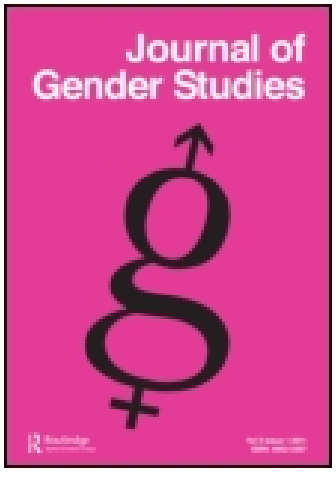

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Nightmares of repetition, dreams of affiliation: female bonding in the Gothic tradition

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Mary Wollstonecraft's fiction uses the conventions of the Female Gothic to portray the horrors of women's oppressive reality within a patriarchal society, which do not end with her escape from the haunted castle. Like Wollstonecraft, the writers Elizabeth Gaskell and Ellen Glasgow also use the Gothic confusion of the boundaries of ordinary life – self/other, past/present, reality/fantasy – to reveal a looking-glass world where assumptions of the female as the persistent 'other' are reversed. The patriarchal principles of unity and chronology give way to a multiplicity of voices, mother figures, and mother substitutes that anticipate a better future for daughters within a community of women. This essay attempts to demonstrate that the recovery of that female heritage constitutes a common concern of all three writers. Their fiction focuses on mothers and daughters and emphasizes the circle of powerlessness that evidences the daughter's inability to escape her mother's fate, while it hints at the empowering possibilities of female affiliation as an alternative in order to escape that fate. Thus, either consciously or unconsciously, Gaskell and Glasgow continued Wollstonecraft's legacy across generations and even thousands of miles across the Atlantic.

Keywords: feminism; motherhood; Wollstonecraft; Gaskell; Glasgow; Gothic

Introduction

Mary Wollstonecraft did not survive to finish her novel *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*: she died of puerperal fever in 1797 shortly after giving birth to her daughter Mary. A motherless child herself, she suffered the neglect of a bankrupt father and the partiality of a legal system that left wives and daughters dispossessed in favour of male relatives. Maria's thoughts in the novel thus seem to be gloomily prophetic:

> The events of her [Maria's] past life pressing on her, she resolved circumstantially to relate them, with the sentiments that experience, and more matured reason, would naturally suggest. They might perhaps instruct her daughter, and shield her from the misery, the tyranny, her mother knew not how to avoid. (Wollstonecraft 1991, p. 66)

Wollstonecraft's personal experience and her use of the Female Gothic articulate her concern about the oppression of women under patriarchal society and the importance she confers on female bonding as a strategy to work against that oppression. The ideas she put forward in her writings in general and in *Maria* in particular not only influenced her daughter Mary Shelley but a great number of female writers as well.

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Taking Wollstonecraft's use of the Female Gothic as a starting-point, this essay will try to establish parallels between Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, the Gothic short story 'The Grey Woman' by Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–65), and 'The Shadowy Third' by Ellen Glasgow (1873–1945). My reason for choosing these writers is that, in my view, both Gaskell and Glasgow share important thematic parallels with Wollstonecraft despite being separated by time, geographical space, and personal circumstances. In the volume of essays on short story theories edited by critic Charles E. May (1994, p. 21), he contends that the short story has served a didactic purpose since ancient times: early literary forms such as the parable, the exemplum, and the fable were primarily used to illustrate a moral lesson. Significantly, both Gaskell and Glasgow also used the conventions of the Female Gothic and the format of the short story to transmit the same message to their female readers, although both writers were primarily novelists and did not often engage in writing Gothic fiction. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write in their preface to *The Madwoman in the Attic*, nineteenth-century women writers indeed shared 'a literary female subculture, a community in which women consciously read and related to each other's works' (1976, p. xii). Although I cannot provide evidence of Wollstonecraft's direct influence on Gaskell's and Glasgow's writing, their Gothic fiction shares identical themes and motives, as I will presently illustrate. Either consciously or unconsciously, both writers seemed to inherit and continue Wollstonecraft's legacy across generations and even thousands of miles across the Atlantic.

