the world with a quiet, recursively productive kind of activity. While "folds of scarlet drapery" shut Jane out of the domestic space of the home, the window seat's "clear panes of glass" "protect" Jane from the cold outside world—though narrator-Jane takes care to show how they do not truly "separate" her from that world (10). Jane looks through the clear glass in the same way that she will later observe the world for her paintings, or read Mr. Rochester's physiognomy, taking up the pictures of the arctic from *Bewick's History of British Birds* and creating an imaginative future for herself. She is stuck between seemingly opposing desires: her longing for independence and adventurous voyaging and her need for homey comfort, for the kind of non-dreadful domesticity that might await a sailor after a long, cold journey. She imagines departures for Nova Zembla or the coast of Norway (8), seeing in the voyage out[229] and the embracing of cold and hardship the only way to create her own homecoming. The cold and drudgery of Lowood, presaged here, is likely a less welcome though equally strenuous test compared to any sea voyage, real or fictional.

The touchstone of these intertexts, placed as an opening frame for Jane's own story, instantly casts her as an adventurer even as she sits stationary and disregarded at the literal sidelines of the domestic bustle of this scene. After her first departure—her expulsion from Gateshead—the text's preoccupation with enacting failed homecomings and homemakings turns Jane into a wanderer, perhaps more of a wanderer than a mere Gulliver or Rasselas. Even as she

[229] See DiBattista and Nord's argument and use of this phrase in *At Home in the World*, 34; 40.

becomes a more confident traveler, margins and boundaries remain Jane's comfort zone. By the end of the novel, the act of returning home—crossing and re-crossing the domestic threshold—has become defining for Jane. Through her active, imaginative reading in the window-seat, Jane is developing the analytical capacities that she will use to define and also transcend boundaries. Here, this skill allows her to create a precarious domestic refuge—one that's always liminal, interruptible, and vulnerable but that serves simultaneously as escape and cocoon. Later, Jane will create these refuges through recursive physical movement like pacing—but reading in a threshold space, particularly when contemplating the difference between adventure and being at home, is another way of actively transforming space. Of course, this takes a certain kind of active reading, as we've seen in *Northanger Abbey*.

It is not uncommon to read this first window-seat scene, in which Jane is literally excluded from the family scene and has to "inser[t] herself…into the margin"[230] as an announcement of the central problem of the novel. Gayatri Spivak's reading, less dark than Hoeveler's, again sees the novel as a journey of testing out possible families: "the progress of *Jane Eyre* can be charted through sequential arrangement of the family/counter-family dyad" (246). Spivak too associates the way Jane reads with both her current marginal position and the task ahead of her. *Bewick's British Birds*, for Spivak, represents Jane's positive, generative ability to read against the grain, to discard the putative message of the book and instead interact with the cold, uninviting world as seen through "clear panes of glass"[231] just as she does the pictures of the book. Spivak sees the reading scene as Jane, figured as "the unique creative imagination of the marginal individualist," "decipher[ing]" the book's pictures (and not the text)

[230] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," 246.
[231] Brontë, 8; qtd in Spivak, 246.

in terms of her own situation as she looks out at the landscape—a move whose power "is precisely that it can *make the outside inside*" (emphasis mine).[232] Spivak, like Hoeveler, links the act of reading with Jane's primary quest, but also adds spatial analysis to her reading of the scene. Jane's active, even powerful inhabitance of space here is key to interpreting the psychoanalytic thrust of the novel in a more hopeful way. Spivak's attention to Jane's ability to "make the outside inside" hints at an alternative to Hoeveler's interpretation of Jane's quest for family. Rather than a Freudian search for possible families, or even a succession of family/counter-family dyads, I see the novel as a series of spatial trials as Jane moves from home to home, returning, lingering, and practicing the kind of space-making she does in the window-seat, whether embodied as literal reading, or in a similarly imaginative, recursive pattern of movement.

Joyful, Productive Return and "Spatial Practice" in the Gothic Bildungsroman

Ascending into the window seat and perusing *British Birds*, like the novel's opening ritual of coming home from a walk, is a repeated action for Jane, a practice of return to the touchstone of one of her favorite books and to a habit of insulation she has built at Gateshead. The Freudian reading of this (or any) pattern of return is that it is an act of regression, an obsessive revisiting of an earlier state, often the lost relationship between mother and child or some sort of psychic wound. Steven Bruhm argues that the Gothic is a fitting form for exploring this kind of "compulsive return to certain fixations, obsessions, and blockages."[233] Bruhm points

[232] Spivak, 246. See my conclusion on rewritings of *Jane Eyre* for a discussion of this as a colonizing practice.
[233] Bruhm, 35. "The Contemporary Gothic: Why We Need It" sees this as a distinguishing feature of contemporary Gothic, comparing it to "the late eighteenth-century Gothic of Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis," in which "moments from the historical past (often appearing as spectral figures) haunt the heroes in order to proclaim some misdeed regarding property or domestic relations" (261). This sort of spectral return is not a personal obsession, but an impulse "to expose ancient tyrannies, to foil the characters perpetuating them, and to return property and persons to their divinely ordained spheres" (261).

out that while the Freudian view of "the obsessive return to the nurturing, safe mother is a regression, one that arrests the individual's psychological development," the alternative, "taking the path forward toward adulthood" still does not ensure "linear progress" (266). The Gothic, he argues, is a form that fundamentally "devastates any sense of linear progression that we might use to put together our 'personal history'" (268). For Bruhm, the return is a strategy that may never yield results, even if it is not an inherently regressive move.

Michel De Certeau's theory of space and "spatial practice" provides a generative, fruitful antidote to the Freudian theory of regression and is particularly applicable to a Gothic bildungsroman like *Jane Eyre*. The act of return, under De Certeau's theory of space, "is 'joyful,' not traumatic, an enactment of the necessary spatial separation between self and other."[234] For De Certeau, "it is the very definition of a place, in fact, that it is composed by these series of displacements" (108). Departure and return, "ways of going out and coming back in," are the "practices that invent spaces," that "permit" habitable spaces (106-7). For De Certeau, adult subjectivity is built by this sort of "spatial practice," especially in patterns of return. Returning to a primal experience (in psychoanalytic terms, often the absence of the mother as the child undergoes the "decisive and originary experience" of differentiating from the maternal body) is both productive and healthy in Certeauvian theory[235]. Without this series of psychological and literal returns, this investigation of the boundaries of differentiation, there is no self. Subjectivity comes into being, then, through the negotiation of this fundamental absence through repeated return to it:

[234] Hughes and Heholt, 53. "To practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, to be other and to move toward the other" (De Certeau, 110).
[235] This is de Certeau's response to Freud's discussion of his nephew's "Fort! Da!" game in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in which the child, through throwing something and making it "gone," then "there" again when the parent retrieves it, enacts part of a process of detachment from the parent, but also engages in an obsession or "compulsion to repeat" (a sign of disorder, for Freud) (De Certeau, 109).

> subjectivity is already linked to the absence that structures it as existence and makes it 'be there'…this being-there acts only in spatial practices, that is, in *ways of moving into something different (manières de passer à l'autre)*. It must ultimately be seen as the repetition, in diverse metaphors, of a decisive and originary experience.[236]

De Certeau frames this negotiation, the movement of departure and return, in both literal and metaphorical terms, as walking. The "walk that Freud compares to the trampling underfoot of the mother-land" is for de Certeau the "relationship of oneself to oneself" that "governs the internal alterations of place" in which space-making takes place (110). The spatial practice determined by one's childhood experience "develops its effects, proliferates, floods private and public spaces, undoes their readable surfaces" and creates one's own landscape (110). This account of the development of mature subjectivity appears in de Certeau's "Walking in the City," a section of *The Practice of Everyday Life* that addresses the modern experience of navigating a city apparently deprived of the local specificities, histories, and legends that would have grown organically in a small village. For Jane, the disorienting phenomenon is not being lost in an impersonal city, but the sense of dislocation of being "not at home" in her home. Domestic spaces are her rootless, uninhabitable landscape.[237] Just as in de Certeau's conception of walking in the city, where street names are borrowed from elsewhere and sites have no local legends to give them meaning, Jane's personal history has been effaced (and her place within a family has been denied) at the beginning of the novel. The novel, then, follows her wandering walk through variously unwelcoming domestic landscapes. In *Jane Eyre*, "physical moving about has the itinerant function of yesterday's or today's 'superstitions'"[238]—moving,

[236] De Certeau, 109.
[237] See Giard and De Certeau's very brief section on "Private Spaces" in volume 2. They note that "the more that exterior space is made uniform…the more one's own space becomes smaller and valued as the place where one can finally feel secure" (147). They note the danger of this space being penetrated, but do not see much difficulty in negotiating the "gesture sequences" of the domestic interior (146).
[238] De Certeau, 106.

wandering, and walking are often the complement to, or the replacement for, revelatory Gothic moments.

The journey of iterative return is not just the way that we negotiate growing up by way of creating our own spaces, but also the way we assimilate the world around us. de Certeau's second metaphor for this practice of assimilation is that of reading, or "reading as poaching." Reading is de Certeau's primary example of assimilation, in that "the ideology of 'informing' through books" is a misunderstanding (168). Instead, we assimilate through reading, where assimilation means "'making something similar' to what one is, making it one's own, appropriating or reappropriating it" (168). Jane's practice of reading, as she performs it in the window-seat scene, is exactly of de Certeau's sort: it is not passive, and not a way of absorbing another's world view: "to read is to wander through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the constructed order of a city or of a supermarket)" and assimilate it, make it our own (169). This mode of reading, like de Certeau's recursive wandering and repetitive pedestrian activity, is a craft of sorts. He compares it to bricolage (174), collecting "a sequence of temporal fragments not joined together but disseminated through repetitions and different modes of enjoyment, in memories and successive knowledges" (174), or even "the subtle art whose theory was elaborated by medieval poets and romancers who insinuate innovation into the text itself, into the terms of a tradition," so that "countless differences…filter into the authorized writing" (175).[239] This is "reading as poaching"—the process, sometimes by continually returning to the same book, as Jane does with *British Birds* and *Gulliver's Travels*, of putting one's reading, and the world, to one's own purposes.

"A Turn for Analysis": Jane as Reader and Adventurer

[239] See also Heller's concept of literary artwork as a "concretion," *Delights of Terror,* 1.

In the window-seat scene, Jane is indulging in a space-making practice. She has found a literal space to cocoon herself within, but she is the one who constitutes the clear panes of glass as "protection" but not "separation" from the outside world, and the function of the "folds of scarlet drapery" to "shut in [her] view," acting as a barrier to having to contemplate the Reeds or analyze the domestic situation for signs of trouble.[240] In her reading, Jane "form[s] an idea of [her] own" as "the words connected themselves…and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast" (8). As with her later watercolors, Jane reads the Gothic *into* these images ("the two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine phantoms" (9)). Jane directly relates her way of reading *Bewick's British Birds* with the activeness of Bessie's routine of reading during the evenings when, "having brought her ironing-table to the nursery hearth…while she got up Mrs. Reed's lace frills, and crimped her night-cap borders, fed our eager attention with passages of love and adventure" (9). Bessie, too, assimilates her reading to her own worldview: many of the tales told here are "taken…from the pages" of such works as *Pamela* (9).[241] Bessie also begins the association between reading, comfort, and trivial domestic tasks as a social buffer and source of communion. *Gulliver's Travels* is one of the tried-and-true sources of comfort Bessie offers Jane after her Red Room incident, along with pastries and access to "a certain little drawer, full of splendid shreds of silk and satin" for doll dress-making (21). It is only in this depth of Jane's despair that she cannot read in an assimilatory way, instead sinking into just the sort of bleak projection that Hoeveler accuses her of all along: rather than imagining that she "might one day,

[240] Brontë, 8.
[241] Another suggestive intertext—and a hint to readers that while Jane and Bessie may be reading these excerpts of the novel in the same vein as fairy tales and ballads, readers should make an attempt to assimilate *Pamela*'s plot (and ending) into *Jane Eyre*.

by taking a long voyage" visit Lilliput and Brobdignag, Jane can see only "a desolate wanderer," just as she cannot stomach the proffered tart (21).

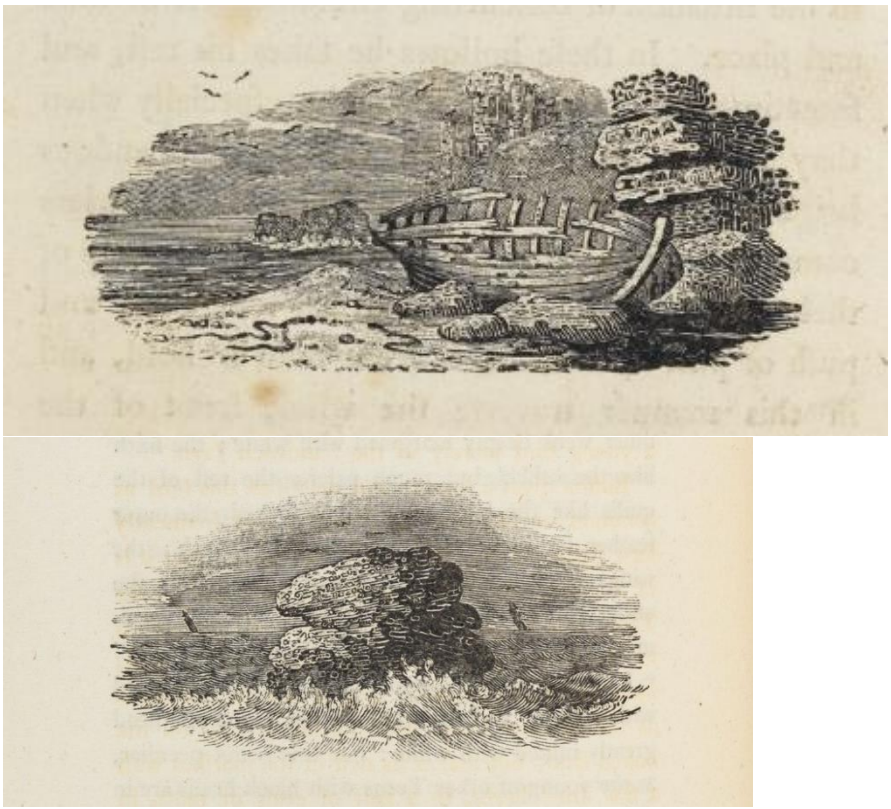

Figure 6. Woodcuts from Bewick's History of British Birds (1797).

Jane's ability to actively analyze[242] and assimilate the world rarely fails her as it does in this low moment. Over the course of the novel, her ability to engage in an active pause, analyze rather than merely describe, and facilitate productive if recursive activity at the thresholds of domestic structures, she is learning the "spatial practices" that will help make the spaces she enters her own—and turn them from prison to refuge, and back. As Jane progresses from family to counter-family, in Spivak's terms,[243] or possible-home to possible-home, in mine, continually

[242] De Certeau's "assimilation" is "analysis" in Jane's vocabulary: When Jane meets Helen, they "[get] on swimmingly together" because "she had a turn for narrative, I for analysis; she liked to inform, I to question" (Brontë, 78).
[243] Spivak, 246.

making dreaded and disappointing returns to not-quite-home in the frosty twilight, she begins to make iterative, staggering progress toward a more empowering relationship with home.

Jane's Progress: From This House, to That Which Is to Come

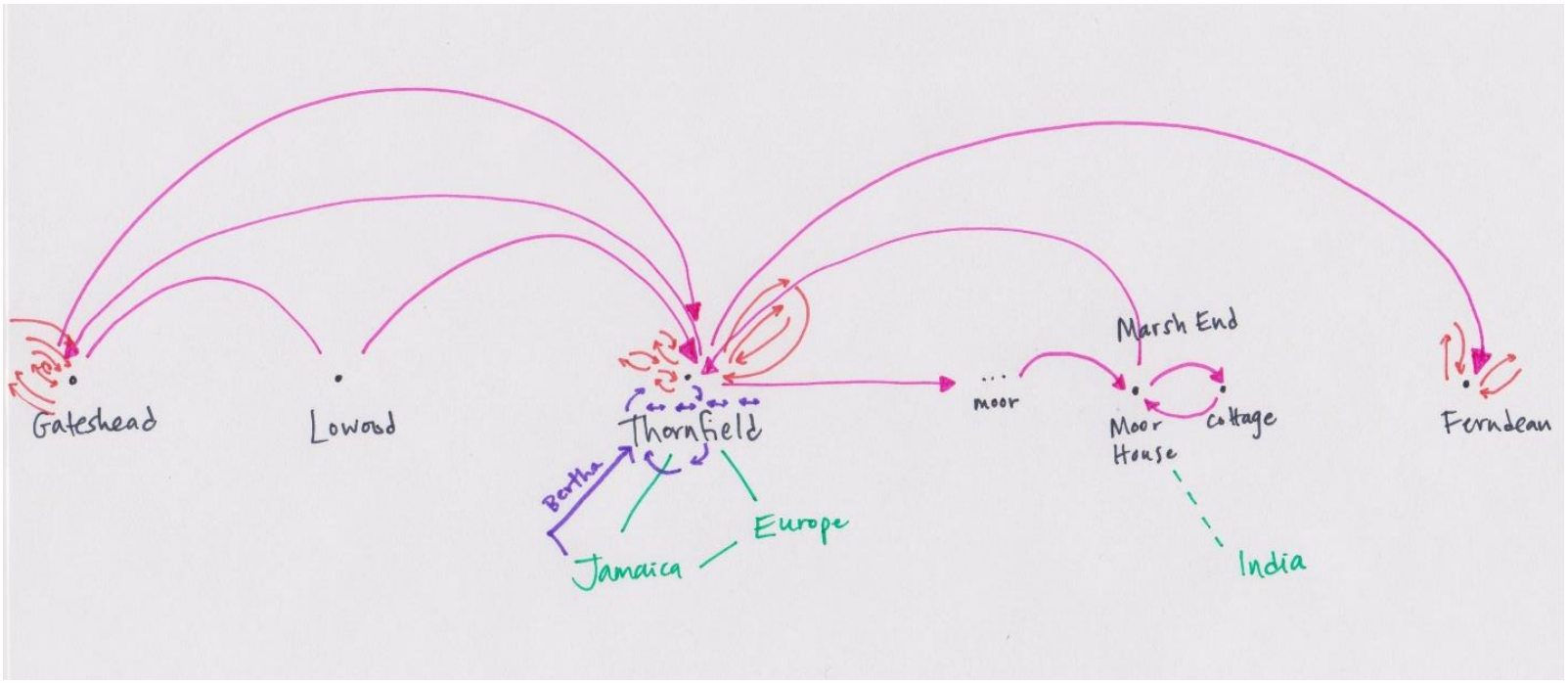

Figure 7. Sketch: Patterns of Return in *Jane Eyre*

It is Miss Temple's "step into a post-chaise" that makes Jane instantly dissatisfied with the "in some degree a home" that Lowood had become for her.[244] Immediately after this moment of departure, Jane "walk[s] about [her] chamber" and lingers at her window, looking out at "the white road" she took to arrive at the school from Gateshead years ago (85). This active span of pacing and windowside contemplation germinates her resolution to search for a "new servitude" (86). By the end of her pacing stint, Jane has "tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon"

[244] Brontë, 84.

and (85) resolved to find "a new place, in a new house," and, if she cannot be happy or successful, at least "look about for [herself] and be [her] own helper" (86). Newly "cut adrift," bound for an uncertain port (93), Jane sets out for her new life.

She experiences her first swift and compact space-making reversal when the forbidding, Gothic, *unheimlich* Thornfield she slowly approaches is turned homey and comfortable through the small acts of hospitality Jane accepts while entering. The last leg of the journey to Thornfield is quintessentially Gothic. Readers follow Jane's detailed, atmospheric observations as she recounts that "the roads were heavy, the night misty; my conductor let his horse walk all the way, and the hour and a half extended, I verily believe, to two hours" (95). The spooky details of the approach are abruptly cut off, and the moment of transition is described completely objectively, even abruptly: "The car stopped at the front door; it was opened by a maid-servant; I alighted and went in" (95). From here, welcoming actions (Leah "usher[s]" Jane in; Mrs. Fairfax "promptly and kindly [comes] forward" to meet her) and Jane's active gaze combine to turn Thornfield Hall into a "cozy and agreeable" place, complete with large cat and everything that could ever "complete the beau ideal of domestic comfort" (95). As soon as she steps into the house, Jane's interiority is back, and she is analyzing: Mrs. Fairfax is "exactly like what I had fancied" and the tone of welcome is exactly suited, in Jane's opinion, to the situation: "no grandeur to overwhelm, no stateliness to embarrass" (95). This is where her ability to actively read, and to characterize the spaces around her based on her reading of people as well as books, serves her well. The acts of hospitality that make Thornfield's first impression a cozy one soon seem excessive—and Jane must temper her expectations as she realizes the Mrs. Fairfax who feeds her and unties her bonnet with her own hands is not, in fact, the Hall's owner.

"A Stiller Doom Than Mine": Rooftop Restlessness and Micro-Returns at Thornfield

Jane's smaller-scale patterns of entry and exit and her everyday returns at Thornfield (at the same quotidian level as the opening scene's "coming-home" from a routine walk) help her work through her thoughts on domestic stagnation and restlessness, calibrate the movements she chooses to engage in, and make use of the Gothic as it appears in her own superstitious imaginings and in the happenings around Thornfield. These patterns constitute her own Certeauvian spatial practice. Early in Jane's career at Thornfield, she becomes restless at the prospect of a "smooth career" as governess alone with Adèle and Mrs. Fairfax, of "too absolute a stagnation":

> Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third storey, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence. (109)

Like Bertha, she paces backwards and forwards along the third storey of the house, exercising the outlet of the "exultant movement" of her analytical mind, the ability to "open her inward ear" in safe solitude and re-imagine her life. In these fits of restlessness, Jane *escapes* the now-stifling domestic preoccupations of the house: "while Adèle played with her nurse, and Mrs. Fairfax made jellies in the storeroom, I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line" (109). While Jane will next protest her confining state, the tone of the passage is one of action and agency—even Jane's ability to articulate and resist the confining structures of the patriarchy is invigorating, a sign of Jane's abilities. Jane climbs right past Bertha to access the rooftop prospect that will feed her imaginative wanderings. Standing atop the house, probably quite close to where Bertha is confined, Jane makes her famous feminist speech. Acknowledging, in the

abstract, that "millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot," she rails against those who say women "ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags" (109). This classic feminist complaint echoes the rhetoric of usefulness levied against Jane in her childhood and soon will be echoed by her view of the menial household tasks that she performs with and for Georgiana and Eliza, empowered by using them to gain centrality at Gateshead at last, yet knowing they give her no intrinsic joy. This exultant speech, however, rings a bit false for re-readers of the novel who know more about the kinds of confinement that go on at Thornfield.

