

HAUNTED NARRATIVES: THE AFTERLIFE OF GOTHIC AESTHETICS IN  
CONTEMPORARY TRANSATLANTIC WOMEN'S FICTION

Jameela F. Dallis

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill  
2015

Approved by:

Minrose Gwin

Shayne A. Legassie

James Coleman

María DeGuzmán

Ruth Salvaggio

© 2016  
Jameela F. Dallis  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

Jameela F. Dallis: Haunted Narratives: The Afterlife of Gothic Aesthetics in Contemporary Transatlantic Women's Fiction  
(Under the direction of Minrose Gwin and Shayne A. Legassie)

My dissertation examines the afterlife of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic aesthetics in twentieth and twenty-first century texts by women. Through close readings and attention to aesthetics and conventions that govern the Gothic, I excavate connections across nation, race, and historical period to engage critically with Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, 1959; Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love," 1979; Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 1996; and Toni Morrison's *Love*, 2003. These authors consciously employ such aesthetics to highlight and critique the power of patriarchy and imperialism, the continued exclusion of others and othered ways of knowing, loving, and being, and the consequences of oppressing, ignoring, or rebuking these peoples, realities, and systems of meaning. Such injustices bear evidence to the effects of transatlantic commerce fueled by the slave trade and the appropriation and conquering of lands and peoples that still exert a powerful oppressive force over contemporary era peoples, especially women and social minorities. This oppression occurs in ways similar to the perils endured by early Gothic characters. Yet, that subjugating power is not all-consuming. Despite the cruelty and violence, trampled aspirations, and tragic finales prevalent in Gothic narratives, another reality remains: women authors still use the Gothic form to push for a reality where women and other

minorities can be treated fairly and achieve a state of being that is the result of their own fashioning. The Gothic is therefore irrevocably chained to issues of gender and sexuality.

Jackson, Carter, Mootoo, and Morrison are a diverse group of writers. Though the texts I examine are related thematically as they all bear evidence of Gothic conventions, the authors' styles, socio-historical backgrounds, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and professional affiliations are relatively disparate. Yet, taken together, their texts attest to the afterlife of the Gothic—the persistence of the genre's defining characteristics into our contemporary period. These authors engage purposefully with less-acknowledged, non-rational truths that disrupt the grand narrative of positivism and create space for transformation. Finally, my comparative approach situates these authors within transnational, transhistorical, and intercultural contexts and opens up new ways of reading their texts.

*For my parents, Brenda Fay Dallis and Herbert Dallis,  
and Ziggy Stardust, my constant companion.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped me shape this dissertation into the document it is today. I would like to thank my directors, Minrose Gwin and Shayne Legassie. Minrose has believed in me and my scholarship from the day we met in Albuquerque, NM in December 2007. She has been a professor, mentor, and so much more to me over the years. I thank her for suggesting the title, “Haunted Narratives: The Afterlife of Gothic Aesthetics,” and for introducing me to *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Minrose has also been an excellent, patient editor. Shayne has consistently asked me difficult questions that have helped me push my analysis further. I thank him for helping me reevaluate the use of French in Angela Carter’s short story, “The Lady of the House of Love.” I am happy that I emailed him for permission to join his CMPL 452 course when he was brand new to UNC in August 2009.

I thank my committee members, James Coleman, María DeGuzmán, and Ruth Salvaggio. From impromptu office and hallway conversations to reading and commenting on early chapter drafts, they have all been wonderful sources of inspiration, support, and encouragement. I am so very happy to have asked them to be a part of my exam and dissertation committees.

I thank my colleague, friend, and mentor Kelly Bezio. I thank my dear friend Heather Branstetter for always being a source of positivity, for reading materials at the

last minute, conducting mock interviews with me, and for so much more. I give great thanks to Ilouise Bradford, one of my best and dearest friends, for being supportive in so many different ways including getting me outside and away from the stressors of pursuing a PhD. I love you all.

Thank you, Sarah Boyd for countless conversations, study and grading dates, and friendship. Thank you dear Christin Mulligan for always having the right words. Thank you, Bethany Lam for being an excellent listener. Thank you, Patrick Horn for years of advice and mentorship. Thank you, Lamar Wilson for reading abstracts, many conversations over dinner, and for writing beautiful poetry and sharing it with the world.

I thank Eric Gary Anderson, Taylor Hagood, and Daniel Cross Turner for helping bring my first publication, an essay on Shani Mootoo, to light. I also thank Rebecca A. Brown and Sharla Hutchison for publishing my essay on Angela Carter and the Tarot.

I send warm thanks to former professors Lisa D. Chávez, Randall Styers, and Feroza Jussawalla. (Lisa introduced me to Angela Carter, Toni Morrison, and many more amazing authors.)

I thank Randall Kenan for many informal office and hallway conversations. I also thank him for telling me about *American Beach*. My chapter on *Love* benefited greatly from his remarks.

I give special thanks to Harry Thomas, Lauren Du Graf, Gale Greenlee, Moira Bradford, Danielle Spurlock, Becca Wilder, Susan Tredway, Andrew Clapper, Rich Giorgi, Sarah Juliet Lauro, Shannon Morrow, Deanna Delgado, and Phillip Locey. You all have inspired and helped me reach this goal in more than one way.

I thank Carolyn Woodward for taking me on as her advisee even though I had never taken a class with her. I also thank her for introducing me to Minrose.

I give great thanks to all of the excellent, innovative teachers I had at Chattanooga School for the Liberal Arts and Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences—especially my English teachers Jean Ann Gardner and Carmen Veller.

I am grateful to the Royster Society of Fellows for the financial support my William R. Reynolds Fellowship has provided and for cultivating a diverse scholarly community over the years.

Special thanks to Jennifer Ho for encouraging me to apply for the Blyden and Roberta Jackson Fellowship in UNC's Department of English and Comparative Literature. I thank Heidi Kim for reminding me about Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*. I also thank the Literature of the Americas Working Group for providing feedback on an early version of one of my dissertation chapters.

I give warm thanks to the Reba Rutz Beidleman Memorial Foundation at the University of New Mexico for helping me move to Chapel Hill, NC to pursue a PhD in English. I also thank UNM's Ronald E. McNair and Research Opportunity Program.

I give great thanks to all of my students over the years at UNC whose conversations, questions, and insights have helped me understand Gothic literature, its reception, and its emotional impact on readers in more depth.

The names above are not a complete representation of all of the friends, groups, and organizations who have supported or inspired me. To those people whose conference papers sparked a research avenue to follow, to those strangers in coffee shops, bars, and parties whose conversations and questions helped me refine my thoughts about my

research over the years, thank you.

On a few more personal notes, I give thanks to my favorite (former) neighbor and friend of my soul, Adriana Freiburger. Thank you to my uncle Carlton Allen, and his wife, Delores. I also give thanks to my great aunt, Ada Stigall, my aunt Ann Taylor, and my uncle Benny Williams.

Thank you, Cora Kammer. Even though you are not here, you are a part of the reason I am. You are not forgotten. Shine on. Creative writing is next!

Thank you to my late aunt, Guana Williams. I miss you. I wish I would have spent more time with you. Your love was boundless—is boundless. Thank you for believing in me.

Thank you, Benjamin Jacob Burnett. You are one of my oldest, dearest friends. I hope we continue to listen to, support, and inspire each other for years to come. I love you.

I give warmest thanks to my oldest, dearest, best friend, Rachel Huckabee. I love and cherish you. Who knew that the friendship we began in third grade would ebb and flow and transform into something so absolutely spectacular?

Thanks to my dear, sweet, senior dog, Ziggy Stardust, who passed away on February 11, 2016—nearly three months after the completion of this manuscript. He would have been twelve in April. Ziggy waited on me to finish my thoughts more than once before I took him out to pee, walked him, or gave him a treat. He taught me that unconditional love exists. I thank him for the gift of caring for and loving him. I miss him dearly, but I know that he is free from the suffering he endured during his final days.

Finally, thank you, mom and dad, for giving me life after many years of trying to conceive me; enrolling me in that new Paideia magnet school; and for loving me no matter our differences. Thank you for giving me a name that means something. I strive to live up to its meaning in all aspects of my life. Thus, I hope this dissertation preserves and produces moments of beauty.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
INTRODUCTION: HAUNTED NARRATIVES.....	1
Encountering the Gothic.....	1
Unease and the Uncanny: Anachronism, Haunting, and the Gothic Text.....	12
Gothic Literature: Hybrid Texts.....	20
Gothic Origins from Suger to Ruskin: Architecture, Excess, and Giving Shape to the Immaterial.....	27
Chapter Summaries.....	44
CHAPTER ONE: “ELEANOR COME HOME”: PARACOSMS OF GOTHIC VULNERABILITY IN SHIRLEY JACKSON’S <i>THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE</i> ...	47
Inventing Home: Eleanor’s Paracosms.....	53
The Haunting House.....	70
Eleanor’s Abdication: Coming Home to Hill House.....	78
CHAPTER TWO: ANGELA CARTER’S “THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE”: READING THE GOTHIC MONSTER’S CARDS, ESCAPING THE GOTHIC HOUSE.....	95
The Unsuspecting Hero in “The Lady of the House of Love”.....	103
The Monstrous Tarot: Origins and the Gothic Text.....	113
Reading Through the Monster.....	116
Failed Seduction.....	121
Annihilation and Transformation: Escaping the Gothic House.....	129
Appendix 1.....	133

CHAPTER THREE: “LIFE REFUSING TO END”: TRAUMA, EMBODIMENT, AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE GOTHIC IN SHANI MOOTOO’S <i>CEREUS</i> <i>BLOOMS AT NIGHT</i> .....	137
Beauty, Terror, and the Gothic Caribbean.....	139
Traumatic Origins: Mootoo’s Gothic Caribbean.....	146
Mala’s Countercolonial Garden: Mootoo’s Transformative Gothic.....	163
Exit the Garden, Reenter the World.....	179
CHAPTER FOUR: <i>LOVE</i> : TONI MORRISON’S AFRICAN AMERICAN GOTHIC.....	185
<i>Love</i> ’s First Pages: L’s Prologue and African American History.....	192
<i>Love</i> ’s Gothic Women: Junior, Heed, and Christine.....	200
Portraiture and the Gothic Novel: <i>Love</i> ’s Anachronism.....	209
(Re)discovering <i>Love</i> .....	218
Contextualizing <i>Love</i> .....	223
CODA: HAUNTED NARRATIVES, TEACHING GOTHIC.....	228
WORKS CITED.....	233

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The choir of Basilique Saint-Denis.....	28
Figure 2: Strasbourg Cathedral's west façade.....	39
Figure 3: The Tempter courting the foolish virgins.....	40
Figure 4: The Papesse (La Papessa/The Popess).....	132
Figure 5: La Mort (Death).....	132
Figure 6: La Maison Dieu (The House of God).....	132
Figure 7: L' Amoureux (Les Amoureux/The Lovers).....	133
Figure 4: Cereus cactus plant sans blooms.....	137
Figure 5: Tubular bud on the cereus plant.....	138
Figure 6: Cereus blooming at night.....	138
Figure 7: The pomerac blossom.....	171
Figure 8: <i>View of Roaring River Estate: Vivares</i> after Robertson.....	184
Figure 13: American Beach ephemera.....	194
Figure 14: View of American Beach.....	195
Figure 15: American Beach vacationers.....	196
Figure 16: Group of women at American Beach.....	196

Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. . . . Such a woman is the infected carrier of the past: before her the structure of our head and jaws ache—we feel that we could eat her, she who is eaten death returning, for only then do we put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers.

—Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, 41

## INTRODUCTION: HAUNTED NARRATIVES

Haunting . . . when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future.  
– Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi

So it would be necessary to learn spirits. . . . to learn to live with ghosts. . . . To live otherwise. . . . more justly. . . . And this being-with specters would also be, not only, but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.  
– Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xvii-xviii

### Encountering the Gothic

Gothic literature is replete with tension and unease. There is tension between the ancient and the modern, the dangerous and the beautiful, the wild and the structured, the individual and society, the moral and the immoral, the material and the immaterial, the affluent and the proletariat, and the imperialist and the subject. Violence, discord, and unease exist between women and men, children and adults, and groups of peoples. The genre is also characterized by its wealth of conventions—the aesthetics that give texture and form to its texts—and familiar characters. Picturesque vistas—sharp and crisp—contrast with the effluence of gardens brimming with multitudinous flora and creeping fauna. Objects take on complex meaning and appear to have lives of their own; enclosed, hidden spaces exist paradoxically within grand estates found at the edge of town. Within the

Gothic's labyrinthine narratives, we find death, decay, and disintegration, yet sometimes there is also a glimpse of rebirth, the hope for renewal, or a complete transformation. These texts marry scenes of paralyzing horror and the elevating sublime—relationships created by the interplay of the traditionally antipodal realms of rational and non-rational, and the natural, preternatural, and supernatural. Gothic narratives reveal that such realms are much more entangled than characters and readers initially perceive. And, more often than not, these texts reveal the pervasive, multifaceted nature of haunting. Its nature holds that the past and other things thought to be buried, forgotten, or overcome—from people to social customs—appear or reappear in the present. Sometimes the material of the past skulks in, while at other times, it erupts. When it does resurface, women—from the cloistered, abused damsel to the heroine determined to win her independence no matter the cost—become embroiled in its wide-ranging effects. In the Gothic text, haunting takes on new meaning as in all its forms it represents the varied obstacles from sexual violence to restrictive social mores that female characters—and many women living now and in the past—have endeavored to surmount. The Gothic is therefore irrevocably chained to issues of gender and sexuality.

Gothic literature has a long history of narratives centered on women, written by women, and read by women.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation examines twentieth and twenty-first century texts by women that bear evidence of conscious engagement with Gothic

---

<sup>1</sup> See E. J. Clery's excellent study, *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (2000) where she discusses the works of Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, Ann Radcliffe, Joanna Baillie, Charlotte Dacre, and Mary Shelley in depth. Clery asserts the renowned tragic actress Sarah Siddons's (1755-1831) performances were "an enabling condition for women's Gothic" (4). Siddons's powerful and "sublime" theatric skill—especially evident in her portrayal of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth—helped expand attributes ascribed to women, breaking women out of many restrictive categories in terms of expression which "made it possible" to envision women as "heroes and historical agents" (4, 7).

aesthetics. Why contemporary women authors employ the Gothic mode to relate their heroines' narratives haunts me, and, as such, close reading and attention to aesthetics and conventions that govern the Gothic are integral to this dissertation. In the chapters that follow, I excavate connections across geographical and temporal space to engage critically with Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, 1959; Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love," 1979; Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 1996; and Toni Morrison's *Love*, 2003. Though separated by nation, decade, literary genre, or race, these important authors write narratives in which the Gothic mode is made more conspicuous by anachronistic elements that highlight the fraught relationships that define the Gothic, and these anachronistic aesthetics are marked with supernatural or non-rational characteristics. Their texts are haunted by these elements.

One cannot read *Love* or "The Lady of the House of Love" without remarking the portraiture—preternatural or anachronistic—the intoxicating, dangerous garden spaces; or the heavy, tangible, crippling influence of the past on the present—be it supernatural or mundane. Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* combines nearly all of these elements and rehabilitates the Gothic aesthetics that haunts its pages and provides a sort of paradise for the novel's protagonist, Mala Ramchandin. Jackson's Hill House and its grounds are inspired by so many haunted homes before it—consider Ann Radcliffe's *Udolpho* or Charlotte Brontë's *Gateshead* or *Thornfield Halls*. Indeed, the Gothic aesthetics in these texts from 1959 onward are imbued with the spirit of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female Gothic writers such as Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, Radcliffe, Joanna Baillie, Charlotte Dacre, Mary Shelley, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and even Jane Austen with her novel, *Northanger Abbey* (written ca. 1798-1799 and published posthumously in 1817).

In *Women's Gothic* (2000), E. J. Clery explains that these women, and at least fifty more, boldly wrote sensational material as a way to highlight women's imaginative prowess and as an "assertion of women's capacity for sublimity" (5)—a capacity often denied by the Enlightenment and male writers, thinkers, and leaders in general—and, in turn, advance a feminist agenda (*Women's Gothic* 1-7).<sup>2</sup>

My dissertation examines the afterlife, as it were, of Gothic aesthetics found in the genre's earliest texts (written by both women and men) and asserts that twentieth- and twenty-first century women authors employ such aesthetics to highlight and critique the persistent power of patriarchy and imperialism, the continued exclusion of others and othered ways of knowing and being-in-the-world, and the consequences of ignoring or repressing these peoples and systems of meaning. These violent, oppressive actions bear evidence that the effects of transatlantic commerce fueled largely by the slave trade and the callous appropriation and conquering of lands and peoples—the zeitgeist that birthed Gothic literature—still exert a palpable effect over peoples, especially women and social minorities, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in ways that echo the plights of early Gothic characters, especially women. Yet, that power is not all-consuming. Despite the cruelty and violence, the frenetic, fragile, and trampled aspirations, and the morose, tragic finales prevalent in the narratives I examine, another reality remains: women

---

<sup>2</sup> The British Gothic novel matured as British Romanticism was gaining traction. Also during this time, Western Europe experienced the rise of the middle and the novel proper. The dates of British Romanticism are generally accepted to be 1785-1830. The first Gothic novel is published by Walpole in 1764. Mathew Lewis's major text *The Monk* is published in 1794. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is published in 1798. Shelley's *Frankenstein* is published in 1818. Writers in both genres were concerned with a revival of romance and the supernatural—elements suppressed by the leading philosophers and moralists of the Enlightenment's interest in rationality, reason, and personal liberty (largely liberty for white men of European descent). Romanticism and the Gothic narrative are direct reactions to these Enlightenment tenets and they seek to reconnect readers and writers with sensibility.

authors still use the sensational, the supernatural, and the labyrinthine Gothic form to push for a reality in which women and other social minorities can be free from oppression and achieve a state of being that is the result of their own fashioning. In these twentieth and twenty-first century texts, women authors engage in meaningful ways with less-acknowledged, non-rational truth forms that disrupt the grand narrative of positivism and create space for the transformative potential of the affective realm. Though Gothic aesthetics are integral to this dissertation, I do not assume that they all carry a ubiquitous meaning across texts, geographical space, and time. My analysis of Gothic conventions does not deny the importance of the socio-historical, cultural, or political realms and their relationships to the literature created within them. The realm of aesthetics and the effects of form on emotion are forever married to the political, social, cultural, and historical spheres.

The Gothic's transformative potential gains its power from arresting scenes, sinister scenarios, and the stock, yet multifaceted, characters that readers encounter in the Gothic text. I am often reminded how influential a text can be for readers unfamiliar with the genre. When I assign Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), Edith Wharton's "Afterward" (1909), H. P. Lovecraft's "The Outsider" (1926), or Eudora Welty's "Clytie" (1941), Jackson's "The Lottery" (1948) or Carter's "The Company of Wolves" (1979), I am often amazed by my students' reactions. They tell me about the uneasiness they feel as a seemingly ordinary tale takes on a decidedly Gothic atmosphere, about the nightmares they have after reading, about their anger that characters act the way they do in a certain story, and about how, despite the disconcerting effects of the narratives, they are enthralled and want to explore the texts

more fully—they want to ponder the authors’ intentions, the deeper meanings of symbols, or the reason why a character perished. They feel inspired to “do something about it” even though they know Poe’s Madeline Usher, Wharton’s Mary Boyne, Lovecraft’s Outsider, Welty’s Clytie Farr, Jackson’s Tessie Hutchinson, or Carter’s re-envisioned Red Riding Hood are fictional characters. Yet, they perceive that these characters and the events they experience reflect more about reality and society than merely a fictionalized realm.

My students are not alone in their responses. There is a long documented history of spirited reactions to Gothic writing. In Ellen Malenas Ledoux’s *Social Reform in Gothic Writing* (2013), she recounts how Matthew Lewis’s monodrama, *The Captive*, opened and closed on the night it premiered, March 22, 1803, due to the audience’s overwhelming response to its content (1). The performance, “interspersed with pantomime and dramatic music,” tells the story of a woman’s “gradual descent into madness after her tyrannical husband wrongfully imprisons her in a private lunatic asylum” (Ledoux 1). Women in the audience fainted and went into hysterics and a man suffered from convulsions; and as Lewis did not want to, in his own words, “throw half London into convulsions nightly,” he immediately withdrew the monodrama (Lewis qtd. in Ledoux 1). Ledoux explains that Lewis’s reaction to the audience’s profoundly emotional response speaks to Gothic writing’s “particular power,” which is “greater than that of verisimilar writing, to raise audience consciousness about political [and social] issues” (1). That “raised consciousness,” she argues, “has the power to shape populist opinion and to influence social policy, but the degree to which it succeeds in doing so depends much more on reader response than it does on authorial intention” (1-2). Ledoux contends that the

“political power of Gothic writing stems from a spirited exchange between authors and consumers through the medium of a recognizable set of aesthetic conventions” (2).

Alongside disturbing events and captivating fantastic scenarios, there is the ordinary, the domestic. This juxtaposition forms another layer of Gothic literature’s “particular power” (1) which has historically attracted a host of female readers.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic heroines most often encounter danger, violence, or mystery in a domestic context. She must fight to preserve the family unit and her virtue, often by descending into hidden depths of domestic space or venturing into the outside world of men in order to protect said family or virtue. In the happier Gothic texts, the reward for the heroine’s successful journey through the unknown, dangerous, or wild—and the maintenance of her sexual innocence—is a spouse, the promise of children, and a domestic realm to call her own (Mussell 58). Thus, the plots of these Gothic narratives are twofold. Kay J. Mussell explains, “[T]hrough identification with the heroine, the reader finds in escape fiction a world in which excitement, mystery, danger, and action occur side by side with the domestic activities and social roles that women have traditionally performed” (58). The father of the Gothic novel himself, Horace Walpole, was interested in creating characters who despite their “extraordinary” positioning, would still think, speak, and act in ways that “never lose sight of their human character” (10). Instead of conflict between the two realms, the Gothic space enables them to enhance one another (58-59). Contemporary women authors Carter, Jackson, Mootoo, and Morrison revise, expand, and complicate the stock Gothic narrative described above. There is no conventional family as reward for their heroine’s trials, but there is still the enmeshed relationship between the domestic and extra-

domestic, and between inside (the traditionally feminine realm) and outside (the traditionally masculine realm).