Gilbert and Gubar argue that there is 'a coherence of theme and imagery … in the works of writers often geographically, historically, and psychologically distant from each other' (1976, p. xi): my contention here is that the same could be said about the Female Gothic. The stories by all three authors include the basic themes and motives of the Female Gothic genre: a gloomy castle (or an equally terrifying imprisoning space) full of labyrinths, secret passages, and forbidden rooms, an unknown manuscript, unreliable narrators or protagonists, and an often attractive but always mysterious male. House and male character are thus central to the Gothic atmosphere: the house is an imprisoning, almost suffocating setting within which the female protagonist is trapped, while the threatening male hides a secret which most of the time surrounds a supernatural figure or event. All three authors, as I will argue, use the Female Gothic tradition to subvert and critique the ideology of separate spheres and evidence the fact that the middle-class idealized home, as Kate Ferguson Ellis contends, 'though it theoretically protected the woman in it from arbitrary male control, gave her little real protection against male anger' (Ellis 1989, p. xi).

Wollstonecraft: *Maria*

As Tamar Heller (1992, pp. 25–29) argues in her discussion about Gothic elements in Mary Wollstonecraft's fiction, Wollstonecraft borrowed the Female Gothic conventions used by Anne Radcliffe to portray 'the wrongs of woman'. Women's imprisonment, she contends, does not end with her escape from the haunted castle: actually, Gothic fiction cannot fully convey the horrors of women's oppressive reality. As I will attempt to illustrate, Wollstonecraft, Gaskell, and Glasgow focus on mothers and daughters and emphasize the circle of powerlessness that evidences the daughter's inability to escape her mother's fate, while they hint at the empowering possibilities of female affiliation as a means to avoid that fate.

According to Anne Williams (1995, pp. 135–141), the Female Gothic explores the secret chambers in the Father's castle and offers the possibility of expressing a female self

partially outside his law, or even of spelling out a new one – Williams here refers to the Lacanian 'Law of the Father' (quoted in Campbell 2004, p. 158), whereby the Father is understood as logic, reason, language, and authority, as opposed to the fluid world of intuition and emotion he associates with the mother. As Williams points out (1995, p. 203), the confusion of the boundaries of ordinary life – self/other, past/present, reality/fantasy – reveals a looking-glass world where assumptions of the female as the persistent 'other' are reversed, and the patriarchal principles of unity and chronology give way to a multiplicity of voices that would have otherwise been silenced. Both Williams and Heller argue that the Female Gothic replaces unity with duality/multiplicity, and Heller especially emphasizes the power of female solidarity to transform oppressive stories within the domestic (Heller 1992, pp. 17–29, Williams 1995, pp. 149–159). Similarly, Gerardine Meaney's reflections on motherhood, which she quotes partly from the French feminist theoretician Luce Irigaray, identify the figures of mother and daughter as almost interchangeable. In Irigaray's words, the daughter is the mother's 'non-identical double' (quoted in Meaney 1993, p. 21), mirroring her experience as discriminated and 'lacking'. The 'nightmare of repetition' (quoted in Meaney 1993, p. 26) that Luce Irigaray envisages as the inescapable fate of daughters is transformed in the Female Gothic into a positive heritage between surrogate mothers and daughters of different social classes.

Maria's memoirs from the madhouse, where her husband Venables has imprisoned her to appropriate her inheritance, are written as a legacy and a warning to her baby daughter. Wollstonecraft uses the popular Gothic genre and the multiplicity of narrating voices to express her discontent at women's situation: Maria's story unfolds together with those of her keeper Jemima and Maria's lover Darnford: although the tough and working-class Jemima is initially hired to secure Maria's imprisonment, her identification with Maria's fate slowly grows into affection for her, eventually leading to their escape. As Janet Todd argues in *The Sign of Angellica* (1989, p. 251), 'Jemima had once to abort a baby to protect her own life although she had felt some tenderness for the unborn child, and it is Maria's story of the loss of her baby that moves her to sympathy'. In Chapter XIII, Maria similarly gains the sympathy of the landlady (who hides her from Venables) by hearing of her story and telling her of her own sufferings (Wollstonecraft 1991, pp. 128–133). Unlike *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft 1992), *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) thus breaks the boundaries of social class and equates the fate of Maria, Jemima, and even Maria's daughter.