In the midst of this mood, Jane often "[takes] a walk by [her]self in the grounds" or "[goes] down to the gates and look[s] through them along the road" (109). Her restlessness at the bounds of her domestic role can still manifest in trips out over the threshold, back and forth. Even when she chooses not to go for a walk, her pacing on the rooftop and her climb to the roof, past all the floors and barriers of the house in succession, is a productive kind of repetitive movement. To reach the roof, this space of exultant feminist revelation, Jane must climb through the narrow hall "with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle" (126). Jane's apparent freedom on the roof is underpinned by an invisible architecture of confinement, different from the structure of domestic tasks and patriarchal expectations symbolized by pudding-making.[245]

[245] Bertha, of course, cannot cross the threshold of Thornfield until her fateful jump off this very roof, freeing Jane, though not herself, from both types of confinement.[245] Her pacing, though a mirror of Jane's just above her, is depicted as without meaning, without forward movement, mental or physical: she is just "a figure" who "[runs] backwards and forwards," animalistic and illegible (293).

Though Jane is restless, wanting "more practical experience" with the world and "more of intercourse with [her] kind," Jane's original condition of feeling displaced from any sense of home has improved somewhat—when she leaves for a walk on another January afternoon, this time from Thornfield, she is certain of an expectant homecoming ("Revenez bientôt ma bonne amie, ma chère Mdlle Jeanette" is Adèle's send-off) (110). Jane, whose alienation readers are already well-versed in, is in a Gothic mood, imagining encounters with fairy-tale creatures, first in the form of a horse and then in the dog-shape that turns out to be Pilot. But "the man, the human being, broke the spell at once. Nothing ever rode the Gytrash."[246] This Gothic moment functions much like Lockwood's first ghost encounter in *Wuthering Heights*: the invocation of a Gothic object points to a connection readers are meant to see between the two characters, a connection which "resides in their similarly doubled alienation, one form of which the reader is witnessing and one form of which remains to be discovered."[247] Each, for a moment, imagines something supernatural in the encounter. The invocation of the Gothic in this scene also helps shape and signal the complex shifting of power that takes place in the encounter. Rochester, who ought to have all the power in the relationship, is instantly disarmed—Jane can "see him plainly," "felt no fear of him," and is given a first impression of her master as undeniably human and mundane in comparison with her fairy tale imaginings. She is even, tellingly, "in the mood for being useful" (113). Rochester, on the other hand, later tells her that he "thought unaccountably of fairy tales" when first seeing her strange face and is altogether put at a disadvantage by Jane's mysteriousness, even if its source is her liminal social position as a

[246] Brontë, 112.
[247] Willis, 25.

governess, which means he cannot figure out her role from her dress. Even in this aspect of the encounter, Jane takes the lead, "helping him" with her title when he is stymied.

Even when Jane makes her return to the house alone, after the gytrash scene, she has gained a paradoxical kind of agency from the encounter. She begins her return with her original restlessness heightened in comparison to the incident:

> I did not like re-entering Thornfield. To pass its threshold was to return to stagnation; to cross the silent hall, to ascend the darksome staircase, to seek my own lonely little room, and then to meet tranquil Mrs. Fairfax, and spend the long winter evening with her, and her only, was to quell wholly the faint excitement wakened by my walk. (116)

But she takes this moment to pause before passing the threshold, stirring up her own faculties in an active feat of spatial practice. Even the syntax mirrors her physical movement—pacing again, as on the rooftop:

> I lingered at the gates; I lingered on the lawn; I paced backwards and forwards on the pavement; the shutters of the glass door were closed; I could not see into the interior; and both my eyes and spirit seemed drawn from the gloomy house—from the grey hollow filled with rayless cells, as it appeared to me—to that sky expanded before me,—a blue sea absolved from taint of cloud; the moon ascending it in solemn march; her orb seeming to look up as she left the hill-tops, from behind which she had come, far and farther below her, and aspired to the zenith, midnight dark in its fathomless depth and measureless distance; and for those trembling stars that followed her course; they made my heart tremble, my veins glow when I viewed them. (116)

In the space of this sentence, Jane indulges her restlessness even to the point of rather Gothic imagery (the midnight dark, the fathomless depth and measureless distance). This is perhaps the most dismal description of Thornfield in the novel—the "gloomy house," the "grey hollow filled with rayless cells" is even more of a prison-house than the attic, in all its Bluebeard-inflected grimness, appears when Jane passes it on the way to the roof. But Jane cannot "see into the interior"; she is aware that it is her mood and outlook that has created the space as a prison, and in giving herself a threshold moment in which to work through her discontent, she is able to

almost magically, with the strike of a clock in the hall, re-make the space she is about to enter. When she does go back into the building, it is "suffused" in a "warm glow," with the "ruddy shine" of a "genial fire," full of marble, brass, "purple draperies," and "polished furniture," creating an atmosphere of "the most pleasant radiance" (117). On a small, temporary scale, Jane has made her own homecoming for herself. It is *not* the addition of Rochester to the household that switches Thornfield from *unheimlich* to *heimlich* here—this active pause and the warm, pleasant observations of the interior happen before Jane has any hint that the owner has returned. Of course, this almost despondent moment can be seen as a Gothic foreshadowing of the truth of the house—with Rochester back in it, it is even more a prison for Bertha. And perhaps the description of "purple draperies and polished furniture" is a bit too effusive, the interior a bit too luxurious, not overtly indicating the dark origin of this wealth, but perhaps hinting at its falseness.[248]

"I want to be at the house": Departing and Returning to Thornfield

A significant consolidation of Jane's power over her relationship with the domestic occurs when she has the chance to revisit Gateshead upon her aunt's illness. In this endeavor she is provided a mentor in domestic control in the form of Bessie, who first welcomes her to Gateshead Lodge and then acts as training wheels of a sort in Jane's first significant "coming-home" of the novel, as she walks up from the Lodge to Gateshead Hall itself. It is only in returning to her old environs that Jane is able to see anything positive in the place—possibly enabled only by this doubled return, where she has even more time to linger at the edge of the main house, both remembering it and anticipating what her return could hold. She even becomes

[248] See Freedgood's chapter on mahogany in Jane Eyre, "Souvenirs of Sadism."

nostalgic, seeing Bessie's care for her as an all-encompassing feature of her childhood, with more emphasis on Bessie's domestic acts as caretaking than in the opening chapters of the novel:

> Old times crowded fast back on me as I watched her bustling about—setting out the tea-tray with her best china, cutting bread and butter, toasting a tea-cake, and, between whiles, giving little Robert or Jane an occasional tap or push, just as she used to give me in former days. Bessie had retained her quick temper as well as her light foot and good looks.
>
> Tea ready, I was going to approach the table; but she desired me to sit still, quite in her old peremptory tones. I must be served at the fireside, she said; and she placed before me a little round stand with my cup and a plate of toast, absolutely as she used to accommodate me with some privately purloined dainty on a nursery chair: and I smiled and obeyed her as in bygone days. (227)

Jane, now armed with the physical and mental benefits of a welcoming tea, takes Bessie with her in her re-entry of Gateshead Hall. Jane spends the walk comparing herself to what she was on the "dark, misty, raw morning in January" when she "left that hostile roof…to seek the chilly harbourage of Lowood" (227). As "the same hostile roof now again rose," Jane still sees herself as "a wanderer on the face of the earth" but "experience[s] firmer trust in [her]self and [her] own powers" (227-8). The visit bears this out. Despite the "coolness" of her welcome, Jane begins directing her stay in the house by controlling her own movements within it. She removes her "bonnet and gloves, uninvited," insists on going upstairs to see Mrs. Reed despite her cousins' reluctance, and simply invites herself to stay, asking the housekeeper to set up a room for her and settling in without consulting the cousins (230). Jane still sits "apart" from them, "near the window," but takes up a habitual spot in the same room, consciously using her activity of drawing as a way to enforce her own presence (233). She is no longer relegated to the "triply off-center" space of the window seat;[249] she has carved out a space for herself largely through occupying herself with domestic tasks so she has a reason to stand her ground. In the end,

[249] Spivak, 246.

Georgiana invites Jane to take walks with her and both cousins separately "entreat" Jane to stay longer after Mrs. Reed dies. In taking charge of the domestic logistics of the cousins' respective departures, Jane has an opportunity to think through her positions on domestic labor, deciding that she is willing to sew, pack, "look after the house," and take care of visitors and correspondence without reciprocation only because she will not have to do so permanently.[250] Through these tasks and responsibilities, as well as her pastime of drawing, which makes the sisters begin to value and interact with her, Jane makes the house more and more hers—and eventually she is the one to "see off" both her cousins when they leave home (241). At this point in her trajectory, Jane's centrality certainly depends on situational factors—she becomes central to the home only when Mrs. Reed is dying and the others are contemplating their departures. But the perspective—and the practice—she has gained at Gateshead puts her well on her way to reconsidering her tirade about knitting and pudding-making—she can see the deceptive power these tasks can provide when taken up actively and strategically.

Jane's first large-scale return to Thornfield consolidates her power through an active pause. After her trip to Gateshead, narrator-Jane explicitly meditates on homecoming[251] and draws out the telling of the return just as young Jane draws out the last approach to the house, deciding to "walk the distance quietly" alone, without giving Mrs. Fairfax notice to send someone to meet her, and chooses to "very quietly" "slip away" from the inn on the evening in June (a fitting contrast to the anti-homecomings of Jane's Januaries) and "take the old road,"

[250] Brontë, 241.

[251] "How people feel when they are returning home from an absence, long or short, I did not know: I had never experienced the sensation. I had known what it was to come back to Gateshead when a child, after a long walk—to be scolded for looking cold or gloomy; and later, what it was to come back from church to Lowood—to long for a plenteous meal and a good fire, and to be unable to get either. Neither of these returnings were very pleasant or desirable: no magnet drew me to a given point, increasing in its strength of attraction the nearer I came. The return to Thornfield was yet to be tried" (242).

"which lay chiefly through the fields, and was now little frequented" (243). Narrative time stretches out, slowing down as we approach the environs of the house. In this interstitial moment, Jane can imagine the homecoming she wants and at the same time take care to create in her head a realistic scenario of what the coming moment will actually bring. She reminds herself, "it [is] not to my home I [am] going" and thinks of the welcome she will get from Adèle and Mrs. Fairfax, trying not to hope for more than a pleasant, superficial homecoming (243). The walk "was not bright or splendid, but "fair and soft," and the tone is meditative as Jane imagines all the possibilities of her reception. Suddenly, the narration dips into present tense as narrator-Jane melds with her younger self as she does nowhere else in the novel, apparently immersed in the memory, *now*, at the hour she arrives:

> They are making hay, too, in Thornfield meadows: or rather, the labourers are just quitting their work, and returning home with their rakes on their shoulders, now, at the hour I arrive. I have but a field or two to traverse, and then I shall cross the road and reach the gates. How full the hedges are of roses! But I have no time to gather any; I want to be at the house. I passed a tall briar, shooting leafy and flowery branches across the path; I see the narrow stile with stone steps; and I see—Mr. Rochester sitting there, a book and a pencil in his hand; he is writing. (243)

These narrative choices—the lengthening of discourse-time and the unique dip into present tense—call attention to this non-Gothic moment. The moment is full of gently productive activity—labourers whose work will sweeten their own homecomings, the possibility of gathering, even Jane's looking forward to measure the remaining steps of her journey, imagining the bodily movements of traversing fields, passing through gates, mounting the stile. Mr. Rochester, too, is writing out of doors, a meditative activity that might seem aimless compared to indoor business correspondence, but might yield something more transformative. The suddenness of this premature arrival, after Jane has taken such care to delay it and get her thoughts in order, leads her to an unwelcome confession that sets the events of proposal and

failed wedding into motion. Upon Mr. Rochester's invitation to "stay your weary little wandering feet at a friend's threshold," Jane, in spite of herself, declares, "I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home—my only home" (246). In another novel, this would be the climactic pronouncement of the novel, and perhaps it is its center, more so than the aborted wedding. But as lovingly depicted as this scene of return is, and as much as both characters attempt to linger in the crystallized moment, the Gothic is again invoked, with an opposite effect as in the gytrash scene at the very same stile.

As Jane so suddenly comes upon Rochester blocking her way, she thinks, "Well, he is not a ghost; yet every nerve I have is unstrung." Jane's discomfort is almost Gothic in its effect—she trembles and "loses [her] voice and the power of motion in his presence" (244). Rochester, on the other hand, jokingly labels her stealthy approach supernatural; she is not "like a common mortal," but a "dream or a shade," someone who "comes from the other world," a "shadow," an "elf," an illusory "*ignis fatuus* light in a marsh," and finally, a "fairy" (245). All this talk has the effect of giving him the upper hand as he remains in her path ("He did not leave the stile, and I hardly liked to ask to go by"). Rochester's talk of magic gives him a sly way to let Jane see he "had spoken of Thornfield as [her] home" and allows him to tease Jane about Blanche Ingram's beauty (245), leaving her so flustered that she makes her confession, never seeing that he has been using Blanche to regain the upper hand in their relationship.

Jane does get her happy homecoming from Adèle, Mrs. Fairfax, Leah, and Sophie, but it is overshadowed by the swift shift in power brought on in the previous scene. Soon after this encounter, she and Rochester have their reckoning and become engaged. If the solution to Jane's complex relationship with home were merely the confines of companionate marriage, the story could end here and readers might be justified in calling it a marriage plot. But as soon as Jane

accepts her engagement to her master (255), her micro-journeys across the threshold of Thornfield begin to go wrong. Immediately after their tryst by the chestnut tree, Rochester begins a pattern of propelling Jane into and out of the house: he "hurrie[s] [her] up the walk, through the grounds, and into the house," shocking Mrs. Fairfax (256). The next day, on Jane's unwanted trip to obtain jewels and wedding clothes, Rochester agitatedly tries to dictate the terms of the trip. Jane observes Rochester's frenetic behavior: "the carriage was ready: they were bringing it round to the front, and my master was pacing the pavement, Pilot following him backwards and forwards" (265). He refuses to let Adèle go with them; Jane remarking that "he was quite peremptory, both in look and voice" (265). Though he relents in the end, his anxiety for departure creates a sense of "hypochondriac foreboding" in Jane (277). He insists on planning to leave Thornfield "within half an hour after our return from church," even on the eve of the wedding anxious to depart (278). On the wedding day, Jane is unable even to take in her surroundings, "hurried along by a stride [she] could hardly follow" (287). Tellingly, she "gaze[s] neither on sky nor earth," cannot tell "whether the day was fair or foul" (287)—her power of observation, crucial until now for her survival in unpleasant domestic situations, has been obscured and blinkered.

Of course, Rochester's fixation on departure and his pacing about at the threshold does not lead to happy domestic union. Interestingly, though, the truest "horror moment" in the novel comes in this lead-up to the failed wedding, not once the awful truth has been revealed. The Red Room scene, one of the set pieces that makes it so easy to classify the novel as Gothic, is a good touchstone for interpreting the only other time when Jane will faint from fear. The immediate stressor that causes a moment like Emily St. Aubert's in front of the black veil—an overwhelming fear so intense that it causes loss of consciousness and a mystery for readers—is

not actually the supernatural gleam Jane sees in the room, but the moment Mrs. Reed dismisses Jane's emotion as violence and "thrusts [her] back," locking her in (18). Similarly, on the eve of her wedding, Jane recounts the "dream" that culminates in a glimpse of Bertha's face, "fearful and ghastly to [Jane]," "discoloured" and "savage," purple, with red rolling eyes, and "lips that were swelled and dark" (283). As she recounts to Rochester,

> Just at my bedside, the figure stopped: the fiery eyes glared upon me—she thrust up her candle close to my face, and extinguished it under my eyes. I was aware her lurid visage flamed over mine, and I lost consciousness: for the second time in my life—only the second time—I became insensible from terror. (284)

Jane's reaction here contrasts interestingly with her reaction when she sees Bertha again, with full knowledge that she is Rochester's mad wife. That scene is conveyed with no commentary from Jane, no glimpse of her emotions. Even Rochester notes that she "stands so grave and quiet…looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon" (294). At other dramatic Gothic moments—sitting up with the injured Mr. Mason, putting out the fire in Rochester's bedroom—Jane is calm and practical. Though the revelation of Bertha is the most dramatic element of the novel, Jane's interiority and analysis is all shifted to the night before, when she waits for Rochester to return so she can recount her dream in detail. Narrator-Jane introduces the episode with a direct address to the reader emphasizing that she has thus far held back a disclosure, omitting it from the natural chronology of the story and choosing to tell it to us the *next* night: "I waited now his return; eager to disburthen my mind, and to seek of him the solution of the enigma that perplexed me. Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence" (276). This wait takes pages and becomes more and more suspenseful without a clear reason for Jane's anxiety. Jane talks to the riven chestnut tree, separates ripe from unripe apples in the orchard, arranges and re-arranges Rochester's habitual chair by the library fire, and eventually decides to run out to meet him on his way, thinking to herself, "I cannot sit

by the fireside, while he is abroad in inclement weather: better tire my limbs than strain my heart; I will go forward and meet him" (277). All this activity, even to the extent of leaping up onto his horse once he arrives, cannot reassure Jane, and all her powers of analysis cannot reason away her forebodings about her supposed dream.

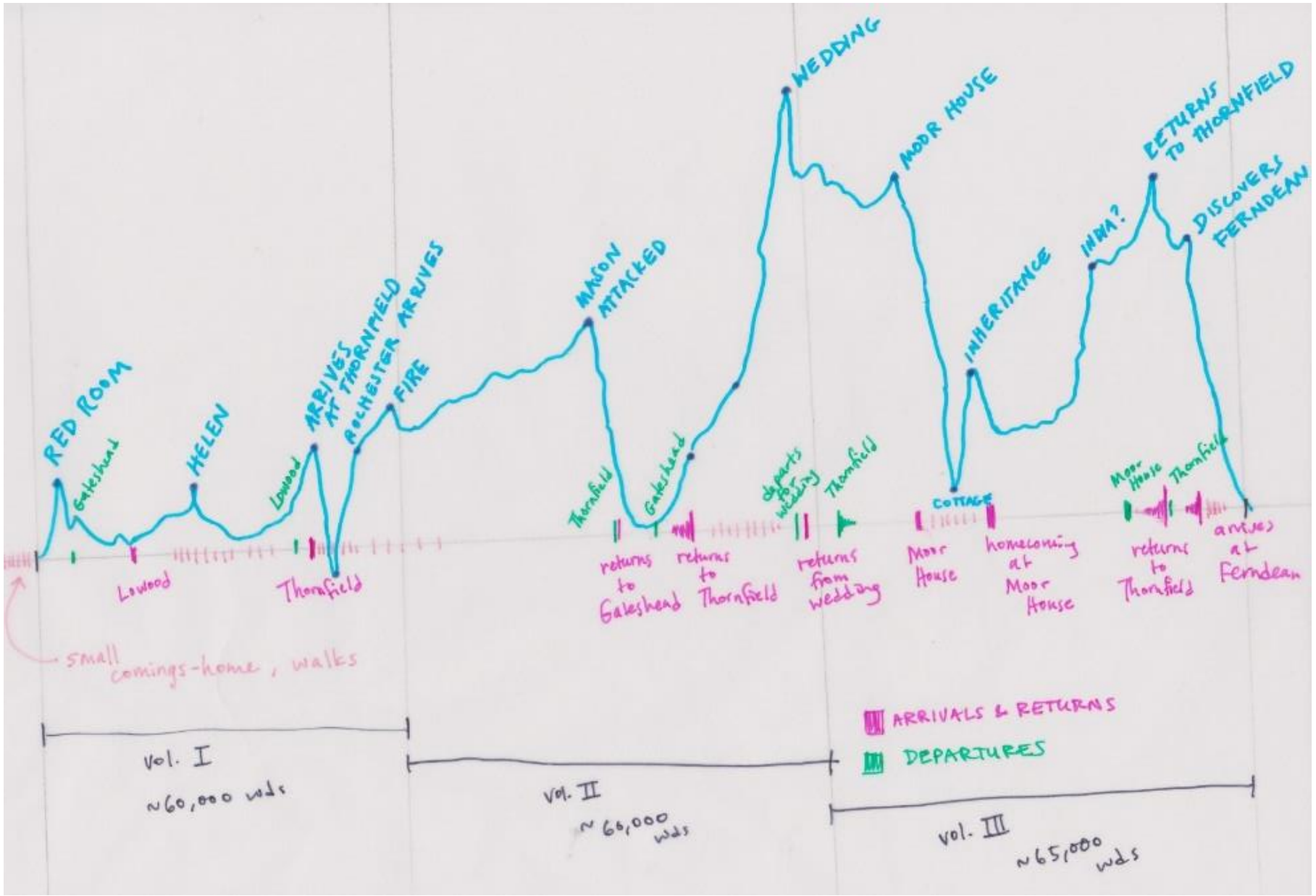

Figure 8. Sketch: Narrative Tension x Returns and Departures in *Jane Eyre*

What follows is one of Jane's habitual abrupt departures. At the beginning of the novel, she is forcibly ejected from Gateshead. Now, having discovered Bertha's existence, broken her engagement, and decided against becoming Rochester's mistress, she leaves Thornfield against all her desires, but completely of her own agency. Jane's departure from Thornfield is both drawn out and mechanical, acting as the hinge point in Jane's search for home.[252] She recognizes that the act of leaving is the ultimate expression of her own moral and psychological agency. Jane is able to begin a new cycle of struggle and adventure to work through her tendencies for restlessness and rebellion. While Jane's activities at her new possible-home in Marsh End start with obsessive fixation and mechanical attention to duty (358-9), she eventually recovers enough from her time out in the cold to begin philosophizing, self-searching, and experimenting with good and bad incarnations of domesticity through more spatial practice.