In a broader sense, this dissertation identifies two main impulses in the Gothic narratives analyzed: the annihilating and the transformative. Radcliffe writes in “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (published posthumously in 1826) about the distinctions between terror and horror: “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (168). Terror is associated with the sublime and its ability to expand one’s consciousness even at the brink of death. For Radcliffe, obscurity lends terror its sublimity. Obscurity “leaves something for the imagination to exaggerate; confusion [from horror], by blurring one image into another, leaves only a chaos in which the mind can find nothing to be magnificent, nothing to nourish its fears or doubts, or to act upon in any way” (169). Contemporary theorist Julia Kristeva argues, “[T]he sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be here, as dejects, and *there*, as others and sparkling” (12; italics in original). Readers familiar with Radcliffe’s fiction will recognize her use of obscurity throughout her novels—especially in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Radcliffe eventually resolves her novels’ obscurity, but plays on readers’ and characters’ uncertainty about the nature of what they perceive to be supernatural events. Thus, Radcliffe strives to create narratives that allow for imaginative freedom even as she asserts her own imaginative prowess. Readers may experience uncertainty or emotional strain from questioning what is real and identifiable or what is non-rational or extranormal. And, in such moments, through the Gothic’s affective power, comes a radical empathy—an openness to connect with something or someone conventionally conceived as other or

separate from oneself. This radical empathy is conveyed through both *The Captive's* hysterical audience and through my students' reactions related above. In the spirit of Radcliffe, terror and obscurity produce a type of fear that can transform—an uneasiness, an unsettling impulse—in the contemporary narratives by Jackson, Carter, Mootoo, and Morrison.

The dance of annihilation and transformation permeates the Gothic narrative from its inception with Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) into the contemporary era. Walpole's novel begins with the death of Conrad, crushed inexplicably by a gigantic helmet—literally annihilated. Conrad, the son of Manfred who is the primary antagonist, dies on his wedding day before he is to marry Isabella. His death ultimately births the story and introduces the prophecy that the false-noble Manfred seeks to abate through lechery and deceit. In the end, in the wake of his daughter Matilda's death (her annihilation) by his own hand, Manfred is transformed into a penitent father. Matilda's death leads to the restoration of the true noble lineage, the creation of a new line through Theodore (transformed from a wandering peasant to the long-lost son of true nobles) and Isabella, and the end of Manfred's ruse. By contemporary standards, the narrative may seem overwrought, and, yes, it is at times, but the precedent *Otranto* sets for future Gothic novels is clear. The central tension between a heroine and antagonist spawns common characters such as the virtuous, innocent woman who either cedes to an evil man's wishes or is nearly raped, raped, or murdered by him; the disguised hero or noble; or the disguised monk. Gothic devices and situations are prominent. We also see the castle or grand estate, the catacombs or subterranean passageways, the sacred place or church that offers sanctuary or seduction (this space can also be a garden), and the unexplained animation of certain objects (such as

portraits) or non-rational events or artifacts without the narrative would fail. In the midst of all these narrative traits and tropes, there is the push and pull of death and life, love and lust, desire and repulsion, annihilation and transformation, horror and terror, beauty and the sublime. Indeed, the sublime and the Gothic have a history and kinship that is worth examining, as terror has long been a part of conceptions of the sublime.<sup>3</sup>

For Edmund Burke and others, it is terror that expands the mind of the person who experiences the sublime; it is experiencing something terrible, something larger than human life, and being able to walk away from, and contemplate, the experience. For example, readers may experience the sublime through a Gothic text's obscurity that leads to foreboding terror; while, on the other hand, through a Gothic heroine may endure an act or place so horrific that she succumbs to the effects and dies (i.e., she is literally annihilated). However, in some cases, the Gothic heroine survives her abuse or supposed certain death and is transformed into something other—something else. Horror and terror work together as annihilating and transformative impulses in these texts. And it is often obscurity that heightens the effect. For example, what is the exact reason for the sinister nature of Hill House? Why does Carter's Countess read Tarot cards? How can Chandin Ramchandin justify the vicious cycle of rape and abuse he perpetrates on his daughters Asha and Mala? Who or what exactly drives Junior Viviane to scheme and orchestrate a deadly encounter between Christine and Heed? Often these impulses are found together on the same page and sometimes they are akin to Sabina Spielrein's theory of death and transformation—that in the process of death, something else is created, and, essentially "destruction [is] the cause of

---

<sup>3</sup> See Vijay Mishra's exhaustive study of the subject, *The Gothic Sublime* (1990).

coming into being” (this theory influenced the work of both Carl Jung and Freud).<sup>4</sup> This concept is especially true in “The Lady of the House of Love” and *Cereus Blooms at Night*. In Carter’s “The Lady of the House of Love, the Countess literally becomes something else—a rose—through her physical death and annihilation. In Mootoo’s novel, Mala effectively becomes something *else* more than once. In Heed’s final moments of life, the hatred that festered between her and Christine is transformed into love, and readers grasp the complexity of Morrison’s 2003 novel’s deft title. In Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, for example, Eleanor arguably becomes a part of something altogether *other*—Hill House itself—though her death.

The chapters ahead trace the contemporary Gothic heroine’s journey from psychological imprisonment and physical death to the promise of psychological and physical liberation. The narratives reflect the suffocating limits and expectations of society, domesticity, caste, and tradition place on women and women’s desire to transcend or modify such boundaries. Freedom from such strictures often culminates in madness, murder, death or a combination of the aforementioned fates. Yet, these deaths are not to be read and interpreted lightly. Jackson’s Eleanor ultimately dies rather than leave Hill House and return to her oppressed, uneventful life. Carter’s Countess escapes the watchful eyes of her painted ancestors and her sanguineous birthright through physical death and transmutation; her faith in her Tarot deck helps precipitate her liberation. Morrison’s novel has more than one heroine. Christine survives the mechanisms of anti-heroine Junior Viviane, and Heed succumbs. Yet because of Junior’s actions, inspired by Bill Cosey, the

---

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2: distractions, in Gordon and Sabina Spielrein’s paper, “Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being” in *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 39 (1994): 155-186.

novel's Gothic villain, Heed dies knowing she and Christine have repaired their friendship—once broken by Cosey's aberrant desire—and rediscovered *philia* love. Like their early Gothic forbears, heroic male characters in these narratives often play passive roles that prove useful in the narrative's climactic or final moments. Mootoo's novel is perhaps the most conventionally Gothic, and it exemplifies the Caribbean as a place of terror and beauty, horror and sublimity controlled (either directly or indirectly) by imperial forces that render women prey—in body and mind—to men transformed into monstrous villains (not unlike their eighteenth century Gothic literary predecessors). In Mootoo's narrative, Nurse Tyler, the cross-dressing narrator, coaxes heroine Mala back to life after she is forced to leave her Gothic garden space, a space that boldly departs from the conventional Gothic garden, and represents a space of positive, life-affirming transformation and offers the promise of new, physical life for its heroine after enduring years of rape and psychological abuse from her father. In all of these narratives, we find women's desire for agency, and a self-fashioned home and state of being.

#### Unease and the Uncanny: Anachronism, Haunting, and the Gothic Text

One defining characteristic of Gothic texts, early and contemporary, is the use of anachronism. Along with the tensions that find a home in Gothic texts, anachronisms precipitate crises and transformation in characters; they move plots to their climaxes and become tangible reminders of the key function of the Gothic genre: to reflect the essence of the oft vexed experience of encountering difference, or, in the terse phrasing of Angela Carter, that of “provoking unease” (“Notes” 134). An anachronism brought the authenticity of the first edition of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the first

Gothic narrative, into question.<sup>5</sup> When Manfred, *Otranto*'s antagonist, offers himself to the young, beautiful Isabella in the place of his son, Conrad, who had been crushed by a gigantic helmet at the beginning of the novel, "the portrait of [Manfred's] grandfather . . . uttered a deep sigh and heaved its breast. . . . quit its pannel [*sic*], and descend[ed] on the floor with a grave and melancholy air" (26). In *Critical Review* (1/19/1765), four months before the second edition of *Otranto* was released, the novel's reviewer took issue with this scene: "We cannot help thinking that this circumstance is some presumption that the castle of Otranto is a modern fabrick [*sic*]; for we doubt much whether pictures were fastened in pannels [*sic*] before the year 1243" (qtd. in Clery, "Notes" 120). The first edition of the novel, which Walpole published under a pseudonym, was a supposed translation of a newly discovered crusades era Italian manuscript (Clery, "Introduction" xi). In the 1765 Preface of the novel's second edition, Walpole admits that the narrative was inspired by a dream in which "a gigantic hand in armour" rested on "the uppermost bannister of a great staircase" (vii).<sup>6</sup> Thus, the genre is infused with the non-rational (the realm of dreams) and rational (the desire to explain) from its beginning.

Anachronisms also reveal the persistence of the past into the present—the past's undeadness. This undead quality is akin to sociologist Avery Gordon's "ghostly matters." As Gordon explains in *Ghostly Matters* (1997), ghostly matters are made of both the visible and seemingly invisible, spectral transhistorical and transgeographical effects of state power,

---

<sup>5</sup>James D. Lilley (2013) notes that reviewers and readers of Walpole's time would have likely been familiar with history and medieval romance to identify a number of anachronisms and question the authenticity of the text.

<sup>6</sup> The "great staircase" is in Walpole's own Strawberry Hill ("Horace Walpole"). I discuss Strawberry Hill at the end of this introduction. Matthew C. Brennan notes a dream was also the inspiration for Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (7) and discusses how many of Gothic novels began as dreams or nightmares in *The Gothic Psyche* (1997).

the gargantuan means of production, and modern capital in everyday life on people and their communities—especially marginalized people and groups. Many of the ways the past infiltrates the present in these narratives are made more obvious by anachronism.

Anachronisms make readers uneasy and play upon a sort of post-Enlightenment Western collective unconscious in which large, draughty homes, gilded family portraits, materials of the occult arts, and heterotopic spaces such as gardens, empty sanctuaries, and dreams and visions elements upset readers' notions of safe, bounded, realms with clear hierarchies.

Indeed, traces of the socio-historical horizons that birthed the early Gothic aesthetic conventions linger in the present; the undeadness of these institutions speaks to the survival and usefulness of the aesthetic forms. While aesthetic representation always reflects and refracts its own times, aesthetic elements themselves obviously have afterlives that can travel through time and space and shed light more broadly on the opportunities and blockades to modes of being (being female, queer, or otherwise *other*), doing (the behaviors and movements a particular society allows or silences), and believing across socio-historical horizons.

Although I do not examine Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) in depth, the novel informs my dissertation's conception because of the novel's concern with a past that haunts and shapes the present. The dying words of the Invisible Man's grandfather continually haunt and perplex him (see pp.16 and 574 of *Invisible Man*, for example), and the text contains a number of noticeable anachronistic artifacts in the text such as Tod Clifton's Sambo doll, Brother Tarp's leg chain, and Mary's broken coin bank (see, for example, pp. 539, 567-568 in *Invisible Man*). For most of Ellison's novel, the Invisible Man collects and carries all of these objects with him in his briefcase. His briefcase ultimately becomes a

receptacle for history and the abject. The abject, as Kristeva posits, is an “uncanniness” that has become

radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But nothing either. A “something” that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (2)

The objects in the Invisible Man’s briefcase are unclean, tainted with the tragic history of humiliation, pain, exclusion, and racism. Yet, these objects are things that make up the Invisible Man’s narrative and they are uncanny or unsettling because they evoke “familiar and old” ideas that he seeks to repress in the briefcase. Ellison’s commentary in the 1981 introduction to *Invisible Man*, is especially pertinent to the tension between past and present the Gothic narrative exploits.

Before the Invisible Man’s character took shape, Ellison reports seeing an anachronistic poster in Vermont. The poster announced a “Tom Show,” which he reminds us is “that forgotten term for blackface minstrel versions of Mrs. Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (xvi). The next passage reveals Ellison’s conclusion that the past is inherently a part of the present: “I thought such entertainment a thing of the past, but there in a quiet northern village it was alive and kicking, with Eliza, frantically slipping a sliding on the ice, still trying—and that during World War II!—to escape the slaving hounds” (xvi). Thus, Ellison comes to the realization that “what is commonly assumed to be past history is actually as much a part of the living present as William Faulkner insisted. Furtive, implacable and tricky, it inspires both the observer and the scene observed, artifacts,

manners and atmosphere and it speaks even when no one wills to listen” (xvi).<sup>7</sup> As Michel de Certeau (1978) puts forth, the past is uncanny: “There is an ‘uncanniness’ about this past that a present occupant has expelled (or thinks it has) in an effort to take its place. The dead haunt the living. The past: it ‘re bites’” (3). Thus, history is “cannibalistic,” and what is excluded or forgotten

re-infiltrates the place of its origin—now the present’s “clean” ... place. It resurfaces, it troubles, it turns the present’s feeling of being “at home” into an illusion, it lurks—this “wild,” this “ob-scene,” this “filth” this “resistance” of “superstition”—within the walls of the residence, and, behind the back of the owner (the *ego*), or over its objections, it inscribes there the law of the other. (de Certeau 4)

The anachronistic poster is uncanny. It is something familiar thought to be estranged due to the perceived passage of time. But, the past is never truly removed from the present and when it reemerges, it demands our attention. Thus, as Ellison points out, history is “implacable and tricky,” it “speaks even when no one wills to listen,” and, I argue, it “inspirits” persons, atmosphere, and objects which shape the conception of generic aesthetics. In the Gothic narratives this dissertation examines, readers recognize anachronisms as uncanny, objects, characters, ideas, or events from the past, or more specifically from eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic texts. Many of these elements, as Carter writes, are “exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions” and subverts the inclination to “read simply for pleasure” (“Notes” 134). These contemporary narratives elucidate the continued relevance of these (un)dead things and force readers to

---

<sup>7</sup> Ellison may be thinking of Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* (1950): “The past is never dead. It’s not even past” (Act I, Scene III).

examine their own uncanny desires and tendencies and to examine the uncanniness of their own socio-cultural environment.

This preoccupation with anachronism invites an encounter with haunting and contemporary theories of haunting. In this regard, Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* is useful. Straddling the fields of sociology and literary criticism and citing Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) as an influential text for her work, Gordon offers that "paying attention to ghosts can, among other things, radically change how we know and what we know" (27). These ghostly matters, the complex matrix of *things* both present and unseen that make up a particular socio-economic-historic experience have a noticeable effect on the real experience of life. They are all the things that construct our experience, swimming just beneath the surface of our being and influencing who we are, what we do, and what we believe. For Gordon, these *things* make up "complex personhood," a concept that implies the complexity of life. It means that "the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward" (4). Ghostly matters haunt people and whole communities (4-5). And, for Gordon, haunting "is a part of our social world, and understanding it is essential to grasping the nature of our society and for changing it" (27). Moreover, Gordon believes that literature can help us understand haunting by bringing "ghostly matters" to the forefront, and in doing so, may create more opportunity for social justice (27-28). Derrida's conception of haunting and hauntology effectively shapes Gordon's observations. Derrida writes,

What happens between the two, and between all the "two's" one likes, such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost. So it would be necessary to learn spirits. . . . And this being-

with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.” (xvii-iii)

The ethical responsibility to others inherent in Derrida’s work is part of what Gordon’s work seeks to address (see Gordon 20). Inhabiting a space akin to that of “ghostly matters,” hauntology is an irreducible category and Derrida asserts it is “first of all to everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology” (63). We humans cannot escape the persistence of the past, and what I suggest is the afterlife of Gothic aesthetics. In the works of the women authors I examine, their use of these aesthetics means *something*. These women, following both male and female Gothic writers before them, create texts that are self-consciously fiction, yet they touch on the areas of lived human experience. Carter argues that “a fiction that takes full cognizance of its status as non-being—that is, a fiction that remains aware that it is of its own nature [is]. . . . a different form of human experience than reality . . . and can help to transform reality itself” (“Notes” 133). I discuss this idea that fiction can shape reality in the second chapter.

Moreover, Gordon writes that “[h]aunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed,” although haunting is often a part of or is the product of these experiences” (xvi). Rather, haunting is “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” and haunting describes “those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view” (xvi). Finally, Gordon explains, “Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future” (xvi). Haunting and the careful employment of anachronisms carry with them great responsibility. Shirley Jackson, Angela

Carter, Shani Mootoo, and Toni Morrison all employ the Gothic past in explicit ways, and each does so for specific reasons relating to the socio-historical dimensions of her fiction.

The noticeable ways the past haunts the present in the Gothic text are often the result of ruthless adherence to outdated modes of being in the world, or as grand narratives from the pre-Second World War era. In Gothic texts, both early and contemporary, women are continually oppressed and victimized in service to the maintenance of grand narratives about family, gender and sexuality, religion, and social hierarchies. For example, in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), orphaned Emily St. Aubert is at the mercy of her aunt, Madame Cheron, who wants Emily to marry for financial and political reasons, not love. At first, her desire to marry Valancourt, whom she met while traveling with her ailing father, is a desirable match. Yet, when Valancourt is no longer conducive to Mme. Cheron's plans, Emily is forced to move to the Udolpho castle with Mme. Cheron and her new husband, Signor Montoni, who only wants her family's properties and proves to be cruel, abusive, and ultimately responsible for Mme. Cheron's death (imprisoned in a Gothic tower). At the castle, Emily is courted by Montoni's friend Count Morano who is also motivated by interests in land and money. In the end, Emily and Valancourt are reunited, but not until after Emily endures many trials, psychological abuse, and unwanted sexual advances. In service to socioeconomic prosperity and security and as evidence of the lack of agency a single woman has—no matter her family—Mme. Cheron is willing to sacrifice Emily's happiness and well-being. Such a grand narrative is discordant with Radcliffe's own politics, and would be shunned by her contemporaries, but yet, it shines light on the fact that Radcliffe and other female

contemporaries were still beholden to in some respects to such modes of patriarchy as are women throughout our own contemporary age.

In a similar vein, Morrison's *Love* deals with the effects of the past in the present and the stronghold of patriarchy and paternalism and its consequences. The narrative present is set in the late 1970s and 80s, but it is set in motion by one key event: for \$200 and a new purse for Heed's mother, eleven year-old Heed is married off to fifty-two year-old Cosey, the wealthiest man in Silk, an all-black beach resort community. The marriage ruins Heed's friendship with Cosey's twelve year-old granddaughter, Christine, and over twenty years later, the effects are still apparent. Cosey's influence lives on through his portrait's ghostly influence on Junior, Heed's eighteen year-old female personal assistant. Of course, like *Udolpho*'s Emily, Heed has no choice in accepting the marriage; she has not even begun menstruating. But, the promise of upward social mobility for her impoverished family coupled with the power Cosey wields, is enough to seal Heed's fate. Unlike Emily, Heed's suffering does not lead to a happy life after the narrative concludes, but only a reunion with Christine during Heed's final dying moments.

### Gothic Literature: Hybrid Texts

In addition to its use of an aesthetics of anachronism, Gothic literature is a hybrid, blended entity. After the modernity of *The Castle of Otranto* is effectively revealed, Walpole appends "A Gothic Story" to the title and explains in the 1765 Preface,

[*The Castle of Otranto*] was an attempt to blend two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been damned up, by a strict adherence to common life. The actions, sentiments, conversations, of the heroes and

heroines of ancient days were as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion. (9)

Thus, it appears, transgression and excess are present in the very inception of the genre, as he introduces the Gothic as something new, interstitial or hybrid, that opens up the space for examination of past and present modes of being and order. Clery rightly asserts, “It was at precisely the moment that *Otranto* was revealed to be a modern work that the adjective ‘gothic’ was first applied to it. There is a dislocation: ‘Gothic’ is no longer a historical description; it marks the initiation of a new genre” (“Introduction” xv). Clery explains that during Walpole’s era, two prevailing attitudes were in vogue: “on the one hand a growing enthusiasm for the superstitious fancies of the past; and on the other, a sense that this kind of imaginative freedom was forbidden, or simply impossible, for writers of the enlightened present” (“Introduction” xi). When the question of the *Otranto*’s supposed ancient origin was raised to Walpole’s friend, Reverend William Mason, the Reverend thought his inoculator ludicrous to think that “anybody nowadays had imagination enough to invent such a story” (Mason qtd. in Walpole qtd. in Clery, “Introduction” xi). He later informs Walpole that he himself had been “duped” (xi). Thus, the act of writing such a narrative was, in a way, revolutionary. James D. Lilley (2013) argues that Walpole’s 1765 Preface marks a “condition of possibility” for the nascent genre. Walpole’s words describe not only an intent to “blend two kinds of romance,” but name a “blend of time and space animated by the rhythms of genesis and destruction, the indwelling of freedom and repetition” (46). Within this “strange terrain,” Lilley continues, “life is registered as an uncanny blend of fated historical materiality and vibrant ghostly immateriality, an atemporal and allegorical mélange of ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ in which the past presents itself as a vital anachronism” (46). He contends that *Otranto*’s “textuality works its effect through accretion—by a ‘saying-

too-much’—not though subterfuge or subtlety. Ghosts haunt us because of, not in spite of, their massive materiality” (47). Lilley draws on Freud’s theory of the uncanny and Freud’s conception of Eros and Thanatos—the drives related to Spielrein’s theory of death and transformation mentioned above. Thus, through self-conscious textuality and anachronism, the uncanny reveals itself, and the Gothic text announces a space in which what was though hidden, resolved, or forgotten lives again. The Gothic text is revolutionary in terms of its aesthetics as it is radical in terms of its politics.

