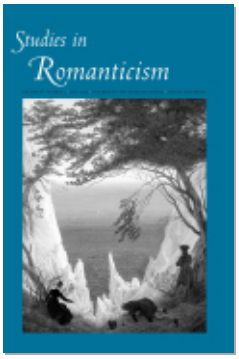
"Bending her gentle head to swift decay": Horror, Loss, and Fantasy in the Female Gothic of Ann Radcliffe and Regina Maria Roche



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While gothic ruins are typically discussed in terms of moldering castles and crumbling historical monuments, the Female Gothic tradition of the long eighteenth century calls attention to another set of ruins: the physical and mental decay the Gothic heroine undergoes on the path from childhood innocence to adult experience. As exemplified in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Regina Maria Roche's lesser-known *Clermont* (1798), the Female Gothic does not depict female maturation as a form of progress, as a series of tests from the supernatural world that the heroine must overcome to emerge as an enlightened adult fortified by moral reason and sensibility. Instead, these novels stage their heroines' development in terms of irrevocable disruption in the dangers they experience from the world of reality, from men in positions of power who perpetually threaten their autonomy and integrity with sexual violence.[1] Through these constructions of female subjectivity as simultaneously regressive and progressive, as unstable as any decaying castle or monument, the Female Gothic locates horror not in supernatural monsters and spectacularized violence as in other Gothic works of the period, but in the mundane realities that women must learn about their subjugation in worlds dominated by men. What Emily St. Aubert and Roche's protagonist Madeline Clermont find on the path from innocence to experience is

1. As Anne Greenfield has pointed out, the modern, more flexible term "sexual violence" would not have been used in the late eighteenth century, when definitions of "rape," differentiated from "seduction," were becoming increasingly narrow. See Greenfield's Introduction to *Interpreting Sexual Violence, 1660–1800* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), 5–7.

not the promised bloom of female maturation, but trauma and decay.[2] This trauma and decay that come with maturity form the foundation for a fantastic temporal framework in the Female Gothic based on a conjoined sense of horror and loss: horror of, and in the present incites a retroactive fantasy of a lost past of innocent perfection.

Ellen Moers's coinage of the term "Female Gothic" was limited in its application simply to authorial gender.[3] However, the term has persisted in scholarly accounts of gender in the Gothic despite significant concerns about its essentialism and its reductive framing of women's Gothic as a response to the 'real' Gothic originated by male authors. "Female Gothic" is further problematized if we take Ann Radcliffe as its originator and primary producer, as some critics have, considering the gendered politics of respectability that led to her contemporary success and eventual canonization.[4] Taking the lead from queer theorists who have reclaimed and reappropriated "queer" as "a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings," my understanding and use of "Female Gothic" conjures its "abjected history" in order to "signify a new and affirmative set of meanings."[5] As queer is "redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage . . . in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes," Female Gothic can be used to acknowledge histories of gendered violence and struggle—including those which still occur even as they are critiqued in and through literary studies today—and to reassert the radical agenda of women's Gothic writing in the long eighteenth century. Finally, Female Gothic can be used to gesture towards future possibilities for equally radical analyses of gender in literary studies of the period.[6] *Udolpho* and *Clermont* are not exemplars of the Female Gothic tradition because they were written by women, or even because they tell stories about women, but because they highlight the

2. Within Ruth Leys's taxonomy of trauma theory, my understanding of trauma as it operates in the Female Gothic falls into the category of the "mimetic," in which trauma is "imagined as involving not the shattering of a pregiven ego by the loss of an identifiable object or event but a dislocation or dissociation of the 'subject' prior to any identity and any perceptual object" (*Trauma: A Genealogy* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 33).

3. Moers, "Female Gothic: the monster's mother," *New York Review of Books* 21 (1974), 24.

4. For convincing and cogent critiques of "Female Gothic" see Jenny DiPlacidi, *Gothic Incest: Gender, Sexuality and Transgression* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 3–9; Ellen Ledoux, "Was There Ever a 'Female Gothic'?", *Palgrave Communications* 3, no. 1 (2017): 2–7 ; and E. J. Clery, *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2003), 1–9.

5. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 169.

6. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 173.

gendered horrors that structure their heroines' maturation to expose the trauma of the ordinary for women in eighteenth-century Britain. Roche's and Radcliffe's Gothic renderings of the "painful realit[ies]" of British culture in the late eighteenth century represent a specific category of writing that takes as its point of departure the "interrogation of paternal models of power . . . [by] articulating the dire predicament of alienated, disempowered female subjects."[7]

Jacques Lacan's reformulation of Freud's *das Ding* in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959–1960) provides one framework for understanding Roche's and Radcliffe's Female Gothic depiction of maturation and its relation to gendered horror and fantasy.[8] In Freud's German, *die Sache* is a nameable thing while *das Ding* is, as in Kant's formulation of the unknowable *Ding an sich*, its unnamable counterpart.[9] Within the Lacanian account of the human subject's mediation of language and desire in the symbolic order, the Thing forms a spectral presence in the real, the order that haunts the symbolic as its unknowable and uncontainable excess that both escapes and organizes symbolic meaning. As Lacan puts it, "the Thing is characterized by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine;" it "will always be represented by emptiness."[10] As a figure of and for the real, the Thing is an unimaginable void at the center of a void. However, the void of the Thing shapes the void of the real, which in turn shapes the symbolic. To manage its relationship to the subjection of symbolization, the symbolic subject constructs a retroactive fantasy of a pre-symbolic state of plenitude and sat-

7. Susan Chaplin, "Female Gothic and the Law," in *Women and the Gothic*, ed. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 142. Other recent critics who retain "female gothic" include Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 15–19, and Carol Margaret Davison, *Gothic Literature, 1764–1824* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 12–19.

8. Gary Farnell has argued that the Lacanian Thing can be used to understand "a new theory of the Gothic." See Farnell, "Gothic and the Thing," *Gothic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009), 113–23, 113. Dale Townshend has also paired the Thing with gothic literature, though his work focuses primarily on the incest taboo surrounding the Thing and the Gothic alike. See Townshend, *The Orders of the Gothic: Foucault, Lacan, and the Subject of Gothic Writing, 1764–1820* (New York: AMS Press, 2007).

9. While my focus is on Lacan's reinterpretation of Freudian theory, such concepts as retroaction, particularly in relation to trauma, and ruins mark Freud's stages of thought from beginning to end. As early as "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), for example, Freud figures the unconscious mind as a scene of ruins to be excavated and interpreted, a rhetorical figure to which he returns in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). Similarly, Freud's early conceptualization of *Nachträglichkeit* and his later theory of the death drive both rely on the logic of retroactivity.

10. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, trans. Dennis Porter, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 125, 129. Subsequent references to this work are cited parenthetically in the text.

isfaction from which it has been alienated. The work of fantasy, the narrative of constitutive loss and the promise of recovery, is thus an essential feature of symbolic existence. For Lacan, however, there is no outside or beyond the symbolic. The Thing at the empty center of the real is, then, the shadow that haunts the fantasy of loss and recovery; it is the absent presence of the impossible beyond of the symbolic. Ultimately, the Thing is horrifying because it figures the void that lies behind the veil of fantasy.[11]

The Female Gothic's retroactively-constructed lost past of childhood perfection, occasioned by the horrifying realities of female maturation, is of the same substance as Lacanian fantasy. And, as the haunting no-Thing lies behind the veil of fantasy, so the absence, the impossible emptiness, of that lost state simultaneously threatens and entices the Gothic heroine. She longs for a return to the innocence of childhood, prior to the accumulated traumas she endures as she matures, but cannot come too close to the truth that this innocent childhood exists only in and as fantasy. The Gothic heroine thus faces a double form of horror: the very real horror of threatened sexual violence and the horror that there is no originary innocence outside of or beyond the fantasy essential to navigating women's reality as depicted in the Female Gothic. While both novels are set in the European continent, Radcliffe's in the sixteenth century and Roche's in an undated period, *Clermont* and *Udolpho* speak to the horrors that women of the late eighteenth century experienced in their daily lives in Britain.

Roche and Radcliffe unmask the horrors with which women are left when the supernatural *is* explained in their renderings of Female Gothic worlds.[12] One of the standard scenes of the highly conventional genre, for example, is when the heroine encounters what she believes to be a ghost in her bedroom. In the narrative's retroactive explanation of supernatural events, however, she learns that it was not a ghost, but a living man who planned to kidnap, murder, or rape her. Not only is this horror in itself far more frightening than any unexplained supernatural phenomenon, but such events are not exceptional to but constitutive of the heroine's process

11. Lacan himself frequently uses rhetorical language of veiling to articulate the function of fantasy and its relationship to desire and loss, particularly in his conceptualization of the phallus. See especially "The Signification of the Phallus," *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 575–84 and "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 11–52. For Lacanian analyses of fantasy as veil see Bogdan Wolf, *Lacanian Coordinates: From the Logic of the Signifier to the Paradoxes of Guilt and Desire* (London: Karnac, 2015), 154–55 and Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 1–54.

12. Kate Ferguson Ellis has argued that the "explained supernatural" in Radcliffe's works counterbalances the excessive sensibility of her heroines and is her legacy to the Female Gothic tradition. See Ellis, "Can You Forgive Her? The Gothic Heroine and Her Critics," in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 461.

of maturation. As Anna Clark has argued, violence was not reserved for rape or seduction in the long eighteenth century, but was in fact built into heterosexual rituals of courtship, which can be understood in the period as the all-important developmental stage when a child transitions into an adult as marked by her marital status.[13] And this transition transfers power over an unmarried girl to a married woman from father to husband, indicated not only in the doctrine of coverture but also in the legal and cultural understandings of sexual violence as a property crime. Indeed, "the perception of the female body as property meant that any violation would be regarded as a crime against a patriarchal figure and not against the woman herself."[14] As an aggravated trespass or deprivation of a daughter's or wife's services, for example, a sexual assault case allowed for remuneration for a father or husband but provided no recourse for a sexually assaulted woman.[15] The traumatic maturation process the heroine experiences in the pages of the Female Gothic novel, marked and marred by repeated threats of sexual assault, reflects the reality of maturity for eighteenth-century women who were subject to literal and figurative forms of violence from both private and public spheres, from intimate relationships and the law. In the Female Gothic of Roche and Radcliffe, sexual violence fuses the ordinary and the traumatic and thus highlights the trauma of the ordinary for women of the long eighteenth century.[16]

In Lacan's schema of sexual difference, what he calls sexuation, the subject occupying the "male" position is stuck at the level of fantasy in his

13. See Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770–1845* (London: Pandora, 1987), 34. For the sexual violence built into eighteenth-century courtship rituals see also Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, vol. I, *Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 277, and Katie Barclay, "From Rape to Marriage: Questions of Consent in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Interpreting Sexual Violence*, 35–44.

14. Julie Gammon, "Researching Sexual Violence, 1660–1800: A Critical Analysis," *Interpreting Sexual Violence*, 15.

15. See Susan Staves, "British Seduced Maidens," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14, no. 2 (Winter 1980–1981), 109–34, 127–28. For a complex and rigorous account of early nineteenth-century legal interpretations of sexual violence as evidenced by women's petitions to the Foundling Hospital, see Kristen Renzi, "Archival Seduction: The Discursive Challenges of Reading Sex Crimes in the London Foundling Hospital Mothers' Petitions, 1807–1827," *Feminist Formations* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2018), 118–46. Significantly, Renzi notes the danger of erasing female sexuality, women's fully consensual desire for and participation in sex, not only in early nineteenth-century legal discourse, but also in current historical accounts of the period.

16. Lauren Berlant reconfigures the concept of trauma into terms of crisis and the ordinary, "a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming." While I retain the term trauma, my understanding and use of it is based on Berlant's emphasis on the ordinary. See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 10.

navigation of desire, while the "female" subject position offers an alternative, the possibility of "traversing the fantasy," or of accepting and incorporating the fundamental fantasy of desire both as fundamental and as fantasy.[17] According to Alenka Zupancic, "we cannot 'get beyond' fantasy;" rather, traversing the fantasy "is a step which can be taken only from 'inside' this fantasy."[18] Lacan's binary organization of sex is a fitting model for understanding the Female Gothic of the late eighteenth century as a gendered genre. As Thomas Laqueur has argued, this is the period in which the older, one-sex model of sexual difference was both supplemented and supplanted by the two-sex model, in which the female body is the "incommensurable opposite" of the male.[19] In fact, we might say that the psychoanalytic conceptions of sex and gender Lacan inherits and adapts from Freud originate in the eighteenth century's two-sex model, to which Gothic writers of the period were themselves responding.[20] If we map Lacanian fantasy and sexual difference onto the function of the supernatural of the eighteenth-century Gothic, then the Female Gothic is "female" because it traverses the supernatural as it deceptively employs supernatural trappings only to reveal that true horror lies not in fantasy, but in the reality that fantasy veils.[21] While Lacan and Laqueur use "sex"[22] to categorize male and female, following Andrew Elfenbein, I will use "gender" in my conceptualization and analysis of the long eighteenth century's Female Gothic.[23]

Though *Clermont* has not been remembered in the tradition of Gothic scholarship in the way that *Udolpho* (or any of Radcliffe's work) has, the novel is essential to understanding the Female Gothic as a gendered genre of horror. Known almost solely for its inclusion in Jane Austen's list of "horrid" novels in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), *Clermont* is typically mentioned only as a brief footnote to Roche's more successful *Children of the Abbey* (1796).[24] Recent critical work has begun to reclaim Roche as an important

17. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 27.

18. Zupancic, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (New York: Verso, 2000), 232.

19. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), viii.

20. Laqueur argues that Freudian sexuality incorporates both the one-sex and two-sex models. See *Making Sex*, 233.

21. For an alternative reading of female terror and male horror through Lacanian sexual difference see Ed Cameron, *The Psychopathology of the Gothic Romance: Perversion, Neuroses and Psychosis in Early Works of Gothic Fiction* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), p. 91–106. Cameron diagnoses female terror as a form of hysteria and male horror as a form of neurosis.

22. Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 10.