"To be as active as I can": The work of homecoming at Marsh End

Jane's time at Marsh End—both in Moor House and her own schoolmistress's cottage—is her final opportunity to assimilate different versions of domesticity. Diana and Mary "lov[e] their sequestered home," and Jane's nature "dovetails" with theirs exactly, both indoors and in her appreciation of the surrounding country. The three women have a "perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles," and Diana and Mary are more "accomplished and well-read" than Jane, leading to the "full satisfaction" of "following in the path of knowledge they had trodden" and an absolute communion ("thought fitted thought; opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly") (350). St. John, however, is set up as the novel's clincher, the

[252] Later, her sudden, supernatural revelation that she must return to Thornfield rather than marrying St. John will be a more powerful exit completely of her own volition, though inspired by *deus ex machina.* Psychoanalytic readings of the novel see the fire and Bertha's final leap to her death as a way of relocating Jane's rage by displacing it onto her double, exorcizing all Jane's emotional resistance to marriage at the same time as the literal impediment to it is miraculously removed.

final counter-example to make readers sure Jane's path is the right one, since it is counter to his. He voices, only once, his "strong sense of the rugged charm of the hills, and an inborn affection for the dark roof and hoary walls he called his home," but in a gloomy way, and "never did he seem to roam the moors for the sake of their soothing silence" (351). He feels compelled to leave the home he admits he loves, his explanation a close echo of Jane's rooftop speech: the "uniform duties" of the priesthood "wearied" him, he longed for "the more active life of the world," and only finds his "cramped existence all at once spread out to a plain without bounds" when he resolves to leave England as a missionary (361-2). St. John's disregard for the good he could do at home and his pointed rejection of his sisters (who we are made to see as Jane's ideal companions, flawless and empathetic) are clear markers that he is in the wrong. And it is against St. John's denigration of all the small cares and tasks of home life that Jane's own domestic philosophy is finally solidified.

Jane at first sees St. John as the ultimate hero of a voyaging-out story, characterizing him as too virtuous for her, too saintly to appreciate the mundanities of home:

> I saw he was of the material from which nature hews her heroes—Christian and Pagan—her lawgivers, her statesmen, her conquerors: a steadfast bulwark for great interests to rest upon; but, at the fireside, too often a cold cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place…It is in scenes of strife and danger—where courage is proved, and energy exercised, and fortitude tasked—that he will speak and move, the leader and superior. (393)

But as he continues to try to harangue her into joining him on his missionary journey, she makes several sets of "revelations" about his character, finally undertaking "the analysis of his nature" (406). Jane, while at Marsh End, vows "to be as active as [she] can," not through going off to die as a result of missionary work, but instead, through constant activeness, "to enjoy [her] own faculties as well as to cultivate those of other people" (389), to "invoke order" "amidst the bustle

of a house turned topsy-turvy," to "brush, and dust, and clean, and cook," creating the domestic joy, "the glad tumult, the garrulous glee of reception" that so "irks" St. John (391; 394). She even embraces pudding-making, setting out a mission statement of domestic creation that St. John sees as "slothful" (390). Jane finally creates a non-dreadful homecoming—not for herself, but for Diana and Mary, describing to St. John "such a beating of eggs, sorting of currants, grating of spices, compounding of Christmas cakes, chopping up of materials for mince-pies, and solemnising of other culinary rites, as words can convey but an inadequate notion of to the uninitiated like you" (390). St. John's character is solidified in his response: "I trust that when the first flush of vivacity is over, you will look a little higher than domestic endearments and household joys," Jane retorting that these joys are "the best things the world has!" (390).[253]

Jane's time at Marsh End hammers one point home: a voyage out with St. John would be, for her, the ultimate domestic servitude—the kind of domestic activity that means being used as a "tool" (416) for someone else's ends, not the kind of productive activity that creates vitality and safety. The prospective voyage to India is figured as "a rayless dungeon,"[254] an "iron shroud" contracting around her (404). Jane does think that if she went with St. John unmarried, she would still (like Emily St. Aubert, through her landscape reveries) have her own mind as a final escape: "I should have my unblighted self to turn to…recesses in my mind which would be only mine" (407). While "[her] body would be under rather a stringent yoke," allowed to perform only those tasks St. John deems real work (learning certain languages, teaching English, evangelizing), "[her] heart and mind would be free" (407). She returns to the rhetoric of

[253] Luce Giard, in "Doing-Cooking," recounts her own similar journey from a feminist refusal to cook, to an enjoyment of it later in life (151-3). One of her interviewees, Irène, aged 44, remarks in "When It Comes Down to It, Cooking Worries Me…" that "it is only recently that I am taking pleasure in cooking" (229). "Doing-Cooking" celebrates the skill and productive activeness that can be found in tasks like Jane's "compounding of Christmas cakes" while seeing clearly all the ways in which cooking may not be joyful for women.
[254] Brontë, 403.

usefulness dwelt on in her early life at Gateshead when she is treated as "a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment" (15-16). At Marsh End, Jane seriously contemplates becoming "chained for life to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool" (416), running through the list of tasks she could perform, ways she could support St. John, certain that her journey would end in working herself to death. This is not the kind of activeness that promotes agency or allows one to take control over one's surroundings. In "toil[ing] under Eastern suns," she would not just be acting only under St. John's directions, for his colonial aims (407), but also entering a way of life that is "hard and cold," without the "humanities and amenities of life," without any "peaceful enjoyments" (392). Jane does not quite see anything wrong with the colonial-evangelical mission at hand, but her horror of his methods leads her more and more to distrust St. John's instincts about the voyage (and about home). In the same period of her life that Jane vows to be as active as possible (389), she realizes that St. John, who "would never rest; nor approve of others resting around him" (392), is not just a hero who can brave the elements and the hardships of travel and adventure that Jane originally imagines as the purview of Gulliver, but someone whose view of what it means to strive—to be courageous, to have fortitude and energy (393)—is inhumanly narrow and paternalistic.

Readers must hold up Jane and St. John against each other: the ascetic who treats her joy in homey activity as a tendency toward "selfish calm and sensual comfort" and does not recognize any activity within the home as "active" (390), and the now-independent orphan who has finally achieved a happy domesticity with the best family she could ever have hoped for. We are implicitly asked to consider Jane's own journey as compared to her first impression of St. John's prospective voyage, the apparent epitome of "scenes of strife and danger, where courage

is proved, and energy exercised, and fortitude tasked" (393). St. John's presence in the novel is essential to allowing readers to accept Jane cleansing herself of rage and rebellion, enjoying wealth, romantic love, and "useful" work that does not require the sacrifice of life and humanity. Jane never explicitly revisits the way she first identifies St. John with nature's "lawgivers, her statesmen, her conquerers"—the apparent "heroes" both of life and of sea voyaging narratives (393). But readers must ask, when she sets off to return to Thornfield, whether Jane herself isn't a version of a hero, whether her constant negotiations with the idea of home constitute her ongoing quest, the realm in which "courage is proved, and energy exercised, and fortitude tasked." For Jane, home always comes in creation and action, and her journey is not about arrival, but continual remaking.

Wending Homeward: *Jane Eyre*'s Ending

It is clear that the novel wants Jane to turn away from the "monstrous martyrdom" that a voyage to India would become. But readers are also made uncomfortable by what can be seen as Jane's final diminishing into the role of subordinate helpmeet and even by the implications of the abrupt supernatural plot contrivance that saves her from this fate. The final Gothic moment that spurs an encounter between Jane and Rochester, unlike the gytrash scene, is the only one in which the supernatural is not completely explained away. Jane is convinced that the voice she hears calling her back to Rochester is not a "nervous impression," but "an inspiration" that, "like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas's prison," "opened the doors of the soul's cell, and loosed its bands" (421). After another night of productive pacing ("walking softly about my room, and pondering" (421)), Jane re-traces the steps of her flight from Thornfield. She remembers her exit, "hurried, blind, deaf, distracted," and now her return is full of feeling and interior monologue: "How fast I walked! How I ran sometimes! How I looked forward to catch

the first view of the well-known woods!" (423). She worries, even expects, that Rochester "may be beyond the British Channel," that "perhaps at this moment he is watching the sun rise over the Pyrenees, or on the tideless sea of the south" (423). But not only has Rochester stayed at Thornfield, he has "shut himself up, like a hermit, at the Hall," refusing to "cross the doorstones" in the aftermath of Jane's flight. During the fire, too, he seems determined to be the last person the house confines or harms: "he wouldn't leave the house till every one else was out before him," everyone, that is, except Bertha (429).

Bertha leaves Jane the wrecked Thornfield, now revealed to be "fragile looking" and hollow, in what is often seen both as the killing off of Jane's inner, rageful child, and the self-immolation of the colonial Creole to make way for Jane, now the heiress of her uncle's Madeira-based fortune (424). Jane comes home to see in Thornfield a "void arch"—a broken patriarchal space that is now empty of power to define or confine (425). Michel de Certeau points out that "Haunted places are the only ones people can live in,"[255] since, under his view of space and spatial practice, what constitutes any space is the memory and meaning we imbue in it when we practice the art of return—our own haunting creates the possibility of habitable spaces. This explains Thornfield's odd emptiness after being purged of Bertha's (live) ghost. There is no story there anymore, no secret, nothing concealed or in need of negotiating—so the building is psychologically uninhabitable because of its *lack* of hauntings. All the elements of the Gothic have been purged, both the Gothic tropes of secrecy and monstrosity and the literal pieces of Gothic architecture most associated with Bertha ("no roof, no battlements, no chimneys—all had crashed in" (424)). Jane's suspenseful return to discover the ruined Hall is one of the most deeply Gothic aspects of the novel, with the allegory of the dead lover, but the object at the end

[255] De Certeau, 108.

of this journey is just a pit stop, a quick misdirection that is swiftly corrected as Jane gets back on the road again.

The novel, having taken an excursion into a more traditionally domestic situation at Marsh End and narrowly avoided becoming a missionary's travelogue, brings us back to *Pilgrim's Progress* as a final intertext. Jane's approach to Ferndean is the culmination of her final series of journeys, coming at the heels of her "six-and-thirty" hour trip from Marsh End to Thornfield. She walks the last mile to the house, going deeper and deeper into woodsy isolation, following a "grass-grown track" through the "thick and dark" foliage of the "gloomy wood," her journey "stretching on and on," "further and further" (430). She thinks she has lost her way: "all was interwoven stem, columnar trunk, dense, summer foliage—no opening anywhere" (430). The house is distinctly wild, all its doors and windows narrow and framed by encroaching forest. The first description of Ferndean, in fact, is that it has "no architectural pretensions" (429). It is not the crenellated Gothic structure of Thornfield, and despite all its gloominess and decay, the environs are not man-made Gothic confinement, but the "hoar and knotty shafts" of nature, the "branched arches" of trees on the track leading to the house the answer to Thornfield's "void arch" (430; 425).

The description of Ferndean as almost swallowed up by the outdoors brings us back to Thompson and Wheeler's 1825 tract on the plight of the wife in nineteenth-century society: the home becomes "prison-house" when one's husband creates a façade of "calm bliss" indoors and seeks for himself, "out-side of doors," "a species of bliss not quite so calm, but of a more varied and stimulating description" (78). This framework helps us interpret Jane's final home at Ferndean over and against the failed attempt of Thornfield. Rochester's initial solution to the binary of indoor prison/out-of-doors activity is to bring Jane with him out of the domestic

situation. As soon as they are engaged, he begins his frenzied habits of rushing the wedding plans and physically manhandling Jane in and out of the house, repeatedly announcing he will "waft [her] away at once to town" (259) "within half an hour after [the] return from church" (279). He and Jane will travel Europe together (259), not returning to Thornfield "for a long time" (278). This option—to abandon the domesticity altogether—would have been one way out of the trap of domestic confinement for Jane, though one wonders what would have happened after the eventual return to England and Thornfield.

Instead, Ferndean's overgrowth seems to suggest the destruction of the barrier between calm domestic bliss and the "out-of-doors" stimulating species of bliss accessible to husbands. The first stage of Jane's arrival at Ferndean sees her taking control of domestic tasks and comforts, bringing in bustle and vitality through trivial yet life-giving concerns. She arrives to a "gloomy" parlour with "a neglected handful of fire" and finds Rochester in a sort of stasis, refusing meals (436) and rebuffing John's offers to help him move around (431). Jane gently enters the household by silently taking over Mary's tasks, fetching Rochester a glass of water (432), then, once he recognizes her, bringing the room into "more cheerful order," and, though she summons Mary, taking care to specify her personal involvement in the work: "I prepared him, likewise, a comfortable repast" (436). She brings up tomorrow's breakfast in practical, mundane terms ("I must bring an egg at the least, to say nothing of fried ham") to manage the gravity of the homecoming (438). Eventually, Jane returns from her wedding to announce the news amidst possibly the most mundane domestic task depicted in the novel, Mary's chicken-basting (449).

This is not quite the joyful domestic activity of the homecoming Jane creates for her cousins at Moor House—nor the stifling, meaningless "making puddings and knitting

stockings…playing on the piano and embroidering bags" she scorns in her rooftop speech (109). Readers have many reasons to be ambivalent about this ending. It is difficult to deny that Rochester has indeed been ritually wounded,[256] to make him both sexually safe and safe for the new middle-class world, as Hoeveler posits.[257] While it is easy to read the possibility of missionary life with St. John as a clearly disastrous alternative, readers are left to wonder why a quietly active life with the seemingly perfect Diana and Mary (learning German rather than Hindostanee) is never quite entertained as an option. And of course, the power differential between Jane and Rochester may now be uncomfortably skewed, while its source is Jane's independence through the all-too-convenient inheritance, which is not just a rather heavy-handed solution—like Bertha's convenient sacrifice—but which also comes from colonial enterprises, reminding us of Jane's complicity. Rochester's wounds are a constant reminder of and punishment for his past bad behavior, leaving Jane with all the comfort of a permanent upper hand—but we never know whether she locates his misdeeds merely in the attempt at bigamy, or also in his treatment of Bertha.

Jane's final homecoming is still not quite what a forlorn orphan would have imagined. Unsettlingly, she sends Adèle off to school, just as Rochester wanted to when he planned their European travels. In the end, Jane still comes to live on Rochester's property, putting her long-awaited independence to the side and seeing it more as a way of entering the relationship as an equal than a true opportunity to make a new home entirely her own, legally hers. She does devote all her activities to supporting her husband, becoming Rochester's sole point of access to the world ("he saw nature—he saw books through me"),[258] and she won't travel in the way she

[256] Compare to the ending of *Udolpho*—Valancourt is not physically maimed and hamstrung as Rochester is, but disempowered to the point of slipping, almost unnoticed, into Emily's domestic life.
[257] Hoeveler, 214.
[258] Brontë, 451.

always imagined—no adventures in France and Italy, just doctors' visits in London and trips to see Diana and Mary (451-2).

But when viewed through the lens of spatial practice, seeing iterative, wandering movement as the ultimate way to keep making the world one's own, Jane's ending can be read as cautiously optimistic. She lives a life that largely destroys the barrier between inside and outside, home and world. Just as she does in the window seat, Jane's patterns of movement and power of analysis and self-awareness "can make the outside inside."[259] The final account of Jane's activities at Ferndean in the weeks and months after her arrival home bear this out. The final pages of Jane's story are centered around a walk: "It is a bright, sunny morning, sir…The rain is over and gone, and there is a tender shining after it: you shall have a walk soon."[260] Jane and Rochester spend the morning "in the open air." Jane "[leads] him out of the wet and wild wood into some cheerful fields," "describes to him how brilliantly green they were; how the flowers and hedges looked refreshed; how sparklingly blue was the sky" (439). She finds "a hidden and lovely spot," and once they have spent the morning there, Jane directs their next move: "We will go home through the wood: that will be the shadiest way" (446). In the final moment of close narration in the novel—the last scene in which story-time and discourse-time are close, and narrator-Jane is not intruding to emphasize storytelling over verisimilitude, Jane creates an everyday homecoming, one of many future returns, that quietly stays with readers: "We entered the wood, and wended homeward" (448).

Of course, though this sentence is a fitting end for Jane's story, is not the end of the novel. Even the famous pronouncement, "reader, I married him" (448), is both afterthought and

[259] Spivak, 246.
[260] Brontë, 439.

penultimate act. Readers and critics have often puzzled over the close of *Jane Eyre* and the relegation of the novel's final moments to St. John, not the eponymous heroine. But as we have seen, St. John and his journey represent the final challenge to Jane's own conception of what an active, generative life should be. St. John's final appearance in the novel represents yet another telling intertextual adventure. The intertextual touchstones scattered through *Jane Eyre* often represent whole, linear journeys in which *abroad* is synonymous with true escape. The novel is bookended with references to epic journeying. Allusions to tales of domestic enclosure (*Bluebeard* and Bessie's ad hoc adaptations of *Pamela*) are made briefly, one side of the apparent binary between tales of adventure and tales of domesticity. *Gulliver's Travels* and the arctic sea voyages found in *Bewick's British Birds* are carefully placed early in the narrative, with voyages into their worlds set up as future alternatives to window-seat reading. But the closing lines of the novel invoke Bunyan. Jane's story ends with St. John's words from across the sea, his conviction that he will soon be called home to God. Just as *Pilgrim's Progress* (or, in full, *The Pilgrim's Progress: from This World, to That Which Is to Come*) ends by carefully recording each pilgrim's last words before they cross the River of Death,[261] Jane's narrative terminates with St. John's own last words. Mr. Dispondencie concludes his "pilgrim's progress" with "*Farewel Night, welcome Day*"; Mr. Valiant says "*Death, where is thy Sting? Grave, where is thy victory?*" (Bunyan, 242). St. John follows along in quite the same vein: "Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!" (Brontë, 452). This decentering ending identifies Jane with those who choose to stay behind, postponing arrival in the Celestial City to do the church's work on this side of the river.[262] In one way, this creates a sense of openness and possibility: *Jane Eyre*'s dénouement is not the end of a story, but also the beginning of a new life of work and care. This choice also

[261] Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 240-244.
[262] Bunyan, 244.

completes the novel's allusive symmetry while destabilizing the intertexts' simple equivalence between voyaging out and freedom, escape, and grace. St. John's own sea voyage becomes, paradoxically, the ultimate act of self-immurement, almost synonymous with his death—his ultimate homecoming.

Jane refuses to equate home, or even a life of caretaking, with death—she represents the alternative to St. John's suicidal restlessness. Jane hasn't arrived at any final, perfect relationship with domesticity, but she has decided that negotiating it will continue to be the action of her life. Domesticity is the realm in which she must find courage and tenacity. She will continue to return, again and again, to engage in spatial practice at the threshold, knowing she risks losing herself to home-as-confinement, but embracing the activity through which it is possible to remake home as her own, carefully assimilated, habitable landscape.

Chapter Four

"Scouting the Paradox": *Villette* and Domesticity Unmoored

> *M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox? Listen.*
>
> —Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*

Villette's Spatial Practices: Setting Domesticity Adrift

While *Jane Eyre*'s final chapters display some ambivalence about the long-term safety and affordances of a traditional domestic situation, Brontë's final stance is cautiously positive, emphasizing Jane's agency and her ability to constantly create and re-create her own domestic environment. After her trials, Jane is able to successfully negotiate power relations through her handling of the physical spaces and domestic rituals of home. If *Jane Eyre* is essentially a recursive pilgrim's progress towards a relatively traditional, idealized version of domesticity, then Brontë's final novel, *Villette*, sets its heroine adrift. While *Jane Eyre* depicts Jane negotiating domestic spaces through her characteristic spatial practice of return until she gains control over her own spatial and psychological landscape, *Villette* probes the limits of traditional domesticity by staging acts of lingering. In *Jane Eyre*, threshold moments are inflection points in which power may be gained—but *Villette* is interested in the possibility of not just lingering at the threshold or returning to it, but living there.

Both novels begin with family scenes in which the heroine is set apart from a family circle, but only in *Villette* does Brontë truly begin to doubt the comforts of this quintessential image of domesticity. Jane's longing to be welcomed into the center of a familial home is complicated, but unadulterated. She's never ambivalent about the comfort a true home would bring, even if she dreads continual exposure to images of the home life she is excluded from.

Jane's rage and despair at her forced marginalization is a relatively straightforward impulse. She sees the patterns of harm cultivated in a domestic situation like that of Gateshead and for a time rejects all trappings of domesticity as oppressive and tyrannical (as in her rooftop speech). Although she grapples with these realities, Jane's primal psychological objective is, at every point in the novel, to be allowed into a family circle like the one she is excluded from at Gateshead. Even if her movement isn't as linear as Gilbert and Gubar's "Plain Jane's Progress" might imply, the novel essentially tracks Jane's journey to gain what she was originally denied—a central place within a traditional household. Brontë allows Jane's overall trajectory to trend upward over the course of the novel as she gains both material power and a sense of agency over her relationship with home. Her various journeys eventually help her achieve the (surprisingly traditional) domestic situation she has longed for since the original dreadful coming-home of the novel's opening. Though Jane's final home at Ferndean may be slightly unconventional, its fundamental structure conforms quite closely to tradition. Jane achieves a legal, heterosexual marriage and presides over an estate in the English countryside—a home that belongs to an aristocratic patriarch, inherited thorough the rules of primogeniture, no less.

Villette (1853) is fundamentally skeptical about domestic spaces and traditions from the start. Its heroine, Lucy Snowe, is not just left at the margins of domestic life—she seems unmoored from the traditions of home. She is unable to fully participate in domesticity, not due to direct exclusion, but because she sees gendered domestic norms as fundamentally uncanny. In fact, ambivalence about home becomes the central feature of the novel. Anxiety, rumination, obsessive analysis, and feverish wandering are Lucy's primary modes of action. Changes in location are irrelevant in *Villette*, and plot events, no matter how coincidental or revelatory, only illuminate Lucy's odd nature and her tendency to be left on the outside, no matter the situation.

For Lucy Snowe, domesticity is never grounded, never sure. Lucy starts the narrative unmoored from home and moves through several domestic situations without putting down roots. Yet the novel maintains a constant sense of claustrophobia, with characters repeatedly finding themselves confined even as they travel farther than Jane ever does. The only palatable version of domesticity the novel depicts is the peculiar kind Lucy constructs herself—domesticity defined by busy preparation and planning for the future, the domestic as a mode of lingering in the expectation of a return. *Villette*'s famously controversial ending makes us leave Lucy in this state of hovering expectation—her idealized home always on the brink of coalescing, with readers left to interpret whether Monsieur Paul is in the act of returning or has died in a shipwreck.