Furthermore, in *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (1995), Maggie Kilgour acknowledges the Gothic novel as a precursor to Romanticism that “manifest[s] prematurely, and therefore understandably somewhat crudely” (3). The Gothic’s interest in the “bizarre, eccentric, wild, savage, lawless, and transgressive, in originality and the imagination” has been conventionally understood as a transitional “puerile form which is superseded by the more mature ‘high’ art of the superior Romantics, such as Coleridge, Keats, and especially Byron” (3). Kilgour seeks to remedy this viewpoint by calling attention to the genre’s inherent hybridity as it

feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and form which it never fully disentangles itself: British folklore, ballads, romance, Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy (especially Shakespeare), Spenser, Milton, Renaissance, ideas of melancholy, the graveyard poets, Ossian, the sublime, sentimental novelists (notably Prevost, Richardson, and Rousseau) and German traditions (especially Schiller’s *Robbers* and *Ghost-Seer*). (4)

Most important, through its self-conscious form and its awareness of its heritage imbued with “old material and traditions,” Gothic writing “suggests a view of the imagination not as an originating faculty that creates ex nihilo, but as a power of combination” (4). This idea of combination gestures toward Walpole’s original intent. Gothic literature troubles convention, blends boundaries, and exposes the suppressed realm of the marginal, the in-

between, and the monstrous: the things that deviate from the “natural or conventional order” (“Monstrous,” def. 1a). Etymologically, “monster” unites the Old French and Latin words for revealing or displaying and through its revelation comes a warning (Bissonette 112). I discuss this concept in more depth in the second chapter. But, in simple terms, as signifiers of the contemporary human condition, the “oppressed and excluded” monsters of the Gothic text, such as the corrupted monk, Ambrosio in *The Monk*, the scheming Montoni from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, or Frankenstein’s monster in Shelley’s 1818 novel, reveal, using Fred Botting’s phrase, “the monstrosity of the systems of power and normalization to which [many peoples] are subjected” (*Gothic Romances* 15). These systems of power are the forces of normalization, systemic oppressions, totalitarian administrations, the mechanisms of feudalism, empire, and colonization, to name a few. The Gothic text’s monsters and the monstrous acts its villains perpetrate warn of the potential monsters born from the unchecked powers of such systems—systems that are often so vast and influential they become amorphous yet are experienced by peoples in tangible, visceral ways.

Therefore, this dissertation is transatlantic in the basic sense that I examine texts from the United States, the Caribbean, and Britain and in the conceptual sense that I understand the Gothic to be inherently transatlantic as Gothic writing emerged during a time of heightened tensions between the *old* and *new* worlds. Old and new are inadequate, largely inaccurate, adjectives we use for the Eastern and Western Hemispheres that delineate major shifts and growth in industry, empire, and the lived experience of many peoples since the sixteenth century. The result of transatlantic exploration, these violent shifts led to rampant colonization, exponential growth in global commerce, and the slave trade. Increased inter-societal and inter-continental contact precipitates the Seven Years’

War (1754-1763), the rise of revolution in the old and new worlds (e.g., French Revolution, 1787-1799; Haitian Revolution, 1791-1804), and helped shape the literary imagination of the early writers of the literary Gothic. Chris Baldick (1992) writes that “Gothic fiction is neither immemorial nor global, but belongs specifically to the modern age of Europe and the Americas since the end of the eighteenth century,” due to the genre’s concern with powers and corruptions inherited from “feudal aristocracy, and with similar lineages and agencies of archaic authority, which can include the pseudo-aristocracies of the American South and the monastic hierarchies of the Roman Catholic Church” (xx). Within the pages of Gothic fiction is the fear of an “age-old regime of oppression and persecution which threatens still to fix its dead hand upon us,” and the anxiety of a middle-class encumbered by the “nagging possibility that the despotisms buried by the modern age may prove to be yet undead” (xxi).

As examples, Walpole’s *Otranto* (1764), Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) are rife with concerns about the marriageability of, desire for, and control of women, their bodies, and the spaces they inhabit; birth, blood, and breeding; and interactions between Western and Italian and Eastern Europeans (the latter two are depicted as inscrutable, villainous others). These novels also bear evidence to cathected remains of the Reformation that breed a familiar tension between Protestant and Catholic ideals. All of the aforementioned elements combine with hauntings, magic, and other often unexplained and non-rational events that occur in draughty, medieval castles, secluded manor houses, walled gardens, and wild forests. These texts also convey a preoccupation with the consequences of radical change, the collision of old and new socio-cultural regimes, and the juxtapositions of beauty, horror, and sublimity. In Lewis’s novel

and his play, *The Castle Spectre* (1797), mystery, anxiety, or misfortune surrounding people in contact with new world racial, social, and environmental others due to what Pierre Chaunu terms disenclavement is manifest.<sup>8</sup> Although both texts take place in Europe, significant details or characters link to Cuba and the African continent. For example, in *The Monk*, the central character Ambrosio, the monk, is bitten by the deadly “Cientipedor” —a “serpent” that is “[c]oncealed among the Roses” (71)—in the monastery’s garden with the seductress, Matilda (who is previously disguised as Rosario, a young initiate of the monastery). After this bite, Matilda saves Ambrosio, but he falls from grace, ultimately murdering his mother, Elvira, and then raping and murdering his sister, Antonia. Lewis notes, “The Cientipedor is supposed to be a Native of Cuba, and to have been brought into Spain from that Island in the Vessel of Columbus” (72). The mention of Cuba is, of course, indicative of European imperial pursuits and its nations’ involvement with slavery and the associated threats. Concealing danger within roses—traditionally associated with beauty, femininity, and secrecy—reiterates the common relationship between beauty and peril in the Gothic narrative. In Lewis’s play set in Medieval Ireland, the evil tyrant Earl Osmond has four African slaves: Saib, Hassan, Muley, and Alaric. This anachronism is poignant and the slaves’ presence is highlighted even more by Saib and Hassan’s poignant speeches decrying slavery—a sentiment that cannot be ignored when the play was performed or in our contemporary moment.

---

<sup>8</sup>Disenclavement is the “ending of isolation for some areas and the increase in intersocial contacts in most areas” (Thorton 14). This phenomena allowed an “increased flow of ideas as well as trade throughout the world, ultimately leading to a unified world economy and potentially, at least, to higher levels of economic development” (14). In the Americas, disenclavement reshaped “whole societies” and created the concept of the “New World” (14). The transatlantic slave trade and catastrophic decimation of indigenous peoples and lands are results of disenclavement between Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

These anachronisms also reveal a concern with people's labor and the roles a given society permits them to inhabit. This anxiety is something we see throughout Gothic narratives especially when one considers the roles and actions of women and other peoples oppressed by patriarchy, heteronormativity, and racism within them. In *The Monk*, Rosario (the male version of Matilda) reflects Protestant suspicions as they find homoeroticism and misuse of power to be hallmarks of Catholic monasticism in contrast to Protestant ministers who live outside church walls, marry, and take part in commerce and politics in more overt ways. There is a latent feminizing of Catholic monks as they are largely confined to the Church—their home—and are required to carry out tasks, such as cooking meals, tending to the sick, and like that usually fall within the domain of women's work. As a female, Matilda reflects the temptation of sexual intercourse, and because Matilda turns out to be a demon from hell, she also reflects beliefs about unmarried, sexually active women—that is, they are impure, dangerous and not to be trusted. In the case of *The Castle Spectre*, the slaves' speeches reveal the growing anxiety in Lewis's time, and most likely his own state of mind, about the morality and consequences of slavery and the slave trade.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, this dissertation is transatlantic in that my comparative approach highlights ongoing transnational cultural exchange and gestures toward Paul Gilroy's important work, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) that maintains

---

<sup>9</sup> Much has been written about Lewis's complex relationship to slavery. He inherited his father's Jamaican plantation. While not overtly against slavery—as he benefited from the work they performed and income they produced for him—he was progressive in his concerns for their treatment and maintaining safer work conditions on the plantation. See Lewis's *Journal of a West-Indian Proprietor* (1834) or, for example, Ledoux's book, *Social Reform in Gothic Writing: Fantastic Forms of Change, 1764-1834* (2013).

“hybridity and intermixture of ideas” between race, nation, and culture are “inescapable” and worth investigating (xi). Gilroy does not argue for blind relativism, as he cautions against the “closure of the categories with which we conduct our political lives” (xi). Rather, the concept of the black Atlantic represents the “desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. These desires are relevant to understanding political organising and cultural criticism” (19). Thus, by situating Jackson, Carter, Mootoo, and Morrison within transnational, transhistorical, and intercultural contexts, my comparative approach opens up new ways of reading their works, disrupts traditional literary categories, and reveals how, for example, an author like Morrison incorporates, expands, and revises the Gothic mode to shed light on lesser-known African American histories and identities.

### Gothic Origins from Suger to Ruskin: Architecture, Excess, and Giving Shape to the Immaterial

The term “Gothic” is tied to not only literature, but also to a historical epoch and its architecture. Thus, the brief history of the development of Gothic architecture that follows helps complete the cultural and literary history of the Gothic literature. In basic terms, the first Gothic literature (e.g., Walpole and his contemporaries) breaks from the Enlightenment’s interest in rationality and reason and reconnects writers and readers with sensibility and affect found in works by Shakespeare and in earlier romances. Kilgour explains, “[G]othic [writing] has been associated with a rebellion against a constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal or order and unity, in order to recover a suppressed primitive and barbaric imaginative freedom” (3). We may, in turn, view the Enlightenment’s devotion

to rationality and scientific inquiry as a reaction to the previous epochs' devotion to religion and alchemy. Gothic architecture, beginning in twelfth-century France and culminating in the sixteenth century, reflects its designers' and artisans' concern with acknowledging, revering, and the ultimate desire to reach a realm beyond the terrestrial: the Christian heaven, the space of the divine, or what falls into the category of the non-rational. Of course, Gothic architecture also reflects the Church's power, wealth, and widespread influence. Some of the most apparent similarities between Gothic architecture and literature are the presence of excess, heterogeneous parts that compose a recognizable structure, the contrast of the grand and the minute, and the interplay of the base and the sublime.

From its inception, Gothic architecture was meant to be read. For example, in his book, *Book of Suger Abbot of St. Denis on What Was Done During his Administration*, twelfth century Abbot Suger outlines a deeper meaning of (then-nascent Gothic) architecture. When Suger decided to build a new choir (see Figure 1) for his dilapidated abbey church (originally completed in 775), Paul Halsall explains, "The result was a major event in the history of architecture. Gothic was born" (n. pag.). Suger's text is filled with detailed explanations about what each costly ornament or architectural structure in the cathedral represents. He pays close attention to the metaphysics of light as discussed below.



Figure 9: The choir of Basilique Saint-Denis

In general, Suger's descriptions are excessive. The amount of precious gems and gold used in the decoration of the cathedral is intentionally excessive and luxuriant to convey the primary importance of honoring the Christian God and his martyr St. Denis (Suger n. pag.). Work on the abbey began in 1137 and was completed in 1144. A ceremony consecrating the new choir and honoring Suger and his King, Louis VII of France, was attended by five archbishops and thirteen bishops. The French archbishops and bishops, Halsall writes, "assume[d] initiative in the future development of Gothic architecture" (n. pag.). Thus, as Paul Frankl (1960) argues, "Gothic is a process. It is a unique, historical process" (830). He explains in more depth,

[Gothic] runs its appointed course. . . . the individual Gothic master can change and after him his journeyman and pupil when he has become a master and has to carry on the work of his predecessor. But as long as he does not introduce or adopt a completely different style—Renaissance—he continues "Gothic," which is always the same and is always changing. What remains is the essence. What changes and is either clarified, intensified, perfected or obfuscated, deformed, watered down, is this essence of Gothic. Both the meaning and the form of this essence are partiality; that means that each part is a fragment of a whole which itself tends to be only a fragment of infinity. (830)

Moreover, Gothic indicates a process that possesses a central essence—a zeitgeist—that suggests art and the spirit of the age have an important relationship. This zeitgeist is carried from one craftsman to another over the course of decades and the process continues on over the course of centuries.

Similar to Gothic architecture, Gothic literature often acts as a mirror for the age in which it was created, as the eighteenth century British Gothic texts highlight tensions between bloodlines, nationalities, and religious sect and doctrine, for example. American Gothic writers Charles Brockden Brown, Poe, and Hawthorne explore temptations, struggles, and moral predicaments that peoples living in a youthful American nation face.

Often termed Dark Romanticism, these texts also complicate Puritan and Transcendentalist ideals and reveal the emotional frailty, and the varied mental and moral weaknesses prevalent in the human condition. The Southern Gothic of the United States reflects decaying and decayed familial structures, and pronounced tension between race, class, and sex. Representative authors and texts include William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), or Flannery O'Connor's *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (1965). The Caribbean Gothic draws from its predecessors and makes more prevalent the problem of imperialism and its influence on all of the tensions already inherent to the genre. Some examples include Leonora Sansay's *Secret History: Or, the Horrors of San Domingo* (1808), Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), and Jean Rhys's prequel to *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

The excessive attention to detail found within Gothic architecture lives on in Gothic narratives. In Gothic texts, estates, chambers, rooms, and gardens are described to minute detail. These descriptions of space and architectural design on the macro (structural) and micro (interior design including furniture and finishes) work to create not only a sense of diegetic verisimilitude but also to reflect the complex relationships and tensions present within the text. This is the idea that the complexity being signified is too great to be contained within sparse descriptions or a spartan atmosphere. For only excess can convey the multifaceted nature of what is being represented. Thus, the descriptions of architecture in these texts gesture toward an impulse to give shape to the immaterial—to give shape to the zeitgeist of the narrative, as it were. For example, in Sansay's novel, when Clara visits the general to learn news about her husband, we learn the "sofas and curtains [are] of blue sattin [*sic*] with silver fringe" in general's apartment, and his bedchamber has a bed in the

“form of a shell, from which little cupids descending [hold] back with one hand, curtains of white sattin [*sic*] trimmed with gold” (84). The description continues and is superfluous, but its excess reflects Clara’s heightened emotional state and the consequences of her visit to the general. For when she returns to her apartment, she learns that her husband has sent a soldier to report on her. As a result, Clara is “distressed beyond measure” and exclaims, “I had better go forever, for St. Louis [her husband] will kill me!” (84). When her husband returns, he “seize[s] her by the arm, and drag[s] her into a litter dressing room at the end of the gallery, [and] lock[s] her in” (84). In this short passage, Sansay has employed a number of Gothic literary conventions including the detailed description of architecture, the Gothic heroine’s search for the truth about a subject or person outside of her home, a husband with stormy, abusive behavior, and the imprisonment of the Gothic heroine. In addition to reflecting the excessive emotion and actions of the passage, the architectural detail also works to provide structural support to the text, like a buttress on a Gothic cathedral, as Clara’s visit and its consequences are framed by detailed descriptions of architectural design.

More broadly, the concern with representing excess expands to the dialogue, narrative organization, and more. Throughout all its iterations, Gothic literature’s form is intricate, entangled, yet identifiable by a set of conventions, and its content is simultaneously morose, light, sublime, magical or supernatural, and tragic. Excess permeates Gothic writing and reflects the conditions of its characters’ (and often its author’s) lives. I discuss this in more depth in a section of chapter one that examines Jackson’s inspiration by and attention to architecture in *The Haunting of Hill House* and also calls attention to how Eleanor’s behavior upon her approach to Hill House is reminiscent of Emily’s first encounter with Udolpho in Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Furthermore,

Jacques Rancière elucidates the relationship between immaterial ideas, as it were, and material form in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004). He argues, “The cult of art presupposes a revalorization of the abilities attached to the very idea of work. . . . a recomposition of the landscape of the visible,” or in other words, “a recomposition of the . . . relationship between doing, making, being, seeing, and saying” (45). With the understanding that the “logic of stories” and the “ability to act as historical agents go together,” rendering “history” more than a series of “stories we tell ourselves,” we can come to realize, according to Rancière, that just as other forms of knowledge, both politics and art “construct ‘fictions,’ that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done” (39; italics in original). Gothic architecture expresses such relationships, and just as the ribbed vault, flying buttress, and pointed arch are key elements of Gothic architecture are commonly identifiable elements, so are distressed and violated women, emotionally broken or physically abusive men, grand homes or estates with unexplained phenomenon, wild excessive landscapes or enclosed manicured gardens become identifiable elements in Gothic literature that convey a large amount of information about desire, danger, vulnerability, beauty and the enmeshed realms of the material and immaterial, the rational, and non-rational, and the socio-historical situation represented and reflected in the text.

“The Nature of the Gothic” in John Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) and Frankl’s *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (1960) trace the origins and evolution of Gothic architecture and the effects of socio-historical factors on material form. Both works are concerned with the physical labor involved in creating the

colossal cathedrals that have become representative of Gothic architecture and medieval aesthetics. This acknowledgment of human labor unites the realm of classifiable, material architectural elements with the intangible realm of spirit—that is, the will and vision of clergy, architects, and laborers, along with the parishioners and spiritual pilgrims the buildings served. Ruskin argues that the “Gothic character” is “entangled with many other foreign substances, itself perhaps in no place pure, or ever to be obtained or seen in purity for more than an instant; but nevertheless [is] a thing of definite and separate nature; however inextricable or confused in appearance” (118-119). This blending of separate forms whose farraginous nature remains distinguishable dovetails with Walpole’s declaration in his 1765 Preface about blending two forms of romance. For Ruskin, the Gothic’s elements are “certain mental tendencies of the builders, legibly expressed in it; as fancifulness, lover of variety, love of richness, and such others” (119). The external qualities include: pointed arches, vaulted roofs. . . . And unless both the elements and the forms are there, we have no right to call the style Gothic” (119). He surmises, “It is not enough that it has the Form, if it have not also the power and life. It is not enough that it has the Power, if it have not the form” (119). Ruskin’s analysis leads back to my assertion at the beginning of this section—that heterogeneous parts that compose a recognizable structure in both Gothic architecture and literature. These heterogeneous parts are the aesthetics that make up a genre, a style.

In a similar analytical vein, Frankl advises that whoever “desires to formulate the essence of Gothic in concepts and words must above all things free himself from the erroneous notion that Gothic is an absolutely fixed thing identical, for example, with those schematic drawings of the system of the Gothic cathedral” one finds in beginners’ textbooks (830). Both art historians are wary of totalizing definitions of what constitutes Gothic and,

as the quoted passages reveal, they argue for a definition of Gothic architecture that acknowledges its diverse forms, which are ultimately the result of the collective efforts of many architects, clergymen, and skilled and unskilled laborers over many centuries. Ruskin asserts, “We cannot say, therefore, that a building is either Gothic or not Gothic in form, any more than we can in spirit. We can only say that it is more or less Gothic, in proportion to the number of Gothic forms which it unites” (133). His statement indicates that there are specific characteristics of Gothic architecture, which Frankl terms “half ethical, half aesthetic concepts” (Frankl 557). The intangible moral elements Ruskin ascribes to the Gothic are: “1. Savageness. 2. Changefulness. 3. Naturalism. 4. Grotesqueness. 5. Rigidity. 6. Redundance”; the elements belonging to the building (and thus the builder) are 1. Savageness or Rudeness. 2. Love of Change. 3. Love of Nature. 4. Disturbed Imagination. 5. Obstinacy. 6. Generosity” (119). He adds, “The withdrawal of any one, or any two, will not at once destroy the Gothic character of a building, but the removal of a majority of them will” (Ruskin 119). We find that his characteristics are abstract but can indeed often be recognized in the visible, material form of Gothic buildings. Ruskin’s definitions are often idiosyncratic, yet useful. For example, the first principle addresses the nomenclature of Gothic architecture, which in fact reflects the stern, “rude and wild” nature of northern European architecture that “appear[s] like a perpetual reflection of the contrast between the Goth and the Roman in their first encounter” (119).

The contrast between the wild and the tame used to delineate cultural, spiritual, and political differences between the European North and South, Gothic and Greco-Roman, the Dark Ages and the Enlightenment, and ultimately “barbarity versus civility and superstition versus Reason” is expressed in the term, Gothic (Baldick xii). Victoria Nelson (2012)

reminds us that the term “Gothic” was an “insulting label, redolent of nasty barbarian Huns” for the European Medieval period used by Italian Renaissance architects who wanted to stand apart from the “follies of a certain style of medieval sacred architecture”—the Gothic or French style—and re-embrace the tenants of classical Greece and Rome—a period and region the Renaissance found more rational than Christian Europe (2). (In the Medieval period, Gothic building style was termed *opus francigenum* or “French style” [Frankl 55].) In essence, the architecture and culture the Renaissance artisans and Neo-Classicists called “Gothic” represented to them “centuries of unproductive pre-history” despite the fact that the actual Goths (the Germanic peoples appearing in southern Europe from the third and fifth century that weakened the Roman empire) never built a Gothic cathedral, or, in the later era, wrote Gothic fiction (Baldick xii). Thus, the term Gothic denotes an opposition to the “modern, the enlightened, [and] the rational” (xii). The term is pejorative, but it is also indicative of the uneasiness the buildings’ wild, massive nature engenders. Moreover, these complex relationships that inform the term “Gothic” in relation to architecture have an afterlife in the extreme contradictions of Gothic literature. Gothic narratives’ chaste women who become the prey of lecherous men, its Church crypts that becomes theaters of rape, its gardens that enable the transformation of one state to another be it virgin to non-virgin, man to woman, present to past, and its sublime landscapes that hold the threat of violence, death, or torture are necessary to the primary function of Gothic literature. This function, “provoking unease,” becomes useful for Gothic architecture if we consider how the building style received its name and how later observers react to it.<sup>10</sup> These contrasts are evident in Carter’s “The Lady of the House of Love,” which I discuss in

---

<sup>10</sup> The phrase “provoking unease” is from Carter, “Notes” 134.

chapter two, as the vampire Countess represents Eastern Europe—associated with non-rational knowledge, barbarity, and superstition in general—and the British soldier represents the order, reason, and technologically advanced Western Europe.