Apart from giving her a voice in the narrative, Jemima (not Darnford) helps Maria escape the madhouse and later finds her daughter, who was thought to be dead. Darnford, though not a completely dislikeable character, turns out to be unfaithful. This reinforces Claire Tomalin's view (1992, p. 253) that Wollstonecraft portrayed a male character that resembled her former lover Gilbert Imlay, 'a sympathetic and charming though somewhat empty-headed lover who seduced a married woman and then drove her by his neglect to attempt suicide with laudanum'. The parallels with Wollstonecraft's life are clear. The ending of the story, far from depicting the conventional romantic encounter between lovers, hints at an alternative option of female bonding which offers Maria, her daughter, and Jemima the affection they crave without the constraints and the loss of independence that marriage and heterosexual love entail. The multiplicity of mother figures and mother substitutes thus anticipates a better future for daughters within a community of women, and the recovery of that female heritage precisely constitutes one of the main concerns of Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction, as well as of Ellen Glasgow's Gothic tales.

Gaskell: biography

Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Gaskell shared similar views as far as women's situation was concerned: both experienced the loss of their mother at an early age. Gaskell's mother died only about a year after she was born. Her father, William Stevenson, sent her to be brought up in Knutsford by her maternal aunt, Hannah Lumb, and her 21-year-old daughter Marianne, presumably because he felt unwilling or unable to cope with the upbringing of a motherless daughter. As Shirley Foster (2002, p. 3) posits, other events in the Stevenson family were important to understand Gaskell's brief contact with her father. Mr Stevenson married Catherine Thomson in 1814, three years after his first wife's death, but Gaskell apparently did not get on well with her stepmother. Apart from other tensions that made their relationship difficult, Catherine had two children by Stevenson and did not have much time for Gaskell. However, her father remained affectionate to her and supervised her studies when she was in London with him, while encouraging her to continue with her self-improvement. As Foster points out, he probably took the decision to send her to the Misses Byerleys' school in Warwickshire in 1821. At school she read Anna Barbauld's and Maria Edgeworth's works and grew up with a solid intellectual and literary education, unlike the more sentimental literary background that was often provided to young ladies of her time. Katharine Byerley also provided a role model for Gaskell's adult life, which successfully combined domesticity and professional activity, since Byerley was a mother of eight and a prolific author at the same time (Foster 2002, pp. 7–16).

Gaskell's early loss of her mother, as her letters evidence, shaped both her domestic and professional life: as she wrote to George Hope in 1849, 'I think no one but one so unfortunate as to be early motherless can enter into the craving one has after the lost mother' (Chapple and Pollard 1966, p. 797). As a mother, Gaskell was always affectionate and attentive towards her daughters' welfare, while motherless daughters pervaded her fiction. Her family provided the social and emotional support she needed, and her female relatives in Knutsford constituted a good example of the possibilities of female bonding (Foster 2002, p. 11), as Gaskell always trusted her female friends and relatives as confidantes. In *Elizabeth Gaskell*: *A Habit of Stories*, Jenny Uglow (1993, p. 32) points out that Gaskell had a childhood 'dread of second marriages'. This is made patent in a letter she wrote to her sister-in-law Anne Robson, giving her advice about her daughters' welfare in case she died and her husband remarried: 'in case of my death, we all know the probability of widowers marrying again – would you promise, dearest Anne, to remember MA's peculiarity of character, and as much as circumstances would permit, watch over her & cherish her?' (Chapple and Pollard 1966, p. 46).

Her Unitarian faith (she married the Manchester Unitarian minister William Gaskell in 1832) also influenced her fiction. Although most Unitarians disapproved of Wollstonecraft's private life (Wollstonecraft had a relationship with Henry Fuseli, she had a daughter by Gilbert Imlay but never married him, and agreed to marry William Godwin only after she became pregnant by him), many of them agreed with her belief that the education of girls needed radical reform. Being part of a marginalized group that openly discussed politics and questioned established beliefs encouraged Gaskell to write about issues as controversial as female oppression, which other writers were perhaps more cautious in dealing with, so it is not unlikely that she had read some of Wollstonecraft's work. As Uglow (1993, p. 32) quotes from the author's letters, the Newcastle minister William Turner, a relative of Gaskell, wrote a letter of advice to his daughter on the eve of her marriage, assuming that she remembered the 'well-founded strictures of Mary Wollstonecraft'.