Lucy Snowe: A Woman Without

Lucy Snowe's character is elusive. *Villette*'s critics—and Brontë herself—often seem unable to describe Lucy without the use of metaphor, as if her personality is almost nonexistent and yet simultaneously unfathomable. While Brontë consistently describes Lucy through the vocabulary of sun and shadow, critics tend to turn to spatial metaphors when linking Lucy to Brontë's larger feminist critiques. Lucy, "as inoffensive as a shadow,"[263] is for Gilbert and Gubar the ultimate outsider, "from first to last a woman *without*—outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health."[264] The ultimate "woman *without*," Lucy is, oddly, also described as not so much *outside* the living world as *underneath* it. Gilbert and Gubar argue that *Villette* is essentially Brontë's oeuvre exposing "the mundane facts of homelessness, poverty, physical unattractiveness, and sexual

[263] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 333, ch. 28.
[264] Gilbert and Gubar, "The Buried Life of Lucy Snowe," 400.

discrimination or stereotyping that impose self-burial on women."[265] Rather than "seeking and celebrating the buried self" or papering over the fate and humanity of buried women, as *Jane Eyre* does with Bertha, they see *Villette* as an "honest elegy for all those women who cannot find ways out," a novel that unflinchingly acknowledges the life of women who "long…for actualization in the world."[266] This makes *Villette* a difficult read for most. This vision of Lucy as "frigid, spiritless," and self-burying[267] does seem to justify Matthew Arnold in his personal label for *Villette*: a "hideous undelightful convulsed constricted novel."[268]

These spatial metaphors at first seem apt. Perhaps *Villette* is the story of Lucy's self-immurement, albeit in a *pensionnat* rather than the traditional convent. And the novel *does* create a sense of claustrophobic, "constricted" unease in readers. So, too, does she often seem to be "without": a term that describes her status not just "on the outside looking in" and her status as observer rather than participant in life's experiences, but a concept that also captures her permanent, intrinsic separateness. Lucy, unlike Jane, is not pushed to the margins of the rooms she occupies—or even left looking in through the "clear panes of glass" at the real, social world from which she is excluded.[269] She is not "outside," a status which would inherently carry the possibility of relocation to "inside." Instead, she is just "without," no door or window to be seen.

But to fully embrace Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of the novel—that it unrelentingly portrays the plight of women under patriarchal rule, refusing to offer Lucy any way to make a life for herself—we must take at face value the "frigid, spiritless" image of Lucy

[265] Gilbert and Gubar, 402.
[266] Gilbert and Gubar, 402-3.
[267] Gilbert and Gubar, 400.
[268] Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, 21 March 1853, in *The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, 134.*
[269] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 8, ch. 1.

Snowe, "damned" for being "a thing that could not feel."[270] Gilbert and Gubar cite Brontë's own musings on the "subtlety of thought"[271] that made her "decide upon giving [Lucy] a cold name,"[272] but they disregard the subtlety, leaving out the second half of Brontë's explanation. The name "Lucy Snowe" (or, in an earlier draft, "Lucy Frost"), carries a peculiar sort of Brontëan logic: "A COLD name she must have; partly, perhaps, on the '*lucus a non lucendo*'[273] principle—partly on that of the 'fitness of things,' for she has about her an external coldness."[274] As Brontë explains in a letter to her editor, Lucy's external coldness is paradoxical: frost (or snow) that is the result of an inner fire. Following the analogy of a grove "named from the fact of its not shining," Lucy is named from the fact of her inability to remain frigid.

Just like most of the novel's characters, readers find it hard to reconcile Lucy's inner self with her cold affect—or even to recognize her fiery, frenetic spirit. Lucy's periods of frenzied action—as when she runs through the streets of Villette,[275] scribbles out an original treatise,[276] or even takes charge of a classroom[277]—are overlooked by most, even pathologized. The novel is, however, full of tiny moments of recognition: Mme Beck shrewdly perceives that Lucy may have the fortitude to face the terror of the Labassecourienne schoolgirls, "rondes, franches, brusques, et tant soit peu rebelles,"[278] and is not surprised when the "inoffensive shadow"

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[270] Gilbert and Gubar, "The Buried Life of Lucy Snowe," 402. Gilbert and Gubar invoke this line from Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," seeing Lucy Snowe as a descendant of Wordsworth's Lucy.
[271] Gilbert and Gubar, 400.
[272] Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, Esq., 6 November 1852, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* by Elizabeth Gaskell, 392.
[273] *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, s.v. "*lucus a non lucendo"*: A paradoxical or otherwise absurd derivation; something of which the qualities are the opposite of what its name suggests. Recorded in English from the early 18th century, this Latin phrase means 'a grove (so called) from the absence of lux (light)'; that is, a grove is named from the fact of its not shining, a proposition discussed by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian (ad c. 35–c. 96) in his *Institutio Oratoria*.
[274] Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, Esq., 6 November 1852, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 392.
[275] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 64, ch. 7.
[276] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 402, ch. 35.
[277] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 78, ch. 8.
[278] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 78, ch. 8: "open, frank, brusque, and ever so slightly rebellious."

conquers the class by tearing up one pupil's dictation and shoving another into a closet in a surprise attack.[279] Ginevra Fanshawe, too, eventually notices the enigma of Lucy's true personality, asking, "Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?" and the perhaps more profound "But *are* you anybody?".[280] Neither of the Brettons, with their conception of "steady little Lucy" and her "grave sensible" ways,[281] would recognize anything eccentric in Lucy, let alone that she is "so peculiar and so mysterious," which Ginevra can see on close acquaintance.[282] Still, even she cannot fully understand Lucy and her potential for imaginative, physical, and emotional activity—as M. Paul eventually does.

Readers, then, have a hint: we don't want to be cast alongside the oblivious Graham Bretton, someone who assumes Lucy's coldness and quietness. Of course, we have an insider view that Graham doesn't. Yet, it is as easy to characterize *Villette's* ending as hopeless as it is to label Lucy shy, dull, staid, and passionless (as Lucy ultimately realizes, this is Graham's view of her). DiBattista and Nord, like Gilbert and Gubar, see only the glimmer of life-as-teacher as the sole positive spin one can put on the ending[283]—and they do not cast this in the most optimistic light. They see the novel as offering Lucy various lifelines and then repeatedly removing them: she "begins to enjoy an expansive sense of life and adventure" in London "until, abruptly and without adequate explanation," she decides to depart for Labassecour; then, more fatally, she is offered "the only kind of family the novel has conjured for her," and we wonder, "will Graham, now identified [as] Dr. John…begin to return the romantic feelings she has for him?" (34-5). It is tempting to want this for Lucy, though I argue it is far worse than the fate DiBattista and Nord

[279] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 80, ch. 8.
[280] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 309, ch. 27.
[281] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 456, ch. 38.
[282] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 333, ch. 28.
[283] Maria DiBattista and Deborah Epstein Nord, *At Home in the World*, 36. Gilbert and Gubar see the hope of life-as-*artist* (or author) as the only way out of Lucy's "woman without" status—Brontë's own way (419).

envision: "by the novel's end we have learned to read these repetitions, this return of the repressed, the cyclical pattern of Lucy's life…home as the place of companionship and warm familial relations will elude Lucy permanently; the unhomely rhythm of loss will continue to determine the shape of her life; and home will inhere only in the sphere of work and authorship" (36). This reading of the ending is hard to counter—though, of course, I read the repetitive, recursive patterns of *Villette* as paradoxically productive. Of course, one can see "work and authorship" as a much more positive path; Susan Fraiman notes that Lucy's *externat* is one way to "produce an outdoors within an indoors," as "Monsieur Paul unlocks a door and we discover, along with Lucy, that her charming little house opens onto the school where she will teach, so that for her, too, private and public spaces intermingle."[284] Still, the ultimate ending does certainly seem to leave Lucy "without" almost everything (except her school and her talent for narration). I argue that just as we must see beyond Lucy's "coldness," we must see beyond the surface-level ideals she has been taught to value. Graham's brand of traditional, benevolent patriarchy is something the novel will not let Lucy achieve—but in the end, this is one thing that she can certainly do without.

"No Bright Lady's Shadow": *Villette*'s Characterization

Lucy's "coldness," or rather, the coldness that often disguises her passionate and sometimes frenetic tendencies, makes her a fully-realized heroine—and also deliberately unlikeable. The principle upon which Lucy's name rests—that she "has an outward coldness," most often interpreted by those around her as something more like nothingness than striking frigidity—does not mean that Lucy's inner fire (originality, or spiritedness) is as uncomplicated as Jane's. *Jane Eyre*'s running motifs of fire and ice give way, in *Villette*, to metaphors of storm

[284] Fraiman, *Extreme Domesticity,* 41.

and stillness, shadow and sun. Brontë takes care to emphasize that Lucy will never be a "sunlight" character, but beneath her front as an "inoffensive shadow" is a frenetic type of activeness—sometimes positive, more often nervous. Brontë makes it clear that as an author, she was "not leniently disposed towards Miss FROST from the beginning," insisting, "I never meant to appoint her lines in pleasant places."[285] Defending Lucy to her editor, she writes:

> You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. 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. It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional, for instance; it was the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness.[286]

This view of Lucy certainly goes along with Gilbert and Gubar's assessment of the novel as an unflinching, unhopeful examination of the realities of life for a woman in Lucy's position. Brontë herself does express a personal preference for embracing the negative as a fundamental part of capturing reality. Regarding negative reviews of her own work, she declares, "to shun examination into the dangerous and disagreeable seems to me cowardly. I long always to know what really IS, and am only unnerved when kept in the dark."[287] Gaskell's *Life* is full of accounts of Brontë's endeavors to ensure Lucy Snowe could never be misconstrued as an idealized heroine:

> As to the character of 'Lucy Snowe,' my intention from the first was that she should not occupy the pedestal to which 'Jane Eyre' was raised by some injudicious admirers. She is where I meant her to be, and where no charge of self-laudation can touch her.[288]

Neither can Lucy's fate be anything close to a traditional fairy-tale ending. Brontë acknowledges that the novel's third volume, with its shift in heroes from Graham (Dr. John) to M. Paul Emmanuel, is "not pleasant" and

[285] Charlotte Brontë to G. Smith, Esq., 3 November 1852, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 391.
[286] Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, Esq., 6 November 1852, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 392-3.
[287] Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, Esq., March 1853, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 404.
[288] Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, Esq., March 1853, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 404.

> …will probably be found as unwelcome to the reader, as it was, in a sense, compulsory upon the writer. The spirit of romance would have indicated another course, far more flowery and inviting; it would have fashioned a paramount hero, kept faithfully with him, and made him supremely worshipful.[289]

Villette relies on this logic: some characters are idealized, typified, and broadly drawn; their characterization and their fates follow the tropes of characters in a romance. Other characters, like Lucy and M. Paul, can never achieve this status, never enter this kind of story. Brontë insists that matching Lucy with a golden character like Graham "would have been unlike real LIFE—inconsistent with truth—at variance with probability":

> Lucy must not marry Dr. John; he is far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited, and sweet-tempered; he is a 'curled darling' of Nature and of Fortune, and must draw a prize in life's lottery. His wife must be young, rich, pretty; he must be made very happy indeed. If Lucy marries anybody, it must be the Professor—a man in whom there is much to forgive, much to 'put up with.'[290]

These "sunny" characters, destined for uncomplicated happiness, are, as Brontë notes, the most thinly drawn. Brontë describes Paulina as the epitome of this phenomenon:

> The weakest character in the book is the one I aimed at making the most beautiful; and, if this be the case, the fault lies in its wanting the germ of the real—in its being purely imaginary. I felt that this character lacked substance; I fear that the reader will feel the same.[291]

Brontë's comments indicate that the elements of an imagined ideal—idealized characters, marriages, or depictions of home—would (or should) *not* be palatable to discerning readers. In *Villette*, the "ideal" has become peripheral to the real, unreachable and merely decorative, functioning to make readers aware of its insubstantiality rather than acting as a balanced element, distributed evenly and melded with the real. The "ideal"—the blond beauty, traditional love

[289] Charlotte Brontë to G. Smith, Esq., 6 December 1852, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 395.
[290] Charlotte Brontë to G. Smith, Esq., 3 November 1852, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 391.
[291] Charlotte Brontë to G. Smith, Esq., 6 December 1852, in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 395.

story, the smoothly functioning middle-class home—is an object of study for Lucy, always separate from herself, often revealed to be shallow, too sickly sweet, or even unsettling.

It might be a full social critique for *Villette* to simply present an unidealized life, to lay bare what it really means to be "outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health."[292] But I argue that *Villette* functions not just to present this reality, which would make its message of social critique inhere merely in the fact of exposing the true effects of a patriarchal system of power—but that it actively critiques the "ideal" structures that it presents as superficially sweet and golden. *Villette* even, tentatively, explores a third way forward for Lucy—a possibility in which she does not miraculously enter the traditional systems she observes but remakes them, finding alternate structures for intimacy and alternate ways of engaging with "home." This way forward is more radical than *Jane Eyre*'s, in which Jane finds a method for continually re-making home on a small scale, *within* the traditional structures of upper-class heterosexual marriage. Lucy's way is precarious, ultimately impossible to sustain in the storyworld of the novel, but Brontë takes care to let readers glimpse it, giving Lucy a way to live suspended on the threshold of traditional domesticity, neither frenetic and nervous nor falsely steady and quiet.

Villette has a particular way of training readers to critique the ideal—it casts them as members of the "sunny" half of the world and insists on coddling them, seeming to withhold the worst details of the plot while simultaneously emphasizing them. This is the way *Villette*'s famous ending functions, taking care to "leave sunny imaginations hope" while insisting on a tragic outcome that seems to leave Lucy more alone than ever. It is Lucy's relationship with both the concept of "home" and the structures of traditional domesticity that allows us to see the

[292] Gilbert and Gubar, 400.

ending from a broader perspective, as more than the simple tragedy of a death within the storyworld, but as an enactment of the very spatial practice that allows Lucy a third way to build a home. To reinterpret the novel's famously vexing dénouement, then, we must track the way Lucy moves through domestic spaces from the novel's beginning.

Shipwrecks and Doldrums: Lucy's Relationship(s) with the Domestic

Lucy's selfhood is almost entirely shaped by her relationship to home. The novel opens at Bretton, the ancestral home of Lucy's godmother, where Lucy is a welcome visitor, though she seems a detached observer rather than a participant in everyday domestic happenings. Over the course of the novel, Lucy will be exiled abroad, wash up in a *pensionnat* in Belgium, and fall into the role of teacher. Each time she begins her life anew, it is with the sense that her situation is a temporary stopover, not a purposeful beginning or a truly fresh chapter of her story. Readers are never allowed to know the details of the loss of Lucy's original home and her immediate family. The novel begins with her visit to Bretton and elides Lucy's return to her own fixed residence as well as the eventual destruction of that home life. It is as if Lucy is always-already homeless, at least as far as the narrative is concerned.

We are introduced to the idea that Lucy has a home other than Bretton in the same breath in which we are told that Lucy is soon to lose it. Mrs. Bretton claims Lucy for her visit, taking her from some apparently temporary home and some apparently distant family, whom Lucy describes as "the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence."[293] The tortured syntax of this expression is ominous enough, but in the next sentence, narrator-Lucy

[293] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 5, ch. 1.

reflects that Mrs. Bretton must have "then plainly saw events coming"—events Lucy will never explain, but will later cast as a metaphorical shipwreck.[294]

After she leaves Bretton at the beginning of the novel, Lucy introduces the image of the slumbering, rocking bark, its stability entirely dependent on the nature of the approaching waves, whether stormy or calm:

> On quitting Bretton, which I did a few weeks after Paulina's departure—little thinking then I was never again to visit it; never more to tread its calm old streets—I betook myself home, having been absent six months. 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?
>
> Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen overboard, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time—a long time—of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.[295]

This early passage links the concepts of home and domesticity with two nautical extremes: shipwreck and the confining placidity of "a harbour still as glass"—the second an option that Lucy explicitly reserves for women. Lucy continues this pattern of gauging her domestic situation in terms of sun and storm throughout the rest of the novel. As part of the famously controversial ending, we know to expect tragedy when she prefaces her description of the storm that "roared frenzied, for seven days" with a quiet proclamation: "I know some signs of the sky; I

[294] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 5, ch. 1; p. 35, ch. 4
[295] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 35, ch. 4.

have noted them ever since childhood."[296] In the early description of the unnamed calamity that makes her homeless, Lucy directly acknowledges the reader, just as she will later do to create the novel's ambiguous dénouement. Here, she "permits" the "amiable conjecture" of her reader—later, she will cut off her narrative in order to "leave sunny imaginations hope."[297] Sunshine, then, is not just a representation of domestic happiness—with storm and shipwreck its opposite—but a quality that certain people possess and others do not. Lucy's outlook on life is exactly this: some people live in the sunshine, while others, like Lucy, will always be in shadow.

Yet this passage also indicates the complexity of Lucy's attitude towards the domestic. The life of "constant sunshine" she allows readers to imagine is one that she cannot imagine herself fitting into. Moreover, she intimates that this image of halcyon calm may be no more than a social fiction, full stop: "a great many women and girls *are supposed to* pass their lives something in that fashion" (emphasis mine). This comment aligns readers with the implicitly-unobservant, willfully ignorant purveyor of social truth, the writer of vague social scripts for women and girls. The hypothetical readers who possess "sunny" dispositions, those who want their suppositions to be "safely left uncontradicted," whom Lucy will "permit" occasional elisions though certain realities "cannot be concealed," are made to seem naïve, if not pitiable. *Villette*'s answer to *Jane Eyre*'s imagery of fire and ice—a clear binary—is this more complex language of sun and storm. In this passage, shipwreck is certainly cast as a negative outcome—yet the "slumbering" life atop a "harbour still as glass," here merely "supposed" to be the desirable default, becomes more and more clearly unsettling the more Lucy associates it with her observation of traditional domestic situations—the only available scripts for women and girls who do not want to be lost at sea.

[296] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 495, ch. 42.
[297] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 496, ch. 42.

Later, when Lucy is plunged back into the environment of Bretton, though relocated to La Terasse in Belgium, Lucy's meditation on "tranquility" and stagnation makes it clear that she cannot really wish for this calm surface. Knowing she wants more from the Bretton home than she will ever receive, Lucy takes up the word *tranquil* as her mantra as she commences her first night at La Terrasse: "Still repeating this word, I turned to my pillow; and, still repeating it, I steeped that pillow with tears."[298] She knows she wants more than "an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief, unengrossing and tranquil" with Graham Bretton—more than her original role at the original Bretton, which she compares to "the gliding of a full river through a plain."[299] Before taking up the narration again as she wakes the next morning at La Terrasse, narrator-Lucy appends a metaphysical lecture to her meditation on "tranquility": "these struggles [to prize tranquility]…certainly make a difference in the general tenor of a life, and enable it to be better regulated, more equable, quieter on the surface; and it is on the surface only the common gaze will fall" (170). She continues, "certainly, at some hour, though perhaps not your hour, the waiting waters will stir; in some shape, though perhaps not the shape you dreamed…thousands lie round the pool, weeping and despairing, to see it, through slow years, stagnant" (171). Gilbert and Gubar see Lucy's struggle for "tranquility" as her impulse for self-burial—the impulse that would keep her alone in the *pensionnat*, denying herself love and the true work of an artist.[300] Instead, I trace Brontë's watery metaphors back to the novel's beginning, which aligns tranquil waters with Bretton and with the kind of domesticity that Lucy will observe—and disapprove of—in Polly Home. Lucy sees this traditional (gendered) domesticity as stagnation, and she will eventually see Graham Bretton in that way as well.

[298] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 178, ch. 16.
[299] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 6, ch. 1.
[300] Gilbert and Gubar, 403.

The spatial metaphors that attempt to capture *Villette*'s—and Lucy's—fundamental nature are contradictory, at once incompatible and, even when taken together, somehow insufficient. Lucy's life seems constantly poised on the brink of shipwreck or in danger of stalling, becalmed, in uncertain doldrums. This discourse pervades the novel—and Lucy's own worldview—expressing her ambivalence and sense of displacement in society. Lucy, though discontented to be left at sea on her own, finds herself unable to uncritically embrace the "safe harbor" of any of the traditional domestic situations she has observed. She is both confined and in flight during portions of the novel. She is accepted into many domestic situations with little effort, yet, in a very real sense, is homeless. Neither an adventurer (or pilgrim) at heart, nor content to remain beached on dry land, Lucy can find no structure for home that allows her both freedom and comfort.

Richard Bonfiglio argues that both *The Professor* and *Villette* "literalize Lukács's definition of the novel as a 'longing for home.'"[301] Bonfiglio is primarily interested in the Belgian novels' treatment of cosmopolitanism, positing that "Brontë introduces forms of portable domesticity in her novels as a means of understanding the failure of masculine forms of cosmopolitan transcendence and detachment during the mid-Victorian period."[302] Thus, for Bonfiglio, Lucy's final (potential) home at the end of the novel depends on, and is a way to negotiate, her unresolved and unresolvable religious and cultural differences with M. Paul. But in a broader and more material sense, *Villette* is not just a means for using the novel form's "twin realist functions of self-realization and socialization" to imagine "what it might be like to feel at home in the broader world" beyond England, living in a cosmopolitan society[303]—but more

[301] Bonfiglio, "Cosmopolitan Realism: Portable Domesticity in Brontë's Belgian Novels," 601.
[302] Bonfiglio, 604.
[303] Bonfiglio, 601.

simply, imagining what it might be like to feel at home in the world.[304] Every novel may be said to do this—but *Villette*, as Bonfiglio argues, literalizes and epitomizes this conception of novelistic discourse. *Villette* "mobilizes the trope of the Victorian home…as a means of ethically situating the increasingly deracinated modern liberal subject," the unmoored "woman without."[305] For Bonfiglio, *Villette* "narrate[s] what Iris Marion Young describes as home's capacity to function as 'a material anchor for a sense of agency and a shifting and fluid identity.'"[306]

For Lucy, the project of self-building is one of home-building—negotiating the gendered politics and quotidian rituals of Victorian domesticity, central as they are to Victorian culture—and in remaking home, remaking her place in society. By the time she is ensconced in Villette's social scene, Lucy can articulate that "pedigree, social position, and recondite intellectual acquisition, occupied about the same space and place in my interests and thoughts; they were my third class lodgers—to whom could be assigned only the small sitting-room and the little back bedroom: even if the dining and drawing-rooms stood empty."[307] Lucy's more substantial project is to negotiate the shifting occupancy of the central rooms of her philosophical home. What configuration of home can lend agency to the rootless "woman without"? How can Lucy negotiate a place for herself in the world without merely copying the traditions around her, putting down Victorian roots and replicating the structures that exclude her? Lucy uses her observations of literal domesticity and its power dynamics to make practical decisions about her domestic situation—and to guide her in reconfiguring her psychological and social place in the world.

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[304] And for this personal level of imagining "home," Lucy (Brontë) requires the Gothic, not just realism.
[305] Bonfiglio, 605.
[306] Bonfiglio, 606; Young, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme," 159.
[307] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 309, ch. 27.