In his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (1992), Baldick credits Ruskin and Augustus Welby Pugin<sup>11</sup> with helping to rehabilitate the term “Gothic” and associate it with the “great age of Faith and of social responsibility” and rendering the term synonymous with Christian “in contradistinction to the corruptly pagan tradition of the Renaissance” (xiii). Of course, what’s interesting about this revision of the term in light of Gothic literature is that, as Baldick explains, “the literary Gothic is really anti-Gothic”:

The anti-Gothicism of Gothic [literature] . . . its ingrained distrust of medieval civilization and its representation of the past primarily in terms of tyranny and superstition, has taken several forms, from the vigilant Protestant xenophobia so strongly evident in the first half-century of Gothic writing [e.g. Walpole and Lewis], to the rationalist feminism of [for example] Angela Carter’s fiction. (xiii)

Ruskin holds nostalgia for a lost era and its magnificent architecture while Gothic writers distrust that same era’s politics—the powerful medieval Catholic Church, the repressive feudal system, and the limits on personal liberty and agency. These conflicting attitudes speak to the fact that the same architectural principles—these grand narratives of aesthetics—can be read in many ways according to the viewer’s philosophical leaning and socio-historical situation. This phenomenon is an example of how aesthetic forms persist beyond their original historical moment, but, at the same time, still be tied to the culture and history that created them. These connections take on new meanings while still retaining a sort of irreducible aesthetic kernel.<sup>12</sup> And, this is what makes Gothic conventions and

---

<sup>11</sup> Pugin was responsible for the interior design of The Palace of Westminster.

<sup>12</sup> My line of reasoning here is influenced by Marina Warner’s discussion of French art historian Henri Focillon’s *The Life of Forms in Art* (1934) in her book, *Phantasmagoria* (2006). Focillon argues that forms “have a life of their own, and forms in art both derive from and generate other forms, autonomously,

objects in contemporary literature seem anachronistic. When Walpole added the phrase “A Gothic Story” to *The Castle of Otranto* to indicate his desire to “blend two kinds of romance,” he also understood what the term “Gothic” meant to his contemporary readers. “Gothic” was associated with the dark ages of hundreds of years of Catholic rule and repression, but, at the same time, the term was also associated with the age of cathedrals, the age of devotion and courtly romance, and the metaphysics of light—light being one of the key factors in how medieval cathedrals were constructed.

Drawing from Suger’s work on the reconstruction of his church at Saint-Denis, Frankl concludes that the church’s—and the Gothic form as a whole—“stylistic *form*” expresses “deeper meaning” (23). He explains,

[m]etaphysics of light, symbolism, the cult of the carts, and the crusades do not explain Gothic, any more than Gothic could explain those phenomena. They all, however, have their common roots in the heightened religious fervor of that generation. Gothic architecture expressed in its language what was taking place in those other intellectual fields. For art is form as the expression or, more precisely, the symbol of the spiritual content inherent in this form. (Frankl 23)

The concern with form and expression ultimately points toward a unity of the material and spiritual, the seen and unseen, and a desire to create a material representation of the

---

according to their own internal principles, both organic and abstract” (Warner 11). Focillon maintains that “forms exist independently of signification, so that while the Gothic arch might symbolize aspiration, divinity, and ethereal lightness, it does not intrinsically do so, and could attract other meanings” and proposes that aesthetic forms are independent from history and society (11). Like Warner, I do not agree with the latter premise, which uncouples aesthetic forms from the socio-historical horizon in which they are created. Yet I do acknowledge, as Warner does, the liberatory qualities inherent to Focillon’s theories because his argument frees aesthetic forms from, as Warner explains, “the fixity inflicted by ideas of the collective unconscious, on the one hand, and on the other, from the relativism of historicism that denies any intrinsic properties to materials or bodies of any form” (11). Thus, for Warner, cultural objects possess a “dynamic autonomy that interacts with experience and modifies it” and cultural “[m]otifs are simultaneously subject to continuous metamorphoses, and yet preserve a certain integrity [for] they are not altogether empty signifiers waiting to be filled, but take up their polymorphous being autonomously, and then attract a host of meanings which interplay with them and continue to generate new forms” (11).

immaterial. Together, we find that the rational, logical building plans and the non-rational religious fervor that inspires the ribbed construction, the arch of a stained-glass window, or the pitch of a roof depend on one another. Suger reconstructs his church in part to honor its relics and disseminate a “metaphysics of light”—the “wonderful (*mirabilis*) light of the stained-glass windows, the sparkle of jewels”—that literally open the “way to God” (Frankl 22).<sup>13</sup> Suger’s work and the Gothic form ultimately acknowledges the influence of the spiritual, social, political, and historical forces on art, that which gives form to these monolithic physical structures.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to Ruskin’s principles, the fourth, for which Ruskin offers his briefest commentary, is simply that the workers who completed Gothic cathedrals and other edifices possessed “the tendency to delight in fantastic and ludicrous, as well as in sublime, images,” which Ruskin argues is a “universal instinct of the Gothic imagination” (130). In Gothic architecture, such contrasts are evident in form and conception to a Gothic cathedral that boasts carvings of angels, gargoyles, tangled vines, revered saints, tempted virgins, and the

---

<sup>13</sup> Inscribed on the abbey’s main doors, which are cast in bronze and gilded, is the following:  
All you who seek to honor these doors,  
Marvel not at the gold and expense but at the craftsmanship of the work.  
The noble work is bright, but, being nobly bright, the work Should brighten the minds, allowing  
them to travel through the lights  
To the true light, where Christ is the true door.  
The golden door defines how it is imminent in these things.  
The dull mind rises to the truth through material things,  
And is resurrected from its former submersion when the light is seen. (Suger n. pag.)

<sup>14</sup> For Suger, this light is the light “God created on the first day, even before he created the sun” (22). Light is Suger’s “most sublime symbol for God”; he writes not only of the physical forms of stone or space, but also of “the light in the chapels of the choir” (22). Frankl explains, this light is that “specifically Gothic light which has a material origin [e.g., through the stained glass windows] but which is such a significant symbol of that spiritual world never very far from Suger’s thoughts” (22).

devil himself. Take the Strasbourg Cathedral for example (see Figures 2-3). The Strasbourg Cathedral's grand scale coupled with its minute, excessively detailed craftsmanship is striking and exemplifies many of Ruskin's characteristics. The sheer amount of time (ca. 1176-1439: 263 years) and labor that lead to its completion is difficult for modern viewers to conceive points to Frankl's understanding of the Gothic as fundamentally a process.



Figure 10: Strasbourg Cathedral's west façade, viewed from Rue Mercière

Again, the principles carry over into Gothic literature. The aesthetics of the sublime appear in representations of wild landscapes that contrast with the enclosed spaces of the estate and subterranean passageways. Characters' reactions to these wild spaces, especially in the way their delight in the beauty of nature is often entangled with a fear of discovery, violation, or the supernatural (e.g. in Lewis, Radcliffe, Stoker, and Brontë and in later texts by Jackson, Rhys, and Mootoo). For example, in Rhy's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, of Jamaica's beauty, Rochester admits, "[H]owever far I travel, I'll never see a lovelier [place]" (98), but bemoans his marriage to Antoinette who he believes is a "lunatic" (99). He reflects, "I hated its

beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her [Antoinette]. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness” (103). Rochester feels he has been cheated, enchanted, and ruined by the unbearable beauty and magic of the Caribbean and its people. Thus, sublime beauty and intoxicating pleasure are tied up with feelings of despair, vitiation, and a distrust of the non-rational.

From Ruskin’s Victorian vantage point, he saw Gothic architecture and the societies and cultures it represented as a beacon for Britain. For Ruskin, Britain was a country in an industrial boom becoming

estranged from nature and the divine; it was a country in danger of following the example of conquered Venice—a locale infused with an air of mourning and melancholy. Of Ruskin’s “The Nature of the Gothic,” Jan Morris writes,

Ruskin’s vision of Gothic after all, and of the society which he saw as its glorious sponsor, was essentially harmonious, a blend of the human, the natural and the



Figure 11: The Tempter courting the foolish virgins (sculpture in the south aisle portal of the west façade).

divine. Industrial society in Victorian England was exactly the opposite. It was dividing man from Nature, from God and from himself. (28)

Ruskin believed that the “organic” nature of Gothic architecture could tolerate “mistakes, roughness, [and] asymmetries because it was derived strictly from Nature. . . . It had none of the servile perfection of the neo-classical” (J. Morris 26) and ultimately deserved the “profoundest reverence” (Ruskin 119). This description also corresponds to Frankl’s understanding of Gothic as a process. Ruskin’s longing for the Gothic, and to understand its nature, reflects his unease with his environment and his fear of change. This uneasiness encapsulates the same sort of tensions one finds throughout Gothic texts. Furthermore, of course, Ruskin’s view is romantic. In the process of completing the great Gothic structures of the Medieval era, he sees both equality and ingenuity, which may have existed on some levels, but fails to acknowledge the possibility that laborers may have experienced suppression of desire and expression, as they were bound to the common purpose of, for example, glorifying the divine. What other choices did the craftsmen of cathedrals have but to use their skill for the Catholic Church or a feudal lord? Perhaps the lack of choice spawned the nuances of Gothic structures; thus allowing a rebellious quality to ornament lofty halls and finials like a Tower of Babel. Ruskin’s viewpoint, even though it is coupled with a decidedly romanticized understanding of the Gothic past, celebrates the process and resulting form of Gothic architecture and foregrounds the importance of history’s influence on the present.

Remarkably, Ruskin’s conception of, and veneration for, Gothic architecture relates to Walpole’s admiration for Gothic architecture. Walpole’s admiration for Gothic architecture led to the writing and publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, as it was his own

“great staircase” he witnessed in the dream that inspired the novel.<sup>15</sup> Two years before *The Castle of Otranto* was published, Walpole published his *Anecdotes of Painting* (1762) and praised the “magic hardiness” and the “venerable and picturesque” qualities of Gothic cathedrals over the “noblest Grecian temple” incapable of conveying “half so many impressions to the mind as a cathedral does of the best Gothic taste” (Walpole qtd. in Frankl 393). Walpole’s affinity for Gothic architecture is best conveyed through his home at Strawberry Hill in Twickenham, London.<sup>16</sup> He discovered the site for his home in 1747 and in 1749 began transforming the site’s cottages into his own “little gothic castle,” his “new old house”—“the castle,” he said he built “of [his] ancestors” (Walpole qtd. in R. Morris n. pag.). Walpole’s words are fascinating when one considers *Otranto*, its narrative content, its 1765 Preface and the fact that his family “were relative newcomers to the British elite” (R. Morris n. pag.). Robert Morris (2011) by explains that “by extending and decorating his house in an antique style, and in a manner that appeared as though this monument was the result of a centuries-long process of accretions, he was at the same time playfully

---

<sup>15</sup> See p. 13 of the introduction.

<sup>16</sup> The construction was indeed a process—true to form for Gothic architecture as the house was built in four stages over the course of 27 years. Strawberry Hill sat in a meadow complete with gardens, pinnacles, battlements, and even a round tower (“Horace Walpole”). The estate also contained its own press, founded in 1757, where Walpole wrote *Otranto* and dreamed the dream that birthed the Gothic literary genre. Walpole designed various architectural “scenes” and realized that (similar to Suger), “Great effects may be produced by the disposition of a house & [sic] by studying light and shades, and by attending to a harmony of colors” (Walpole qtd. in R. Morris n. pag.). R. Morris also notes that Walpole also incorporated “revolutionary innovations that were not to be taken up by other architects until the 20<sup>th</sup> century” such as sliding Gothic windows that create a “‘picture window’ effect” and allow one to view “uninterrupted vistas of the surrounding park” (R. Morris n. pag.). These windows render the “outside as beautiful as the inside” (Walpole qtd. in R. Morris n. pag.). The attention to light, color, and innovative architectural elements mimics the blended, heterogeneous structure outlined in Walpole’s 1765 Preface. R. Morris argues that Walpole’s home “transformed the Gothic Revival from a primarily decorative fashion into a major architectural movement” and inspired “countess other edifices [built] in a similar style” including the Houses of Parliament in London, the Parliament building in Budapest, and a host of public buildings and college campuses around the world” (n. pag.). Thus, Suger and Walpole have pioneer status in common as Walpole initiated a literary genre and helped reinvigorate Gothic architecture.

constructing a venerable pedigree that his family did not possess” (R. Morris n. pag.). Thus, it seems no coincidence that the subject of *Otranto* and many other Gothic novels deals with imposters to the nobility.

Finally, Suger’s *Book*, Walpole’s Strawberry Hill and *Otranto*, Frankl’s *The Gothic*, and Ruskin’s “The Nature of the Gothic” represent significant relationships between architecture and literature, time and historical context, and aesthetic forms and literary themes. In essence, Suger, Walpole, Ruskin, and Frankl are concerned with the relationships between the ancient and the modern, the rational and non-rational, human desire and the aspirations of industry, immaterial sources of inspiration and material forms, and the threads that enmesh them all. This dissertation is conceived in kind. Jackson, Carter, Mootoo, and Morrison are a diverse group of writers. Though the texts I examine are related thematically in that they all bear evidence of Gothic conventions, the authors’ styles, socio-historical backgrounds, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and professional actions and affiliations are relatively disparate. Jackson’s assertion that with fiction writing, “nothing is ever wasted; all experience is good for something,” and she finds it “much easier” to “write a story than to cope competently with the millions of daily trials and irritations that turn up in an ordinary house” (“Experience and Fiction” 195, 203). As a result, from her short stories to novels, Jackson’s work largely focuses on the realities of domesticity and, in turn, many troubling narratives of family and tradition. Carter incorporates the esoteric in many of her revisionist fairy tales, feminist novels, belles-lettres essays, and other works. Of the group of writers I examine, Carter is perhaps the most explicit in her attention to aesthetics—particularly Gothic aesthetics—in her quest to examine intellectual and political problems (“Notes” 133). For her, “Using an absolutely non-naturalistic formula [gives her]

a wonderful sense of freedom” and she enjoys the “pictorial, expository nature of Gothic imagery, its ambivalence, and the rhetorical, non-naturalistic use of language” (133). Mootoo’s *Cereus* particularly speaks to her belief that “oppression breeds oppression” and her refusal to accept that “human beings are inherently oppressive or violent” (Mootoo qtd. in Khankojé 31). Thus, her works probe social constructs of gender and race while examining oppression and the potential for transformation. Morrison’s oeuvre centers on black people’s experiences, their histories, and the truths of living in racist, sexist, stratified societies. For her, “writing is thinking and discovery and selection and order and meaning”; it is also “awe and reverence and mystery and magic” (“The Site of Memory” 71). She performs “literary archology” to enter the interior lives of African Americans that are so often ignored, removed, or left out of the historical record (71). Yet, through the disappointing, often Gothic, realities, there is often joy and hope. Taken together, the following chapters on texts by Jackson, Carter, Mootoo, and Morrison attest to the afterlife of the Gothic—the persistence of the genre’s defining characteristics into our contemporary period. In their contemporary texts, these authors engage purposefully with less-acknowledged, non-rational truths—and histories and lived experiences—that disrupt the grand narrative of positivism and create space for disruption and transformation.

## Chapter Summaries

The proceeding chapters are arranged chronologically by the publication date of the text each chapter examines. The first chapter, “‘Eleanor Come Home’: Paracosms of Gothic Vulnerability in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*” focuses on the multifaceted relationship between Eleanor’s desire for independence, fulfilling companionship, and an

ideal home through her creation of detailed paracosms (involved fantasy worlds often created by children) and the annihilating, imprisoning influence of the unquestionably Gothic Hill House. Ultimately, the mid-twentieth-century American grand narratives of belonging, romance, and domestic bliss call for Eleanor to sacrifice her desires and her independence for the family unit, and Hill House is a metaphor for the inescapability of domesticity for women still prevalent in a post-Enlightenment world.

Themes of women's imprisonment and annihilation meet themes of women's transformation and agency in the second chapter, "Angela Carter's 'The Lady of the House of Love': Reading the Gothic Monster's Cards, Escaping the Gothic House." My analysis shifts the critical focus from reading the protagonist, a vampire Countess, as an insatiable vampire to reading the Tarot cards the Countess faithfully reads each day. Although imprisoned by her condition of monstrosity in the decaying Gothic house of her forbears, the Countess uses Tarot to reach beyond and ultimately escape her prescribed space. In all, Carter's inclusion of the Tarot calls for recognition of esoteric forms, forms of the non-rational that leave us with more than one answer, more than one reference.

In the third chapter, "'Life Refusing to End': Trauma, Embodiment, and the Transformative Gothic in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," I turn to the Caribbean Gothic, arguing that Mootoo's postcolonial Caribbean novel revises and transforms the conventional Gothic narrative. Instead of dying after enduring psychological abuse and being raped repeatedly by her father, Mala, the protagonist, cultivates a decay-filled countercolonial garden that becomes a transformative Gothic space in which she experiences the sublime and flourishes. Thus, the third chapter highlights the transformative potential of the Gothic space in contrast to the imprisoning spaces of the previous chapters.

Finally, “*Love*: Toni Morrison’s African American Gothic” centers on a distinctly African American experience of the Gothic through the novel’s setting in a historically African American beach community that has lost much of its prosperity after desegregation. *Love*, complex and nonlinear, incorporates many decidedly Gothic themes from Morrison’s previous novels including haunting, incest, and pedophilia. This chapter centers on the relationship between Christine, Heed (imprisoned in their Gothic house) and Junior Viviane (who acts as a disruptive, transformative catalyst) and the influence of town patriarch Bill Cosey (Christine’s grandfather and Heed’s husband) on the three women long after his death. Morrison’s use of Bill’s Cosey’s haunted portrait—a Gothic artifact—is a physical representation of the past’s persistence into the present and calls for critical reflection on those—especially African American women—who were abused and whose desires and agency were rendered secondary preceding, during, and after the Civil Rights movement.

Thus, the Gothic’s concern with issues of gender, sexuality, race, othered histories, and othered ways of knowing and existing in the world reveal the genre’s breadth and its relevance for the contemporary age. The Gothic lives on.

CHAPTER ONE

“ELEANOR COME HOME”:

PARACOSMS OF GOTHIC VULNERABILITY IN

SHIRLEY JACKSON’S *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE*

No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, its walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone.

– Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*, 243

The first lines of *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Shirley Jackson’s fifth novel, are, according to Stephen King, among the finest “descriptive passages in the English language” (282). King continues, “it is the sort of quiet epiphany every writer hopes for: words that somehow transcend words, words which add up to a total greater than the sum of the parts” (282). Indeed, much of *The Haunting of Hill House* transcends the words on its pages and reveals Jackson’s conscious construction of a Gothic narrative that resonates with issues of the mid-twentieth century while drawing on the conventions of eighteenth-century Gothic novels—especially those by Ann Radcliffe and Horace Walpole. In essence, *The Haunting of Hill House* is haunted by these texts. The idea of being haunted is a recurring theme in

Gothic literature and is especially important for reading *Hill House* and for understanding its mode of production.

Hill House is an entity that actively haunts—“haunting” in the novel’s title is a continuous activity the house performs. My own reading of the novel is a case in point. It left me breathless. I read the entire novel in two brief sittings, punctuated only by the necessity of sleep—the necessity to dream. The last pages of the novel were dizzying. I felt invaded by the text and experienced a type of sympathetic kinship with Eleanor whose consciousness is invaded by the lure of a Gothic home. And, in the novel’s final moments, I witnessed Eleanor, the narrative’s late 1950s American Gothic heroine, driven by her desire to belong, succumb in spirit and flesh to Hill House: the space that ultimately seduces, imprisons, and annihilates her. Furthermore, at the novel’s closing, the concept of haunting is made more powerful by Eleanor’s susceptibility to the predominant, stifling gendered narratives of mid-century America that trap her in the web of a domestic dream. Eleanor becomes the agent that haunts Hill House; and, beyond the diegetic space of the novel, we understand that she will haunt Hill House and its grounds “alone” (417). The mid-twentieth-century American grand narratives of belonging, romance, and domestic bliss call for Eleanor to sacrifice her desires and her agency to create a safe, comforting space of her own fashioning. Ultimately, Hill House is a metaphor for the inescapability from conventional modes of domesticity and domestic labor for women—an imprisoning reality still prevalent in a post-Enlightenment world.