It is likely that Gaskell had a moral or didactic purpose in writing 'The Grey Woman'; Wollstonecraft also wrote *The Wrongs of Woman* with a didactic purpose. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she actually expressed a clear preference for the essay. She thought the novel fostered a false sentimentality in female readers, while it smothered their intellectual capacities:

> there are women who are amused by the reveries of the stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all retained in a sentimental jargon, which equally tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily routines. (Wollstonecraft 1992, p. 313)

Despite her dislike, Wollstonecraft perhaps acknowledged the power of the novel to reach female readers' homes and consciences. Similarly, Foster (2002, pp. 68–69) contends that although Gaskell's interest in short stories may have been mainly commercial, her concern for the unequal situation of women in society in her short fiction is as pervasive as in her novels. Gaskell contributed to Dickens' periodicals *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* with several stories, among which is 'The Grey Woman'.

Gaskell: 'The Grey Woman'

As is the case with *The Wrongs of Woman*, Gaskell's 'The Grey Woman' (1861) 'is framed by metafictional narrative' (Foster 2002, p. 151). Here, the protagonist's memoirs are mediated by the narrator, her voicelessness here emphasizing her powerlessness. The story is set in Heidelberg, where a group of people on holiday is caught in a storm and takes refuge in a nearby mill. The narrator is immediately drawn to the portrait of a beautiful young woman: 'my eye was caught by a picture in a dark corner of the room' (Gaskell 1995, p. 189). After seeing the woman's name written on the house Bible, the miller produces some old documents that contain the memoirs of his aunt Anna Scherer, which she left to her daughter Ursula as a sort of apology for preventing her daughter's engagement to the man she loved.

According to patriarchal stereotypes of femininity, relationships among women can never involve co-operation and solidarity: their unequal position in society results in mutual jealousy, competition for male attention, and identity only in relation to men. Gaskell's story seems to illustrate this notion while warning us of its destructiveness. Anna Scherer's narrative starts in 1879. A motherless child, as Wollstonecraft and Gaskell themselves, Anna leads a contented life at her father's mill in Heidelberg until her brother Fritz gets married to a local beauty, Babette Müller. Since Babette is jealous of Anna's superior beauty, she makes her life unhappy once she becomes the new mistress of the mill, and, as Anna recollects in her memoirs, 'that Babette Müller was . . . the cause of all my life's suffering' (Gaskell 1995, p. 193). When Anna receives an invitation from a former schoolmate to visit her in Karlsruhe, Babette presses on her husband to allow her to go even though she is reluctant to leave home. To my mind, Babette's unkindness towards her sister-in-law seems to illustrate Gaskell's awareness that some relationships among women become destructive, especially when they accept a self shaped by patriarchal views on women.

During her visit to her friend Sophie Rupprecht in Karlsruhe, Anna observes the superficiality of its high society, where 'French fashions were more talked of than French politics' (Gaskell 1995, p. 196). Anna is driven almost unwillingly to marriage with the attractive and wealthy Monsieur de la Tourelle by Madame Rupprecht, a sophisticated and morally shallow lady who 'thought a great deal of all French people' (Gaskell 1995, p. 196). However, Anna admits that she becomes engaged to Monsieur de la Tourelle

mainly because of her own passivity: 'I had got into a net through my own timidity and weakness, and I did not see how to get out of it' (Gaskell 1995, p. 199). When she gathers enough courage to confess to her father that she does not really want to marry him, 'he seemed to feel … as if, after the ceremony of betrothal, no one had any right over me but my future husband' (Gaskell 1995, pp. 199–200).

After the marriage, Anna and her husband move to his castle in Les Rochers, an odd combination of the traditional Gothic castle, with a new building attached to it 'by means of intricate passages and unexpected doors, the exact positions of which I never fully understood'. She is led to a set of luxuriously furnished rooms in the new building, set apart from the rest of the house 'by heavy doors and portières', where 'the servants could not hear any movement or cry of mine unless expressly summoned' (Gaskell 1995, pp. 202–203). He never encourages her visits to other parts of the castle, and the flower garden, which can only be accessed through his rooms, 'was designed in order to give me exercise and employment under his own eye' (Gaskell 1995, p. 212).