Uncanny Domesticity: *Villette* and the Gothic

Villette is undoubtedly a Gothic novel. While every supernatural or mysterious event is eventually explained away (unlike in *Jane Eyre*, in which the final happy domestic situation depends on Jane's auditory hallucination), uncanny moments and structures constitute the very fabric of *Villette*'s narrative. Most importantly, every Gothic element in *Villette* is an expression of Lucy's conflicted relationship with home. "Home" itself will make many uncanny returns throughout the novel. The returns of *Villette* are classically psychoanalytic in a way that those of *Jane Eyre* are not, and the *unheimlich* is almost the central problem of the novel. Most notably, volume two begins with a unique example of Freud's uncanny in the episode where Lucy comes to stay at La Terrasse. Rather than simply seeing what was "homely" in a new light, psychologically speaking, Lucy awakes from a faint to see that domestic objects from her aunt's house, Bretton, have literally followed her to Villette, complete with "phantoms of chairs, and the wraiths of looking-glasses.[308] Lucy's observation here is an explanation-in-microcosm of the entire novel's use of the Gothic mode:

> At first I knew nothing I looked on: a wall was not a wall—a lamp not a lamp. I should have understood what we call a ghost, as well as I did the commonest object: which is another way of intimating that all my eye rested on struck it as spectral.[309]

If we again invoke Martin Willis's theory of the Victorian Gothic, asking "why, and in what ways, the Gothic might work within other textual modes…why it is found there, what it is employed to do, and under what conditions it achieves this,"[310] we would have to conclude that the Gothic mode pervades *Villette* to the extent that it is as Gothic as it is realist. Lucy, as first-person narrator and as character, turns what is normalized or traditional into what is spectral, at

[308] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 177, ch. 17.
[309] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 165, ch. 16.
[310] Willis, "Victorian Realism and the Gothic: Objects of Terror Transformed," 17.

every turn. Willis argues that in a novel like *Silas Marner* (one he classifies as a realist work invoking the Gothic mode) the narrator stands apart to examine *characters* making use of the Gothic tradition, "view[ing] the Gothic mode from an omniscient space far above it, a space that is realism."[311] *Villette* has no such narrative distance. We view the world—particularly the trappings of home and the traditions of courtship—through Lucy's spectralizing gaze.

In works like *Jane Eyre*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Udolpho*, Gothic moments often signal that there are nefarious doings lying behind domestic places and traditions: forced marriages, greedy patriarchs, or wives imprisoned in the attic (not to mention the colonial source of wealth such as Rochester's). But in *Villette*, it is domesticity itself (in its traditional form) that Lucy sees as suspicious, uncanny. Susan Fromberg Schaffer invokes G.S. Weaver's 1883 treatise *The Heart of the World: Or, Home And Its Wide Work* to explain Brontë's instinct "to reject the Victorian concept of the ideal woman who had, in herself, no intrinsic worth whatever":[312]

> The woman is the priestess of home, and she puts herself into it and its affairs and conditions…She is most herself and most satisfied, and useful when the affairs of her home occupy chiefly her mind and heart. If she goes out into the world to engage in any of its affairs, she does it for the benefit and in honor and love of her home. What she does for the world is done at arm's length and from her home as her office—headquarters—fortress.[313]

Lucy Snowe is instinctively unnerved at this mode of occupying home, as we shall soon see. But *Villette* is also Lucy's journey to create for herself a place where she *can* "be most herself and most satisfied, and useful," as she is in the three years when awaiting the return of M. Paul. In these years, however, her joyful domestic affairs become possible only after she has recognized her intrinsic worth outside the domestic sphere. Brontë gives readers a glimpse of a version of a woman "putting herself into" home and its affairs without becoming priestess of some fortress,

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[311] Willis, 27.
[312] Schaffer, Introduction to *Villette*, ix.
[313] Weaver, *The Heart of the World: Or, Home And Its Wide Work*, 37.

identifiable only through the domestic rituals she presides over—though this paradigm is both hard-won and, even in the novel's very last chapter, transient.

It is the uncanny version of home, however, that dominates the novel and haunts Lucy. Her godmother's home, Bretton, follows Lucy throughout the novel, through doubles and returns. Not only is it recreated in La Terrasse in one of the novel's implausible coincidences—but Graham Bretton (of Bretton) is quadrupled, turning out to be not just Ginevra's "Isidore" but also the stranger who helps Lucy on her arrival in Villette *and* as Dr. John—two reveals which narrator-Lucy draws out for her readers, extending the mystery and heightening the almost-supernatural coincidence. As Schaeffer writes, the Brettons "are like turtles; wherever they go, they take their homes with them." This comfortable portability of "home" for the Brettons is, for Lucy, a haunting. It means she is always in the same place, even when she relocates multiple times and travels across the channel—though she's never truly *in* that place, always "without." This creates an eddying quality to the novel's structure, and to Lucy's progression. Schaeffer sees Bretton's uncanny returns as "an ingenious way of showing how Lucy's mind, as in all minds, the past and present interpenetrate; so that, while Lucy believes it is better to go forward than backward, forward motion may paradoxically be taken as a step backward, just as backward motion may actually indicate progress."[314] Again, Brontë's metaphors provide a hint: while storm and shipwreck may not be ideal, it is also not Lucy's fate to remain becalmed, or glide smoothly from place to place—she must trouble the waters.

Spectral Bretton

The opening of *Villette* introduces Lucy's complex relationship with home and stages her first realization of her discomfort with gendered domestic tradition. The novel's first sentence

[314] Schaeffer, xvii.

starts to create a lexical field of peace, order, and tradition: "My godmother lived in a handsome house in the clean and ancient town of Bretton."[315] Lucy is quietly, if not actively, welcome at Bretton, and the house's physicalities are almost the antithesis of Gothic architecture—uncluttered, clearly laid out, and spacious on a moderate scale, without dizzying heights and depths or excessive ornamentation. The house is not only "handsome" but is described by way of its "large peaceful rooms, the well-arranged furniture, the clear wide windows, the balcony outside, looking down on a fine antique street" (5). For Lucy, it is a place "where Sundays and holidays seemed always to abide—so quiet was its atmosphere, so clean its pavement" (5). She notes, "these things pleased me well" (5) in a quiet, temperate, contemplative kind of approval and sense of harmony—not so joyful or expressive as Jane's enjoyment of Moor House. Lucy's character is first elucidated through this description of the house—the peaceful, quotidian joys of Sundays, the sense of a local familial history and tradition, the comfortable orderliness of a well-arranged life in which one can take up just the right amount of space.

Lucy feels at home at Bretton in a quietly expressive way. She reflects, "Time always flowed smoothly for me at my godmother's side; not with tumultuous swiftness, but blandly, like the gliding of a full river through a plain" (6). While Jane is marginalized, miserable and even rageful at the beginning of her novel, Lucy is welcome in this house which so conforms to her ideas of pleasant order. But Lucy is still not quite a part of things, not at the center of the domestic situation, even if she is not purposefully sent to the margins. She is a passive passenger on the "gliding river" of Bretton's domesticity, leaving almost no trace behind her.

Lucy is strangely absent—or invisible—in the first chapters of the novel, even as she narrates every thought and event. Schaeffer notes that "someone reading *Villette* for the first time

[315] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 5, ch. 1.

would inevitably assume that it was to be a novel about "little Polly," not Lucy Snowe."[316] Schaeffer describes the Brettons as "above all else rooted; they are the Brettons of Bretton, members of a family so long in residence that they may well have given their name to their ancient town" (xviii). Both the Brettons and Polly are centered—rooted—through naming and re-naming in these introductory chapters. According to Schaeffer, "this doubling of names indicates security of a very high order" (xvi). Brontë makes this triple grounding unmistakable by naming the novel's first chapter "Bretton." This reiterated naming will recur in Polly's next home (at the Hôtel Crécy of the Rue Crécy) (Schaeffer xvi), which of course appears in Chapter 27, "The Hotel Crécy." Not only have the Brettons been triply rooted before Lucy's name appears in the novel, but Paulina has been named three times before the start of the chapter that bears her name. First she is "Missy"[317], then "the child called herself Polly," but we learn that "her full name was Paulina Mary."[318] Lucy remains unnamed for the duration of the novel's first chapter—and she is first named as an aside in the context of describing Polly, at the beginning of Chapter 2 ("Paulina"). While Polly, Graham, and Mrs. Bretton have direct dialogue in the opening chapters, Lucy's own speech is almost always reported indirectly, except when speaking to Polly one-on-one.[319] She literally has no voice in the household, merely a passive chorus agreeing with what is said around her. With the wreck of her own home on the horizon (at first she worries the letter announcing Polly's arrival is a "disastrous communication" from home), Lucy clings to the placidity of the life she will later cast as a too-calm social fiction.

Lucy is not only homeless, but nameless, without a place-based history or legacy. The first chapter of *Villette* (1853) takes care to enumerate the many things Lucy is *without*. She

[316] Schaeffer, xviii.
[317] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 8, ch. 1.
[318] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 11, ch. 1.
[319] E.g. "I expressed my confidence in the effects of time and kindness" (11).

implicitly lacks Mrs. Bretton's physical qualities ("handsome, tall, well-made") and the Brettons' "health without flaw" and "spirits of that tone and equality which are better than a fortune to the possessor" (5). Lucy, the unnamed observer-narrator, recounts all this before the first page of the novel is up. But it is not until Paulina arrives, a "stimulus" that Lucy sees more as a "disturbance" of her quietly flowing life at Bretton, that Lucy is made to see the domesticity of Bretton not just as something she lacks and has only partial access to—but something that requires or rewards a certain kind of paucity.

There is a historical context worth appending to Gilbert and Gubar's characterization of Lucy Snowe as the ultimate "woman without." The 1851 Census of Great Britain "revealed that out of a national population of twenty million, there were 500,000 more women than men, and there were two and a half million unmarried women," sparking decades of debate surrounding these "surplus" women, sometimes called the "redundancy crisis."[320] In his essay "Why Are Women Redundant?" (1862), William Rathbone Greg pathologizes this surplus with considerable rhetorical flourish: "there is an enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which, positively and relatively, is indicative of an unwholesome social state, and is both productive and prognostic of much wretchedness and wrong."[321] Mary Poovey points out that "when Greg argues that unmarried women constitute 'the problem to be solved,' he not only mobilizes assumptions about women; he also alludes to an entire social organization that depends upon naturalizing monogamous marriage, a sexual division of labor, and a specific economic relation between the sexes"—gendered frameworks that "performed critical ideological work at midcentury."[322] It is this

[320] Levitan, "Redundancy, the 'Surplus Woman' Problem, and the British Census, 1851–1861," 36.
[321] Greg, "Why are Women Redundant?" 276.
[322] Poovey, *Uneven Developments,* 2.

"household" logic that seems particularly appropriate to Lucy Snowe's outlook on the world. For Greg, redundancy means that there are

> …hundreds of thousands of women…who have to earn their own living, instead of spending and husbanding the earnings of men; who, not having the natural duties and labours of wives and mothers, have to carve out artificial and painfully sought occupations for themselves; who, in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own."[323]

The language of redundancy and surplus[324] sharpens and contextualizes Gilbert and Gubar's conception of the "woman without"—Lucy is without wealth, beauty, health, husband, and home—but for many in the midcentury, and for Lucy herself, it is home that will be the crucial arena in which to consider the question of her "redundancy."

Polly's arrival at Bretton is the first Gothic moment of the novel—and all of her uncanniness inheres in her engagement with domestic ritual. On a dark and stormy night, Polly arrives as a wrapped bundle from which extends a "small voice" and a "minute hand."[325] "The creature," as Lucy first labels her, is characterized by a "sort of fastidious haste" in her preoccupation with the neatness and correctness of small tasks—how to fold her shawl, what furniture is suited for her in the drawing room (8). We finally become aware of our narrator's identity as Lucy identifies her own sense of unease with Polly's obsession with home: "I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination; but whenever, opening a room-door, I found her seated in a corner alone, her head in her pigmy hand, that room seemed to me not inhabited, but haunted."[326] Later, she describes Polly as "like a small ghost

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[323] Greg, 276.
[324] Note that Brontë insists *Villette* is a novel that cannot pretend to the kind of "social use" of Gaskell's *Ruth* (letter to Gaskell, *Life of Brontë*, 398) and which "touches on no matter of public interest" as she "cannot write books handling the topics of the day" (letter to George Smith, *Life* 390).
[325] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 7, ch. 1.
[326] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 12, ch. 2.

gliding over the carpet."[327] Lucy "perceive[s]" that Polly has a "one idea'd nature," a "monomaniac tendency" (12). It is this singular focus on playing "priestess of the home," of "put[ting] herself into it and its affairs and conditions"[328] that disturbs Lucy. Because Polly is so young (doll-like, with a neck "delicate as wax,"[329] according to Lucy), we can see more clearly what "putting herself into" the affairs and conditions of home means. When her father is present, Polly takes on all responsibility for his comfort, handing the tea even though "the sugar-tongs were too wide for one of her hands, and she had to use both in wielding them; the weight of the silver cream-ewer, the bread and butter plates, the very cup and saucer tasked her insufficient strength and dexterity; but she would lift this, hand that" (15). Even as her efforts are absurd, Lucy still sees her as "silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly" (16). Simultaneously doll-like, lisping, and "womanly," Polly makes these everyday domestic rituals into something uncanny, even unhealthy—at least in Lucy's eyes.

Once her father leaves, Polly switches to taking Graham his tea; she "must be busy about something, look after somebody."[330] Even Lucy acknowledges that Polly is "not interesting," has no originality or indeed personality, except when attending to Graham (24). Then, "herself was forgotten in him," so much so that her quirks and anxieties become apparent; she is "fidgetty" and obsessive (25). Lucy observes, "one would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now that her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham, and seemed to feel by his feelings: to exist in his existence" (25). It certainly seems like Polly *would* be "surplus" if she couldn't be mistress of a household, either husband or father's. If she were put in Lucy's situation, in Greg's words

[327] Brontë, *Villette,* p.34, ch. 3.
[328] Weaver, *The Heart of the World: Or, Home and Its Wide Work*, 37.
[329] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 8, ch. 1.
[330] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 23, ch. 3.

"compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of [her] own" "in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others,"[331] her life would seem not only redundant, but empty—truly empty, even in comparison to Lucy's experiences as a single "woman without" in the rest of the novel.

Polly's investment in domestic ritual is clearly gendered and ends up disappointingly one-sided. As part of her management of Graham's tea, she insists on additional offerings, suggesting to Mrs. Bretton, "perhaps your son would like a little cake—sweet cake, you know…One little piece, only for him—as he goes to school: girls—such as me and Miss Snowe—don't need treats, but he would like it."[332] Polly clearly means for her attentions to be appreciated and reciprocated, almost a coded language. Lucy observes that after requesting something particular for Graham (in this case marmalade), Polly "delicately refuse[s]" to partake, "lest, I suppose, it should appear that she had procured it as much on her own account as his. She constantly evinced these nice perceptions and delicate instincts" (23). But Brontë links the marmalade and sweet cake episodes with Polly's realization of her true place in the household, an episode where she is spurned in favor of Graham's school friends. She realizes that while her domestic care is, for her, a show of deep devotion, an all-consuming investment in Graham's life, the attention he returns is casual and situational. In this case, it is Graham who throws a Gothic cast on this inequity: when Polly reacts strongly to his rejection, he remarks, "Mama, I believe that creature is a changeling" (27).

We can see the role the Gothic mode plays in illuminating *Villette*'s ideology of domesticity by comparing similar scenes across genres. *Silas Marner*, our example of a realist Victorian novel, contains a scene which compares interestingly with *Villette*'s example of

[331] Greg, 276.
[332] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 25, ch. 3.

gendered domestic comforts (the sweet cake). Dolly Winthrop, calling on Silas and bringing him "some small lard-cakes, flat paste-like articles much esteemed in Raveloe," evinces the same philosophy as Polly regarding gendered consumption of baked goods: "I don't eat such things myself, for a bit o' bread's what I like from one year's end to the other; but men's stomichs are made so comical, they want a change—they do, I know, God help 'em."[333] While Silas has no use for the cakes, "there was no possibility of misunderstanding the desire to give comfort that made itself heard in her quiet tones" (72). In *Silas Marner*, the domestic becomes a tool for overcoming the Gothic—a true medium of care. Dolly braves the "mysterious sound of the loom" and all the other Gothic associations projected onto Silas by the townspeople,[334] her lard cakes an excuse to visit, not an emotionally laden message. Dolly is a consummate caretaker—but it seems this is a symptom of her personality, not its sole source. She is "so eager for duties that life seemed to offer them too scantily unless she rose at half-past four, though this threw a scarcity of work over the more advanced hours of the morning, which it was a constant problem with her to remove.[335] Dolly is a woman "whose nature it was to seek out all the sadder and more serious elements of life, and pasture her mind upon them…the person always first thought of in Raveloe when there was illness or death in a family, when leeches were to be applied, or there was a sudden disappointment in a monthly nurse" (71). Her care creates reciprocal ties across the community, not one-sided, gendered habits. Dolly is a rare figure of purely positive domesticity, who does her best thinking during trivial kitchen tasks and uses her (reciprocated) motherly

[333] Eliot, *Silas Marner*, 72. Both characters insist they themselves do not eat such treats, but Polly does so to enforce a one-way caretaking mode of domesticity designed to call attention to herself ("to stand by his knee, and monopolize his talk and notice, was the reward she wanted—not a share of the cake" (25)). Dolly makes her comment to put Silas at ease and give an excuse for bringing over the lard-cakes—*her* ulterior motive is to check on him. Silas instinctively engages in hospitality by re-offering Dolly's visiting son the cake to eat, marking the first positive visiting experience of the novel. It turns out that Polly's transactional act of housekeeping is a gendered, one-way exchange, creating a hierarchy that leads to her exclusion from masculine domestic spaces like the study.
[334] See Willis p. 15.
[335] Eliot, 71.

overtures to bring Silas into the community, rather than exert control over him. *Silas Marner*'s is a world where the domestic is the opposite of the Gothic—a positive force in the world—while the Gothic represents human mistrust and unkindness. In *Villette*, the domestic *becomes* Gothic, and the Gothic mode is a way for Lucy to see, and tell herself, that she ought to mistrust the version of domesticity that seeks to make her "surplus."

Schaeffer explains the "peculiar narrative strategy" that devotes "three chapters, which span only a few months" to Polly, who then "does not reappear for ten years" by "recogniz[ing] that little Polly is the younger Lucy Snowe,"[336] a psychological double.[337] Schaeffer sees Polly's role as demonstrating that Lucy must learn "to settle," to attach herself to people, since she too is "impetuous, affectionate and singular" when attached to someone and "not interesting" alone (vxiii). While it is compelling to read *Villette* as Lucy's journey to learn to accept attachment, even with its attendant possibilities of "loss, rejection, or death" (xx), I argue that Polly's role is not to show Lucy the way towards attachment, but to be exorcised, safely married off, to drop out of narratability. Lucy must find a home that is not haunted by the spectre of Polly and her brand of domestic fervor. Most critics see Lucy's observations of Polly as over-critical, protesting too much—Lucy's repression of her secret desire for affection, her stifling of her inner self.[338] But Lucy's criticisms are valid. She has the kind of critical gaze that translates Polly's behavior into something uncanny—and she is unsettled by the idea that the only option presented to her for gaining companionship, confidence, and home is that of living through someone so completely that "herself was forgotten in him." Lucy wants to be seen, and remembered, in a way she isn't at Bretton (certainly not by Graham). Polly, forgotten and dismissed as soon as she

[336] Schaeffer, xviii.
[337] See also Q.D. Leavis, in the introduction to the 1972 Harper edition of *Villette*. Gilbert and Gubar view Polly, Ginevra, Mme Beck *and* the nun all as "aspects of [Lucy's] self" (419).
[338] See Gilbert and Gubar, 403-4.

is no longer Graham's sole option for domestic amusement, cannot be the only model for Lucy to follow. For the moment, Lucy chooses to remain unseen, misinterpreted, rather than succumbing to the surface-level role she has observed in Polly.

Reexamining Lucy's Hauntings: Gothic Moments in Labassecour

Polly's uncanniness trains readers to be on the lookout not only for the Gothic, but for alternatives to the kind of domesticity that Lucy's subconscious can only see as threatening. Some critics see Lucy as rejecting every possibility put in front of her. Sharon Marcus notes that "The trio of feminine types represented by coquettish Ginevra Fanshawe, exemplary Paulina Home, and commanding Madame Beck provide Lucy with opportunities to spurn female friendship in all forms."[339] They also offer Lucy three "typified" versions of feminine engagement with the domestic—roles that readers can feel comfortable rejecting, narrow as they each are. Oddly enough, the closest Lucy ever comes to a female friendship is also the model she comes closest to mimicking—that of Miss Marchmont, the heiress and patron of a village, whom Lucy briefly cares for after the "shipwreck" of her original home and before departing for Belgium. Her time with Miss Marchmont depresses Lucy's spirits, and she finds herself content with what seems extreme confinement: "two hot, close rooms became my world…I demanded no walks in the fresh air."[340] However, Lucy's "small adopted duty must be snatched from [her] easily contented conscience" as Miss Marchmont dies after (crucially) telling Lucy her own story of disappointed courtship and broken domestic hopes. Miss Marchmont's story of her fiancé returning home on Christmas Eve, only to be killed in a riding accident almost on her doorstep, presages Lucy's own fate with M. Paul. Lucy reflects, upon leaving Miss Marchmont's estate,

[339] Marcus, *Between Women*, 103.
[340] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 37, ch. 4.

that in becoming content with the "two hot, close rooms" of the sickroom, she "had wanted to compromise with Fate: to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains" (38). We know that Lucy's own "great agony"—strikingly similar to the aborted homecoming in Miss Marchmont's story—will eventually arrive. This also tells us that, though it will take time and growth, Lucy will find an alternative to the "privation and small pains" of a life of invisible, one-way domestic care.

The rest of the novel stages Lucy's attempts to discover some new sense of self, a new way of making home, punctuated by the growing pains of the uncanny returns and coincidences that bring Bretton back into her life. Apart from the spectral quality of these reappearances in and of themselves, other Gothic moments are scattered through the plot—each associated with a turning point in Lucy's (slow, halting) development of a new philosophy of home.