The novel commences with Dr. John Montague, an anthropologist who analyzes “supernatural manifestations” and whose degree lends him a sense of “respectability” because his investigations are “utterly unscientific” (243). He rents Hill House for three

months and plans to research paranormal activity there with the hopes of writing and publishing a book about his findings, for which he “absolutely” expects compensation, because, of course there will be a “sensation following upon the publication of his definitive work on the causes and effects of psychic disturbances in a house commonly known as ‘haunted’” (243). Montague “had been looking for an honestly haunted house all his life” (243). Although doubtful when he first hears of Hill House, he becomes “hopeful” then “indefatigable” in his efforts to investigate Hill House and employ nineteenth-century ghost hunting methods (243). He suspects that the “leisurely ways of Victorian life lent themselves more agreeably to the devices of psychic investigation, or perhaps the painstaking documentation of phenomena has largely gone out as a means of determining actuality” (243-44). Thus, Montague romanticizes the lost age while seeking to rehabilitate a form of it through his investigation. To aid his research, Montague selects people who have had some kind of “abnormal” or unexplainable experience in his or her lifetime (244). Out of twelve letters, two candidates agree to join him: Theodora and Eleanor Vance.<sup>17</sup> Hill House’s owners insist a family representative take part in the research, so Luke Sanderson is included in the party.

For Eleanor, Hill House comes at the end of one era and holds the promise of the beginning of something new. The 32-year-old had cared for her recently deceased invalid mother, whom she hated, for eleven years and now lives with her sister, whom she “genuinely hated” as well (245). She dislikes her brother-in-law, her five-year-old niece, and

---

<sup>17</sup> For the evolution of Theodora Vane into Eleanor Vance and other revealing elements of Jackson’s writing and revising of the novel and its characters, see Lootens’s “‘Whose Hand Was I Holding?’: Familial and Sexual Politics in Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*” in *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*. Ed. Bernice M. Murphy. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005.

has no friends to claim as her own. Eleanor “could not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life” (245). The years with her mother had been “built up devotedly around small guilts and small reproaches, constant weariness, and unending despair” (245). Perhaps, most telling, “Without ever wanting to become reserved and shy, she had spent so long alone, with no one to love, that it was difficult for her to talk” and that “ever since her first memory, Eleanor had been waiting for something like Hill House” and had “held fast to the belief that someday something would happen” (245-46). During her caregiver years, she played solitaire, or listened to the radio all alone. She was forced to read “[l]ove stories,” or romance novels, to her mother for “two hours” every afternoon (301). For at least a third of her life, she has been subjected to the narratives of romantic love with their submissive, yearning women, handsome, ravishing men, and the unrealistic expectations about life, relationships, and the extraordinary circumstances one must endure to achieve a happy life or love relationship such stories bring with them. Naturally, romances share a common ancestor with Gothic narratives and fairy tales as these genres draw on, revise, and expand the medieval courtly love tradition. Thus, Jackson utilizes the aesthetics of the Gothic mode to illuminate the fragility of Eleanor’s personhood as she struggles with the haunting reality of her caregiver past—the burden of domestic labor, her yearning for her own domicile, and the newly opened realm of independence that journeying to Hill House represents.

Eleanor’s sister, Carrie, and brother-in-law fear that Montague may perform “*experiments*” on her, or, perhaps worse, “introduce Eleanor to savage rites not unconnected with matters Eleanor’s sister deemed it improper for an unmarried young woman to know” (246). Such concerns appear genuine and reasonable to a degree and they acknowledge the tendency for young women to be taken advantage of sexually by older men (and men in

general), but they also reiterate the absurd reality of a world in which it is not remarkable for women to be subjected to such abuse. These circumstances occur again and again in the Gothic text and contemporary novels I discuss in later chapters such as Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and Toni Morrison's *Love* (2003), which reproduce and critique these appalling dynamics in graphic, excessive detail. In Jackson's novel, Carrie's words also convey a conventionally religious view of sex which suggest that Eleanor must keep herself a virgin in hopes of marrying one day; this fate seems the only appropriate trajectory for Eleanor.<sup>18</sup> Carrie's fears about "*experiments*" also bring to mind the scientists of nineteenth-century Gothic novels, such as Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein who dare to become god-like and manipulate life and bodies (see Botting *Gothic 2*). In the early years of the Atomic age, concerns such as the latter were prevalent. It is ironic that while male scientists may wield the power to effectively destroy the world—both human and natural, a young woman like Eleanor only wants to borrow a car and have her own space to call home.

After Montague, Luke, Theodora, and Eleanor arrive at Hill House, the investigation begins, and paranormal activity begins to trickle out and then erupt within the house, its grounds, and its characters. Evidence of this eruption is especially noticeable in Eleanor's behavior. After building suspense and a series of scenes that suggest Eleanor is falling under the house's spell, the novel culminates with Eleanor's compulsion to climb the library's decrepit staircase, which, apropos to a Gothic novel, leads to a trapdoor and turret where a former female occupant allegedly committed suicide. After she endangers herself

---

<sup>18</sup> Theodora and, to an extent, Mrs. Montague complicate this trajectory, but they are still caught up in the spell Hill House casts while they visit the space.

and her rescuer, Luke, Montague insists Eleanor leave Hill House “for [her] own safety” (414). But, readers know that Eleanor feels differently and, in a way, her first thoughts upon learning about Hill House mirror Montague’s search for Hill House, as “[d]uring the whole underside of her life, ever since her first memory, Eleanor had been waiting for something like Hill House” (246). Until her arrival at Hill House, Eleanor had served her mother for over a decade, and after her mother’s death, Eleanor had only a cot in her niece’s nursery to call her own. In the end, driven from the space that has become her home, Eleanor kills herself by smashing her car—a ubiquitous symbol of mid-twentieth-century American independence—into a tree.

While writing the novel, Jackson came to the realization, “More than ever before I am wandering in a kind of fairytale world” (Jackson qtd. in Oppenheimer 226). And, ultimately, the imprint of Jackson’s fairy tale wanderings remains. One of the most fascinating aspects of the novel is Eleanor’s careful construction of home and a fairy tale-esque life. As Eleanor makes her way to Hill House, she creates a series of ideal home environments, some building on others, and others shifting into new possibilities. Gaston Bachelard (1958) explains, “A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing a veritable psychology of the house” (17). Despite Eleanor’s stated aversion to reading the love stories she read her mother (301), her longing for a home is shaped by naïve, socially conditioned beliefs in the happy endings of fairy tales and expectations of romantic love coupled with her imaginative ability to create finely detailed paracosms based on such beliefs. I use the word paracosm, “a prolonged fantasy world invented by children; can have a definite

geography and language and history,” to indicate the child-like origins of many of Eleanor’s fantasies (“Paracosm”). In all, *The Haunting of Hill House* does what Angela Carter says a good Gothic novel should do: “provoke unease” (“Notes” 134). Perhaps most unsettling is that Hill House becomes the only place Eleanor believes she can exist happily because it is the only space, or entity, that accepts her as simply Eleanor. Eleanor’s construction of and desire for an ideal home of her own is peppered with fairy tales, a desire for self-affirming domesticity, and the haunting specter of her barren past. The nature and form of her yearning provoke unease when readers find the predominant expectations for a good, desirable, or acceptable mid-twentieth-century American woman’s life are essentially still as confining and destructive as a Gothic manor or harlequin romance. And, through Eleanor’s death, we identify the tendency in Gothic literature for an innocent woman to be physically or psychically violated and often killed by a man within spaces and contexts that should ideally provide repose, protection, or domestic harmony.<sup>19</sup>

#### Inventing Home: Eleanor’s Paracosms

Eleanor is determined to answer Montague’s invitation and, midway through chapter one, she takes her sister’s car and begins her journey to Hill House with a strong sense of agency. She reflects on her life, the warmth of summer when her dad still lived, and admonishes herself: “She had taken to wondering lately, during these swift-counted years, what had been done with all those wasted summer days; how could she have spent them so wantonly? I am foolish, she told herself early every summer, I am very foolish; I am grown up now and know the values of things” (251). She understands that “[n]othing is ever really

---

<sup>19</sup> In *The Haunting of Hill House*, though, there is no single male perpetrator.

wasted” but she still feels that the “cold thought” of having “let more time go by” (251). But now Eleanor is driving, asserting her independence, “I am going, I am going, I have finally taken a step” she thinks and in this moment, “the car belonged entirely to her, a little contained world all her own; I am really going” (251). Although this passage conveys the extent of Eleanor’s repression, it also highlights the power she gains from taking and driving the car. Indeed, at the end of the novel, it is in the car that she arguably regains a true sense of agency—if only for a few moments—separated from the seduction of Hill House and what it represents. It is important to note the precise language: the car contains a “world all her own” (251). Bachelard writes that the house is “our corner of the world,” “our first universe” where the chief benefit of the house is that it “shelters daydreaming” and “protects the dreamer” allowing one to “dream in peace” (6). For Eleanor, her first and second home have offered no such repose. Thus, it is the car that becomes this generative space for dreams and fantasies. The car becomes the first step on Eleanor’s perceived path to an ideal home and state of happiness and in the last two sections of the first chapter, we see a series of idealized homescapes and scenarios: Eleanor’s paracosms.

Through her inventive paracosms, Eleanor searches for the most secure, stable situation. She seeks to develop a space, a true home, that provides the security, love, and stability she feels is missing from her life. The soul of Eleanor’s ideal house would be one where a new life can begin. Ideally, according to Bachelard (1958), “Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house” (7). Here, the house is gendered female especially through the word, “bosom.” Bachelard uses the phrasings “human being,” “our,” and “we” in this section, but he also writes, “mankind,” “man,” and “him” which genders the person who is born in the “cradle of the house” male (7). By the

end of Eleanor's journey, it becomes clear that an enclosed, protected space is what she truly desires. However, Eleanor's naïve belief in the grand narratives of her era converge with a much more complex reality—one that is haunted, one in which peoples are oppressed, one in which her agency is under constant attack by convention, authority, and paternalism. In this mid-twentieth-century Gothic narrative that enclosed space is numinous. It represents the "loss of human identity and the alienation of self from both itself and the social bearings in which a sense of reality is secured" because of the "breakdown of modernity's metanarratives" that reveal "identity, reality, truth and meaning are not only effects of narratives but subject to a dispersion and multiplication of meanings, realities and identities" questioning "narratives of authority and legitimacy of social forms" (Botting, *Gothic* 157).

The car is a complex symbol. We may interpret the course of Eleanor's journey as one that moves her from the space of the mother and the domestic—an oppressive feminine space and not the "bosom" Bachelard proclaims—through the space of the masculine: the public space of the road and the car. The latter is a transgressive space in which Eleanor can shake off the burden of forced domesticity. In "Girls and the Getaway: Cars, Culture, and the Predicament of Gendered Space" (1995), Carol Sanger discusses the conventional, sexist rhetoric around women and cars—women are absent-minded drivers, women are best draped over hoods of brand new sports cars, driving may be dangerous taking women "too far from home and then break down," and that real driving is reserved for men (707). Cars are also sexualized as feminine and symbolic of a rite of passage for young American men. At the same time, however, cars are also "private, intimate space[s]" marketed to women in as mobile homes (709). Yet, they also come with the danger of violence and rape as cars

“become subject to the logic of places and the familiar paradoxes of the public-private distinction” as the privacy of home “left women unprotected from violence perpetrated by other members of the household,” that same danger extends into the private space of the vehicle (730). Within Carrie’s anxiety about Eleanor taking the car is the subtext of fear of sexual violence. This is already suggested in her mention of “experiments” and reinforced by her continual lament about “something” happening (248-249). The subject of sexual violation is too taboo for Carrie to articulate the possibility. When Eleanor has made up her mind to go to Hill House, she, Carrie, and her brother-in-law argue about Eleanor’s use of the car. The car is equally Eleanor’s, as she helped pay for half of it, but Carrie and her husband do not believe she should be able to use it—even though they will be staying in the mountains during the summer. The most revealing part of this exchange is the continual disavowal of Eleanor’s partial ownership of the vehicle and the concern about the car’s material worth and it being returned in good condition. Instead, they only see Eleanor as a source of domestic labor, or worse: a burden, a cancer in their conventional nuclear family. Carrie, “addressing her teacup,”—a significant description as the cup comes to represent for Eleanor one’s heartfelt desires, one’s resolve to see one’s will fulfilled—says, “even if *Eleanor* is prepared to run off to the ends of the earth at the invitation of any man, there is *still* no reason why she should be permitted to take my car with her” (249; emphasis in original). They try to appeal to pathos and propose scenarios about Eleanor’s niece becoming ill and Carrie resorts to, “I am sure Mother would have agreed with me, Eleanor” (249). Of course, this conclusion will only encourage Eleanor to take the vehicle. She lacks concern and fear about experiments or sexual acts being performed on her, and “she would have gone anywhere” (246).

In the early part of the twentieth century, cars offered whites—especially white women—separation from ‘undesirable’ elements and peoples (e.g., blacks on street cars and other forms of public transit).<sup>20</sup> In 1915, Ford promised “Freedom for the woman who owns a Ford,” and Sanger asserts the “car secured freedom with safety, adventure with control. [Wealthy white] Women drivers could move about in public space but were still insulated from direct contact with those outside the car” (712-713). As the First World War progressed, more and more women begin to drive in service of others and American society was more accepting of the women’s mobility. By the 1950s, the rise of suburban living, middle-class women’s agency—“choice, freedom, and rationality”—and perceived happiness was increasingly tied to “household status and heterosexual service” and the car’s use provided status (Cott qtd. in Sanger 718). Eleanor is correct to imagine the car provides a “world all her own,” but her sister’s anxiety is also apropos. The car represents a multifaceted space: transgressive and liberatory, yet dangerous and oppressive. Ultimately, Sanger argues,

the car has sustained and enhanced traditional understandings about women’s abilities and roles in areas both public (the road) and private (the driveway). Specifically, the car has reinforced women’s subordinated status in ways that make the subordination seem ordinary, even logical through two predictable, but subtle, mechanisms: by increasing women’s domestic obligations and by sexualizing the relations between women and cars. (707)

Of course Eleanor’s trajectory follows the fate of the average mid-twentieth-century woman: home (Hill House) lies at the end of the road and through Eleanor’s imagination, her figurations of ideal homes never leave her mind. This paradox aligns with Botting’s

---

<sup>20</sup> All the characters in *Hill House* are white, and there is no mention of black people which reflects the largely segregated state and social mores of American society in the 1950s. But Jackson was definitely aware of blacks and their struggles and was also involved in Communist and Marxist circles. Ralph Ellison was even a godparent to one of her four children (Hattenhauer 15).

observation on the device of transgression—albeit Eleanor’s taking the car may seem to be a minor transgression. Gothic novels tend to “reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety” as transgression—“crossing the social and aesthetic limits” of the time “serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits” (*Gothic* 7). Thus, Eleanor’s eventual fate calls attention to the very dangers both explicit and latent in mid-century rhetoric about women, cars, and the potential for them to take them away from homes permanently through the threat of mechanical failure or violence. Eleanor’s deadly crash also reiterates Sanger’s claim that cars do not provide women with more actual freedom and independence, but subtly function to keep them tethered to the private, domestic realm.

Jackson employs, builds on, and revises the familiar Gothic heroine trope: Eleanor is orphaned and begins a journey of self-discovery. For example, Radcliffe’s Emily St. Aubert has a lovely life with her loving parents until her mother dies unexpectedly, her father becomes ill, and dies soon after during their journeying to warmer climate where she happens to meet her future mate, Valancourt. But before a happy ending, Emily is forced to travel with her aunt to the cruel Montoni’s castle and endure much hardship and unexplained occurrences. Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre is orphaned and is abused by her aunt and haunted by her uncle’s ghost. She has a brief period of happiness before becoming the governess of Mr. Rochester’s ward. Carrie acts as surrogate mother to Eleanor, and in doing so—because Eleanor perceives her as uncaring—Jackson resurrects the cruel aunt motif: a woman who can never replace the ideal mother, who is too pure to be included in the diegetic space of the Gothic narrative, or otherwise survive its villain’s devices (e.g., Elvira, Antonia’s mother in *The Monk* who is murdered by Ambrose). In both Radcliffe’s

and Brontë's novels, the heroine's journey ends in marriage—which is rare for many Gothic heroines (e.g., Walpole's Matilda and Lewis's Antonia are both murdered).

Later, Jackson complicates the Gothic heroine narrative with the refrain of “Journeys end in lovers meeting” from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* 2.3.<sup>21</sup> Lootens discusses how the phrase is remembered by Vancey, who is the lead heroine in an early version of *Hill House*. This character is outwardly the “sensible young woman”—the “female equivalent of the bluff, hearty bachelor narrator of so many classic Victorian ghost stories,” but, inwardly, Vancey is a “romantic, lonely woman who feels entrapped by the peaceful, ordered existence symbolized by her weekly visits to her married sister's house” (153). Vancey claims, “she was ‘made to die for love,’ and that love ‘hasn't asked’” (Jackson qtd. in Lootens 153). Already, we see some imprint of Vancey on Eleanor who feels trapped by her existence in her sister's life and whose romance plays out in her paracosms. (This sacrificial motif also survives in the brief mention of the love stories Eleanor was made to read to her mother each day.) On her way to visit her sister once, Vancey thinks of the *Twelfth Night* verses inspired by a hardware sign with the name “R. Sweeting,” and reflects, “They did frequently end in lovers [*sic*] meetings. . . . Carrie wanted me to get married, for some

---

<sup>21</sup> The relevant section from *Twelfth Night* follows:

O Mistress mine, where are you roaming?  
O stay and hear! your true-love's coming  
That can sing both high and low;  
Trip no further, pretty sweeting,  
Journeys end in lovers' meeting—  
Every wise man's son doth know.

What is love? 'tis not hereafter;  
Present mirth hath present laughter;  
What's to come is still unsure:  
In delay there lies no plenty,—  
Then come kiss me, Sweet-and-twenty,  
Youth's a stuff will not endure. (3.2)

inscrutable reason. Perhaps she found the married state so excruciatingly disagreeable herself that it was the only think bad enough she could think of to do to me” (Jackson qtd. in Lootens 153). Lootens argues for the significance of her musical selection because Vancey’s “private jest evokes the comic world of *Twelfth Night*, in which an exiled, sexually ambiguous heroine finds a new home, a lost brother, and true love” (153). And, as haunting plays such an important role in the conception of *Hill House* and in the novel itself, Looten’s observation that like a “blind motif” that is retained in a fairy tale “long after it has lost its original context and meaning,” the *Twelfth Night* song “will be passed down to the central figure of each draft” is important (153). By the final draft, Lootens argues, the key phrase, “journeys end in lovers meeting” becomes a “ritual invocation of faith by a woman who does not know its origin; who does not even believe in the value of knowledge; and who is afraid that if she remembers the whole song, she will discover it is ‘improper’” (153). Sadly, this ignorance fuels Eleanor’s destruction.

Eleanor has never driven “far alone” before and considers, again expressing agency, her journey itself as “her positive action” leading her down a “path of incredible novelty to a new place” (252). Eleanor toys with the notion of abandoning the car (while fearing punishment) and stopping “just anywhere and never leave again” (252). Eleanor’s first conception of a new home comes as she fantasizes about wondering until she is exhausted—perhaps as Jane Eyre did after her escape from Thornfield and Mr. Rochester. But, Eleanor’s fantasy of traveling in the wild until exhausted is more child-like than Jane’s motivation for journeying alone. Jane was escaping her sexual desire—not wanting to be Rochester’s mistress after the discovery of the truth of his first wife, Bertha. Eleanor envisions herself “chasing butterflies or following a stream” and upon nightfall finding the

“hut of some poor woodcutter who would offer her shelter,” or thinks “she might make her home forever” in one of the nearby villages (253). Eleanor is always moving toward a home while many other Gothic heroines journeying alone are escaping a space that has become *unheimlich*, or dangerous to their virtue (their virginity) or physical well-being. Eleanor even contemplates that she’ll “never leave the road at all, but just hurry on and on until the wheels of the car were worn to nothing and she had come to the end of the world” (253). The mention of the “woodcutter” evokes Little Red Riding Hood in which the “threat of being devoured is the central theme,” according to child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim (169). Of course, Hill House is this precise threat as both Theodora and Eleanor later express. Theodora uses the phrasing that something was “coming to eat her” while Eleanor uses the verb “consume” (340). Moreover, the fairy tale woodcutter also evokes a protective male figure; one who is not interested in his young female visitor sexually, as she is the one who protects Red and defeats the wolf. Eleanor’s perceived fearlessness in the face of her sister’s fears about a deranged, perverted doctor or other harms the road may bring to a woman, is more appropriately read as naiveté or a child-like belief in the safe, happy endings offered by fairy tales. She translates these fantasies into her paracosms and psyche.

Darryl Hattenhauer (2003) associates fairy tales with the “dream text” as they are both narratives of “wish fulfillment” (168). But, Bettelheim’s research seems more apropos:

Fairy tales, unlike any other form of literature, direct the child to discover his identity and calling, and they also suggest what experiences are needed to develop his character further. Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one’s reach despite adversity—but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed. The stories also warn that those who are too timorous and narrow-minded to risk themselves in finding themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence—if an even worse fate does not befall them. (24)

Indeed, Eleanor begins to create her own fairy tale life. She becomes the heroine of her paracosm. Her paracosms allow her to begin to construct a new, more ideal life. Yet, she risks herself too completely and loses sight of her self and agency by the novel's end because she has not had the time or space to truly develop her own personality. Jackson modifies the fairy tale's function to fit the uncanny narrative of the Gothic tale as *Hill House* works to reveal the "ineffectuality of [the character's] own dreams" and transforms the ideal of the nurturing nuclear family into one that kills, Lootens argues, to "[touch] on the terror of [Jackson's] entire culture (150-151).