Monsieur de la Tourelle is all charm and elegance, almost effeminate, with delicate features and an exquisite taste, which reinforces the horror at the discovery of his secret life. He forms part of the 'Chauffeurs', a gang of robbers who terrorize the area and who delight in torturing and cruelly murdering their victims. In contrast, her Norman servant Amante is strong and quite masculine in appearance, but provides Anna with the sisterly love she needs, and helps her to escape when she discovers her husband's activities. Amante succeeds in escaping the villains by cross-dressing; as in *The Wrongs of Woman*, it is the working-class woman and not the middle-class lady who is given major force in the narrative. As Uglow (1993, p. 264) remarks, 'indeed the mistress seems more like a child, while the servant is a source of strength … At moments of crisis servants constantly take the initiative'. Further parallels between the working-class women in the two novels can be perceived in Janet Todd's analysis of Jemima, which rephrases Uglow's view of Amante:

> if the sentimental middle-class woman is perhaps always a child, she was always an adult, born into no family, rather like Mary Shelley's monster created by Frankenstein, probably influenced by her mother's portrait of Jemima. (Todd 1989, p. 251)

Disguised as a tailor, Amante manages to bring Anna safely to Frankfurt, where they live, together with Anna's baby daughter Ursula, as man and wife. Here Gaskell, according to Shirley Foster (2002, p. 152), not only subverts notions of identity but also 'highlights false constructs of gendered behaviour'. After Amante is murdered by the villains, Anna marries the doctor who helped her to give birth in secret, and lives the secluded existence of a ghost. Apart from being terrified to leave her room for fear of Monsieur de la Tourelle's revenge, her hair has become grey and her face now resembles that of an old woman. Actually, she never mentions her name in her memoirs, but only calls herself 'The Grey Woman' or 'Mother', which evidences that conventional femininity (and masculinity) can be metaphorically and literally life-threatening: 'the "grey" woman literally embodies female suppression and entrapment – in her own numb, dreamlike state, in her marriage and even in her flight … Once in safety, terrified to leave her room, she develops an agoraphobic fear of the wider world. Again and again Gaskell shows women rendered helpless and denied speech' (Uglow 1993, p. 473).

Despite the disruptive potential of the story (Anna first lives with a woman as her wife, and finally resorts to a bigamous marriage), Gaskell provided a gloomy ending for her story. Perhaps she did this because, as Foster (2002, p. 152) suggests, she could think of 'no real healing process for the heroine, or … she could think of nowhere else for her story to go'. Nevertheless, by making Anna a bigamous wife in order to preserve her safety,

Gaskell reinforces the helpless situation of women under existing marriage laws, a subject that Wollstonecraft had touched in *The Wrongs of Woman*. Husbands' control over the property of their wives left married women in an unequal position, and this became a controversial issue during the nineteenth century, until the Married Women's Property Act was finally passed in the UK in 1882 (Hartsman 1985, pp. 158–159). As Claire Tomalin notices in relation to Wollstonecraft's interest in the divorce laws passed in revolutionary France in 1792, 'one of the propaganda purposes in Mary's novel *Maria* was to point out the need for similar laws in England, where divorce was still extremely expensive, complicated and difficult to obtain' (1992, p. 197).

Glasgow: biography

As mentioned above, the main purpose of this essay is to establish connections in the fiction of Wollstonecraft, Gaskell, and Glasgow, even though these three writers do not seem to share many features at first glance. Ellen Glasgow was born on a different continent after both Wollstonecraft and Gaskell had died and led a completely different life from those of her predecessors. Glasgow's autobiography, however, reveals a feature she shared with both authors: she also felt deprived of a mother figure. After giving birth to 10 children and coping with an unsympathetic and unfaithful husband, Glasgow's mother Anne Gholson developed serious uterine problems and had several nervous breakdowns, which progressively turned her into an invalid. In addition, the author's strict upbringing according to patriarchal morality most probably conditioned her future concern about women's unequal situation. Glasgow's fiction presents further parallels with that of Wollstonecraft and Gaskell aside from biographical details and thematic aspects: most significantly as regards my analysis, Glasgow also uses the conventions of the Female Gothic and the format of the short story with a didactic purpose, namely to reveal the most terrifying sides of women's everyday lives.

In Glasgow's stories, the psychological and emotional identification that occurs between the main female characters often makes them almost indistinguishable. The five stories Glasgow wrote between 1916 and 1923 follow the basic Female Gothic plot I have briefly described earlier on in this essay. As Pamela Matthews (1994, p. 108) states, the boundaries between life and death are often blurred, especially for the few characters (usually female) that seem to be aware of the mystery, but the most significant confusion takes place between female self and other. Rather than isolating her protagonist in the house, Glasgow provides her Gothic heroine with the help of another woman, a female non-identical double in the fashion of Jemima and Amante. In Glasgow's stories, as in *The Wrongs of Woman* and 'The Grey Woman', the house represents the imprisoning and the silencing of women within a name and a space which is not their own, but in which they are supposed to reign as angels of purity and innocence. As Matthews (1994, p. 109) suggests, Glasgow also uses her Gothic tales with a didactic attempt, namely to denounce and challenge the nightmarish reality that women of her time were disciplined to assume every day as desirable and proper, 'since "normal"… is likely to mean, among other commonplace horrors, female idealization and objectification, domestic imprisonment, and [an] inadequate self-worth'.