23. See Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 8.

24. Austen, *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sandition*, ed. James Kinsley and John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25.

figure in the formation of the Irish Gothic tradition, but the omission of *Clermont* needs remedying.[25] As Lisa Kröger has argued, the novel "is arguably the definitive text of the Gothic novel craze during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."[26] *Clermont* and *Udolpho* follow almost precisely the same plotline. Both Emily St. Aubert and Madeline Clermont must abruptly leave their childhood homes and experience a series of seemingly supernatural terrors as well as real threats of sexual violence from lecherous aristocrats. Both involve intricate plots with multiple narrators and timelines, and both reiterate the traumas that define female maturation. When she is left under the 'protection' of the evil Montoni after her parents' deaths, Emily is threatened with forced marriage to a man she does not love, believes she stumbles upon the corpse of her imprisoned aunt, engages in a battle of wills to keep her inheritance, and narrowly escapes the schemes of the conventional ghost who turns out to be a man hidden in her bedroom. Madeline witnesses the murder of her guardian at the hands of her son-in-law, is forced to hide from the same man (in the room that contains her guardian's corpse) for fear that he will discover her beauty, and then must escape his repeated threats to make her his mistress when he is indeed violently overcome by that beauty. These real horrors are compounded by countless encounters with seemingly supernatural phenomena, though, in the end, both narratives' conclusions unconvincingly gesture towards resolution.

Despite these consistencies in plot, style, and form, Radcliffe's is the novel that has endured. Natalie Schroeder has argued that this is because Roche's novel is an unsuccessful attempt at imitating *Udolpho*.[27] As she notes, "genuine horror in Madeline's experience is not simply an acci-

25. See Julia M. Wright, *Ireland, India and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75–83; Begoña Lasa Álvarez, "Regina Maria Roche, An Eighteenth-Century Irish Writer on the Continent and Overseas," in *Glocal Ireland: Current Perspectives on Literature and the Visual Arts*, ed. Marisol Morales Ladrón and Juan Francisco Elices Agudo (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 51–61; Jarlath Killeen, *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 7–19; and Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie, *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions, 1760–1890* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2–14.

26. Kröger, "Haunted Narratives: Women Writing the Ghostly in Early Gothic Fiction," in *The Ghostly and the Ghosted in Literature and Film: Spectral Identities*, ed. Lisa Kröger and Melanie R. Anderson (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2013), 3. More recently, Jenny DiPlacidi has treated *Clermont* in some depth in her study of Gothic incest as has Kathleen Hudson in her analysis of Gothic servants. See DiPlacidi, *Gothic Incest: Gender, Sexuality and Transgression* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2018), 203–8 and Hudson, *Servants and the Gothic, 1764–1831: A Half-Told Tale* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018), 133–37.

27. Schroeder, "*The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Clermont*: Radcliffean Encroachment on the Art of Regina Maria Roche," *Studies in the Novel* 12, no. 2 (1990), 131–43.

dental feature," but a constant presence throughout the novel.[28] This "genuine horror" is in fact *the* critical component of both Madeline's and Emily's traumatic experiences on the path from innocence to experience. Female maturation in these Female Gothic novels is a series of horrors occasioned by the reality of sexual violence, and the horrors of this reality are so consuming that the Gothic heroine must create and maintain the retroactive fantasy of a lost past of innocent perfection. As Lacan's horrifying Thing lies behind the veil of fantasy, which retroactively constructs the loss of some originary state of wholeness and fullness but ultimately obscures the origins of this loss in the fantasy itself, the Gothic heroine imagines her maturation as a lifting veil of innocence.[29] First there was perfect innocence, which is then lost when the veil is lifted and the horror of reality is revealed. But this veil of innocence ultimately serves the same function as the veil of fantasy. Horror and loss are coextensive: the heroine experiences loss when she faces the horror of decayed maturation, but that loss emerges only in and through the horror. The fantasy of loss thus soothes the horror of Female Gothic reality compounded by the horror that there is no outside or beyond that reality. The decay that comes with female maturity places the Female Gothic in the realm of inescapable gendered horror despite Radcliffe's own proclamation that terror, in opposition to horror, "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them."[30] The power of the Female Gothic as written by Radcliffe and Roche lies in its very femaleness as constructed by Lacan: in its ability to traverse the fantasy, to uncover the reality of eighteenth-century gender. For the Female Gothic heroine, true horror does not come from supernatural ghosts and demons but from individual men and the social structures they dominate. In its redistribution of horror into the realm of reality, the Female Gothic gives voice to the exceptionally unexceptional disempowerment women experienced at the hands of loved ones and the law alike in the long eighteenth century.

28. Schroeder, "*The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Clermont*," 135.

29. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has, of course, provided the most influential account of the importance of veils in the Gothic. See Sedgwick, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel," *PMLA* 96, no. 2 (1981). Following Andrew Warren's more recent work, I am interested in the metaphoric figuration of the Gothic veil. See Warren, "Designing and Undrawing Veils: Anxiety and Authorship in Radcliffe's *The Italian*," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 54, no. 4 (2013).

30. Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700–1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000): 163–70, 168.

"The Depravity of Mankind": The Female Gothic's Gendering of Genre

From the moment Madeline leaves the seemingly idyllic paradise of her childhood home to be educated by her father's mysterious friend the Countess de Bouville, she must confront the horror of female subjugation in the long eighteenth century. When Madeline expresses interest in the prototypical man of sentiment, Monsieur de Sevignie, the Countess warns her of the dangers men pose to unsuspecting young women. In response to this lesson in female education, Madeline "was shocked to hear of the depravity of mankind; and shuddered least she should find de Sevignie one of the worthless characters the Countess had described to her," and then in a state of "dejection" attempts to "dispel the horror such an idea gave rise to."[31] The Countess teaches Madeline the first horrifying rule of female maturity: men must be feared as potential sources of danger and, as the Countess implies, of sexual violence in particular. Madeline's experience is indicative of what Toni Bowers identifies as one of the central features of eighteenth-century fiction: the "attempt to draw stable distinctions among the categories rape, seduction, and courtship—to show a heroine learning to distinguish one man's violence from another's coercions and yet another's honorable suit."[32] Madeline responds both psychologically and physiologically to this warning of the depravity of mankind. She is not only left in a state of dejection and horror, she also shudders, a bodily response typically reserved in the Gothic for supernatural phenomena. In this case, however, it is not a ghost or demon that threatens violence and "ruin," but a living, breathing man.[33] And not just one man, but all of mankind. While "mankind" would typically refer to the universal humankind in the late eighteenth century, it seems, given the context of this moment, that the Countess is indeed referring specifically to men.

31. Regina Maria Roche, *Clermont*, ed. Natalie Schroeder (Chicago: Valancourt Books, 2006), 57. Subsequent references to this work are cited parenthetically in the text.

32. Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9. Tanya Evans argues that current criticism on sexual violence in courtship practices and in cases of rape and seduction in the long eighteenth century presumes women's middle-class status and does not fit with the experiences of working-class women. See Evans, "'Unfortunate Objects': London's Unmarried Mothers in the Eighteenth Century," *Gender and History* 17, no. 1 (2005), 127–53.