One of the most enduring interpretations of *Villette*'s overall moral and emotional thrust is based on interpreting Lucy's encounters with the spectral nun who supposedly haunts Madame Beck's *pensionnat*. The traditional consensus on this ghostly nun is that she represents Lucy's repression of her feelings for Graham Bretton—and thus her repression of the part of herself that is like "little Polly," who longs for affection, attention, and home. The nun is result of the strain this repression puts on Lucy's psyche—as Dr. John diagnoses, the "product of long-continued mental conflict" (of which he is the source). Gilbert and Gubar read the nun as "not only a projection of Lucy's desire to submit in silence, to accept confinement, to dress in shadowy black, to conceal her face, to desexualize herself…[but also] symbolic for Lucy of the only socially acceptable life available to single women—a life of service, self-abnegation, and chastity."[341] For Joseph Allen Boone, the nun "becomes an index of erotic deprivation, emotional

[341] Gilbert and Gubar, 426. See also Burkart's *Psychosexual Study*, Heilman, "Brontë's 'New' Gothic," and Johnson, "Daring the Dread Glance."

duress, and fantasy life that Lucy's first-person voice attempts, only half-successfully, to conceal."[342] Even Sharon Marcus sees the nun as a projection of unhealthily repressed desire, though not necessarily for Graham Bretton ("she is haunted by a nun—a figure for lesbian sex since Diderot—who ends up in Lucy's bed"[343]). For most readers—and this is certainly a convincing interpretation—the nun represents the possibility of a cloistered life for Lucy, the life where she will not acknowledge her desires for Graham and will repress herself into being a spinster schoolteacher, denying her longing for a home.

However, I read the Gothic moments in the *pensionnat* as continuous with the use of the Gothic in the Bretton chapters. The Gothic is a signal that something is wrong. Lucy's analytical mind turns threats to her independence into manifestations of the uncanny. Lucy cannot rationally explain to herself her criticisms of Graham's version of domesticity, so she creates the symbolic language she needs in order to be able to think critically about accepted norms. The nun appears when Lucy is in danger of succumbing to everything that Graham, and Bretton overall, represents.

The nun's first and most dramatic appearance occurs when Lucy receives a coveted letter from Graham. The only place Lucy can read the letter turns out to be the attic. Lucy creates her own Gothic moment as she indulges in her feelings for Graham, when her inner analyst knows she should associate them with threat and spectrality. She draws out the description of this climb into Gothic territory, building suspense as if what will come next is some horror, rather than a pleasure:

> Taking a key whereof I knew the repository, I mounted three staircases in succession, reached a dark, narrow, silent landing, opened a worm-eaten door, and dived into the deep, black, cold garret. Here none would follow me—none interrupt—not Madame herself. I shut the garret-door; I placed my light on a doddered and mouldy chest of

[342] Boone, *Libidinal currents,* 36.
[343] Marcus, 104.

> drawers; I put on a shawl, for the air was ice-cold; I took my letter; trembling with sweet impatience, I broke its seal.[344]

The letter is "a letter simply good-natured—nothing more" (244). In the moment, this small crumb of affection feels like relief to readers, and true happiness to Lucy, "genuine and exquisite: a bubble—but a sweet bubble—of real honey-dew," but even Lucy knows all the while that both rationally and emotionally, it's ominous that the casually kind tone of the letter, its simple good-nature, seems "godlike" to her in the moment. Just as narrator-Lucy is at the height of her meditation on the importance of this one small kindness, the Gothic overtakes the narrative once again in a sudden shift with no transition but a pregnant paragraph break:

> This present moment had no pain, no blot, no want; full, pure, perfect, it deeply blessed me. A passing seraph seemed to have rested beside me, leaned towards my heart, and reposed on its throb a softening, cooling, healing, hallowing wing. Dr. John, you pained me afterwards: forgiven be every ill—freely forgiven—for the sake of that one dear remembered good!
>
> 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? (244)

It is Lucy's over-valuing of Graham's flimsy, fickle mode of social care, the same casual kindness that proved so conditional for Polly in the Bretton chapters, that calls the nun into being. We could see the nun as Lucy's repression coming to sabotage her—or we can see the haunting as another manifestation of the threat posed by the unhealthy domestic dynamic that is Graham's defining characteristic. Lucy has grown; she now recognizes in herself the "monomania" that she once saw in Polly. When she returns to the garret after summoning help, she surveys the scene and immediately re-focuses on the true source of the spectre, the letter: "there stood the bougie quenched on the drawers; but where was the letter? And I looked for that now, and not for the nun." In a moment of self-examination, narrator-Lucy switches to third-

[344] Brontë. *Villette*, p. 244, ch. 22.

person: "'Oh! they have taken my letter!' cried the grovelling, groping, monomaniac" (246). Lucy's monomania is in searching so desperately for the letter, not a label in response to seeing an apparition. The letter is the cause of what almost seems like madness, even to Lucy in the moment, as the narration returns to first-person: "'My letter! my letter!' I panted and plained, almost beside myself. I groped on the floor, wringing my hands wildly…I don't know what the others were doing; I could not watch them: they asked me questions I did not answer" (246).

Rather than being associated with repression and self-abnegation, the nun is summoned by Lucy's emotion—her moment of dwelling in and savoring hope and passion. Furthermore, the nun episode creates the circumstances for a strikingly demonstrative and vulnerable expression of Lucy's longing for the home and companionship Graham represents. The nun sparks revelation: Lucy does not try to hide her absurd attachment to Graham's letter or curb her emotion, and he cannot fail to see her feelings quite clearly. The nun prompts an unusually frank conversation between Lucy and Graham, in which Lucy is completely vulnerable. When he realizes it is a letter from him that she prizes so much, she admits, "I had come here to read it quietly…I had saved it all day—never opened it till this evening: it was scarcely glanced over: I *cannot bear* to lose it. Oh, my letter!" (246). Graham, who had picked up the letter while Lucy was madly searching the garret for it, only restores it to her because he sees the depth of her feeling. Lucy reflects, "if my trouble had wrought with a whit less stress and reality, I doubt whether he would ever have acknowledged or restored it. Tears of temperature one degree cooler than those I shed would only have amused Dr. John" (247). This conversation is both a passionate demonstration of Lucy's feelings and further evidence of how lightly Graham regards them. Not only does he reiterate what Lucy rationally knows—that the letter objectively isn't

worth her care and contains nothing that would justify it—but he toys with depriving her of evcn that small comfort.

This conversation also shows readers something important about Graham's method for domestic happiness. After diagnosing her, Graham, in his medical capacity, recommends that Lucy "cultivate" happiness. This proposition rings hollow to Lucy: "happiness is not a potato" to be cultivated. She asks how Graham cultivates happiness for himself—and his answer reveals that his happiness is bestowed on him, the result of his situation, not some habit of mind or will: "I am a cheerful fellow by nature: and then ill-luck has never dogged me," he responds (250). Graham's response to Lucy's distress mistakes Lucy for the source of her own unhappiness—just as critics do when interpreting *Villette*'s spectral nun as a manifestation of Lucy's repression. The problem isn't Lucy's regulation of her feelings (and this episode makes it clear that Lucy *isn't* repressing her longing). It's Graham himself, and the structures that reward him, that make Lucy unhappy. Outside forces deny Lucy access to the kind of happiness Graham accepts without cultivation or reciprocity. What haunts Lucy is not her own choice not to pursue Graham or seek a true home; it's Bretton and all it represents that haunts her. The nun is an expression of Lucy's feelings for Graham, which themselves represent her worship of traditional, one-way, gendered domesticity.

In this way, the Gothic is a psychological tool that allows Lucy to think critically about the domestic. The nun is at first a signal, then a nudge to keep thinking through her obsession with Graham—a question posed. Just as at Bretton, the Gothic is a manifestation of Lucy's critique of traditional domesticity. Polly's arrival at Bretton allowed Lucy to see the household critically for the first time, even if she could only articulate her critique through her sense of the ineffable uncanniness sparked by Polly's behavior.

The process of banishing the nun (and uncovering her as nothing more than the machinations of a stereotypical courtship, Hamal's penetration of the *pensionnat* in order to access Ginevra) is lengthy and halting. The nun will haunt Lucy several more times. For Gilbert and Gubar, the nun's apparition after Lucy buries Dr. John's letters under the pear tree "suggests that worship of the godly male, desire for romantic love and male protection, is so deeply bred into Lucy that, at this point, she can only try to repress it."[345] They see Lucy as only ever able to repress this desire, not release or transform it—or find a way to have romantic love and protection that isn't "worship of the godly male." Lucy's is a long, drawn-out version of Polly's realization at Bretton. Seemingly, little Polly accepts the lesson—that her domestic care for Graham won't be returned in an equal or reliable way—and moves forward by perfecting her "womanliness" as much as possible. Lucy notes that Graham will never truly know his future wife: "in Paulina there was more force, both of feeling and character; than most people thought—than Graham himself imagined—than she would ever show to those who did not wish to see it…Graham would have started had any suggestive spirit whispered of the sinew and the stamina sustaining that delicate nature; but I who had known her as a child, knew or guessed by what a good and strong root her graces held to the firm soil of reality." Paulina's choice is to root herself as firmly as possible, leaning into traditional domesticity.

The nun does reappear after Lucy buries the letters—but it is eventually exorcised once Lucy can see a way to construct a home that doesn't put her in the role of worshipping priestess. This new type of home may depend on a partner who is similarly haunted by traditional domesticity. The final time Lucy sees the nun is alongside M. Paul—she is a superstition, a haunting, they have in common. They both have a history with problematic domesticity. M. Paul

[345] Gilbert and Gubar, 427.

even has more of a real claim to the *pensionnat*'s nun, whose legend is built on his own tragic past. Prevented from marrying because of just the kind of domestic logic that William Rathbone Greg epitomizes—the wife must "spend and husband" a masculine income—M. Paul's prospective fiancée eventually dies in a convent. Both M. Paul and Lucy will rid themselves of their psychological ghosts—after they bond over their shared spectre.[346]

It takes several more encounters with Dr. John for Lucy to begin exorcising Graham Bretton from her mental house. Finally, during her drugged *nuit blanche* on the night of the fête, she shuts him away, keeping in her heart "a place of which I never took the measure, either by rule or compass," which would remain "all [her] life long," and still wondering whether if "released from that hold and constriction…its innate capacity for expanse might have magnified it into a tabernacle for a host."[347] Soon after this pronouncement, Lucy overhears and observes M. Paul and his family, leaping to the conclusion that although the original Justine Marie, the inspiration for the story of the *pensionnat*'s ghostly nun, "was indeed buried," a very real Justine Marie, M. Paul's teenaged ward, is meant to become his fiancée.[348] Lucy realizes that she "had never felt jealousy until now"; "this was not like enduring the endearments of Dr. John and Paulina…in *this* Love I had a vested interest" (468). When she returns to Rue Fossette, the nun has been deflated, her empty habit left for Lucy to find. Lucy is "not overcome. Tempered by late incidents, [her] nerves disdained hysteria…[she] defied spectra" (470). Lucy sees that it is just a habit stuffed with a bolster and physically destroys the nun, stomping on her for good measure, now "relieved from all sense of the spectral and unearthly" (470).

Lucy's Spatial Practices

[346] Brontë. *Villette,* p. 368, ch. 31.
[347] Brontë. *Villette,* p. 457, ch. 38.
[348] Brontë. *Villette,* p. 468, ch. 39.

Despite the impression that Lucy is "immured" in her *pensionnat*, hemmed in, restrained, and on the verge of self-burial, she is depicted as almost always active and in motion when left to her own devices. Sometimes this motion is frenetic, almost fevered, or seemingly fruitless—sometimes a sign of her powerlessness, as in the Gothic tenor of her arrival in Villette. Occasionally, she could be said to be practicing flânerie (as Young Sun Choi argues she does in London[349]), but in Belgium, Lucy's patterns of movement are more often "purposeful and private."[350] To de Certeau's "Walking in the City," Luce Giard appends "Ghosts in the City," in which "wild objects"—not the "things" of Wall's domestic interiors, but not tenants of de Certeau's impersonal, deracinated city either—populate the streets.[351] These "wild objects"—"the pointed stem of a corner house, a roof open-worked with windows like a Gothic cathedral, the elegance of a well in the shadow of a seedy-looking courtyard" (135)—"generat[e] narratives" and "allo[w] action" (136). They create "spaces of operations" through their ambiguity (136). It is this type of city through which Lucy wanders, making sense of wild objects and using the urban space as her own place of activeness.

Lucy's arrival in Villette is the most Gothic vision of the city: "a route of indirection" and legitimate fear "brings Lucy, tellingly, to the threshold of the unknown: the door of the reputedly haunted *pensionnat* that becomes her new home."[352] Lucy is not just as bewildered and panicked as an eighteenth-century heroine lost in a labyrinthine castle, "she cannot even manage to follow the directions of the one walker she has encountered and with whom she can communicate; she is thus depicted as very much isolated, and not even an observer, upon her arrival in Villette –

[349] Choi, "*Villette* Revisited: Lucy Snowe's Urban Experience," 101.
[350] Morrison, "Brontëan reveries of spaces and places: Walking in *Villette*," 188.
[351] De Certeau and Giard, "Ghosts in the City," *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 2, 35.
[352] Boone, 36.

one whose steps falter."[353] Interestingly enough, the walker whose steps Lucy cannot manage to follow turns out to be Graham Bretton, though we don't know it at the time. It is again the symbolic Graham who launches Lucy into a Gothic reverie. This episode contrasts tellingly with another scene in which Lucy is uncomfortable in an urban setting:

> Urban space like streets, restaurants, cafés or theatres constituted the experience of men, to which women — especially middle-class women — were denied access. Therefore, the presence of women in public space elicited moral anxiety and a respectable woman walking the street alone could be mistaken as a 'streetwalker' or a 'fallen' woman. In the novel, Lucy's entering the coffee-room of a foreign hotel is thus transgressive of the ideal of Victorian womanhood.[354]

Lucy is nervous and self-conscious in the coffee-room, "wish[ing] to Heaven [she] knew whether [she] was doing right or wrong," comforted only by her status as "Anglaise" and therefore probably expected to be odd and independent.[355] But the episode is not Gothic. By the time Lucy is settled in Villette, she has begun her journey of "appropriate[ing] urban space and disrupt[ing] the deep-seated idea of the city as a male terrain, ultimately inscribing the new ideals of public and private."[356] Choi observes that "to date *Villette* has been regarded as a novel of bleak vision which recasts the author's real-life trials and tribulations, physical or psychological" but "despite the initial, rather unfavourable, impressions it makes, the city turns out to be essentially life-giving for Lucy."[357] Of course, the city, much like the home, "emerges as an ambivalent space" in *Villette*; "it could pose a threat but could be also immensely promising."[358] It takes activeness and struggle—manifested in Lucy's characteristic patterns of eddying motion, and in particular, her walking—to keep re-creating the streets of Villette as a space of possibility.

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[353] Morrison 190.
[354] Choi, 101.
[355] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 60, ch. 7.
[356] Choi, 102.
[357] Choi, 99; 102.
[358] Choi, 99.

Lucy often stumbles in this process, falling into periods of stagnation, but she has "the artist's faculty of making the most of present pleasure"[359] and walking in the city becomes the cure for her neurotic spells. Just as it takes perseverance and activeness for Lucy to walk in the city, it takes vigor to see the "present pleasure" present in *Villette* the novel. Yet it is there, in Lucy's "lifelike, graphically vivid description of food, furniture and clothes"[360] and her "genuine appetite for those very treats"[361]—treats which the novel allows, and incentivizes, her to indulge in more and more as the novel progresses. As de Certeau argues, in a modern city, "physical moving about" can take the place of pre-modern "superstitions" and place-based legends for the walker who feels the past has been effaced.[362] Of course, Lucy's mind creates enough "superstitions" to be getting on with—but it is through her method of walking, *everywhere*, in the *Haute-ville*, the *Basse-ville* and especially the *pensionnat*'s *allée défendu*, that allows her to work through her imaginings and purge the nun.

Lucy Morrison argues that "studying perambulation in the novel reveals walking itself as an operation of defiance and self-definition hitherto underacknowledged in Brontë's text."[363] Brontë "affirms [Rousseau's] belief that movement through space on one's own can enable thoughts to define the self and expand its experience.[364] Lucy Snowe "keeps her walks solely hers, embracing the liminal self-positioning they afford her," and "uses physical motion as a means to compel herself to emotional expression.[365] And she "trusts those who want her to walk;" her romance with M. Paul culminates in the rambling walk he takes her on to show her

[359] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 60, ch. 7.
[360] Choi, 100.
[361] Marcus, 107.
[362] De Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 106.
[363] Morrison, 187.
[364] Morrison, 194.
[365] Morrison, 192.

the house he has rented at Faubourg Clotilde, a walk that "establishes Lucy in her independence."[366]

The times when the novel pays most attention to Lucy's movements through space are moments of conflict and struggle, when Lucy must decide to propel herself through the world—whether this means leaving her sickbed during the long vacation to wander the streets, or to step over the threshold of the *pensionnat* into the *salle de classe*. On this occasion, Lucy is characteristically over-emotional, terrified at the prospect of being "called down from [her] watch-tower of the nursery" and being the object of attention of sixty continental schoolgirls. Just as at Miss Marchmont's, she sees herself as perfectly "capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses, and making children's frocks."[367] But when put to the test by someone who takes the time to see her for what she is ("Madame Beck asks, "sternly," "vous sentez vous réellement trop faible?"), Lucy chooses motion rather than stagnation. Poised between "the small door of communication with the dwelling-house" and "the great double portals of the classes or schoolrooms," Madame Beck asks, "Will you go backward or forward?" and Lucy answers, simply, "En avant" (78). This is one of the more decisive threshold moments of the novel—Lucy's physical step is one of true self-making. She reflects, "I shall never forget that first lesson, nor all the under-current of life and character it opened up to me" (79).

While *Jane Eyre*'s central spatial practice is one of re-trying the return home, Lucy's is almost the opposite: she awaits a return, in suspension, neither on dry land nor yet shipwrecked, nor in completely stagnant doldrums, caught by the currents of social pressures but remaining poised for the coming of an event, treading water even if she may seem calm on the surface. It is

[366]Morrison, 194.
[367] Brontë, *Villette*, pp. 76-7, ch. 8.

easy to see this way of moving through the world as passive, despairing, or self-torturing. Yet given all Lucy is constitutionally and situationally "without," it is a powerful accomplishment to keep her head above water and remain able to make her move, that next step over the threshold, when the next ripple of opportunity presents itself.

After the *nuit blanche* when she finally rids herself of the nun's spectre, Lucy wakes to find that the "two stalwart companions that [she] brought home from the illuminated park," (Freedom and Renovation) had fled from her and she had nothing left but to "trust secretly" and "sustain the oppressive hour," "clinging to [her] last chance, as the living waif of a wreck clings to his last raft or cable."[368] She lingers in the classroom, where M. Paul eventually finds her just in time to declare himself and present her with a new home before he departs. This is the least active, least promising instance of lingering and awaiting a return in the novel, but it is just enough. This mode of inhabiting space will become more active, an actual, envigorating practice, in the novel's dénouement. Lucy's final act, awaiting M. Paul's return from abroad, is a near-duplication of the story Miss Marchmont tells her at the beginning of the novel. Gilbert and Gubar point out that the situation is a reversal of Wordsworth's Lucy poem "Strange Fits of Passion I have Known," in which a horseman gallops home, fearing he will find his lover dead. Brontë "approaches the event from the…perspective of the waiting woman," a position Gilbert and Gubar cast as "stationary and enclosed."[369] But when Miss Marchmont's lover, Frank, arrives at her door being dragged by his horse, she "refuse[s] to be ordered about" though her servants try to have her taken into the house. She is "quite collected enough, not only to be [her] own mistress, but the mistress of others" though "they had begun by trying to treat [her] as a

[368] Brontë, *Villette,* p. 479, ch. 41.
[369] Gilbert and Gubar, 405.

child, as they always do."[370] If Gilbert and Gubar are right in assuming that any reversal of Wordsworth's poem would definitionally make the woman a figure "whose worst fears are always substantiated,"[371] Miss Marchmont is still able to linger in the feeling of expectation before the calamity, every time she remembers the story—and is able to respond with uncommon strength.[372] Lucy's own example of suspended return will be even more complex.

Reciprocal Domesticity and Villette's Voyeurs

We have seen what Lucy cannot abide in traditional domesticity—and it is not so difficult to articulate what she *does* want, though harder to recognize what it would look like to attain it. Susan Fromberg Schaeffer writes that in *Villette*, "Charlotte Brontë was to explore with exceptional acuteness the need for a room of one's own as well as the emptiness of that room when it has no one but oneself inside it."[373] When Lucy devises her plan for eventually opening her own school—something she can look forward to in life and build for herself—she immediately falls into a morose reflection: "But afterwards, is there nothing more for me in life—no true home—nothing to be dearer to me than myself, and by its paramount preciousness, to draw from me better things than I care to culture for myself only?"[374] Lucy has a strong conviction that one can create happiness for other people, though one can't simply conjure it up for one's self out of nothing (happiness can't be cultivated "like a potato"). If you're not a Graham Bretton, golden and fated for good luck and easy circumstances, you need some outside intervention in order to more than placidly survive.

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[370] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 41, ch. 4.
[371] Gilbert and Gubar, 405.
[372] She is Lucy's model for the costs of weighing "occasional great agonies" against "submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains" (38).
[373] Schaeffer, xi.
[374] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 361, ch. 31.