Wollstonecraft's works had a good reception in post-revolutionary America: they went into various editions, and pieces echoing her ideas were published in several journals and newspapers throughout the nineteenth century (Lundberg and May 1976, pp. 262–293, Zagarri 1998, pp. 203–230). Glasgow was a feminist and openly supported the Suffrage Movement, so it is unlikely that she had never come across Wollstonecraft. *The Equal*

Suffrage League of Virginia, of which Glasgow was a founding member, actually grew out of a meeting held in her house in the autumn of 1909 (Raper 1988, p. 14). Like Gaskell, Glasgow wrote stories mainly for economic reasons and saw the structure and length of the novel as more akin to her way of writing. However, the short story proved a useful tool to experiment with sketches of ideas and characters that would become central in her major works of fiction.

Despite her predilection for the novel, Glasgow's short fiction was highly popular among readers. Moreover, she probably felt at ease with the Gothic, a genre that was both widely read by women and feminized in a number of ways. Its popularity and its association with female readers and writers fictionalized Victorian gender and class hierarchies, and thus it was commonly seen as 'other' (that is, not standard, not normative), subversive, and marginal. Matthews (1994, p. 113) posits that Glasgow chose the Gothic tale in order to subvert male authority and offer an alternative to male representations of women's traditions: the format of the short story, the reader assumes, would help to make her message much more emphatic and effective. The literary conventions of the Female Gothic provided Glasgow, as it had provided her predecessors, with a valuable tool to redefine women's stories and, at the same time, to define her individual self as a woman and as an artist. The reassessment of the strict traditions in which she had been brought up is thus central to the story with which this essay is concerned, 'The Shadowy Third' (1916).

Glasgow: 'The Shadowy Third'

'The Shadowy Third', as many other fictional pieces by Glasgow, is a story about (surrogate) mothers and daughters, and female affiliation is highlighted as an alternative to marriage. It presents a young professional, Margaret Randolph, hired by Dr Maradick as the personal nurse of his wife, who seems to be suffering from strange mental disorders. In this story, it is not even the female character's own words but an account of her victimization: Mrs Maradick's version of the story, although mediated by a supportive female, is never heard.

Roland Maradick, the chief surgeon at the hospital, is the traditional powerful male whose irresistible charm infatuates the protagonist. Maradick personifies the description of the Gothic villain as defined by Heller (1992, p. 18), very much in the fashion of George Venables and Monsieur de la Tourelle. His romantic appeal equates to his love of power, and his attractiveness becomes a weapon to exert control over, even tyrannize, the women around him: 'he was, I suppose, born to be a hero to women. Fate had selected him for the role, and it would have been sheer impertinence for a mortal to cross wills with the invisible Powers' (Glasgow 1963, p. 40). Maradick relies upon his sexual power as a male and his authority as a doctor to guarantee Margaret's obedience, but she soon allies herself with his wife instead.

Even before she meets Mrs Maradick, Margaret cannot help but 'feel her pathos and her strangeness' (Glasgow 1963, p. 55). The house in Fifth Avenue where the Maradicks live acts as the modern version of the haunted castle, in which Mrs Maradick is literally imprisoned as a madwoman. Echoing Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, she is not locked exactly in the attic but in her third storey room. According to the nineteenth-century doctrine of separate spheres, although Mrs Maradick's only power resides in the domestic, her husband reminds her of her powerlessness by turning her house into a prison. Moreover, his professional authority serves to justify his wife's nervous disorders and keep her under constant threat of permanent removal to an asylum. Charles E. May

(1994, p. 133) contends that 'the novel exists to reaffirm the world of "everyday" reality' while the short story 'exists to "defamiliarize" the everyday': for Mrs Maradick, as for Maria Venables and Anna Scherer, the apparently safe and blissful world of the domestic has become more terrifying than horror fiction itself. As Caroline Gonda (1996, p. 157) also notices in her analysis of the Gothic elements in *The Wrongs of Woman*, in all three stories 'the "real world", the world of "commonsense" order itself is the nightmare . . . the natural order produces more horrifying effects than the supernatural'.