33. E. J. Clery has argued that Radcliffe's preoccupation with literal and figurative ruins reflects her "preferred narrative method," with its emphasis on "uncanny phenomena [that] exist in the present as signs and relics of a primordial crime" (*Women's Gothic*, 59). For readings of romantic ruins beyond the Gothic genre see Rei Terada, "Living a Ruined Life: De Quincy Beyond the Worst," *European Romantic Review* 20, no. 2 (2009), 177–86, and Jacques Khalip, "The Ruin of Things," *Romantic Circles Praxis Series: Romantic Frictions*, ed. Theresa M. Kelley (September 2011), romantic-circles.org/praxis/frictions/.

As she learns of the dangers that men threaten, Madeline experiences horror and dejection simultaneously. Dejection here can be understood as a form and definitive moment of loss in Madeline's maturation process. Horror clearly indicates fear: Madeline is afraid of the lesson she has learned about the depravity of mankind. Dejection is murkier. Why does the depravity of mankind inspire feelings of dejection? It would seem that the reality of maturity does not live up to the ideal that Madeline must have imagined for herself, and this indeed is a form of loss.[34] Horror and loss thus operate simultaneously at the outset of Madeline's path to a maturity built upon decay. And this dual operation will play a crucial role in constructing the retroactive fantasy of a veil of innocence protecting a state of perfection that precedes the trauma of female maturation.

In Lacan's formulas for sexuation, subjects called "men" and subjects called "women" assume sexual difference according to the structural positions with which they identify.[35] For Lacan, then, sex is not determined by anatomy or biology, but instead by psychic structures which negotiate the subject's relationship to the symbolic. The subject in the male position "is marked by the hole that leaves it no other path than that of phallic jouissance."[36] That "man" can only inhabit the path of phallic jouissance means he is stuck in fantasy, in a fantastic relation to his own and to others' desire. This fantasy is structured around the figure of the phallus, the paternal metaphor, as signifier of and for lack. As the master signifier which in fact has no signification in itself, the phallus functions as the hole marking the male subject and propels his fantastic desire to seek as its (impossible) end the filling of that hole with something beyond the inevitably frustrating limitations of the symbolic. This desire is based on and in fantasy because, as the phallus is the signifier that simultaneously escapes and organizes signification, the hole that phallic jouissance attempts to fill is the constitutive feature of all symbolic subjects, whether designated male or female. The constitutive hole of subjectivity can never be filled because there is no exception to the limit of the symbolic. The "woman," though she is "subjugated to the Other, just as much as man," nevertheless has a different relationship than man to the Other, to her symbolic subjection, and, therefore, has a different relationship to fantasy.[37] The woman has the capacity to

34. For a reading of melancholic loss in romantic literary texts through psychoanalytic and queer theory, see Nowell Marshall, *Romanticism, Gender, and Violence: Blake to George Sodini* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013).

35. Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 63, 57.

36. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972–73 (Encore)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 8.

37. Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 89. For an overview of feminist responses to Lacan's vi-

see the consistency of the Other as fantasy, or, in Lacan's words, that there is no "Other of the Other."[38] There is no other or Other that can fill the hole that gives shape to the symbolic subject and to the symbolic itself. According to Slavoj Žižek, the woman "sees through the fascinating presence of the Phallus [and] is able to discern in it the filler of the inconsistency of the Other."[39] That is, the woman sees the phallus as signifier, as absence, rather than as a positive presence and also sees the finite field of the symbolic as infinite in itself. She does not see past or beyond the fantasy, but into the fantasy through fantasy.

When Madeline shudders at the depravity of mankind, she is enacting the Female Gothic's gendered ability to reveal that there is no Other of the Other. Placed in the position of the woman in Lacan's organization of sexual difference, the Female Gothic demonstrates that, for women, there is no outside or beyond a social world dominated by men. And, moreover, there is nothing outside or beyond that is more frightening than that world itself. With the absence of the supernatural and the monstrous of other Gothic works, the Female Gothic is left with the presence of mere reality, as mundane as it is violent for women in the long eighteenth century.[40] The gendered genre sees through, in Žižek's words, the "fascinating presence" of the supernatural and shows that the supernatural ultimately masks that which is truly horrifying to eighteenth-century women: reality.[41] When Emily St. Aubert finally escapes from the seemingly supernatural mysteries of Udolpho, she laments that "I am lately come from a place of

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sion of feminine sexuality see Suzanne Barnard's introduction to *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 1–20. For readings of Lacanian femininity with a focus on its relationship to fantasy see Willy Apollon, "Four Seasons in Femininity or *Four Men in a Woman's Life*," *Topoi* 12, no. 2 (1993); Barnard, "Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance," *Reading Seminar XX*, 171–85; Kirsten Campbell, "Political Encounters: Feminism and Lacanian Psychoanalysis," in *Jacques Lacan: Between Psychoanalysis and Politics*, ed. Samo Tomsic and Andreja Zevnik (New York: Routledge, 2016), 233–52; and Alenka Zupancic, *What IS Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 2017), 5–19.

38. Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire," *Écrits*, 687.

39. Žižek, "Woman is One of the Names-of-the-Father, or How Not to Misread Lacan's Formulas of Sexuation," *Lacanian Ink* 10 (1995).

40. E. J. Clery has argued that the "heroine-centered" plots of the Female Gothic trace a "history of woman" based on legal and economic disempowerment ("The Politics of the Gothic Heroine," in *Reviewing Romanticism*, ed. Philip W. Martin and Robin Jarvis [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992], 71).

41. Caroline Jackson-Houlston understands the romance genre as organized around sexual violence. She argues that the linking of sex and violence in Walter Scott's rendering of the genre serves as an interrogation of gender conventions. See Jackson-Houlston, *Gendering Walter Scott: Sex, Violence, and Romantic Period Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

wonders, but unluckily since I left it, I have heard almost all of them explained."[42] Here Emily demonstrates that a supernatural explanation for the unexplained would be far preferable to the explained supernatural. Along with *Clermont*'s Madeline, Emily has learned of the depravity of mankind, which, unlike the castle, she cannot escape. She has been forced to see through the fascinating presence of the supernatural and is left only with the brute reality that women's maturity consists of a series of horrifying lessons and tests in the violence of which powerful men are capable. In this way, Roche and Radcliffe's Female Gothic takes the same function as "woman" in Lacan's organization of sexual difference.

The accumulation of horrifying lessons Madeline must learn about eighteenth-century gender takes its toll on her body and mind, leading to a decayed maturity. Unlike the heroine of romance who grows into her beauty as she progresses through trials and errors, when Madeline returns to her father's home after narrowly escaping the clutches of the Countess's son-in-law, "the alteration in her looks seemed to strike him to the very heart: the rose that had bloomed upon her cheek when they parted, the luster that had brightened her eye was fled, and sadness had taken entire possession of her" (211). The "fair promise of maturity seemed now utterly at an end" (212) as Madeline appears "sinking beneath a grief which seems bending her gentle head to swift decay" (213). The painful lessons in the horrifying reality of female subjectivity that Madeline experiences open her path to maturity with a premature ending. Maturity is no longer a fair promise, but a curse that seems to doom Madeline's future before it has properly begun. Madeline has lost what she has yet to have. The bloom and luster of childhood indicated an equally promising maturity, which becomes a lost promise once she learns of the horrors of reality for women in the long eighteenth century. Madeline's "progress" is a premature process of bodily and mental decay, which are not the natural effects of age, but the forced effects of trauma in what is supposed to be the bloom of young adulthood.[43] Further, Madeline's return to her father's home, to the space that represents her childhood, is a regression in the stages of her development.[44] The heroine is not supposed to return to her childhood home until

42. Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 491. Subsequent references to this work are cited parenthetically in the text.