One paracosm leads to another. After her musings of spending a life with the woodcutter, Eleanor accepts Hill House, which will provide her with room and board, as her destination. She accepts the road as an "intimate friend" (253). (Although from fairy tales like "Little Red Riding Hood," readers know the path inevitable leads to a potentially fatal test.) Eleanor passes a "vast house, pillared and walled, with shutters over the windows and a pair of stone lions guarding the steps, and she thought that perhaps she might live there, dusting the lions each morning and patting their heads good night" (253). She imagines herself living there. At this moment, "Time is beginning this [first day of summer, the 21<sup>st</sup>] morning in June, she assured herself, but it is a time that is strangely new and of itself; in these few seconds I have lived a lifetime in a house with two lions in front" and she continues the fantasy which includes a "little dainty old lady" who cares for her and imagines her ordered, solitary life, until her death: "When I died . . ." (ellipses in original) (254). There are important details in her fantasy: she has a "quiet dining room at the gleaming table and between the tall windows the white paneling of the walls shone in the candlelight; [she] dined upon a bird, and radishes from the garden, and homemade plum

jam” (254). She sleeps beneath white organdy and a nightlight guards her from the hall (254). Eleanor imagines a spotless, white house—the maid, the organdy, tall windows, stone lions she imagines herself washing with warm water once a week (objects people of the town are so proud of, they bow to her), and garden suggest wealth and Eleanor’s desire to live a comfortable, aristocratic lifestyle.

Organdy acts as multifaceted metonym in the paracosm.<sup>22</sup> Eleanor imagining her bed enclosed in such a white fabric gestures toward marriage and romantic relationships, but the older woman to care for her reveals the latent desire for a loving mother figure. Here, the detail, and the imagined worlds that follow, are also indicative of narrative excess common to the Gothic, as often times, details provided in the genre are beyond what is necessary to convey the main points of the story; take any novel by Radcliffe, or Lewis’s *The Monk*, or a contemporary work such as Carter’s “Lady of the House of Love,” or Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Details in these narratives about texture of fabric or wallpaper in Carter, for example, or the graphic description of sexual assault in Mootoo exceed what is essential to relate an event or circumstance, but pay homage to a tradition of precise details found in early Gothic narratives. And such level of detail mimics the ornamentation on Gothic buildings that range from glorious archways to terrifying depictions of demons and gargoyles.

Eleanor relishes her drive and passes an old fairground with torn signs with “fragments of words”: “DARE” and “EVIL” which she translates to “DAREDEVIL,” taking it as an admonishment for her to slow down lest she “reach Hill House too soon”

---

<sup>22</sup>Organdy is a “very sheer, thin, crisp fabric” often made of cotton and sometimes blended with polyester that is often used in bridal and evening wear, party dresses, and in fine curtains (“Organdy”). Finishing the fabric to achieve its characteristic stiffness can be a costly process.

(254). Writing and texts are familiar devices in the Gothic narrative; of course letter writing was the main form of communication between characters separated by distance in early Gothic narratives, but writing and texts also populate the Gothic landscape in conspicuous ways that influence and bear information about the plot and characters' fates. For example, Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert is haunted by "words, which had roused equally her curiosity and terror" from papers her father commanded her to destroy after his death (103). By contrast, the papers accompany a locket with a woman's face and no words to identify the subject. Words convey information through the symbolic, but without context, the symbols are left to haunt the imaginary. Emily and readers do not discover the mystery for another five hundred pages. Hattenhauer discusses the importance of texts and allusion in Jackson's oeuvre, arguing that in *Hill House*, subject formation comes not only from the "prison house of language" but from "specific texts"; the "role of discourse in subject formation and interpellation" is so precise that "even just a few specific texts directly determine much of the subject" (165). Thus, allusions to fairy tales (and many other texts including Gothic novels), fragments of words, and Eleanor's detailed stories of her imagined life (her paracosms), combine to produce a vulnerable heroine who seeks out "omens everywhere," and renders her destined to "dare evil," like a fairy tale or Gothic heroine (Hattenhauer 166).<sup>23</sup> Yet, instead of heeding such omens, and valuing the power of the imaginary, she privileges the symbolic, constantly constructing paracosm after paracosm. Ironically, while she creates a text of her life, she loses agency. And, in the end, she will only survive in the

---

<sup>23</sup> This sentences contains quoted material from two sources. The phrase "omens everywhere" is from *The Haunting of Hill House*, page 254, while the second phrase "dare evil" is credited to Hattenhauer in the parenthetical citation.

written reports of Montague and others who contribute to circulating the “various unsavory stories” about Hill House (244, 417).

Next, on her journey, Eleanor experiences a moment of the sublime. And in doing so, Jackson harkens back again to Lewis, Radcliffe and others whose heroines and heroes alike stop to stare at sublime vistas. Eleanor stops “beside the road to stare in disbelief and wonder” (254). She sees “splendid tended oleanders, blooming pink and white in a steady row” (254). The row leads to a gateway of “ruined stone pillars, with a road leading way between them into empty fields. . . . Inside the oleander square there was nothing, no house, no building, nothing but the straight road going across and ending at the stream” (254). She thinks to herself, “Now what was here . . . and is gone, or what was going to be here and never same? Was it going to be a house or a garden or an orchard; were they driven away forever or are they coming back?” (254). The emptiness of the field coupled with ruined pillars is symbolic of one of key motivations of Gothic literature—acknowledging the past’s imprint on the present through the process of decay. The pillars mark that something else once existed. Eleanor remembers that oleanders are poisonous and then her inventive spirit takes off. She speculates the flowers are guarding something—perhaps something beautiful yet dangerous like Beatrice Rappaccini?<sup>24</sup> Again, Jackson’s narrative highlights another Gothic aesthetic theme as flora and gardens, common to the Gothic narrative, pair beauty and danger that evoke the Eden myth and impending moral collapse. My chapter on Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* will discuss how this Gothic device is rehabilitated and transformed.

---

<sup>24</sup> Here Nathaniel Hawthorne’s well known “Rappaccini’s Daughter” comes to mind (1844).

In this alluring space, Eleanor postulates she will “get out of [her] car and go between the ruined gates and then, once [she] is in the magic oleander square, find that [she] has wondered into a fairyland” (254). She then imagines walking through the barrier and breaking the spell by entering a “sweet garden” with benches, roses, arbors, and a jeweled path which leads to a palace that lies under a spell. In this courtyard past stone lions (she is borrowing from her previous fantasy) there is a weeping queen waiting for her princess (Eleanor) to return. She imagines the queen dropping her embroidery upon Eleanor’s entry, crying out and stirring long-sleeping servants to prepare a feast “because the enchantment is ended and the palace is itself again” and she and her mother will live happily ever after (255). Here, she imagines returning to the loving mother that, unlike most Gothic heroines, she never had. She promptly finds fault with her fantasy: “No, of course, she thought, turning to start her car again, once the palace becomes visible and the spell is broken, the *whole* spell will be broken and all this countryside outside the oleanders will return to its proper form, fading away . . . into a soft green picture from a fairy tale. Then, coming down from the hills there will be a prince riding” (255). Eleanor retreats from the unattainable mother (she cannot reenter the womb), and the homosocial relationship of her previous fantasy, and, rather, gives into the conventional narrative of heterosexual love and the fairy tale notion of a prince who rescues a vulnerable heroine. At this point, she has already spun three elaborate paracosms that could become full-length narratives on their own.

Shortly after, Eleanor stops for lunch and draws out the endeavor “because this was a time and a land where enchantments were swiftly made and broken” and takes comfort in knowing “Hill House always waited for her at the end of her day” (255). Eleanor is already beginning to personify Hill House and conflate the space with her desired home. At the

diner, she witnesses a little girl refuse to drink her milk from a glass because she “wants her cups of stars” (256). Eleanor immediately appropriates the girl’s desire: “Indeed yes, Eleanor thought; indeed, so do I; a cup of stars, of course” (256). The mother promises the girl she can drink from her cup of stars when they return home, but Eleanor silently warns the girl, “Don’t do it . . . insist on your cups of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again” (256). The little girl glances at Eleanor and smiles with a “subtle, dimpling, wholly comprehending smile, and sh[akes] her head stubbornly at the glass” (256). Eleanor silently praises her, “Brave girl . . . wise, brave girl” (256). Of course, the irony of the scene makes itself clear later when Eleanor relinquishes her dreams of the paracosms she has created on her journey to Hill House. After the family leaves, the refrain from *Twelfth Night* first appears: “Journey’s end, she thought, and far back in her mind . . . a tag end of a tune danced through her head, bringing distantly a word or so; ‘In delay there lies no plenty’” (256). In the play, the complete passage encourages a listener to stop immediately, cherish the present moment, and accept the love before oneself. Jackson’s meticulous craft shines as the very next sentence reads “She nearly stopped forever . . . because she came to a tiny cottage buried in a garden” where she could live alone, behind the roses, and where she would plant oleanders to keep others away (256). She imagines herself with a robin, raising white cats, sewing white curtains, and providing fortunes and love potions for “sad maidens” (257). In this paracosm, Eleanor is an independent agent who buys tea and brews potions; it is the last fantasy Eleanor has of making a home before she reaches the Hill House estate.

It is significant that this final vision occurs after the encounter with the girl who misses her cup of stars. The shape of the cup, its roundness is associated with the

phenomenological idea: “*Das Dasein ist rund*,” or “Being is round” (Bachelard 239).

Bachelard explains that roundness and calm naturally go together; and, when “a thing becomes isolated, it becomes round” (239). For both children and adults, cups carry the meaning of world creation. Children have tea parties with cups filled with imaginary liquid, blissfully creating a reality all their own. Adults may begin or end their days with a cup of coffee or tea—drinking during these moments provides private space to reflect and daydream, to create a world.

After stopping in Hillsdale, defying Montague’s directions to avoid the village, Eleanor begins the increasingly dark climb to Hill House’s gate. She thinks, “I am a new person, very far from home” and lines from *Twelfth Night* come to her (260). Suddenly, helpless, she wonders, “Why am I here?,” but she cannot turn back because she is “expected” (260-262). (This rhetoric reiterates Sanger’s claim that the car is not a complete means of escape for women because they are always expected to return to the domestic space.) The last fantasy Eleanor crafts comes after she has entered the estate and makes her final approach to Hill House. House insinuates its presence into this paracosm. She silences the *Twelfth Night* refrain thinking the forgotten words (which we soon learn are “Journeys end in lovers meeting”) must be unsuitable. Noticeably, she recounts the architecture, “[s]he caught glimpses of what must be roofs, perhaps a tower, of Hill House. They made houses so oddly back when Hill House was built . . . they put towers and turrets and buttresses and wooden lace on them, even sometimes Gothic spires and gargoyles; nothing was ever left undecorated” (264). Next, we glean a sense of hope as she muses, “Perhaps Hill House has a tower, or a secret chamber, or even a passageway going off into the hills and probably used by smugglers. . . . Perhaps I will encounter a devilishly handsome smuggler and . . .”

(264; final ellipsis in original). Thus, her shining hero (the prince from a previous fantasy) devolves into a rogue as she approaches Hill House. When she comes “face to face” with the house, she stops, stares, and then words come freely into her mind, “Hill House is vile, it is diseased”; she thinks suddenly, “get away from here at once” (264). So much happens in these moments as Eleanor first approaches Hill House. The fantasy evokes Radcliffe’s Montoni, whose castle at Udolpho serves as an operation base for his group of banditti, and Count Morano who uses the castle’s secret passageways to reach the object of his desire, Emily. Eleanor’s instinct is to shiver, to leave. Here, the association of Hill House’s Gothic architectural details with general malaise echo the Renaissance and Neo-Classic architects who viewed Gothic style as barbaric and representative of a dark, repressive epoch.<sup>25</sup> But, like an unexperienced child in a fairy tale, Eleanor ignores this instinct, and seeks to satisfy her curiosity. Ignoring such an instinct also speaks to her sense of duty—ingrained over eleven years as caretaker—as she says more than once Hill House is waiting for her and, as noted above, that she is expected.

The next and sixth world Eleanor creates for herself is one she hopes will impress Theodora, who is both Eleanor’s Gothic double and the sister/source of love for which she longs. Eleanor creates an apartment for herself comprised of things she encountered on her journey and the paracosms they inspired. She has “[w]hite curtains, “little stone lions,” and a “white cat” (303). She makes clear that everything has to be “exactly the way [she wants] it, because there’s only [Eleanor] to use it” (303). Her words seem childlike and fanciful and she adds, “[O]nce I had a blue cup with stars painted on the inside; when you looked down into a cup of tea it was full of stars. I want a cup like that” (303). It is important that Eleanor

---

<sup>25</sup> See pp. 27, 34-36 of the introduction.

says she wants a “cup like that,” and not that she wants a cup like that *again*. She subconsciously implies she *never* had a cup of stars, which she has come to associate with agency and a defined sense of self and desire in the face of authority and restriction. Theodora replies that perhaps such a cup will “turn up someday, in [her] shop,” and she will send it to Eleanor “with love from her friend Theodora” (303). Then, Eleanor immediately adds to her imaginary home with, “I would have stolen those gold-rimmed dishes” referring to one of the possessions about which the Crain sisters bitterly quarreled. Here, again, Eleanor’s imagination bears evidence of Hill House’s creeping influence and her own propensity to fantasize through stories.

### The Haunting House

In *The Closed Space* (1990), Manuel Aguirre argues that Jackson “introduces an entirely new element into the Haunted House theme,” as the house does not “simply destroy its victims, it *changes* them” (190). (This concept is also certainly in play in Morrison’s *Love*.) Aguirre concludes that the “victim is meant to become one with the Enemy” (190). Here, the “Enemy” refers to a “numinous” enemy—something that “transcends the rational, that which by human definition lies beyond our conceptions of morality and reason: the awesome, the awful, the wholly Other” (3).<sup>1</sup> Aguirre argues that the house in modern terror fiction is “not a haunted but a *haunting* house. It is no longer a human space; it does not happen to be sheltering a numinous presence, it *is* the numinous presence, an otherworldly living space that craves birth, sustenance, growth, reproduction in the human world” (192). This otherworldly, haunting house becomes “another perfect parasite, another cell in the body of mankind which has been transmuted into a part of the

Enemy,” writes Aguirre (192). Indeed, the house itself becomes the agent that haunts. And, later, Eleanor becomes one with the haunting house and haunts its guests. Hill House distorts the idea of home as a welcoming haven just as the Gothic castles and draughty manors of Gothic fiction that have come before it, but Jackson complicates the concept by imbuing the house with a personality. The personality animates the house that comes to represent the haunting reality of modernity’s failure to provide spaces that nurture difference, encourage female independence and non-traditional female roles (e.g., the gruesome morality scrapbook Hugh Crain, the designer and original owner of Hill House creates for his daughters [361-364]). The persistence of the house’s influence into the post-WWII America is intentional and significant as Jackson could have set the story in a different era, as Carter does with “The Lady of the House of Love,” or as Mootoo does in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Setting the novel in her own time, Jackson illuminates the notion that Eleanor could be any woman. Theodora represents the liberated version of Eleanor, but even so, she is still susceptible to domestic abuse (e.g., her fight with her housemate or lover precipitates her journey to Hill House [p. 247], the blood she finds smeared on her walls and clothes at Hill House [350-354]). (Jackson employed a similar device in her well-known short story “The Lottery” that begins on June 27<sup>th</sup> and was published on June 26, 1948 in *The New Yorker*.)

For Jackson, the house is a metaphor for the terror of home and desire; the Hill House represents the incongruences between the life a woman like Eleanor wants for herself and the life available to her. The house is self-conscious and cognizant of its victim’s desires, fears, and vulnerabilities. Tricia Lootens (1991) points out that early drafts of *Hill House* reveal “the character of Hill House’s haunting was not clear from the beginning” and

maintains that Jackson had initially set out to write a “fairly standard ghost story, not a horror story about the ways in which people, especially women, are destroyed by the nuclear family, sexual repression, and romantic notions of feminine self-sacrifice” (152). Thus, *Hill House* is the end result of Jackson’s self-conscious craft as she is haunted by the house that inspires it, and by the demands of her own complex domestic and professional life. Hattenhauer explains in his book, *Shirley Jackson’s American Gothic* (2003), that heteroglossic proto-postmodernist writer Jackson was a serious writer who struggled with addiction, depression, and an emotionally and sexually abusive husband in Stanley Hyman (23). Her writing provided most of the family’s financial support and she was responsible for all of the domestic labor (17-18). Knowing these elements of her life complicates the reading of her fiction as many of her stories deal with family, tradition, and domesticity. In her essay, “Experience and Fiction,” Jackson writes about the inspirations for *Hill House*. The initial impulse came after she read a book about nineteenth-century psychic researchers who rented a haunted house and recorded their visual, aural, and felt experiences for a Society for Psychic Research paper (200). Jackson concludes that the occupants “thought that they were being terribly scientific and proving all kinds of things,” and she fails to find “the story of a haunted house,” but rather discovers “the story of several earnest, [she believes] misguided, certainly determined people, with their differing motivations and backgrounds” (201). Jackson found this scenario “so exciting” that she wanted “more than anything else to set up [her] own haunted house, and put [her] own people in it, and see what [*she*] could make happen” (201). After this decision, all sorts of things related to ghosts and haunted houses began to surface and the first “manifestation” of her “intentions” that disturbed Jackson occurred at a brief train stop in New York City where “dim and horrible in the

dusk” she saw a “building so disagreeable” that she could not stop looking at it (201). She described the building as “tall and black” and when the train began to move again, it disappeared. That night, Jackson woke from nightmares about the building—the kind that make “you have to get up and turn on the light and walk around for a few minutes just to make sure that there is a real world and this one is it, not the one you have been dreaming about” (201). Of course, Jackson’s experience brings to mind the long-established relationship between dreams and Gothic novels cited in my introduction—especially the example of Walpole’s dream that includes architectural details.<sup>26</sup>

The memory of the building ruined her vacation in New York and she went out of her way to avoid seeing it again, but it still haunted her “coloring all [her] reflections of a pleasant visit to the city” (201). She finally wrote a friend at Columbia for information on the building. His response provided Jackson with “one important item for [*Hill House*]”: the building only existed from a particular angle because seven months prior, there had been a fire that killed nine people and burned the building severely (201-202). Only a shell remained of the building from its three other sides, and “the children in the neighborhood knew that it was haunted” (202). From this experience, Jackson believed she understood her feelings about “that horrid building” as a primer for learning how people “feel when they encounter the supernatural” (202). Jackson admitted longstanding interest in “witchcraft and superstition” and began to ask people what they thought about the supernatural; she found that

most people have never seen a ghost, and never want or expect to, but almost everyone will admit that sometimes they have a sneaking feeling that they just possibly could meet a ghost if they weren’t careful—if they were to turn a corner too

---

<sup>26</sup> See p. 13 of the introduction.

suddenly, perhaps, or open their eyes too soon when they wake up at night, or go into a dark room without hesitating first. (202)

Jackson's words describe the feeling I had while reading *Hill House*. More than once, I felt as if I had been transported to the precipice of possession. I imagine the mechanism of the novel's effectiveness is some *thing*—something else that lies in wait only hesitating for the perfect moment of vulnerability. That something is obscurity and the feeling is terror. In the Halloween 1959 *Saturday Review* of the novel, Maxwell Geismar praises Jackson's ability to describe the "alarums and excursions of human pathology," and concludes that Jackson's "pen becomes charmed, or rather demonic, and the supernatural activity is really chilling" (Geismar 61).<sup>27</sup> Of note is Geismar's assessment that "the author is not altogether fair with [readers]" because, based on works by William Roughead, an early true crime writer, or Henry James, for example, readers are "bound to expect a 'rationale' of even the supernatural" (61). He continues, "Miss Jackson never deigns to offer this [rationale]. . . . She is concerned only with the effect of a terrifying atmosphere—which she calls 'reality'—upon a mind already preoccupied with horrors" (61-62). Indeed, Jackson believed, "No one

---

<sup>27</sup> It is significant that Geismar continually refers to Jackson as "Miss Jackson" in his review even though, by then, she had been married for nineteen years. His language is indicative of the social climate and patriarchal system in which Jackson operated. Jackson recounts a call she received two days before her first novel, *The Road Through the Wall* (1948) was published. Mrs. Sheila Lang, an older woman who writes for the community newspaper, *North Village Notes*, calls to ask Jackson for "little items of local news" (Jackson, "Fame" 387). Jackson repeatedly refers to the upcoming publication of her book while Lang asks her about where she lives, how many children she has, and insists on calling Jackson Mrs. Hyman. When the column is published, it reads, "Mrs. Stanley Hyman has moved into the old Thatcher place on Prospect Street. She and her family are visiting Mr. and Mrs. Farrar-strauss [*sic*] of New York City this week" (Jackson 388). Of course, Farrar and Straus is Jackson's publisher and she and her family are going to New York for her "publication day" (387). Essentially, the encounter with Lang and Geismar's use of "Miss" reveals how difficult it was for mid-century Americans to imagine a woman having a life outside the domestic space even though throughout the Second World War, women in the U.S. and Britain made up an important part of the workforce. After the war, it seems, many were happy with women returning to their rightful place: the home. It was certainly uncommon for a woman to be both married and earn a successful income independent of her husband. Essentially, Lang and Geismar's attitude toward Jackson's profession and marital status represent the zeitgeist of post-war and pre-1960's America. And, this is the same spirit that haunts *The Haunting of Hill House*.

can get into a novel about a haunted house without hitting the subject of reality head-on, either I have to believe in ghosts, which I do, or I have to write another kind of novel altogether” (Jackson qtd. in Oppenheimer 226).