In his famous and much-quoted book *The Short Story*, Ian Reid (1977, p. 28) emphasizes that short fiction tends to concentrate on a crucial event – 'some significant moment, some instant of perception . . . sudden momentous intuitions' – that functions as a turning-point in the main character's experience. Charles E. May (1994, p. 172), similarly agrees with Reid's statement by affirming that these changes 'typically appear as the movement from a relative state of ignorance to a relative state of knowledge, and the movement occurs even when a character ironically rejects or ignores the knowledge . . . the change frequently instills a sense of mystery'. In the case of Glasgow's story, the appearance of Mrs Maradick's little daughter Dorothea will undermine Margaret's trust in logic and medical authority, leading her to believe in Mrs Maradick's apparently insane delusions.

As in other instances of Gothic fiction, Glasgow supports Mrs Maradick's inconsistent version of the story with the narrative of an intelligent, reliable witness such as Margaret, who nevertheless sympathizes with Mrs Maradick and confers great importance to her own intuitions. Having seen a little girl playing in the library on her arrival at the house, Margaret imagines that Mrs Maradick's hallucination consists of the belief that her daughter is dead, although later she learns that only herself and Gabriel, the black butler brought by Mrs Maradick's mother from South Carolina, can see the girl. Later, the source of Mrs Maradick's malady seems to be that she sees the ghost of her daughter Dorothea, who died from pneumonia, although Margaret is sure she has seen the girl too. In *Contesting the Gothic*, James Watt (1999, p. 105) argues that the Female Gothic 'privileges the intuitive power of her heroines during the periods of confinement by offering a grounding for their apparent paranoia'.

Margaret's instinctive identification with Mrs Maradick in Glasgow's story recalls Wollstonecraft's and Gaskell's assertion of female bonds of mutual affection and understanding – 'there was something about her . . . that made you love her as soon as she looked at you' (Glasgow 1963, p. 59) – contrasting with the objectification and loss of selfhood that characterizes male–female relationships – 'I felt I would have died for him' (Glasgow 1963, p. 57). Mrs Maradick's incoherent phrases voice her terror at the isolation, powerlessness, and victimization she has suffered under male authority, which warns Margaret against the perils of marriage. This time it is not her daughter Mrs Maradick is addressing, since her daughter is dead, but the helpmate and friend whom she takes as a surrogate younger sister. Through Mrs Maradick – even her name is reduced to that, which echoes Anna Scherer's loss of name – Margaret learns that marriage leaves women dispossessed of name, property, financial control, and even personal independence and identity. Although married women in Virginia were allowed to hold property from 1878, male privilege and authority, as the story shows, still allowed husbands ways to control their wives' money (Khan 1996). Gary Kelly's remarks (1996, pp. 212–214) in his assessment of *The Wrongs of Woman* could certainly apply to Gaskell's and Glasgow's stories as well: Mrs Maradick's narration first 'relieves the pain of imprisonment', but what begins as 'expressive acts of self-consolation' is transformed into 'a political self-vindication and a manual of instruction, a Revolutionary feminist conduct book'. Mrs Maradick's story,

as Maria's and Anna's memoirs, has to break the laws of ladylike modesty 'in order to authenticate their picture of oppression with details too indelicate for a lady'. In all three cases, although the protagonist is entrapped by patriarchy and 'cannot do much for herself', she gathers enough strength to 'write her self for the emancipation of another'.