43. For readings of trauma in the Female Gothic see Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 108, and Carol Margaret Davison, "'There's No Place Like Home?': Nostalgia, Perversion, and Trauma in the Female Gothic," in *Nostalgia or Perversion?: Gothic Rewriting from the Eighteenth Century Until the Present Day*, ed. Isabella van Elferen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

44. Kate Ferguson Ellis has influentially read the Gothic castle as a figure for late

she has overcome adversity and married her love interest, when she is properly equipped to instruct future generations on the domestic rewards that come from adversity. However, Madeline's return home is premature. Madeline would rather confine herself to this safe space as she "shrink[s] from the idea of fulfilling the claims of society" (216), and longs to absent herself from "a world where [she] experienced little else than distress and danger" (215). Upon her premature return, Madeline's childhood home serves as a contrast to a dangerous and distressing world that seems to have alienated her from the bloom and luster of innocence, leaving Madeline with the grief of decayed maturity. Fulfilling the claims of society means not only learning of the gendered horrors that result from the depravity of mankind, but, more significantly, accepting mankind's depravity as the organizing feature of that society. Because the danger and distress of society is so horrifying, Madeline experiences her return home as a retreat behind the veil of innocence. In this retreat occasioned by the horrors of the social, rather than the supernatural, Roche's Female Gothic insists along with Lacan that there is no Other of the Other; it exposes at once the consistent inconsistencies of the social for eighteenth-century women and, ultimately, the impossibility of escaping those inconsistencies despite the heroine's best efforts.

Emily also endures an accumulation of gendered horrors throughout *Udolpho*, and thus experiences maturation as a form of trauma. While Madeline's progressive decay manifests primarily in her body, Emily's occurs internally, threatening her senses and reason. Not only are her senses "dead" (224) to the landscape, cutting her off from fortifying moral lessons in sublimity, but "her mind became haunted by the most dismal images, such as her long anxiety . . . suggested" (329). Emily's mind has turned into a supernatural scene of horror from which she cannot escape. She is imprisoned in the moldering Gothic walls of Udolpho, but her mind, too, becomes a crumbling prison that threatens its own destruction as she internalizes the horrifying realities of female maturity. One peculiar effect of her maturation is Emily's increased propensity for superstition. "Long suffering had made her spirits peculiarly sensible to terror, and liable to be affected by the illusions of superstition" (330); and, with her "faculties overstrained by suffering . . . [the] influence of superstition now gained on the weakness of her long-harassed mind" (355). The effect of long suffering is not a matured sense of moral fortitude, but instead a "regressive" sense of the fantastic.[45] Faced with very real threats of sexual violence, fear of the supernatural

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eighteenth-century concerns about "the home." See Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), ix–xvi.

45. This regressive sense of superstition is doubly "infantile;" it signals both the infancy of

seems less threatening for Emily. Because her reality is filled with gendered horror, Emily displaces her fear onto the supernatural. Even though superstition is inimical to Emily's enlightened sensibility, it is more palatable than fully acknowledging the horrors of reality for eighteenth-century women.[46]

By attributing danger to supernatural forces instead of to the violence and horror that come from human men, Emily demonstrates the Female Gothic's traversing of fantasy as a uniquely female function within the Lacanian schema for sexual difference. By retreating into the relative comfort of the supernatural as separate and indeed safe from the reality of male violence, Emily reveals that the supernatural functions as a fantastic veil of innocence in the Female Gothic. Emily prefers to retreat behind that veil of innocence rather than to face the horror that lies beyond the veil and, in so doing, unveils the magnitude of that horror, to which supernatural terror pales in comparison. Radcliffe's Female Gothic looks into fantasy through fantasy in its female structure; it evokes the supernatural to explain that the source of women's fear does *not* lie in any supernatural realm beyond their everyday realities. And when these everyday realities become too traumatic to bear, as Emily indicates in her preference for the supernatural over the "rational," the result is pure fantasy. In the Female Gothic, fantasy operates, then, on two levels: the level of form and the level of narrative. One of the distinct formal features of Radcliffe's and Roche's Female Gothic is the use of the supernatural explained to unveil the fantasy that female horror lies anywhere outside reality. However, *within* their Female Gothic narratives, the process of maturation—the laying bare of reality's horrors—is so traumatizing that the veil of fantasy, which operates for the Gothic heroine as a veil of innocence, is, as in Lacan's structure

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society, figured in the Catholic feudal past, and the infancy of the individual. For a Žižekian account of the Catholic superstition of the historical past see Robert Miles, "Abjection, Nationalism, and the Gothic," in *The Gothic*, ed. Fred Botting (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001) 56–59. For the (anxious) associations of childhood with superstition see Ann Wierda Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 172–74. Alternatively, Terry Castle makes the argument that Emily's sense of the fantastic is not, as I have argued, indicative of a form of regression, but is instead a marker of her refined sensibility, which is reflective of the larger romantic tendency to populate the mind with the supernatural ghosts of those people and places that have been lost. See Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 122–39.

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

of the symbolic, essential for navigating female maturity. In the words of Anne Williams, these formal and narrative strategies "constitute a Copernican revolution in Gothic narrative technique" and, more specifically, a revolution in women's writing.[47]

"An 'Irreal' Nightmarish Universe:" The Veil of Innocence as Retroactive Fantasy

For both Emily and Madeline, the veil of innocence turns out to be a retroactive fantasy constructed to cope with the traumas of eighteenth-century maturation as reimagined in the Female Gothic. The safety and protection of a childhood innocence free from the horrors of reality for women is only experienced simultaneously with, not prior to, the horror.[48] Before journeying outside their childhood homes on the path to maturity, Madeline and Emily are exposed to secrets, deception, and distress stemming not from a social world beyond the home, but from within the family itself.[49] Madeline spends her childhood witnessing her father's dejection, attempting to soothe his pain, while she has no sense of where this pain originates. Emily discovers her father gazing upon a mysterious set of papers and a miniature portrait of a woman who is not her mother with a "wild expression, that partook more of horror than of any other character" (26). On his deathbed, St. Aubert leaves Emily with an injunction to burn without ever reading these secretive documents that shroud her identity, history, and family in mystery. Innocence is not a state of blissful ignorance, but instead haunted by secrets of the past; it is a state of anxious unknowing.