In order to have someone who can reciprocate the kind of domestic care she has seen from Polly and Mrs. Bretton at Bretton, then—in order to create a home—Lucy needs to "be rightly known."[375] This means she longs to be seen—and seen in a way that allows for and sparks growth, movement, and dynamism. She doesn't like to be pinned down by someone's gaze—wrongly known—classified and shelved, made static by someone's observation. This is the way she is seen by Graham Bretton, who projects the identity of "unoffensive shadow" onto Lucy, rather than recognizing her passion. A rather two-dimensional character himself, Graham classifies women into types and tropes—often, literal narrative tropes. While it takes dozens of demonstrations, there are two powerful moments that lead up to Lucy's ability to relinquish her obsession with Graham. Lucy's glimpse of Vashti at the theatre is, arguably, the first acceptable model for womanhood she has seen—neither a Cleopatra nor the alternate images of "la vie d'une femme," the series of four portraits that Lucy calls "cold and vapid as ghosts" that inhabit a "triste coin" of a Villette gallery.[376] Vashti is a "different vision."[377] Like Lucy, she is "but a frail creature" called "plain" by some, but she "[keeps] up her feeble strength," which has "conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace." She is "struck" with suffering, "neither yielding to, nor enduring" it (258). For the first time, Lucy forgets to think of Graham "or to question what he thought," at least "at intervals," her heart "draw[n] out of its wonted orbit" (259). When Lucy does think to ask him, he makes clear his view of Vashti: "he judged her as a woman, not an artist" (260). This simplistic condemnation (though Lucy does not narrate his specific words) sticks with Lucy: she remembers, "that night was...marked in my book of life…with a deep-red cross" (260). The last straw for Lucy is to be herself cast as a "type" in a narrative. Graham begs

[375] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 99, ch. 10.
[376] Brontë, *Villette*, pp. 201-2, ch. 19.
[377] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 258, ch. 23.

her to facilitate his reconnection with Paulina in a move not at all surprising to readers, but which is somehow still a shock for Lucy. She recounts, "with now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a rôle not mine…he did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke."[378]

It is one of the central paradoxes of *Villette*, and of Lucy's character, that she behaves so much like someone who does not want to be seen, and yet fundamentally longs to be. Since the days of Bretton, she has employed the philosophy that "in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think, in being consummately ignored" (ch. 10). This is a rather cheerful statement of her principle; often it is not that she takes pleasure, but finds safety, in being ignored and overlooked, mischaracterized. And of course, Brontë has set the novel in a time and place of ultimate surveillance. *Villette* abounds with voyeurs, watch-towers and Foucauldian observation. What would be a prime Gothic element in any other novel is, to Lucy, an amusing absurdity, a practice she can understand, and even a source of pleasure: Madame Beck, creeping into her room in her nightdress to gaze down at Lucy's apparently sleeping face and turn out her pockets, swiftly gains Lucy's respect, if not her complete moral approbation. The visitation is distinctly un-spectral, not ghostly—not even startling or apparently too surprising. Lucy is comfortable with this kind of pervasive surveillance because it is obvious, tangible, and practical; because she can see it as French, a cultural quirk; and because she is adept at countersurveillance. She is not affected by the panopticon principle of the *pensionnat* because she knows exactly when she is being observed, and she can observe Mme Beck's surveillance undetected. Being surveilled is also one way of being seen, and one opportunity for

[378] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 318, ch. 27.

Lucy to act of her own volition, to *decide* to accept the surveillance and actively perform her own.

Thus, *Villette* comprises the perfect closed environment for Brontë to explore, and eventually demonstrate, what it might look like for a "surplus" woman to be mostly invisible, but still "rightly" seen. Both Paulina and Madame Beck seem to see Lucy clearly—they do not underestimate her and they understand that she is more than she seems. Pragmatically, Lucy says that "Madme Beck and I, without assimilating, understood each other well."[379] When Polly reappears in Villette, Lucy reflects that "if anyone knew me it was little Paulina Mary" (301). Paulina perhaps proves this when she later comments, "Lucy, I wonder if anybody will ever comprehend you altogether."[380] But there are really only three candidates entertained as possibilities for joining Lucy in her own, new kind of domesticity: Graham, Ginevra, and M. Paul. All three are uncertain cases, debatable as to whether they truly see Lucy at different points in the novel's progression.

M. Paul is a consummate voyeur, and also a bit of a tyrant, who exhibits what Boone rightly calls "often inexcusable paternalism."[381] Boone's *Libidinal Currents* provides a persuasive account of M. Paul's extensive and penetrative surveillance into the walled garden of the *pensionnat*.[382] Despite the extreme violation of privacy and suggestive symbolism involved in M. Paul's project of "reading" "female human nature" from his rented observation post,[383] in the end, M. Paul's "secret forays into the garden via the agency of his key—ostensibly a sign of his phallic superiority—involve both a descent from his tower and the traversing of a sexual

[379] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 298, ch. 26.
[380] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 425, ch. 37.
[381] Boone, 52.
[382] Boone, 38-40; 52-3.
[383] See *Villette* p. 363, ch. 31.

divide that effectually strips him of his masculinist claim to distanced authority."[384] In fact, Lucy never seems bothered by M. Paul's paternalistic strictures, his rebukes, and his Catholic principles, both because he is never truly harsh or judgmental in his harangues, only temperamental and reactive, and because she seems to enjoy having someone to combat. M. Paul's lectures about Lucy's supposed "worldly ways"[385] demonstrate that he sees her in a way no one else does. At the gallery, he shuts Lucy into the corner to look at the vapid portraits of *la vie d'une femme*, hypocritically enjoying the Cleopatra portrait while insisting it is too scandalous for Lucy to look at—but Graham, on the other hand, does not see Lucy as enough of a sexual being to be in any danger. M. Paul also regularly "ransacks" Lucy's desk; she knows the "hand of M. Emanuel's was on the most intimate terms with my desk," and he leaves it tainted with the smell of his phallic cigars—but he also leaves books and bonbons for her, feeding her intellectual ambition and understanding her taste for sweets.[386]

M. Paul's prickliness is often a sign of care. In one instance, he is drawn into jealousy thinking that Lucy is sewing a watchguard for Dr. John, and then is sincerely moved when it is gifted to himself. By contrast, Graham is in some ways unobservant—but in others, he is portrayed as a veritable panopticon in himself. We learn that even if he will easily forget Lucy's existence for three months, after he has witnessed how much she values his letters, or snub little Polly in favor of real friends, he somehow is always tracking every small domestic task done for him: "when you thought the fabrication of some trifle dedicated to his use had been achieved unnoticed," he smilingly "prove[s] that his eye had been on the work from commencement to close." Lucy tellingly, if concisely, recognizes, "it pleased him to be thus served."[387]

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[384] Boone, 53.
[385] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 332, ch. 28.
[386] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 343, ch. 29.
[387] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 198, ch. 19.

By the third volume of the novel, readers (if not Lucy) have been shown so many of Graham's faults and inadequacies that they cannot think he merits such "service." Indeed, for readers, Graham is only interesting in the interest he provokes in the women around him—just as little Polly was originally, to Lucy. It is unclear what the attractions of an evening at the fireside in La Terrasse would be, apart from the teasing of Mrs. Bretton and the brief suspense before Graham and Paulina's engagement. Even when Graham exhibits some version of gendered domestic care of his own, he seems to do it as a means of control and a vehicle for projecting his own view of people onto them. At Madame Beck's fête, he makes Lucy his proxy for looking after Ginevra:

> "There is no draught, Dr. John," said I, turning.
>
> "She takes cold so easily," he pursued, looking at Ginevra with extreme kindness. "She is delicate; she must be cared for: fetch her a shawl."
>
> "Permit me to judge for myself," said Miss Fanshawe, with hauteur. "I want no shawl."
> "Your dress is thin, you have been dancing, you are heated."[388]

M. Paul makes a similar nudge at the Hotel Crécy, after he has snapped at Lucy for seeming too intimate with Dr. John ("He looked at my shawl and objected to its lightness. I decidedly told him it was as heavy as I wished"[389]), but he does not insist on controlling Lucy and makes the comment as a way to apologize.

Villette—like Lucy—collects, tracks, and hoards these little moments of domestic care like precious golden crumbs. But nothing is a more profound signal of care in *Villette* than providing someone with exactly the right food. Ginevra is the first to build a semi-reciprocal relationship with Lucy. Lucy somehow "doesn't know why" she "always contrived that [Ginevra] should be [her] convive" when the inmates of the school shared cups, or why she gives

[388] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 148, ch. 14.
[389] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 320, ch. 27.

Ginevra half her allotment of breakfast *pistolets*, "never varying in my preference, though many others used to covet the superfluity," while "she in return would sometimes give me a portion of her coffee."[390] For Sharon Marcus, "the narrator is clear about why Lucy is drawn to Ginevra: she finds her pleasant to look at and enjoys her unquenchable need to solicit Lucy's attention."[391] While "Lucy's queerness is distinctly Victorian: it inheres in an anomalous distaste for other women's amity, not in a transgressive preference for women's love,"[392] her very habit of scolding Ginevra is, for Lucy, a sign of a more real relationship than she will ever have with Dr. John, whom she never questions or reprimands. Lucy surveils Ginevra and tries to influence and curb her actions—just as M. Paul does to her, in turn. In the end, Marcus argues,"the erotic heat associated with negative, aggressive affects like jealousy, humiliation, and punishment circulates freely between Ginevra and Lucy, but the warmth generated between them dissipates into what each sees as a more primary contest over men."[393] The stage of the novel in which Ginevra dominates is also the one in which Lucy is most insistent that she disdains what Ginevra stands for—her femininity, often symbolized by her taste for sweet things. Marcus shows that the example of Colonel de Hamal sets up this schema quite clearly. Lucy scoffs at him, telling Ginevra that she likes him "as I like sweets, and jams, and comfits, and conservatory flowers."[394] As Marcus points out, Lucy *does* have a taste for sweet things—though perhaps she makes some fine distinctions between sweets and cakes. Lucy's relationship with Ginevra is characterized by Lucy's insistence that she does not care that she will always compare unfavorably to Ginevra's beauty and femininity—even her ability to purchase and enjoy pretty trinkets and attract

[390] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 234, ch. 21.
[391] Marcus, 108.
[392] Marcus, 105.
[393] Marcus, 108.
[394] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 147, ch. 14.

romantic interest. When it comes to edible treats, "Lucy can acknowledge her 'relish for these dainties' because her appetite for them can be satisfied, but her conviction that she is unamiable makes her loath to desire sweetness in feminine form, whether as the cloying Ginevra, the delicate Paulina, or the doll-like Hamal."[395]

It is telling to track the moments when Lucy allows herself to indulge in being a "petite gourmande."[396] The episode of the *petit pâté à la crême* is the first moment when it's clear M. Paul seems to "rightly know" Lucy. For one, he thinks she'll be able to act in the play—and then once she has learned her lines, he is solicitous, if belated, in taking care of her, and he even seems to magically understand what she would like best. Lucy notes, "I had seen in the vestibule a basketful of small *pâtés à la crême*, than which nothing in the whole range of cookery seemed to me better). A *pâté*, or a square of cake, it seemed to me would come very *apropos.*"[397] M. Paul delivers, and Lucy spends quite some time narrating the results:

> To my great joy this food was limited to coffee and cake: I had feared wine and sweets, which I did not like. How he guessed that I should like a *petit pâté à la crême* I cannot tell; but he went out and procured me one from some quarter. With considerable willingness I ate and drank, keeping the *petit pâté* till the last, as a *bonne bouche*. (137)

This example of care and understanding is paired, of course, with M. Paul's officious tyranny—he literally locks her in an attic—the only action in the novel that would be fitting of a Gothic villain. Yet it does not produce the same anguish as her encounters with Graham do. Much as she is uncomfortable and nervous as the lone woman in a hotel's breakfast room, but not terrified as she is in her first night in Villette's streets, being bullied into acting in the play and being confined in the attic make her nervous and self-conscious, but neither constitute a Gothic moment. As Boone argues,

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[395] Marcus, 108.
[396] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 355, ch. 30.
[397] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 136, ch. 14.

> It is M. Paul's demand that Lucy act in the school play that, despite its aura of sexual violation ("the doors burst open…two eyes…hungrily dived into me") and carceral enforcement (literally imprisoning the reluctant understudy in the attic till she learns her part), results in Lucy's awakening to her potential as a literally and figuratively *acting* subject: 'I acted to please myself…A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature.' And…the fact is that 'dramatic expression' and 'relish,' in the most positive sense, come to define her subsequent encounters with M. Paul.[398]

In response to Lucy's (surprising yet unsurprising) talent for stage acting, M. Paul tells her, "I know you…I watched you," seeing "not mere light, but flame."[399] Recall that what Lucy longs for in home and companionship is not just someone who will see her for what she is (not as a frigid or inoffensive shadow), but above all, she wants to be seen but not to be pinned down into stasis in being so seen. She wishes for an environment which would "draw from [her] better things than [she cares] to culture for [her]self only."[400] Lucy wants to be—and be seen as—an acting subject, an actor in the world, not be assigned or mis-assigned some static role. And she enjoys having to fight to defend, and thus explore, the boundaries of her selfhood. One aspect of domestic intimacy the novel posits is this dynamic where, as Mrs. Bretton says, "keeping in order, and correcting, and repressing" someone is a mode of gentle affection and care. Indeed, this is a "good service" [401] Lucy can never perform for Graham—she worships him so one-sidedly that even when she rationally knows his faults, she never even admits them to herself, let alone voices them, either in lighthearted raillery or serious objection. In M. Paul there is "much to put up with," to challenge, combat, or push back against. A telling expression of M. Paul's affection for Lucy is that he is interested enough in her to think that she "needs keeping down"[402] and is willing to keep attempting to do so.

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[398] Boone, 52; Brontë, *Villette*, p. 133; 141, ch. 14.
[399] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 155, ch. 15.
[400] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 361, ch. 31.
[401] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 272, ch. 24.
[402] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 363, ch. 31.

This "keeping down" is both lighthearted and mutual in Lucy's relationship with M. Paul. By the culmination of their friendship, Lucy is surveilling and penetrating M. Paul just as much as the reverse. Boone argues, "It is now Paul who is 'open' to Lucy's entrance, he who serves as a static threshold or portal through which her active quest for knowledge leads."[403] Whether that quest is actually for intellectual accomplishment, which Lucy denies is her ambition or talent, or for self-making in some other respect, the ending of the novel bears out that M. Paul has at least served as a "threshold" or "portal," even if he doesn't end up the site of her whole home and future life. Simply the fact that the roles of surveillance, mastery, and penetration have become mutual is a sign of "the unsettling of categories and oppositions that runs through the text…one way in which the diffusion of power into multiple conduits in the Foucauldian schema may also countermand that very system—in this case, by making possible a multifaceted mode of signifying, and hence of being, that, gradually embraced by Lucy, gives her the psychological space and inner strength to avert male objectification."[404] M. Paul is able to follow Lucy in her breaking of conventions, her subversion of smooth surfaces and placid journeying. Lucy notes that with him, she "could talk [her] own way—the way M. Paul was used to—and of which he could follow the meanderings and fill the hiatus, pardon the strange stammerings, strange to him no longer."[405] We are left to wonder whether this "third way," Lucy's version of the traditional domestic, characterized by reciprocity, nourishment, constant motion, challenge, and growth, is sufficient for Brontë, or if Lucy still ought to be wary.

"Here Pause: Pause at Once": *Villette*'s Suspension of Closure

[403] Boone, 51.
[404] Boone, 52
[405] Brontë, *Villette*, p. 418, ch. 36.

Villette begins by offering a view of domesticity as a forced binary in which neither extreme is desirable. Lucy accepts this binary view of domesticity for much of the novel, though she is unsettled by it. Rather than attempt to enlighten sunny characters about the realities of the world, or step into the sunlit world herself, Lucy makes it easier for characters like Graham and Ginevra Fanshawe to live their charmed lives. The opening chapters and most of the novel's events and outcomes seem to confirm Lucy's logic and this binary: "home" is either taken for granted or completely unattainable; domesticity either placid or disastrous. The end of Lucy's narration, however, presents two possibilities that could each be seen as a "third way"—or they could be interpreted, together, as reinscribing this traditional binary.

1. First, the false ending:

In describing her first visit to her new home at Faubourg Clotilde, Lucy writes, "I was full of faults; he took them and me all home" (488). From a "woman without," she has now become "once more [herself]—re-assured, not desperate, nor yet desolate; not friendless, not hopeless, not sick of life, and seeking death."[406] M. Paul "claims her hospitality" and Lucy "accepts her part as hostess" with "shy joy" (488). She pours the chocolate from her "pretty gold and white china service" after he goes out to procure "what was needful from the restaurant"—a joint venture (488). We know it is a good sign that "our meal was simple: the chocolate, the rolls, the plate of fresh summer fruit, cherries and strawberries bedded in green leaves formed the whole: but it was what we both liked better than a feast" and Lucy "[takes] a delight inexpressible in tending M. Paul" (488). And while the furnishings are M. Paul's gift, the rented house is Lucy's: M. Paul is clear that "the first year's rent you have already in your savings; afterwards Miss Lucy must trust God, and herself" and he "instantly [gives her] the particulars in

[406] *Villette,* p. 482, ch. 41.

writing" (489). Lucy does not fear to tease him, remembering, "magnificent-minded, grand-hearted, dear, faulty little man! You deserved candour, and from me always had it" (488); "he forgot his own doctrine, he forsook his own system of repression when I most challenged its exercise" (491). The penultimate chapter of the novel closes, "Now, penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection, having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart—I preferred him before all humanity. We parted: he gave me his pledge, and then his farewell. We parted: the next day—he sailed" (492). Unless we are perturbed by the idea that Lucy "lives by his affection" and is "penetrated with his influence," this seems like the ideal outcome for her happiness and integrity.

2. Then, the paradox:

Lucy tells us, "M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox?" It seems that just the knowledge that she is not a "woman without" has revolutionized her circumstances. Her happiness is not solely because of her expectations for the future "or lived wholly on a bequeathed hope or a parting promise."[407] M. Paul "supplied bounteous fuel," keeping this expectation a reality: "By every vessel he wrote; he wrote as he gave and as he loved, in full-handed, full-hearted plenitude…his letters were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed" (494). The nourishment, or living water, seems to be this constant stream of reassurance that her life is different now, in addition to the sincerity of his love. Lucy need not doubt her value or second-guess her future: "I was spared all chill, all stint; I was not suffered to fear penury; I was not tried with suspense" (494). But other than this constant flow of letters, it seems Lucy only needs to be in this suspended state, awaiting happiness, to be happy:

[407] *Villette,* p. 494, ch. 42.

> I commenced my school; I worked—I worked hard… The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart. The spring which moved my energies lay far away beyond seas, in an Indian isle. At parting, I had been left a legacy; such a thought for the present, such a hope for the future, such a motive for a persevering, a laborious, an enterprising, a patient and a brave course—I could not flag. Few things shook me now; few things had importance to vex, intimidate, or depress me: most things pleased—mere trifles had a charm. (493)

It seems she has been turned into one of the golden people who cannot be "shaken" or "vexed," simply because they are aware of their charmed status. Yet because it seems so clear that Lucy has never been so happy and would be equally happy if M. Paul's absence were to be extended, as long as she could remain steady in the expectation that he *would* return, the prospect of his actual return may seem a bit ominous to careful readers. The final paragraphs of the novel switch to present tense. The brimming state of readiness ("my school flourishes, my house is ready;" the library shelves are filled and the plants are in bloom (495)) hints that Lucy's fortunes may be at their height, poised for a fall.

3. "But—he is coming":

Narrator-Lucy and Character-Lucy meld for fleeting moments as the mundane signs of coming winter turn into a dramatic storm: "wander as I may through the house this night, I cannot lull the blast" (495). Then suddenly, narrator-Lucy resumes her place: "that storm roared frenzied, for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance" (495). We know that "some" are dead after the storm, but before any closer revelation, the story halts:

> 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. (496)

While we are overtly told we can leave room for hope or imagine a happy ending, the final line makes it clear that this is a lacuna, not a pause: we are told in stilted, matter-of-fact phrases, "Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell" (496). We know, then, that Lucy has lived at least this long, and stayed in Villette—and if we are told we could let ourselves "picture…a happy succeeding life" (496), it seems likely that Lucy will *not* fulfill this wish outside our own imaginations (now punctured by the narration of the reason for pausing, the pretense of offering ambiguity).

Why, then, create this suspended ending, when the "real" outcome is apparent enough? Why does Brontë both create ambiguity and deflate its significance? One theory looks to Brontë herself: her letters indicate that in general, she may have grappled with the balance of realism and escapism in her endings, resisting commercially-minded entreaties for novels like *Villette* to "end well" (also her father's request, meaning the heroine should "marry, and live very happily ever after").[408] Kate Flint argues that Brontë "was only prepared to compromise up to a point" in acquiescing to this kind of request, even if her father's opinion were to reflect popular literary preferences.[409] There are also aesthetic reasons that Brontë would feel it fitting to deny readers their expectations—and then even their certainty of interpretation—one last time. Boone argues that

> what sets *Villette*…apart is the sense that the traditional techniques for establishing interiority within the domain of novelistic verisimilitude—for example, quoted monologue, first-person narration, and indirect free discourse—ultimately fall short of

[408] In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Gaskell explains: "I may mention what she told me; that Mr. Brontë was anxious that her new tale should end well, as he disliked novels which left a melancholy impression upon the mind; and he requested her to make her hero and heroine (like the heroes and heroines in fairy-tales) "marry, and live very happily ever after." But the idea of M. Paul Emanuel's death at sea was stamped on her imagination till it assumed the distinct force of reality; and she could no more alter her fictitious ending than if they had been facts which she was relating. All she could do in compliance with her father's wish was so to veil the fate in oracular words, as to leave it to the character and discernment of her readers to interpret her meaning" (437).
[409] Flint, "The Victorian Novel and Its Readers," 124.

> articulating the darker reaches of desire, anxiety, and repression to which the dreamlike narrative of *Villette* attempts to give expression. To convert these psychosexual currents into narratable story necessitates, as Brontë's author-surrogate Lucy discovers, a 'heretic narrative': one that dissents from, that refuses to conform to, traditional belief systems, whether they be doctrines of church, self, or literary form. And this perverse veering away from the norm is something that *Villette* executes with a passion, creating a quintessentially unstable fiction.[410]

To be true to this literary commitment, then, the novel's ending must be heretic, too—unstable and splintering convention. A novel that holds up and rejects not just particular character "types" but the entire method, creating "an 'antihero' who is so determined to remain behind the scenes that she nearly succeeds in erasing herself from the plot of which she is the central subject,"[411] might necessitate an equally evanescent (lack of) closure. The "veil" drawn across a definitive ending may also be the novel's last gift to Lucy, who desperately resists being "wrongly" known or fixed by the gaze of an unworthy observer, just as Brontë herself felt during her writing of *Villette*, when the secret of her pseudonym was first revealed to the public.[412]

But I believe the ending also constitutes a thematic answer to Lucy's central problem. Perhaps Lucy's "third way" is not the "false" happy ending with M. Paul, nor the life-after-tragedy we could imagine had he failed to return, but the careful approach of *suspension*. Lucy's happiest three years are spent lingering in stasis, yet constantly active, growing and changing. This is not the same as Graham's advice to "cultivate happiness" in the face of overwhelming outside circumstances—but a glimpse of what it can be like to have a real hope of changing those circumstances. To expect that event, and live awaiting that sort of homecoming, is a spatial practice in itself.

[410] Boone, 35
[411] Boone, 37.
[412] See Tim Dolin's introduction to *Villette,* xi-xii.