Jackson troubles readers’ perceptions of reality through Eleanor’s encounters in Hill House and on its grounds. (The encounter between one’s expectations about reality and otherness is something Carter revisits throughout the often Gothic short story collection, *The Bloody Chamber*, and especially in vampire’s use of the occult in “The Lady of the House of Love” [1979].) Geismar’s frustration about Jackson’s refusal to explain the supernatural is important to ponder. His frustration suggests it is not enough for the supernatural to stand on its own—to remain unexplained because it simply is extraordinary. The supernatural describes beings and objects that occur outside the normal range of human activity and encounters. *Hill House* is Gothic in the sense that it heralds back to Walpole, Mathew Lewis, and Radcliffe, who sought to reincorporate the supernatural and sensational into literature in unabashed ways. Jackson’s use of the supernatural and non-rational is precisely what makes Hill House a sinister space and increases the level of terror the novel elicits in its characters and readers. It is the notion of not knowing exactly why or how Hill House functions that adds to the narrative’s intrigue. As she relies in part on obscurity, Jackson employs terror in a way Radcliffe would approve.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> While discussing the work of Shakespeare, Milton, and Burke, Radcliffe argues that terror expands while horror contracts the soul, and that “uncertainty and obscurity” inform terror which is a part of the sublime (“On the Supernatural” 168). Unlike horror, terror can be magnificent in its ability to give the imagination fuel to exaggerate, to “nourish its fears or doubts” (169). For the early Gothic writers in general, writers like Shakespeare “were considered to be the inheritors of a tradition of romantic writing that harked back to the Middle Ages” and thus encouraged the “visionary and mystical power of writing”—the primacy of sensation over didacticism (Botting, *Gothic* 35). Such was the intent of Radcliffe and her ilk. See also pp. 18-19 of the Introduction.

The way the evil mechanism of Hill House functions is part of what makes the novel Gothic as it plays on the thrill of terror—a “sort of tranquility tinged with terror [which] causes the sublime”<sup>29</sup>—and the uncanny—that what makes home unhome-like, *unheimlich*. Readers of Radcliffe know that Udolpho is home to no actual ghosts—all of the obscure, seemingly supernatural occurrences are explained by the novel’s end. Radcliffe’s work exploits the terror and interest—the dance of the sublime—building in readers over the course of her novels and provides resolution at their closure. For Jackson, the mystery of Hill House’s ability to haunt renders it most terrifying. Jackson’s use of mystery mirrors the subtle ways social convention, the repression of individual’s personal development, and the lack of a nurturing environment to call one’s home, leads to an absence of agency and breaking up of selfhood, which is what happens to Eleanor. In other words, as Fred Botting (1996) writes, “Gothic terrors activate a sense of the unknown and project an uncontrollable and overwhelming power which threatens not only the loss of sanity, honour, property or social standing but the very order which supports and is regulated by the coherence of those terms” (*Gothic* 7). “Sanity, honour, property, and social standing” and all things associated with the maintenance of home life, and would certainly be important to Jackson’s contemporary readers as the country was inundated with post-war concerns for the accumulation of goods and capital, domestic prosperity, and the overall ideal of the American dream. Hill House seeks to separate, isolate, and terrorize its victims. It is not a building that offers a space welcoming to family or the maintenance of family. Montague says as much:

[I]t might not then be too fanciful to say that some houses are born bad. Hill House, whatever the cause, has been unfit for human habitation for upwards of twenty

---

<sup>29</sup> Radcliffe, “On the Supernatural” 168.

years. What it was like before then, whether its personality was molded by the people who lived [at Hill House], or the things they did, or whether it was evil from its start are all questions [Montague] is unable to answer. (290)

The uncanny terror of the unhomelike home is the terror Jackson employs through *Hill House* as the origins of the house's haunting remain unexplained, and the house's walls, its grounds, its texts, literally haunt its occupants, namely Eleanor, in expressively intimate ways. Together these elements ultimately consume and annihilate Eleanor.

To return to the idea of "reality," and Jackson's inspirations for the novel, despite her desire to keep the ghosts she encountered limited to extensive research into the phenomenon of haunting, haunted spaces, and the narratives about them, she is haunted by her findings. She resorts to reading *Little Women* each night before bed to ward off the nightmares that the pictures she clipped and architecture books she read might produce. Eventually, Jackson finds a picture of a California house that "really looked right," as it reminded her "vividly of the hideous building in New York" ("Experience and Fiction" 202). It had the "same air of disease and decay" as the latter, and seemed the perfect candidate for a ghost (202). Jackson's use of "disease and decay" convey the literal dis-ease, or unease the house evokes in her. Decay is a reoccurring element in Gothic aesthetics and seems especially significant because of its physical manifestation of the imprint the past makes on the present. Decay, as we shall see in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, is a process of death, but it is also a process of transformation. And that transformative impulse may produce more unease as the final result of decay may be something unrecognizable. Decay and transformation are especially important devices in texts by Carter and Mootoo I analyze in the second and third chapters of this dissertation. Carter and Mootoo's texts rehabilitate decay, annihilation, and transformation in ways that produce something else—a tangible

remainder be it a symbol as in Carter are the promise of new life as in Mootoo. However, in most Gothic works, including Jackson's, decay is associated with death, danger, and annihilation. If there is a transformation, it is often not a positive, reaffirming one. The imprint of "disease and decay" Jackson finds in both the New York and California houses lives on in Hill House.<sup>30</sup> Hill House is a character just as much as Eleanor or Theodora, and Jackson's careful development of the house and its details mirror the careful development of Eleanor's paracosms.

#### Eleanor's Abdication: Coming Home to Hill House

Aguirre is right to point out that Jackson introduces a new type of haunted—or haunting—house into the Gothic genre; it is one that is alive and is "not just inhabited by some ghostly presence, as *Otranto* was; rather, the force that lurks in it is *part* of the house itself" and, he argues, the house becomes a predator" (190). Hill House is indeed one that changes its victims as it seeks to destroy them (190). It is important to note, though, that Jackson is consciously building on a previous foundation. Eleanor observes the house,

---

<sup>30</sup> To abate her curiosity, Jackson wrote her mother, who had lived in California her whole life, with hope of procuring more information about the "ugly house" (203). In an uncanny turn of events, her mother informed her that the house was built by Jackson's great-grandfather and was abandoned for many years before it caught fire. It was "generally believed that that was because the people of the town got together one night and burned it down" (203). Jackson then writes, "By then it was abundantly clear to me that I had no choice: the ghosts were after me. In case I *had* any doubts, however, I came downstairs a few mornings later and found a sheet of copy paper moved to the center of my desk" (203). On the paper, in her own handwriting, she finds the words: "DEAD DEAD" (203). Jackson had occasionally sleepwalked, but this event propelled her to begin writing the novel in earnest. Jackson's reality—both her waking life and unconscious slumber—had become haunted by the spectre of an unsettling house that a family member had a hand in building; this coincidence seems poignant especially since Jackson's mother is surprised any photos of the home remain extant. The whole series of events seems to attest to what Morrison would call "rememory"—the phenomenon Sethe in *Beloved* describes: "Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world" (43). The site is imprinted with the energy of people, events, or things and is akin to what Morrison terms, "emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared" ("The Site of Memory" 77).

trying to “locate the badness, whatever dwelt there,” unable to discern its color, style or size only knowing that it is “enormous and dark, looking down over her” (265). She has come so far that she cannot go back, she tells herself (265). Upon Emily’s arrival at Udolpho, she not only notices its “gothic greatness,” but also observes it as “silent, lonely, and subline, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign. . . . its features became more awful in obscurity, and Emily continues to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen, rising over the tops of the woods” (227). Similarly, Eleanor perceives roofs and towers on her final approach to Hill House. Jackson builds on the obscurity and Radcliffe introduces in Udolpho and enlivens that obscurity with a genuinely sinister energy. At the beginning of the second chapter of Jackson’s novel, narrator (another source of obscurity) reflects,

No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice. . . . but a house arrogant and hating, never off guard, can only be evil. (265)

“A badly turned angle” invokes the ruined house in New York that Jackson encountered during the early days of researching the novel. The personification of Hill House embodies the essence of the Gothic as Hill House dissolves boundaries between animate and inanimate; its architecture and ornamentation are imbued with personality. King discusses the haunted house, or the “Bad Place,” as an archetype that disrupts our notion of the ideal home, a space that is wholly welcoming; in the “Bad Place,” home becomes uncanny (281). “Watchfulness” implies surveillance, stalking; “touch of glee” coupled with watchfulness devolves into spiteful play. These descriptors bring to mind the grin of Frankenstein’s monster, the fragile realization that drives he cannot fully control are in play, and the

circumstances and situations he cannot fully assimilate that lead to deadly, disastrous results. Susanne Becker explains that Gothic aesthetics function to problematize “well-established narrative[s] and cultural structures,” such as the “house and its ideological order” (25). Such is the case in *Hill House* as Jackson builds on the Gothic tale familiar to readers. It is significant that Eleanor finally remembers the line, “Journeys end in lovers meeting,” after hesitating to walk up Hill House’s steps. In that moment she senses that Hill House “was waiting for her, evil but patient” (266). The house becomes akin to a Gothic suitor like Mr. Rochester—one who is magnificent yet arresting; one who wants to seduce yet is brooding and secretive. Lootens argues that “the haunting is personally designed for the haunted” and gains knowledge of its victims’ “illusions” and “deadly needs”; the “most terrifying aspects of Hill House’s haunting” she claims, “is its intimacy, which is simultaneously familial and erotic” (151). Eleanor’s needs for love and a home are what Hill House successfully exploits.

During the first supernaturally active night in Hill House, where there is a persistent knocking on the walls that mimics Eleanor’s mother’s practice, a chilling cold overflows Theodora’s bedroom where Eleanor has come to give comfort. “Little pattings came from around the doorframe, small seeking sounds, feeling the edges of the door, trying to sneak a way in” to the women while Luke and Montague chase “some animal, like a dog” out the house and “into the garden” (337). Here Montague comes to realize that the house is trying to separate them, confirming that Hill House works to defamiliarize the idea of family and render the home sinister. The next morning, Eleanor intimates that the house “wanted to consume” its occupants and take them “into itself” and make them “a part of the house” (340). Dr. Montague laments, “This excitement troubles me. . . . It is intoxicating, certainly,

but might it not also be dangerous? And effect of the atmosphere of Hill House? The first sign that we have—as it were—fallen under a spell?” (340). Of course, the pointed term “spell” must awaken something within Eleanor. After all, one of Eleanor’s paracosms consists of a home within a magical realm—a locale protected by a spell. It is in her nature to want to break that spell, enter the secret place, and come *home*. Aguirre rightly points out that becoming one with Hill House is the “very aspect that attracts Eleanor, eager to escape a suffocating life” (190).

In part, we can identify Eleanor’s search for a home as one about which Doreen Massey in *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) writes. Massey argues that women are the always present “Others” of the First World societies (166). That, in contrast to men who often set out to “discover and change the world,” women, mothers in particular, are “assigned the role of personifying a place which [does] not change” (167) which echoes Bachelard’s statement quoted above.

Eleanor has been forced into the role of mother as she cared for her own mother. Her transition from daughter to mother was unpunctuated by romantic love or sex. In her discussion of identity and place, Massey acknowledges how a “place called home” can provide stability, oneness, and security, but calls us to complicate the notion of place by considering its four-dimensional parameters (167). Massey is interested in “space-time” and argues that “place is formed in part out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location” (168). She continues,

the singularity of any individual place is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location (nowhere else does this precise mixture occur) and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location (their partly happenstance juxtaposition) will in turn produce new social effects. (168)

The conditions of Eleanor, Theodora, Luke, and Montague's stay at Hill House create such a singularity of individual place. Hill House is the space/place and its personality adds another layer of animation to four-dimensional space. Hill House's personality and Eleanor's vulnerable nature—in her search for home and discovery (a desire that conflates the conventional male and female roles Massey discusses)—create the perfect, precise set of circumstances for Eleanor eventually to embrace completely Hill House as a space to call home. In fact, in the moment Eleanor reiterates Theodora's original sense that something “was coming to eat her,” she also unknowingly begins to come to the knowledge of her own fate. Montague observes that whatever happened overnight at Hill House was outside of imagination, that is, real, because they all experienced phenomena. Eleanor quips that Luke, Theodora, and Montague could all be products of her imagination and Montague does not receive her solipsism lightly: “If I thought you could really believe that,” he warns, “I would turn you out of Hill House this morning. You would be venturing far too close to the state of mind which would welcome the perils of Hill House with a kind of sisterly embrace” (340-341). But, alas, Eleanor is delighted with Hill House and wants to “reel,” and “sing,” and “move in great emphatic, possessing circles around the rooms of Hill House” (341-342). She thinks, “I am here, I am here” and anticipates the day's explorations. She soon settles on asking Theodora to accompany her to the summerhouse in the appropriately overgrown side garden, but plans are interrupted by an unknown entity's message scrawled in chalk in a hallway: “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME,” it reads (345).

Eleanor is shaken and begins to identify as “the one chosen” arguing with Theodora about who wrote the message (346). Yet, this identification is unsettling as it implies she is

separate and not properly incorporated into the loving, family unit; this feeling of being an outsider is the type of feeling she has had for most of her life. Earlier, she is happy to be an individual “possessed of attributes belonging only to [her]” who simultaneously feels that she has “a place in this room” (299). Earlier, she has a sense of independent agency while being a part of a group. She has a more adult-like conception of family and relationships. But now, the thought of being separate is threatening and Eleanor begins to reject the idea of boundaries between herself and the others because she associates her new family with the feeling of home. She attaches to this feeling intensely because she has been without it for so long. Yet, alas, Eleanor is regressing to a more child-like state of vulnerability; which, in turn, makes her ever more susceptible to the idea that Hill House is the only space that can provide a true sense of home, belonging, and even love. Thus, if Eleanor is separate from the others, she is homeless once more. She begins to express her impending fate: “Is there still a world somewhere?” she asks, and remarks, “I can’t picture any world but Hill House” (348). The others take her comments lightly, but Eleanor is beginning to shift her imaginative space to Hill House alone. The assertive Eleanor, who took her the car she shared with her sister, the car with a “little contained world all her own,” is beginning to lose agency as the desperation to belong, to feel wanted, and to be a part of a family builds (251). She seeks what Massey might call “reassuring boundedness” within the space Hill House provides (169). She sees no other world outside of Hill House because society has taught her to “establish [an] identity through negative counterposition with the Other beyond the boundaries” (169). Eleanor struggles with establishing a unique identity while belonging to a “place called home”; she has not been conditioned to reconcile the intricacies of inner and outer worlds (Massey 167; 170).

Eleanor's frustration continues after Theodora's clothes are covered in what is thought to be blood and the phrase "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR" appears in "shaky red letters" over Theodora's bed (351). The unpunctuated phrases leave room for varying interpretations. We can read the first, shorter phrase above as a plea coming from her dead mother, sister, or Hill House itself if directed to Eleanor if it is punctuated in one of the following ways: "Help! Eleanor, come home!" or "Help, Eleanor! Come home!" With no internal punctuation, the phrase seems to be directed at Luke, Theodora, and Montague and encourages them to "help Eleanor come home"—as in help her return home. The later longer second phrase can combine a plea and a demand: "Help, Eleanor! Come home, Eleanor" or "Help! Eleanor! Come home, Eleanor!" These words also leave room for a question: "Help Eleanor come home. Eleanor?" or "Help! Eleanor come home. Eleanor?" The lack of punctuation leaves room for Eleanor, and the others, to develop their own conclusions about the meaning of the text. And, ultimately, all of these variations in punctuation highlight the obscurity or indeterminacy that is characteristic of Hill House. No matter how it is punctuated, the second phrase does seem more of an imperative demand, however, and it reflects the growing influence of Hill House over Eleanor in particular. As a result of this unexplained occurrence, Theodora must wear Eleanor's clothes and quips, "We're going to be practically twins," to which Eleanor ineffectively retorts, "Cousins," in an attempt to preserve a separate identity from Theodora (354). Eleanor begins to hate Theodora, especially after she's cleaned up and wearing Eleanor's red sweater (354). Eleanor envies Theodora for her beauty and her life full of color—aspects Eleanor feels she lacks, but aspires to in her imaginary universe originally introducing herself to the group as a courtesan of sorts (324; 284); and, of course, there is the

latent sexual attraction between the two women many others have noted including Geismar (1959), Hattenhauer (2003), Lootens (1991), and Judie Newman (1990).<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the novel, Jackson plays on the trope of the double, or doppelgänger. The double is a common device in the Gothic narrative, and encountering one's double or the common themes of mistaken identity often bring death. For example, Walpole's Isabella and Matilda are doubles and it is Matilda, Manfred's daughter whom he kills in a fit of jealous rage convinced his coveted Isabella has met with her lover in private. In *Hill House*, the relationship between Eleanor and Theodora is the most significant doppelgänger pairing. Eleanor may also find a double in the older Crain sister who never married but had a female companion to whom she left the estate (which coincidentally echoes the relationship in Eleanor's second paracosm). But, Jackson's notes reveal, Lootens explains, how "Theodora both personifies and negates Eleanor and her family" (163). The note reads: "Theo *is* Eleanor/"NO ONE TO LOVE ME = NO HOUSE Therefor [*sic*] Eleanor invisible/THEO SISTER" (Jackson qtd. in Lootens 163). Thus, Theodora becomes the object of Eleanor's desire and representative of the family unit she felt has never seen or loved her. Lootens argues that "Eleanor cannot cope with her own sexuality. Henceforth, she will pursue Theodora as an intimate companion, but she will shrink in disgust from her touch" (Lootens 164). I would agree. Eleanor has not developed a full sense of her adult sexual self—she has not had the physical or psychological space to do so. She has only had her mother's romance novels, her childhood fairy tales, and her newly created paracosms. Eleanor's desire for sexual knowledge is present, even though it may be latent in her paracosms. The desire is more evident in her identification as a courtesan quoted above.

---

<sup>31</sup> I use the phrasing "imaginary universe" over "paracosm" here because her identification with a courtesan conveys she is maturing beyond her child-like imaginings.

Theodora interprets Eleanor's behavior as "crazy" and suggests perhaps Eleanor "ought to go home" (324). Ed Cameron (2010) explains the connection between "imaginary primary narcissism" and the inability to attach one's libido to an external object, the double becomes the "object of libidinal attachment" (161). In all, the doppelgänger forces a heroine to confront a part of herself she has hitherto "ignored or foreclosed," and becomes the "closest thing to an external object for the subject" to confront and purge her hidden self (161).

While reflecting on the bloody message and her new found hatred of Theodora, Montague discusses the nature of fear, "Fear . . . is the relinquishment of logic, the *willing* relinquishing of reasonable patterns. We yield to it or we fight it, but we cannot meet it halfway" (355). His words reflect Eleanor's inner struggle, and she feels compelled to speak:

When I *am* afraid, I can see perfectly the sensible, beautiful not-afraid side of the world, I can see chairs and tables and windows staying the same, not affected in the least, and I can see things like the careful woven texture of the carpet. . . . But when I am afraid I no longer exist in any relation to these things. (355)

Montague adds that people are only afraid of themselves—suggesting the fear of one's hidden self; Luke disagrees and says people are afraid of seeing themselves "clearly and without disguise," but Theodora touches a nerve in Eleanor when she says fear is based in the discovery of "knowing what we really want" (355). Eleanor says she is "always afraid of being alone" and laments that *her* name has been spelled out on Hill House's walls, and she desperately reveals,

Look, there's only one of me, and it's all I've got. I *hate* seeing myself dissolve and slip and separate so that I'm living in one half, my mind, and I see the other half of me frantic and driven and I can't stop it, but I know I'm not going to be hurt and yet time is so long and even a second goes on and on and I could stand any of it if I could only surrender—(355; emphasis in original)

Of course the others are taken aback by her admission and immediately after her revelation, Eleanor claims she cannot remember what she just said. Becker puts it succinctly, "In the

gothic tradition, the uncanny closeness of the same often indicates disintegration” (242).

Theodora has triggered what Eleanor cannot accept or fully imagine for herself—her self as a fully realized sexual being. Surrender means annihilation and being consumed into Hill House, which will come to represent the loving family she so greatly desires.

In the quoted passage above, precise word choice functions as foreshadowing and we are transported to the scene in which Eleanor is leaving Hill House—forced or driven to do so—and she cannot stop herself from smashing into the tree while her flickering consciousness asks why she is being allowed to destroy herself. She naively believes that the space of the family, the home, cannot be dangerous, that it cannot hurt her; but, alas, the Gothic narrative and the Gothic house work to dismantle such grand narratives to reveal the often flawed, oppressive foundations on which they rest. Undeniably, the house produces phenomena to challenge Eleanor’s assertion that she cannot be hurt, and that the space of the home is harmless. When she and Theodora fall asleep holding hands between two beds in Eleanor’s room that night, Eleanor is greatly disturbed by the ghostly moaning of a child and increases her grip on Theodora’s hand, “holding so tight she could feel the fine bones” (358). When she wakes to find that she is not indeed holding Theodora’s hand, in disbelief she cries, “God God [*sic*] whose hand was I holding?” (358). The skeletal hand she grasps can be read synonymously as death. Reading the moment as that suggests Theodora is emotionally dead or unavailable to her, she will briefly abandon her pursuit of Theodora and attempt to “[learn] the pathways of the heart” with Luke (359).