In the opening paragraphs of *Clermont*, the narrator explains that Madeline "never received any satisfactory answer" when she asks her father why "they had no relatives, no friends, in that great world from which they were secluded" (3). From the narrative's introduction, Madeline is aware that there is something missing from her life. She knows that others have

47. Williams, "Wicked Women," in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 98.

48. In his study of competing conceptions of romantic childhood, Alan Richardson, citing Jacqueline Rose, argues that "the fiction of childhood innocence [is] a function of 'adult desire,' which provides an imaginary space for the enactment of our own anxieties" ("Romanticism and the End of Childhood," in *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations*, ed. James Holt McGavran, Jr. [Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999], 37). This act of turning adult anxieties into fantasies of childhood is what I am calling retroactive fantasy.

49. For accounts of the complexities of the Gothic family see Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of the Gothic* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 1–26 and 87–98; and Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 388–99.

relatives and friends, though she does not, and that there is a world outside of the secluded space of her childhood home. Moreover, that outside world from which Madeline is excluded is "great," which implies that it is not only vast and unknown but also that it is enticing, that there is at least a part of her that longs to be part of that world. When Clermont responds to Madeline's inquiries with "agitation," her fears that her father's past is a painful one are confirmed. And though this confirmation "redoubled her attention, trusting that, if she could not obliterate, she might at least soften their remembrance," the narrator laments that "to do so in reality, was, alas! beyond her power" (4). Madeline is set up to fail from the beginning. She takes on a task for which she is not equipped, and so she must face not only her father's sadness, not only her own mysterious family origin, but also the disappointment that, no matter how hard she tries, she cannot do anything to relieve Clermont's suffering. As a dutiful, sentimental daughter, she is both a blessing and a curse to Clermont, whose dejection "sometimes so far overcame him, as to render him unable to bear even the society of his daughter, his only earthly comfort" (4). Madeline's efforts are not only ineffectual, they at times compound Clermont's suffering and make her presence unbearable. This childhood, haunted by secrets, laden with palpable sorrow, strung together by a series of disappointed efforts, is not one of simplicity and innocence but is instead a burden, a weight Madeline must carry before she ever experiences the horrors of that "great world" she once imagined.

Yet, when Madeline returns to her childhood home and then must face her impending return to the outside world, she extols its peace and tranquility: "'Oh! Scenes dear and congenial to my soul, had I never left you I had never known the reality of falsehood, never been truly unhappy'" (216). Madeline is clearly revising the reality of her burdensome childhood when she imagines that falsehoods and unhappiness exist only in the world outside her childhood home. Her childhood and her home become markers of a lost past, of a safe time and space in which she was sheltered from a social world filled, as she has learned in her experience of maturation, with nothing but horrifying distress and danger at the hands of sexually violent men. Because these lessons in the depravity of mankind have instilled a constitutive sense of horror from which Madeline cannot escape, fantasy goes to work on the past. Though her childhood was not prior to, but instead defined by falsehoods and unhappiness, the horror of Madeline's maturation process inspires a sense of loss for a state of innocent perfection which exists only in fantasy.

As Madeline imagines her childhood protected by a veil of innocence before being lifted to reveal the trauma of female maturation, Lacan describes the Thing as something "fundamentally veiled . . . it always presents

itself as a veiled entity" (118). Further, the Thing is "the prehistoric, unforgettable Other, that later no one will ever reach," though the symbolic subject nevertheless "aims for the experience of satisfaction to reproduce the initial state" (54). Here Lacan adds a historical dimension to the Thing by placing it in some prehistoric, initial state which might be reproduced, though, ultimately, it is unreachable. At the same time, the prehistoric is outside of history; it is prior to time and therefore prior to remembering and forgetting. What is unforgettable, then, is the absence of this initial state of perfection. This absence, however, is too horrifying to register consciously, and so a veil of fantasy must cover the absent Thing. The veil creates an illusion of a presence behind it, which supports the fantasy of an initial state which has subsequently been lost. But when the veil of fantasy is lifted, we are reminded of the absence behind the veil, that the initial state has no existence other than as a retroactive fantasy constructed from within the confines of the symbolic. While Aaron Schuster warns that the Thing's "emptiness should not be thought of in terms of deprivation or loss," I would argue that its absent presence behind the veil of fantasy places the Thing in an important relationship to loss, though the Thing itself is not any positive object which has been lost and might be recouped.[50] Indeed, loss and fantasy are inextricably linked: the fantasy of loss masks the horror of the Thing as a "hole in representation," which ultimately threatens the loss of fantasy.[51] Fantasy is an essential feature of symbolic existence; without it, we are, according to Žižek, made to see "reality as an 'irreal' nightmarish universe . . . [which] is not 'pure fantasy' but, on the contrary, *that which remains of reality after reality is deprived of its support in fantasy*."[52] In other words, the real that is not real and the Thing that does not exist are laid bare in their emptiness without the support of fantasy and thus take on all the properties of Gothic horror. The traumatic void that is the Thing at the center of the real annihilates order, meaning, and being. As the iconic veil that covers the waxed figure of death in *Udolpho* ultimately covers, in Schuster's words, a "hole in representation," so does the Female Gothic's veil of innocence function as a veil of fantasy that protects the heroine from the double horror of real sexual violence and the "'irreal' nightmarish universe" of the Thing.[53]

As the veiled Thing is prehistoric, so Madeline's lost past of innocence is

50. Schuster, *The Trouble with Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 2016), 141.

51. Schuster, *The Trouble with Pleasure*, 141.

52. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 66.

53. David Sigler reads the (un)veiling of the waxed figure in *Udolpho* as a Lacanian "parable for sexual enjoyment." See Sigler, *Sexual Enjoyment in British Romanticism: Gender and Psychoanalysis, 1753–1835* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 49–56.

without time and purely within fantasy. The fantastic veil of innocence covers the absence of this initial state that has been lost on the path to maturity and, in the covering of this absence, makes bearable the horror of eighteenth-century gender for women. Though Madeline's retroactive construction of a lost past of innocence is a fantasy, it is, as Lacan says of the Thing, "not nothing, but literally is not" (63). Her fantasy has no material reality, no point of reference, but nevertheless has a spectral substance in its immateriality. The fantastic veil of innocence that covers the absence of an innocent childhood past is something strange to, but at the heart of Madeline; it is strange because it is not "real," but at Madeline's heart *because* it is not real, because its existence in fantasy makes the horror of reality in the present—and anticipation of the future—tolerable.[54] Though it has never been lost, when Madeline returns to her father's home, her innocent childhood is "refound"; "that it was lost is a consequence of that—but after the fact" (118). While Madeline experiences this return as a refinding of something lost, its loss is a consequence of the reality that it has never been lost, that there never was a state of innocent perfection from which she has been estranged in her maturation process. She is not refinding something that has been lost, but finding a fantasy that constructs this finding as a refinding.