This is my answer to DiBattista and Nord's observation that Lucy abruptly and inexplicably leaves London after her one joyful day of sightseeing, rather than staying in the one place where she can apparently be happy. Of course, Lucy's day in London is spent as a *flâneuse*: she does not have to strive to integrate into the spaces she occupies because she is a sightseer. More deeply, however, she is able to enjoy London because she thinks of it as a pause, one shining day in which she is in-between homes, and thus tautologically unable to feel homeless. *Villette*'s entire argument is that Lucy's homelessness follows with her, just as the Brettons, like turtles, can take their home with them wherever they go. Lucy tries moving countries, not just houses, and finds herself inevitably haunted by the uncanny return of Bretton, almost immediately. But *Villette* fulfills the domestic conclusions of *Jane Eyre*, taken to their furthest. If home is not one place or the other, and a heroine's task is not to find the "good home" amongst a sea of bad ones, it is the inhabiting, the home-making, that comprises the idea of "home." *Villette*'s "paradox" is Lucy's way forward into a new mode of domesticity, one that affords all the actual joys of home (not just making home into a place of work, as DiBattista and Nord argue[413]). As Lucy notes, "life is so constructed, that the event does not, cannot, will not, match the expectation" (409). But one can make a life—find joy in curating books, nourishing houseplants, and making plans—in a space of expectation, cultivating the idea that one hasn't arrived but is always about to.

To have Lucy end happily with M. Paul would indeed come too close to simply erasing the concerns of the novel. If Brontë's aim—or one of them—is to truly explore what could become of a "woman without," a "surplus" woman who has no chance of traditional marriage, then Brontë's only answer cannot be to simply allocate her heroine a man, despite the

[413] DiBattista and Nord, 36.

probabilities. In the context of the public debate about "redundant women," too, this ending would be meaningless. The stance of feminist organizers and essayists in the mid century was not that, as Greg suggested, women should simply be redistributed to account for the surplus, but that women should become valued for more than their roles as supporters of their husbands, spenders of male earnings, and moral centers of the home.

The affordances of a practice of suspension include eliding any remaining concerns that readers might retain about M. Paul and his patriarchal and voyeuristic tendencies. Lucy's imagined version of his gaze, when he is absent but planning to return, is entirely different from the self-policing resulting from a Foucauldian panopticon. It is not that Lucy is aware that she could be being observed at any time and thus curbing her behavior—she is able to imagine a fitting response after observing herself.

Suspension is, in fact, the answer to the perfectly-proportioned plum pudding—a balance of real and ideal, wholesome and sweet. For Lucy, a realist and an idealist at once, it is the threat of stagnation, not the threat of confinement *or* adversity, that haunts her. Even live burial would give her something to struggle against—better than placidity and invisibility. Lucy, who wants to be seen as a possible actor in the world, not a useless redundancy, actually longs to be something like a character in a Gothic novel of the eighteenth century, worthy of being confined or suppressed, given a reason to need ingenuity and activeness to fight back. Gothic novels, after all, have been known for their capacity to *see* women and their plights, no matter how problematic the storyline or resolution. *Villette*'s resolution may be an innovation of the "new" Gothic indeed, capturing and reproducing the paradox of a novel that elucidates an interiority, yet leaves it unsurveilled, that "pauses" its resolution, its heroine perpetually full of kinetic energy and possibility, poised at the height of uncertain expectation.

Conclusion

"Until She No Longer Touched the Ground": Space, Place, and Revising Home in *Cereus Blooms at Night*

As I have argued, recursion—both in the form of physical movement and through acts like reading—is a key element of the kind of spatial practice that can help marginalized figures negotiate house and home. In the spirit of this method of return, I'd like to end by revisiting one of my texts and examining the tradition of rewriting it has inspired.

Imani Perry defines intersectional feminism as "a praxis of reading"—a way of reading the world.[414] For Perry, Woolf's "room of one's own" is giving up too soon, offering a path to autonomy that only those closest to the centers of power could follow. Seeking out a room of one's own means fitting one's self into the daily rhythms and practices of the House. Perry sees Woolf's essay as, in the end, "recommending the accoutrements of the patriarchy: a room (spatial control with a lock on the door, both property and sovereignty of a sort, and personhood as recognition as the property holder) and ongoing monetary resources."[415] Perry takes up Hortense Spillers's concept of vestibularity,[416] extending it to describe not just those ungendered and relegated to the vestibule by the dehumanizing horrors of the middle passage and chattel slavery, but all those who are excluded from the master's house—from the structures of "personhood, sovereignty, and property"[417] that make up the patriarchy. Perry concludes that "the best response to vestibularity may be not to enter the house while leaving it intact, but to raise questions while standing in the vestibule about the stability of the structure of the house, about both enclosure

[414] Imani Perry, introduction to *Vexy Thing*, 7.
[415] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 90; Imani Perry, "Unmaking the Territory and Remapping the Landscape," *Vexy Thing*, 171.
[416] Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 67. Perry is succinct: "to be vestibular was to be excluded from the rules of gender or the capacity to have authority over one's own gendering…to be vestibular was to be monstrous because they were (coercively) disordered according to the dominant rules of gender" (37).
[417] Perry, "Unmaking the Territory and Remapping the Landscape," 175.

and how some are cast outside of its doors."[418] Novels—Gothic or not—are often models for how we can, like Morrison's Pilate Dead or Rhys's Antoinette Cosway, "ben[d] the naturalized landscape," disrupt "the conditions of what we accept as normal,"[419] and "remap the world, our flesh, and our relations."[420] These characters re-narrate events and re-map their worlds, using their flesh to upend the prescribed order of things (even cardinal directions).[421] Their approach is active, a praxis that "denaturalizes what has been naturalized" (182) through movement, wandering, and strategic occupation of space and place.

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels I've presented in this dissertation don't fully remap the domestic landscape in the way Perry's truly vestibular characters do. The heroines of these canonical Gothic novels are marginal rather than truly vestibular, recognized as fully human though their rights are limited by the laws and practices of coverture. They do more than simply obtaining a room of their own in the metaphorical house of the patriarchy, instead negotiating and re-negotiating their access to power and their ownership of the spaces they pass through. But their revision of domestic traditions is often limited. *Jane Eyre* is a prime example. By the end of the novel, Jane has become an adept reader of power structures, "reading" the world in the de Certeauvian sense—by re-writing it. Of course, all this depends, quite literally, on the dehumanization—and ultimate death—of Bertha Mason, the "madwoman in the attic." Part of Jane's spatial practice—her ability to re-make the domestic, or as Spivak says, "make the outside inside"—is metaphorical colonization.

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[418] Perry, 197.
[419] Perry, 172.
[420] Perry, 197.
[421] "When Pilate's nephew Milkman first sees her, she has 'one foot pointed east and one pointed west,'…the first evidence of how Morrison creates Pilate as a navigational hero" (Perry 181).

Bertha's only forms of movement consist of pacing in her attic prison and her final vertical leap to her death as she burns down Thornfield Hall, clearing the way for Jane's marriage. Bertha is racialized and dehumanized in Jane's first and only clear glimpse of her: she is called "a figure" that "runs backwards and forwards" like "some strange wild animal."[422] Jane can only narrate her as animalistic, her movements meaningless—though just this sort of recursive movement, explicitly including pacing, has become one of Jane's characteristic actions allowing her to assert her own selfhood. Perry points out that Jane's is a failure of *reading*: she writes, "Jane saw Bertha. But she could not act as a witness because she was incapable of reading her—her movements, her story" (191).

This lacuna has made *Jane Eyre* one of the most re-written texts of the nineteenth century.[423] Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the most direct re-writing of the novel from Bertha's, or Antoinette Cosway's, point of view, a text clearly meant to push "the reader to consider the ethical error in the classic text that tucks the shameful woman away in the attic" (191). Perry also notes the recuperative visual art of Lezley Saar: "In 'Bertha Rochester,' 2012, the head of Charlotte Brontë's famous 'madwoman in the attic' is proposed as a free-floating tree of pain and despair, while surrounding keyhole photographs of clocks and stacked dollhouse furniture give one a sense of her isolated life."[424] For me, Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) is the rewriting that offers the best picture of how a novel—and a character—can use the praxis of re-treading familiar ground to heal from trauma and recuperate silenced stories.

[422] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 293.
[423] See Patsy Stoneman's entry on "incremental literature" in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës.*
[424] Campbell, Andy. "Lezley Saar: California African American Museum (CAAM)," *Artforum*, www.artforum.com/events/california-african-american-museum-caam-2-238216/. See Saar's Madwoman in the Attic collection, which includes other literary figures such as Lady Audley (of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*).

It does more than just correct the "ethical error" of *Jane Eyre*—it crystallizes into a wondrous, generative version of threshold spatial practice as both resistance and homely care.

Cereus Blooms at Night rewrites the plot of *Jane Eyre* through a postcolonial lens, reimagining the Creole Caribbean "madwoman" as the protagonist of her own story, in the same tradition of rewriting as *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *Cereus* is a queer, feminist remapping of Brontë's original story of a search for freedom within the structures and systems of the patriarchy. Relocated to the fictional Lantanacamara (an homage to Trinidad), the narrative situates the same search for home within the structures of racial and colonial oppression. Mala, seen as mad by the townsfolk of Paradise, nurtures activity and growth within the stasis of extreme trauma. Much of the scholarship[425] on *Cereus*'s depiction of healing after sexual violence and rejecting colonial norms centers on the act of witnessing and on the narrator's ability to connect with Mala despite her rejection of spoken language. Less studied is the pattern of characters' movements and the ways they engage with domestic space. While the townsfolk find her behavior opaque, Mala's bodily movements and micro-journeys are patently legible to the narrator of the novel, and thus to the reader. I argue that Mootoo stages her subversive answer to *Jane Eyre*'s racism and colonialism through the novel's careful rearranging of the patterns and paths of its predecessor—the patterns through which Mala (and her disassociated child-self, Pohpoh) negotiate the ins and outs of everyday domestic space. In the end, it is through repeated reveries built upon domestic activities—the small, everyday activeness of kitchen and garden—that Mala begins to make connections with others and create a new way of life after trauma.

[425] See Tagore, "Witnessing as Testimony;" Valovirta, "Ethics of empathy and reading in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*;" Escudero, "'Softer than Cotton, Stronger than Steel': Metaphor and Trauma in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*;" and Diamond, "Rape, Representation and Metamorphosis in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*." Paulina Palmer, in *The Queer Uncanny*, does address space and place.

A few moments help us see this rewriting as an almost literal rearranging of the spatial practices of the original plot—a chance for Mala to cultivate her own activity-in-stasis, her own recursive pattern of returning to (and hovering within) a threshold to gain power and agency. Mala's father, Chandin Ramchandin, struggles with his identity—with the racism and colonialism that structure his life—in a way that becomes associated with his navigation of domestic space almost immediately. He dreams of "a stone and mortar house with special rooms for this and that—a library, a pantry, a guest room—like the Thoroughlys" (the missionary family that adopts him away from his parents). Chandin quite literally finds his place in the Thoroughlys' home, and in the world—through material domestic arrangements:

> But evenings, sitting quietly in the living room with the family, he had a very definite place. The Reverend had a chair that he alone sat in, as did Mrs. Thoroughly, and Lavinia invariably lay on her back or stomach on the very same portion of rug, or sat on a footstool near her mother. Chandin found that a straight-backed upholstered chair had come to be marked as his. Although it was only a physical place, the chair became an antidote to the chaos of his uprootedness…Gazing awestruck at the chandelier, he would daily renew his promise to be the first brown-skinned person in Lantanacamara to own one just like it.[426]

When Chandin finally presides over a home of his own, this dream of "special rooms for this and that" is only partially fulfilled. What he ends up with is not a drawing room, but a different incarnation of a named room—the "sewing room" in which his body will remain for thirty years. It is not the "madwoman in the attic" that comes to represent the novel's central trauma and

[426] Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night, 31-32.* Compare this logic of the domestic interior to the way Hippolita, in *The Castle of Otranto,* understands and even predicts the plot through knowing the patterns of inhabitance of each part of the castle.

recovery, but her abuser who ends up dead, decomposing in the sewing room, after a final attack on Mala. This sewing room is not only a traditionally female space, at least in name, but an almost symmetrical inversion of *Jane Eyre*'s spatial signifiers: it is housed in a sort of partial basement below the main floor. The architecture of the house in which Mala was raised is described carefully:

> …a two-storey house typical of modest dwellings in the area. The house stood atop mudra stilts. On the top floor was a drawing room, an ample kitchen and two bedrooms, the smaller shared by the two children and the larger by the adults. Porches ran on the front and back sides of the upper storey, each with a stairway leading to the ground. Between the bedrooms was a doorway leading down an enclosed stairway, the only access to a storage space that occupied a quarter of the downstairs, commonly known as the sewing room, whether or not it was used as such. The other three-quarters was open air. (50)

This description possibly requires some visualization. First, see Jesús Sotés Vicente's cover art for the Penguin edition of *Cereus Blooms at Night.* This first image is an illustration of the façade of a house like the Ramchandins', a home on stilts with a verandah and stairs leading up to the front door. While it doesn't quite visualize the situation with the sewing room, I find it interesting that the second choice for cover art (the original cover is of a cereus plant in bloom) is of the central home.

Figure 11, an elevation sketch of the house, is meant to depict the cereus-laden sewing room as it sits below the main house, the rest of the structure supported by stilts. The chandelier that Chandin Ramchandin eventually procures as a facsimile of the one in the Thoroughly's house remains. Once he is dead, Mala creates a barricade of household furniture that blocks the

door down to the sewing room. A significant, repeated threshold moment is the experience of treading the careful path Mala has created and which she must navigate every time she delves down into the depths of the house to deposit more detritus on her father's corpse. The series of locked doors and precarious pathways through household objects is a bulwark of safety for Mala—an interesting contrast with the housebreaking scene in *The Monk*, which features a similar careful description of penetrating a series of locks and thresholds.

Figure 9. Elevation sketch of the Ramchandin House, *Cereus Blooms at Night.*

In *Cereus*, the "ruined great house" of Gothic novels is Mala's own childhood home, and her journey is not in relocating from place to place within the town of Paradise, but in the ways she re-makes this house and heals from the trauma inflicted on her there. For years after she has stashed her father's body in the sewing room, Mala perambulates through her yard, circling the house day by day, returning to the verandah where she now sleeps, and collecting dead insects to deposit down in the sewing room with her father, creating layer upon layer of rich, fertile detritus that both masks and worsens the smell of Chandin's decomposition. She husbands the

decomposition process and creates a cocoon for herself in the yard. The house is engulfed by nature and overwhelmed by moths who come to feed on the night-blooming cereus plant that grows out of her father's corpse, on the outer wall of the sewing room. Mala prepares snail shells for the return of their inhabitants' souls—boiling them out and leaving them to bleach and dry, like the empty house she monitors.

In Mala's present, she has completely broken from the rituals of house life—but she imagines the adventures of her child-self, Pohpoh, who is savvy in navigating and conquering these traditional spaces and structures. Pohpoh isn't a "dark double" like Bertha (a shadow of Jane she must purge) but a part of Mala that she splits off from herself over the years, and eventually sets free. Mala imagines a scene in which Pohpoh habitually exits her father's house to break into other houses at night. Like Mala, the memory-weaver and cocoon-maker, Pohpoh, too, is likened to a moth—in her active phase, not her cocooning phase (143, 156). She finds her target for the night, imagining "bedrooms with a happy family, a fairy-tale family in which the father was a benevolent king" (156). The narrator tells us what attracts Pohpoh to the act of housebreaking: "during these night-time adventures she had learned that the layouts of houses were predictable, depending on the social status of the dwellers. It thrilled her to have guessed which room followed which" (158). When she completes her tour of the house without being caught, she feels "triumphant. Avenged." The mastery she has over the logic of the house, her ability to correctly place and organize rooms and their purposes, to imagine and master the ordered relationships that oppose what the Paradise gossips refer to as Chandin having "mistaken" his daughter for his wife (65),[427] gives Pohpoh a sense of control and assurance.

[427] This is the way the Paradise townsfolk describe to each other the sexual assault Chandin commits against his children—that one night he "mistakes" them for her (65).

Eventually, the two houses—separated by thirty years—converge, and Pohpoh is running to "Mala's House"—no longer called Chandin's, or even The House on Hill Street (175). Bertha Mason's sacrificial, illegible vertical leap from the roof of Thornfield is mirrored in *Cereus* by Pohpoh's joyful escape from her past, flying up into the sky in a moment of magical realism, "each stroke [of her arms] taking her higher until she no longer touched the ground" (186). *Cereus* depicts a complex and iterative journey towards healing. Mala is temporarily taken into custody, but Pohpoh is free. The fire that mirrors Bertha's fatal arson in *Jane Eyre* is instead set by Otoh so Mala cannot be convicted of her father's murder, and it leads to her gradual assimilation back into a new, queerer version of the community that shunned her—what critics will describe as a community of witnessing.

In addition to depicting Mala literally living in and around the threshold of her home, *Cereus* subverts traditional Gothic tropes and remakes them: death, decay, and monstrous creatures (insects) are life-giving, insulating, fertile, and representative of renewal and healing—even as they isolate Mala in the slowly-being-engrossed-by-nature house. The imagery and narrative structure of cocooning and the gentle, fertile rot that leads to rebirth replace concerns about confinement. Just like the snails whose souls come back to inhabit their boiled-out shells, Mala "hover[s] around [her] old stomping grounds" (54) as she conducts the process of emptying out the house so that re-inhabiting—or re-constructing—herself can be bearable. The burned-out shell of the house won't become Mala's eventual home—but the process of remaking it has allowed Mala to find a way of being in the world, an odd, unorthodox relationship with the landscape that she takes with her to her new home at the Alms House. Mala's madness is completely unlike Bertha's—she makes deft, gentle movements in and around the house, husbanding the plants and insects, except for a moment when she is viewed through the eyes of

certain townspeople, to whom she becomes opaque, just as Bertha is for Jane. At the Paradise Alms House, where Mala is sent after she's been released from jail, Nurse Tyler's radical empathy and care manifests in simple domestic comforts (like making vegetarian meals and "patting the cow manure around the base" of Mala's transplanted cereus cutting (5)). Domestic tasks become a way of reading Mala,[428] an almost literal language of care, since Mala is otherwise nonverbal.

Mala's impulses for revising domestic space are unorthodox—piling up furniture, living amongst the plants and insects, entombing her father at the center of her house and not so much covering him over as growing things around him. But they disrupt the colonial logic of the Thoroughly's drawing room[429]—the logic Chandin replicated in his own relationships—and let Mala invent new modes of activity, small acts of domestic care (like the husbanding of plants and animals) that allow her to constantly re-make the world around her.

Many of the realities of *Cereus* are far, far darker than what we are shown in *Jane Eyre*. But the novel's ending is more generative, leaving the protagonist firmly rooted in a community of care, rather than isolated (if in total control) at Ferndean. Like *Villette*, the novel ends poised at the point of an expected (but doubtful) return. Tyler (the narrator) leaves us torn between doubt and expectancy as he directly addresses Mala's absent sister Asha in the novel's suspended conclusion. Just as *Villette*'s arrested ending is flagged by a direct acknowledgment of the reader's existence and reactions, Tyler's last words remind us of our status as readers even as he

[428] See McCormack p. 70

[429] Donna McCormack makes the point that often, society's view of "healing" is assimilating back into the status quo, "reintegration into the very family, community, nation and other social structures that are responsible for the originary violence" (51; 19). She makes use of Homi Bhabha's theory of performativity to interpret *Cereus*, where "the performative disrupts the coherence of the pedagogical," explaining, "the performative is the daily messy living that interrupts the neatness of the pedagogical…the performative, unlike the pedagogical, is 'the repetition that will not return as the same' (McCormack, p. 17; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 232-3). See McCormack on "un-housing," 51.

ends the narrative, open-endedly: enticing Asha (and readers) with the imminent promise of Mala's transplanted cereus plant, days away from its annual blooming, he concludes, "We await a letter; better yet, your arrival. She expects you any day soon" (249).

This dissertation originated in images that stuck in my mind—or ones that mysteriously disappeared from it. Having read *Northanger Abbey* perhaps half a dozen more times than I've read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, perhaps it was inevitable that I would remember Isabella's exclamation, "Oh! I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world! Are not you wild to know?" and discover, after each reading of Radcliffe's master-work, that I couldn't have explained the truth of the veil to save my life, only remembering that as in *Northanger*, the upshot was that ordinary men, not murderers or supernatural beings, are the dangers hiding behind every corner. *Jane Eyre*'s "dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight" conjures not quite an image—though one can't help but imagine the gray, English rawness of a winter evening—but a momentary glimpse of the strange, embodied *feeling* of the affective paradox of dreading setting out because you don't want to have to come home. Many of the diagrams appended to this dissertation find their source in an image that wouldn't come clearly to mind (following Emily's path across Europe is made practicable only by drawing sweeping lines across the map rather than trying to track Emily's journey from place-name to place-name in linear, textual form, thanks to Radcliffe's dubious grasp of continental geography).

This dissertation proposes that in Gothic novels, the "threshold" becomes a space, not just an architectural feature. Of course, the threshold is the site of our coming in and going out, the site of the habits that come together to create the act of dwelling. In worlds that feature domestic extremes, the threshold—and the spatial practices of the threshold—do not offer a respite. A threshold is not a place where you can hide if neither extreme (the pastoral cottage or

the Gothic tower) appeals. It's a space of activeness and rumination, a touchstone to return to, to gather your energies (even if haltingly and recursively, over repeated returns) for the next attempt at re-making home. If the image emblematic of my argument about *Jane Eyre* is a narrative map of recursive return to the threshold of home rather than a linear pilgrim's progress, *Cereus Blooms at Night* demonstrates the way the idea of "the threshold" has expanded over the course of this dissertation. Importantly, it stands in for all the Gothic texts I have not included here—a reminder that while some are denied "a room of one's own" and are marginalized even in a tale of the ostensibly-marginal overcoming tyranny, as in *Jane Eyre*, their movements demonized and their activeness made illegible, there are also models for claiming stories and spaces by working within *or* outside of the master's house.

I have argued that it's not just literally crossing the threshold of home that constitutes the sort of activeness that happens in threshold space—it's walking in the city, reading with a critical and assimilative eye, nesting in a window-seat. For a visual representation of Mala Ramchandin's threshold spatial practice in *Cereus*, I imagine a maze of glistening snail trails criss-crossing haphazardly in lazy curves around her house and throughout her yard—in this case, activity-in-stasis may be more about the cocooning practice of circling the site of Mala's trauma, and less about her infrequent trips across the actual threshold of the house to feed the decomposition and renewal she's cultivating. The activeness of threshold domesticity includes the furious, joyful stirring of puddings at the heart of the kitchen, the reclaiming of a story or remapping of a landscape, and even the balancing act of hovering in suspension, dwelling in the hopeful expectation of home, actively creating it rather than expecting it to arrive.

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Figure 3. “*Cymbeline*: Iachimo’s Attempt on Imogen.”

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