According to the literary conventions of the Female Gothic, the domestic ideal, according to which the husband protects and provides for his wife, is here reversed: Glasgow's short story portrays the crushing reality of harsh capitalism and women's legal helplessness, which allow the husband to control his wife's property. Maradick's plan of appropriating his wife's property and money, transmitted through matrilineage, requires the elimination of her daughter so that he will be left as the sole beneficiary of his wife's inheritance. After confining her to the asylum in which she dies, he is free to marry his former lover and sell the house to be transformed into an apartment block. James Watt's definition of Radcliffean heroines (1999, p. 104) could as well be used to describe the helpless situation of the victimized heroines that concern us here; the three stories 'focus on the fate of the young, propertied woman negotiating, without protection, the pitfalls of the marriage market'. Similarly, Caroline Gonda's reflections on the Female Gothic in *Reading Daughters' Fictions* could also define the purpose of all three writers in using Gothic conventions. In Gonda's words, 'Gothic fiction works to subvert the ideology of "separate spheres", with its ideal of the home as a haven for middle-class female virtue' (Gonda 1996, p. 142). After Mrs Maradick leaves for the asylum, Margaret stops seeing the girl and leads a methodical life as Maradick's office nurse, until she almost convinces herself that her encounters with Dorothea have been an optical illusion. One evening, while repeating a poem that Mrs Maradick liked, Dorothea reappears. The girl, her mother's exact copy and, to rephrase Luce Irigaray's concept, her mother's identical double, returns when Margaret remembers her emotional bonds with Mrs Maradick. Despite Dorothea's apparent powerlessness and her inability to escape her mother's house (that is, her literal entrapment within the domestic as a ghost), the spell is broken by co-operation with Margaret, now a sort of surrogate mother to her. Even as a ghost, she is able to defend the matrilineal heritage that Mrs Maradick left and cause Dr Maradick to die by making him trip on her skipping rope and falling down three flights of stairs. What Margaret calls 'an invisible judgement' (Glasgow 1963, p. 72) is, according to Pamela Matthews, Maradick's punishment for overestimating his power as a male and underestimating the power of a female community unwilling to submit to his 'charming way with women' (Glasgow 1963, p. 57). The 'angel in the house' he condemned to madness and death, the child he himself killed, and his apparently devoted subordinate acquire enough strength to defeat him. Ironically, Matthews (1994, p. 123) remarks, at the end of the story he becomes 'as dead – and as powerless – as other such "angels" have been'.

Conclusions

As Gaskell (1995, p. 190) reflects in 'The Grey Woman', 'the sins of the fathers are visited on their children'. The three works discussed here illustrate this statement: in *The Wrongs of Woman*, Maria suffers the consequences of her father's strict discipline, his lack of affection, and his bankruptcy, finally allowing his mistress to tyrannize the household. Jemima is constantly brutalized by abusive men and jealous women. Later, both Maria and her daughter become the victims of George Venables' wickedness and greed; Maria's imprisonment in the madhouse renders her powerless to protect her daughter from being abandoned to orphaned poverty and neglect. The end of the story provides an alternative option to conventional patriarchal discourse by reuniting Maria and her daughter and

establishing a female community in which both Maria and Jemima finally find a form of affectionate bonding that does not entail oppression or denigration.

Gaskell's story, with its spectacular depiction of cross-dressing and bigamy as the only escape from imprisonment (and death) within the Law of the Father, nevertheless offers a bleaker ending. A motherless child and a victim of her sister-in-law's jealousy, Anna is trapped in a house and a marriage she never desired but which she cannot escape. Mirroring Maria's experience, Anna's marriage also 'bastilled her for life' (Wollstonecraft 1991, p. 115). After the death of Amante, she loses her health, her beauty, and even her name, condemned to an unfulfilling death-in-life. Even her daughter Ursula cannot escape her father's sins, as the man she loves is Maurice de Poissy, whose father was murdered by her father Monsieur de la Tourelle.

More than a century after Wollstonecraft's death, the Suffrage Movement and the First World War had provided the impetus for important changes in women's lives. However, Glasgow's personal experience as a woman and as a writer probably made her message essentially the same, namely that 'traditional masculinity kills' (Matthews 1994, p. 71). In her story, Mrs Maradick is taken to the asylum by an unsympathetic nurse who is charmed by Dr Maradick's allure – just as Venables uses Maria's maidservant to abduct her child, and Babette convinces her husband to send Anna to Karlsruhe. As Gary Kelly (1996, p. 218) writes in *Revolutionary Feminism*, these are clear examples 'of how patriarchy uses women against each other'. Glasgow contrasts the competition and jealousy among women under patriarchy with the potential benefits of female affiliation: her extensive network of female relatives and connections attests to her adherence to a formula for a life of mutual affection and understanding when heterosexuality and conventional marriage are left out of the equation. Like Glasgow, Wollstonecraft and Gaskell experienced the nightmare of motherless childhood and dreaded its repetition, so their fiction provided their daughters with an open door – or at least a key – to escape the Father's house.

Notes on contributor

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