Within Lacan's symbolic structure, the absent abyss that is the Thing at the center of the real must be veiled by fantasy. As the not-nothing in the order of the real that literally is not, the Thing, if unveiled, would inspire such horror that symbolic meaning would disintegrate and leave nothing upon which to structure subjectivity. However, because the Thing *is* veiled in fantasy, there remains a drive beyond desire to circle around, without directly uncovering, the horrifying absence behind the veil. This encircling of horror is, according to Zupancic, "the strategy of avoiding the Thing [*das Ding*], the death drive in its 'pure state.'"[55] Instead of understanding this attraction and repulsion as an enactment of the Kantian sublime, as Zupancic does, within the context of the Female Gothic of Roche and Radcliffe, this simultaneous process occurs in the domain of pure horror devoid of painful pleasure.[56] The trauma of female maturation is a form of horror that Madeline attempts to escape by retreating to her childhood home, retroactively constructed as a safe space free from the outside world

54. Lacan explains that the Thing's existence in fantasy, or fantastic existence, is "something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me." See Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 71. There is something uncanny about the Thing, which is both familiar and alien.

55. Zupancic, *Ethics of the Real*, 155. For another reading of the Thing in relation to Lacanian drives see Wolf, *Lacanian Coordinates*, 150–55.

56. For the distinctions between sublime terror and pure horror in the Gothic see Botting, *Gothic* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 71–80.

which has exposed her to the frightening realities of gender in the long eighteenth century. The fantasy construction is produced through horror and felt as a form of loss, though the loss is a fantasy that emerges coextensively with Madeline's gendered horror. Though the loss is fantastic, it is a form of protection against another horrifying reality: there is nothing and no Thing behind the veil of innocence. Horror incites a fantasy of loss, which masks the horrifying absence of anything outside or beyond horror itself. Madeline's drive to re-find something that is nothing, her lost innocence that exists only in fantasy, then becomes a suicide mission, for finding that nothing would disintegrate the fantasy fundamental to sustaining herself in a world of distress and danger. Fantasy's intervention thus ensures that the double horror—the horror from reality and the horror that fantasy masks—threatening the Gothic heroine with dissolution is only ever encircled, strategically avoided in Zupancic's formulation, and never fully unveiled.

Emily's experiences of superstition in *Udolpho* encircle the horror of eighteenth-century female maturity as well. Superstition contains a sense of imaginative freedom, an other-worldly form of consolation, a way of retreating into a safe space of innocence, in the way that Madeline physically returns to her childhood home. In Emily's distress over the imprisonment of Madame Montoni, she imagines that the mysterious music she hears (which we eventually learn comes from Du Pont) is the voice of St. Aubert, reaching from beyond the grave to "inspire her with comfort and confidence" (331). In this way, superstition functions as a form of solace in the midst of deep pain and suffering. As Diane Long Hoeveler notes, the Gothic reveals a deep ambivalence about the historical progress of enlightenment, what she terms the "secularizing of the uncanny, a way of alternately valorizing and at the same time slandering the realms of the supernatural."[57] Just as Emily prefers to attribute her fears to superstition and the supernatural, when in fact they are very much founded in the real threats of sexual violence, she similarly clings to the superstitious belief that her dead father is providing much-needed assurance that she can in fact withstand the seemingly endless tests to her moral fortitude.[58] Early in the novel, St. Aubert instructs Emily on the dangers of indulging in her too-

57. Hoeveler, *Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary, 1780–1820* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), xv.

58. Markman Ellis argues that the terrors in Radcliffe's work are imaginary and aimed at reform in contrast to the novels of Mary Wollstonecraft, who uses real terror for revolutionary aims. See Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 71. Carole Margaret Davison similarly reads Wollstonecraft's Female Gothic as a more incisive and explicit "indictment of patriarchy" than can be found in Radcliffe's. See Davison, *Gothic Literature*, 147–49.

keen sensibility, essentially teaching her the gendered lessons of sensibility in the late eighteenth century: a woman must reason to feel as she must feel to reason; for women, feeling and reason are always in the service of the other. When Emily misperceives the music as the supernatural presence of her father, then, she is, in Hoeveler's words, alternately "valorizing" and "slandering" superstition, which simultaneously veils and unveils the horror of reality. Though we know that St. Aubert taught Emily early in life to curb her overactive sensibility, to temper sentiment with reason, it would appear here that superstition is not a childish, innate quality which Emily must overcome in her maturation process; it is instead something she acquires in this very process.

So, when the Gothic heroine experiences superstition, she is seemingly refinding her immature youth, but like the never-lost Thing, Emily's superstition is not something that has been lost and then refound; it is in fact found on her path to maturation and is then displaced onto her retroactively-constructed childhood past. While it would seem that Emily experiences a sense of loss when she experiences superstition, it is not a sense of loss for her simple and innocent past, but instead a loss of the simple and innocent past that never existed except in the work of fantasy.[59] Emily's superstition protects her from the double horror that comes from the reality of her maturity and from her never-possessed and never-lost innocent childhood and, therefore, operates as its own form of fantasy. The fantasy of superstition, or the superstition of fantasy, is Emily's strategy of avoiding the horrifying emptiness of the Thing. Emily's fantasy captures the shape-shifting nature of fantasy itself as it operates throughout the Female Gothic. Radcliffe evokes the fantastic supernatural to lay bare the horrors of reality for eighteenth-century women, to show the limitations of the supernatural when it comes to depicting gender in the period. Indeed, according to Eugenia C. DeLamotte, "social forces [are] so vast and impersonal that they seem to have supernatural strength."[60] This uniquely feminine strategy within Lacan's understanding of sexual difference, however, also demonstrates the essential operation of fantasy for the Gothic heroine to maintain her distance from annihilating horror.

"Mingled emotions of pain and pleasure": The Artifice of Order Restored

Roche and Radcliffe resolve, or attempt to resolve, their heroines' traumatic maturation processes with compensatory conclusions, which promise

59. Margarita Georgieva claims, on the contrary, that "growing up in the Radcliffean context is depicted in a positive light" (*The Gothic Child* [London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013], 34).

60. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17.

domestic felicity as the reward for their long suffering. But as Christine Berthin notes of Gothic conclusions, "when order is restored it is a mimicry, a pure artifice, and its status is as fragile as that of the supernatural world of terror and fear."[61] Though they both attempt to explain away the horrors that have structured their heroines' maturation processes, Roche and Radcliffe also call attention to the mimicry and artifice of their conclusions. The narratives' attempts to compensate for the traumas of female maturity function as innovations on the trope of the explained supernatural, or the rational (and retroactive) explanation for seemingly supernatural events. As Roche's and Radcliffe's Female Gothic employs the fantasy of the supernatural to uncover the horrors of reality for women in the long eighteenth century, their narratives' compensatory conclusions gesture towards resolution only to disclose the fantasy behind that gesture. In the way that their Gothic heroines retroactively construct fantastic veils of innocence to protect their childhoods, which ultimately veil the reality that those pasts exist only in fantasy, the promises of restitution for gendered trauma only compound the horrors that make restitution impossible. These conclusions, then, play a crucial role in building the uniquely female form of these Gothic works as they traverse the fantasy of loss and recovery: they invoke the fantasy to disclose the fantasy *as fantasy*.

Clermont's conclusion seems to present a happily-ever-after for all its deserving characters: all secrets are unveiled, order is restored, consanguineal families are reunited, and conjugal families are formed. After Madeline's union with de Sevignie, the two make a home of the Chateau de Valdore, which seems a peculiar choice given that the chateau is the first of three houses of horror Madeline encounters in her maturation process. Neither Madeline nor de Sevignie can enter the chateau "without mingled emotions of pain and pleasure" (377). That Madeline would feel pain upon returning to the space in which she was threatened with sexual violence and witnessed murder is natural, though it is less convincing that this pain would be mingled with pleasure. While Kröger claims that ultimately "Madeline is able to 'un-ghost' herself and take control of both her body and future," this return to a space of secrets, violence, and murder concludes the narrative not with a new beginning, but with a set-up for a repetition of the past: the ghosts of the past will continue to haunt the future.[62] The lessons in horror Madeline learns about eighteenth-century gender cannot be unlearned and the trauma of these lessons, while unacknowl-

61. Berthin, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 65.

62. Kröger, "Haunted Narratives," 8. Daniel Cottom similarly argues that "the heroine must be victimized but made transcendent through this victimization" in Radcliffe's work (*The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985], 50).

edged, precludes the possibility for the happy ending toward which Roche seems to ambivalently gesture. This ambivalent conclusion enacts the trauma of female maturation in the long eighteenth century, which is not a form of progress, but structured instead upon a fantastic temporality of regression, anticipation, and horrifying decay. Further, the ghosts of the past that promise to haunt Madeline's future give spectral shape to the lack of a happy ending and fill it with the horror of the Thing, of emptiness. The promised happy ending offers a sublime mingling of pleasure and pain, but this promise veils the domain of horror within which Roche's Female Gothic operates. The conclusion's attraction and repulsion to the happy ending as mask of, and for horror takes the route of the drive, which encircles the absent Thing only to strategically miss its empty center.

Radcliffe makes a concerted effort to highlight the joyous promises offered in *Udolpho*'s conclusion only to make visible the fantasy of a happily-ever-after that transcends the traumas of female maturation. Unlike Madeline and de Sevignie, Emily and Valancourt do not return to their houses of horror after their union, but instead to Emily's pastoral childhood home, La Vallée. While Madeline prematurely returned to her childhood home on her regressive path to maturity, it would seem that Emily returns home at just the right moment.[63] Indeed, the narrator's hyperbolized conclusion promises that "innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!" (672). All wrongs are righted, justice is served, and no matter what traumas one experiences, innocence is restored. However, the marriage scene directly preceding this stale moral lesson reveals that this promise of innocence restored is a form of fantasy. Not only is the marriage celebrated with "ancient baronial magnificence," which is in itself curious considering Emily's middle-class taste for the simple and understated, but the wedding feast is surrounded by historical tapestries depicting Charlemagne's martial exploits and battles. While the narrator seems to indicate that Emily's innocence can and will be restored, this happy ending is shadowed by the menacing tapestries of the barbarous past, which involves the violence of war and the infantile belief in the supernatural. In fact, the servant Annette "almost fancied herself in an enchanted palace, and declared, that she had not met with any place, which charmed her so much, since she read the fairy

63. For Angela Wright, the "utopian pastoral serenity" offered in Radcliffe's conclusions is the heroine's reward for navigating the perilous path to "self-love" (*Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764–1820: The Import of Terror* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 104). For the significance of Radcliffe's conclusions see also James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 107–8, and Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 76–77.

tales" (671). Like a fairy tale, Radcliffe's Female Gothic novel is a work of fantasy, one which uses fantasy to foreclose the possibility of a happy ending that promises to erase the traumas of female maturation in the long eighteenth century.

Carol Margaret Davison has critiqued earlier interpretations of the Female Gothic heroine as "passive victim" for their failure "to recognize any developing agency, autonomy or sense of identity in the heroines of these works."[64] I have argued that the Female Gothic of Roche and Radcliffe stages female maturation as a series of traumas that preclude the heroine from maintaining a stable identity beyond fantasy engendered by the horrors that organize worlds dominated by men. Within the Lacanian formulation for sexual difference, the Female Gothic heroine is stuck in fantasy. This emphasis on the trauma, horror, and fantasy that structure the decay of female maturity runs the risk of repeating the mistakes to which Davison has helpfully and importantly called attention. However, in the hands of Roche and Radcliffe, the Female Gothic dramatizes the abject horrors of eighteenth-century gender in a way that gives voice to women's pain and suffering; it speaks the truth of horror and the horror of truth. These female writers gender the Gothic genre to show precisely that women *do not* have agency or autonomy in their public or private lives. Their emphasis on sexual violence as the central feature of female development reflects the horrors that women in the long eighteenth century experienced from individual men and from the legal system that, indeed, was based on their "civil death," on the absence of women's agency or autonomy in either "ordinary" or "traumatic" circumstances.[65] Lacan's model of sexuation and figuration of the horrifying Thing perhaps paradoxically provides frameworks for understanding the gendering of the Female Gothic genre as voicing the ordinary trauma of eighteenth-century gender to assert a measure of agency and autonomy that did not exist in legal fact. The Lacanian Thing is horrifying because it does not actually exist behind the veil of fantasy in the way that women did not exist in the eyes of the law despite its policing of their bodies and lives in the long eighteenth century. Roche's and Radcliffe's Female Gothic exposes this horrifying reality through its examination of fantasy and loss and, in so doing, turns the genre into a record of women's history.

By reclaiming and reappropriating Female Gothic, we can reimagine

64. Davison, *Gothic Literature*, 94. Davison is responding particularly to Michelle Massé's reading of trauma in the Female Gothic as a "prohibition of female autonomy" (*In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992], 12).

65. Diana Wallace, "'The Haunting Idea': Female Gothic Metaphors and Feminist Theory," in *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, ed. Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 31.

critical approaches to Gothic writing that take gender as their primary object of inquiry. We can reinvest the term with new meanings and with new objectives, which do not take Ann Radcliffe as the "mother" of the genre or assume that "female" designates any natural or intrinsic set of experiences and features. This means that we must look beyond Radcliffe to formulate and understand the complex workings of gender in the pages of the Gothic.[66] We must also construct careful literary histories of the long eighteenth century that ground our readings in the material realities of the period, while nuancing these histories with all the conceptual and theoretical tools available in our arsenals. Among these tools, Lacanian psychoanalysis still suffers from charges of anachronism and ahistoricism, despite a growing body of work that proves its relevance for studies in romanticism and its capacity to coexist with rigorous historical inquiry.[67] Within the field of Female Gothic studies, Diana Wallace has set the precedent for work that shows how psychoanalysis, "rather than being antithetical to history, offers an alternative way of thinking" and "can offer us a metahistorical theorization of women's exclusions from history."[68] Following these critical leads, this essay has attempted to demonstrate that interrogating gender in the Gothic using psychoanalysis and historical methods can not only reinvigorate scholarship on the eighteenth-century Female Gothic, but can also resituate our understanding of the relationships between gender, power, and violence that haunt us today.

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66. Kathleen Hudson, ed., *Women's Authorship and the Early Gothic* (forthcoming from University of Wales Press) brings together works that consider Gothic writing by women other than Radcliffe, and also beyond the now-canonical Clara Reeve and Charlotte Dacre.

67. For the most recent example of this work, see *Lacan and Romanticism*, ed. Daniela Garofalo and David Sigler (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019).

68. Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories*, 21–22.

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