After she finds Luke has no interest in loving her romantically, she longs again for Theodora and they try to reconcile by taking a walk to the brook, but as they reach the garden, fear and darkness overcome them. As the Gothic garden is often associated with the

beauty, danger, and transformation/fall of Eden myth, we may expect Eleanor and Theodora to encounter one or more of such. The garden reveals an idyllic scene with a happy family: mother, father, children laughing in grass with lovely colored flowers and a perfectly blue sky; then the “mother leaned over to take up a plate of bright fruit,” and immediately, Theodora screams, telling Eleanor to run and not to look back (368). Readers never know what Theodora saw in the garden. She may have been frightened by the very fact of a shared vision, hallucination, or being witness to a ghost family’s picnic. Again, Hill House reveals that it and its grounds offer no safe haven for family. If Eleanor read the signs without the blinders of her desire for a home, she may be able to realize that Hill House is not the home she seeks. This event can also be read in light of the novel’s larger theme—that the “absolute reality” (243) Hill House offers is the stifling, deadly nature the space and its ability to transform the model nuclear family into something terrifying. This is especially true when one takes into account Hugh Crain’s bloody scrapbook of morality he left for his daughters (361-364) and the bitter feud between them over inheritance and property (294-299).

When Montague’s occult practitioner wife arrives, Hill House continues its pursuit of Eleanor through planchette with the words, “Nell,” “Home,” “Want to be home,” “Waiting,” “Lost,” “Mother” (379). The messages are clearly directed at Eleanor and reaffirm the previously quoted phrases and Eleanor’s own waiting and her early perception of Hill House as waiting for her. But what truly rattles Eleanor is that she has “been singled out again” (380). Mrs. Montague also comically confirms Eleanor’s doppelgänger in Theodora by thinking that Theodora is “Nell” (379). That night, Eleanor, Theodora, Luke,

and Montague stay in the same room together under attack by a creeping cold and a shaking door, and Eleanor thinks,

It is so cold . . . I will never be able to sleep again with all this noise coming from inside my head; how can these others hear the noise when it is coming from inside my head? I am disappearing inch by inch into this house, I am going apart a little bit at a time because all this noise is breaking me; why are the *others* frightened? (385; emphasis in original)

This passage captures the moment Eleanor is able to anticipate the actions of Hill House while simultaneously realize her vulnerability to Hill House. Readers may wonder if her vulnerability is all her own and whether the noise is only sounds or voices that exist inside Eleanor's mind. Or is it the noise the noise of something *other*? Is the noise indicative of something more sinister, something *else*? In this part of the novel, obscurity begins to take over and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the haunting and phenomena that the others experience versus Eleanor. Before this scene that reveals the disintegration of her self, Eleanor thinks "concretely" that all she wants in the world is "peace, a quiet spot to lie and think, a quiet spot up among the flowers where I can dream and tell myself sweet stories" (380). Her desire echoes what Bachelard claims is the chief function of the home—a space that shelters and fosters daydreams (6). But, are these flowers her oleanders or the flowers from Hill House's ghost family picnic? Is the space she desires available within one of the paracosms she created on her way to Hill House or inside vile Hill House? At this point in the novel, the concept of a spell so often mentioned begins to unravel. And over the course of the novel, the enchantment evolves from an imagined paradise beyond stone lions into Hill House itself.

What comes next in *Hill House* is Eleanor's willing abdication of herself. The house shivers and shakes, the sounds are "getting out" of her head, the noise is so loud, the room

so cold and “sickening,” “swinging” all over. Eleanor feels as if she is falling “endlessly” and “nothing [is] real except her own hands white around the bedpost” she is gripping (386). Hill House appeals to pathos and Eleanor thinks: “I supposed it would stand for years; we are lost, lost; the house is destroying itself” (387). She hears “laughter over all, coming thin and lunatic, rising in its little crazy tune” and thinks, “No, it is over for me. It is too much. . . . I will relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate, give over willingly what I never wanted at all; whatever it wants of me it can have” (387). “I’ll come” she says aloud and the “room was perfectly quiet” (387). Lootens writes of this scene, “Once more, a woman has sacrificed her own identity to hold her ‘family’ home together. Eleanor’s surrender leaves one with an uneasy question: can a woman sacrifice herself if she has never really had, or perhaps even wanted a self?” and Lootens continues, “Does Eleanor know she has a choice?” (166). But, indeed, Eleanor “willingly” gives what she perceives she “never wanted.” Eleanor simply does not want to be alone, and the next morning, her wish is fulfilled. She becomes in tune with Hill House and is content that she “can hear everything, all over the house” (388). From this point on, as Newman points out, “only Eleanor is haunted” (“Shirley Jackson” 180).

In a final attempt to attach to Theodora, Eleanor says she will go home with her and repeats the words from the previous night, “I’ll come”; however, Theodora does not want her and asks in “exasperation” if Eleanor “*always* goes where [she’s] not wanted?” (390; emphasis in original). Eleanor replies “placidly,” “I’ve never been wanted *anywhere*” (390; emphasis in original). While walking with Theodora and Luke down to the brook, Eleanor muses about a life with Theodora and imagines Luke is telling Theodora, “I [Eleanor] am not easily taken in, that I had an oleander wall around me,” and Theodora laughs because

Eleanor “will not be lonely any more” (393). The details of Eleanor’s paracosms are still on her mind, and she desperately wants to create a space in which Theodora, Luke, herself, and the stuff of fairytales can coexist. In her dream, she thinks Theodora and Luke are “kind” and that she was “very right to come because journeys end in lovers meeting” (393). But, Hill House perceives her naiveté and seduces her in a way Theodora or Luke never will. Eleanor walks ahead thinking they will follow and fulfill her fantasy of a loving unit, but instead, she walks alone, realizes she is alone, and hears footsteps and the words, “Eleanor, Eleanor” both inside and outside of her head (394). She thinks that it is “a call she had been listening for all her life” and is “held tight and safe” while closing her eyes begging to not be let go (394). Theodora and Luke fail to complete her fantasy once more; she feels separate and alone with them while Hill House lets her inside, embraces her, and fills her with something akin to romantic love.

Over the course of the novel, Eleanor has been unable to enter the grave-like library because of her association of the space with her mother. When she first encounters it, she is “overwhelmed with the cold air of mold and earth” and says aloud, “My mother—” (314). But, now, at the novel’s close, she seeks out “Mother,” and can enter the library that has the “odor of decay” (404). She has “danced gravely before [the statue of] Hugh Crain,” and feels her “hands taken as she dance[s]” (406). In these moments, Eleanor feels wanted, loved, and a part of something she desires. Crain comes to fulfill the role of a romantic suitor, a being who watches her dance with “gleaming” eyes (406). Eleanor becomes “the haunter” knocking on doors and tricks the family she feels has rejected her (Newman, “Shirley Jackson” 180). She dances throughout the house and boasts, “none of them can see me” (407). She touches a kitchen door and “six miles away Mrs. Dudley [Hill House’s

caretaker] shuddered in her sleep” (407). Somehow, Eleanor comes to the “tower, held so tightly in the embrace of the house” (407). This section of narrative is disorienting. Readers may wonder if Eleanor is imagining these events or if she is indeed united with the house and has achieved some sort of spectral power that allows her to be invisible and inside and outside at once. Jackson seems to reverse the absurd calamities that befall Gothic heroines as they are often confined and closed off from the house in which they reside or are imprisoned. Here, Eleanor is given a boundless freedom to wonder all over and step inside the house “as though it were her own” (407).

When Eleanor finally enters the library, she experiences warmth—like the comfort of a womb. She has come home, finally:

Here I am inside. It was not cold at all, but deliciously, fondly warm. . . . all around the soft air touched her, stirring her hair, drifting against her fingers, coming in a light breath across her mouth, and she danced in circles. No stone lions for me, she thought, no oleanders; I have broken the spell of Hill House and somehow come inside. I am home, she thought, and stopped in wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought; now to climb. (407)

The first time Eleanor stops in wonder in the novel is while she is on her way to Hill House when she stops to explore the row of poisonous oleanders that lead to a clearing and become a part of one of her beloved paracosms. Here, in the library, Eleanor gives up her dream of stone lions—her ubiquitous symbol for domestic stability and bliss—and accepts that there are “no oleanders” for her. Eleanor effectively abandons her paracosm as the oleanders have held a link to her creative, fantastic realm. She has “broken the spell of Hill House”; she has pierced the membrane and come inside her new home; she has re-entered the womb. In entering this tower space, the warm womb, she re-enters the space of the mother. But for Eleanor, this space of the mother carries with it guilt, lost time; the memory of her role as caretaker is a suffocating, restrictive presence in Eleanor’s life. It is her

decay—that stuff of the past that eats away at the present. Her mother and the cult of domesticity and sacrifice she represents have severely hindered Eleanor’s self-development. By giving up on her construction of her own domicile, Eleanor is prey to Hill House—a numinous, “Bad Place” that seduces and traps her. Luke rescues Eleanor after she scales the dilapidated spiral staircase in pursuit of the trapdoor that leads to the tower where a previous resident committed suicide. Alas, she finds the trapdoor nailed shut, and she laments that she “can’t get away” (408). Earlier she thinks, “Of all of them I would least like to have Luke catch me” (407). Does she not want Luke to rescue her because she desires a romantic connection with Theodora? Or does she not want Luke to rescue her because she has given up on her dreams of romance and a dashing hero who will return her home? The reason is unclear. In the end, Eleanor, the simultaneously newly independent and naively beguiled young woman, returns to the space of her original oppression—that of the mother—and becomes the animated, haunting house itself.

After Eleanor’s wild night, Montague tells her she must go home. She reveals, “I haven’t got any apartment” and says she wants to remain at Hill House, and that the house wants her to stay as well (412-413). As Eleanor enters her car, it feels “unfamiliar and awkward”; the space has become uncanny (416). Her “world of her own” has been displaced to Hill House’s bosom. As Montague cannot grant her wish to remain at Hill House, Eleanor must do so for herself. In her final moments, she surmises:

They will watch me down the drive as far as they can see . . . it is only civil for them to look at me until I am out of sight; so now I am going. Journeys end in lovers meeting. But I *won’t* go, she thought, and laughed aloud to herself; Hill House is not as easy as *they* are; just by telling me to go away they can’t make me leave, not if Hill house means me to stay. . . . I can; *they* don’t make the rules around *here*. They can’t turn me out or laugh at me or hide from me; I won’t go, and Hill House belongs to *me*. (417; emphasis in original)

Taking Eleanor's life in account, Bettelheim's declaration that "every child believes in magic, and he stops doing so when he grows up (with the exception of those who have been too disappointed in reality to be able to trust its rewards)" rings true (118; parentheses in original). Ultimately, Eleanor has been too disappointed in her life to trust that something better exists than Hill House. Hill House becomes the magic space beyond the oleanders she can believe in. Eleanor's responsibility to her mother imprisons her; and her naïve belief in the narratives of romance—influenced by her duty to read to her mother—be it between women or between men and women, blinds her. She has become completely repressed and wants to remain that way, and says to herself even as she prepares to get in her car: "Walled up alive. . . . I want to stay here" (413). For Eleanor, even the promise of open space on the road is closed. With these words, Eleanor also alludes to the Gothic trope of imprisoned women like Radcliffe's Mme. Cheron. The last line of passage above relates that Eleanor feels she has ownership of Hill House and will not stand to be evicted. But, she forgets that whatever walks at Hill House, walks alone (243; 417). Conquered by the draw of Hill House as she begins to drive away, she thinks, "I am really doing it, I am doing this all by myself, now, at last; this is me, I am really really really doing it by myself" (417). It is only in her final moments of life that she effectively breaks the spell of Hill House and briefly reconnects with the budding agency she had when she took the car from the garage: "In the unending, crashing second before the car hurled into the tree she thought clearly, *Why* am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop me?" (417; emphasis in original). But, it is too late. The momentum cannot be arrested. Without full agency, Eleanor relinquishes her cups of stars. But, alas, she never had one.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ANGELA CARTER'S "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE": READING THE GOTHIC MONSTER'S CARDS, ESCAPING THE GOTHIC HOUSE

I think that it is immoral to read simply for pleasure.

– Angela Carter, "Notes on the Gothic," 134

"The Lady of the House of Love" is a part of Angela Carter's renowned 1979 collection of reimagined, erotically charged, often feminist fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber*. The short story is inspired by Carter's 1976 radio play *Vampirella*, which, in turn, is inspired by the sound of a pencil running across a radiator that Carter said, "made a metallic, almost musical rattle. . . . the noise that a long, pointed fingernail might make if it were run along the bars of a birdcage" (Carter, Preface 9).<sup>32</sup> In "The Lady of the House of Love," Carter alludes to "Sleeping Beauty" and "Jack and the Beanstalk" while invoking and revising the aesthetics of well-known Gothic texts such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* with a Transylvanian highlands castle and mysterious preternatural occupant. Yet, "The Lady of the House of Love" brims with tension created by what lies beneath, or somewhat beyond, the surface of

---

<sup>32</sup> We see this scene in "The Lady of the House of Love" story on p. 93. See Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère's excellent book *Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013 for a thorough discussion of the radio play and its relationship to the short story (pp. 209-225). Although shorter short story version of "The Lady of the House of Love" was published in 1975 summer/autumn issue of *The Iowa Review*, according to Carter's papers, the radio play came first (See Hennard 332 and Carter, Preface 10).

the text. Carter posits, “All writing of any kind, in fact, exists on a number of different levels. . . . If you read the tale carefully, the tale tells you more than the writer knows. . . . tells you, in all innocence, what its writer thinks is important, who she or he thinks is important and, above all, why” (*Expletives* 3). Hence, Carter’s narratives beckon the exhumation and acknowledgment of buried meaning. And, as she is known for crafting stories that render no simple analyses—texts that pull from the literary, the esoteric, and the sensual—it is no surprise that this palimpsest narrative features the Tarot, which ultimately reveals a breadth of connections: from a thirteenth-century heretical sect to Gérard de Nerval’s poem, “El Desdichado” (1853,1854).

In Carter’s narrative, a monstrous, yet beautiful, daily tarot-reading disenchanted vampire Countess dovetails with established readings of Gothic monsters—especially vampires and reflects early twentieth-century (and contemporary) Western European anxieties about foreignness, contagion, and unbridled desire associated with Eastern Europe and beyond. After all, monstrous alterity is most often “cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual” (Cohen 7). The vampire represents all five. The narrative also reflects what Karen F. Stein (1983) calls the “darker side of the Romantic vision”—the sensibility that “glorifies the self in isolation from society” that is exemplified in the Gothic narrative (123). In the Gothic mode, we find the “extreme poses of rebel, outcast, obsessive seeker of forbidden knowledge, monster” (123). Carter’s Countess inhabits all four positions. “Monsters,” Stein explains, “are particularly prominent in the work of women writers, because for women the roles of rebel, outcast, seeker of truth, are monstrous in themselves” (123). Men may nobly rebel or leave home in a heroic search of truth, while the same acts for women are “deemed

bizarre and crazy” (123). Thus, the Gothic space becomes fertile ground for the “narratives of female experience” (123).

Furthermore, through the revision of traditional fairy tale narratives, Carter reverses and complicates the familiar invasion narrative, as she introduces the rational, unsuspecting hero, a virginal bicycle-riding English World War I officer, into the threatening, sequestered, domestic space of the Countess. Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère (2013) writes that, although such a reversal may be read as feminist, it “does not represent a significant improvement in her condition but merely the move from one stereotype (the passive princess) to another (the bloodthirsty vamp)” (215; parentheses in original). However, Carter’s short story is much more complex and breaks free of both a fairy tale happy ending and the “brutal killings of the vampirical others” in *Dracula* (216). In the narrative’s final moments, the hero’s innocent kiss kills the Countess and her essence is transformed into a rose—a process both redolent of both the Gothic mode and fairy tale magic. And, beyond the diegetic space of the text, we know the soldier will perish in France as he “has about him . . . the special glamour of that generation for whom history has already prepared a special, exemplary fate in the trenches of France” (97).

As Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* is characteristically Gothic because of its heroine’s tragic end, its uncanny labyrinthine mansion, and its narrative themes and devices including the tension between Eleanor’s desires and the grand narratives of her time, so is “The Lady of the House of Love.” Yet, whereas Eleanor, the heroine of Jackson’s novel, experiences the annihilation of her agency which results in her death, Carter’s monstrous Countess dwells in the space of annihilation and uses the Tarot as a way to assert her agency within the confining Gothic environment she is forced to inhabit. Although the

monstrous heroine may not continue to live, she achieves her goal of freedom from enslavement to heredity dictates and societal limitations. Sabina Spielrein's theory of destruction—that death is necessary for life—is useful for understanding the Countess's annihilation as a triumphant, radical transformation.<sup>33</sup> In the final chapter of this dissertation on Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the idea of death as a necessity for life is even more important. Thus we witness a shift: Eleanor's naïve reliance on the grand narratives of her time lead to her demise and she is left to haunt Hill House alone. The Countess's disgust for her condition and her ultimate refusal to trust in the grand narratives of her time and space in favor of reliance on alternative truths results in her physical death, but spiritual freedom.

Furthermore, "The Lady of the House of Love" provides another example of how the fairy tale and Gothic narrative relate as both genres share "concern with liminal states and spaces, (self-) transformation, and the luring of boundaries between the human and the nonhuman" (Hennard 213; parentheses in original). Hennard (2013) writes that because the two genres are conventionalized, "they also display a parodic self-consciousness" (213). Although Carter may draw on, exaggerate, and exploit Gothic aesthetics, her interest in "fiction that remains aware that it is of its own nature, which is a different nature than human, tactile immediacy" is serious ("Notes" 133). In "Notes on the Gothic Mode" (1975), Carter writes, "fiction that takes full cognizance of its status as non-being,"

---

<sup>33</sup> See page 11 of the introduction. In short, Spielrein's theory states that destruction is the cause of coming into being. Annihilation and transformation are essential to beings at many levels. For the Gothic narrative, annihilation often leads to rebirth or transformation into another state of being. But often that process results in physical death for a narrative's heroine.

represents a different “human experience than reality (that is, not a logbook of events) can help to transform reality itself” (133).

Carter’s narrative invites an analysis that acknowledges what Jeffery Cohen argues in *Monster Culture* (1996): “[E]very monster is in its way a double narrative, two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves” (13). To discover such testimony, we recognize the monster as “pure culture” and “nothing of itself” and consider Cohen’s claim that, because of this, the “monster can be read only *through*” (21; emphasis in original). Reading *through* the Countess and the diegetic space of the text reveal her testimony by interrogating the more-than-ancillary presence of the Tarot in the text. In the radio play, *Vampirella*, there is no mention of the Tarot; and lines from the Countess’s father, her caretaker, and other characters make the play very different from the short story—in the play the Countess has even less agency and her father’s voice is the last one heard. Despite the anguish he experiences upon his daughter’s death, the Count celebrates his “perennial resurrection” (116). In “The Lady of the House of Love,” the Countess consults the cards repeatedly; references to them appear on half of the narrative’s sixteen pages. Through the Tarot, the Countess is searching for something more than her fated existence provides. Through the Tarot, she escapes her Gothic house—a prison of hereditary obligation, paternal control, and subterfuge. She seeks plasticity—a malleable state of being—and pushes against her ancestral habitat that is devoid of villagers, for only “shadows that have no source in anything visible” remain (93). Her “demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom projects a baleful posthumous existence,” and the peasants driven away by troublesome revenants would rather the Countess remain caged, thus mirroring the reality of her pet lark

(93). We imagine her in this state described by the narrator as “the place of annihilation”; the Countess herself is “a cave full of echoes . . . a system of repetitions . . . a closed circuit” (93). As she “draws her long, sharp fingernail across the bars of the cage in which her pet lark sings,” she wonders, “Can a bird sing only the song it knows or can it learn a new song?” (93).

The latter image considered together with the reversal of the invasion narrative common in fairy tales such as “Sleeping Beauty,” Hennard observes that Carter “recasts the Countess as a victim as much as a predator; she becomes a persecuted romantic figure longing for true love and expressing herself in soulful (even melodramatic) tones” (215; parentheses in original). Carter’s Countess becomes trapped in her own beautiful yet monstrous “cage of her body” in which there is a “trapped bird that wants to sing its own song” (215). Moreover, in this space and state, the Countess exists as a static symbol, a relic of a time and place threatened with changes fueled by competing political, social, and economic drives of momentous scale as the First World War wages. Thus, if we must read through monsters as Cohen suggests, we must read *through* the Countess. What is left is the Tarot laid out before her. The Tarot cards ultimately precipitate the opportunity for the Countess to sing her own, new song. And, reading the Countess’s Tarot cards is something critics, to my knowledge, have yet to do.<sup>34</sup> In *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (1994), Jacqueline Howard argues that Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism

---

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Merja Mankinen’s “Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality,” *Feminist Review* 42, *Feminist Fictions* (1992): 2-15; Sarah Sceats’ “Oral Sex: Vampiric Transgression and the Writing of Angela Carter,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 20.1 (2001):107-121. Lau mentions the cards but does not offer an interpretation of them. Of the Countess, Lau writes, “she is incapable of dealing a different set of Tarot cards” and parenthetically includes a quotation that lists the cards’ names (116). Hennard notes “a series of tarot readings that always present the same configuration of cards” in her study, but does not name or interpret the cards (209). See also my discussion of Lau later in this chapter.

allows us to situate individual Gothic . . . tales with a greater degree of historical, social, and cultural specificity and to reflect on ways in which different interpretation can be, and have been, generated. By demonstrating the “multi-voicedness” of Gothic texts, we can affirm that any aesthetic or political claims made for the genre are closely dependent on which discursive structures are privileged in the reading process. (17)

Thus, it seems, the Tarot falls into an area scholars and critics avoid because of its association with the occult, the non-rational, and othered ways of knowing that may be understood to fall far outside of the purview of serious critical inquiry. The Gothic text itself has been long been a type of outsider literature. Even though there is a copious amount of criticism on the genre, we cannot forget that Gothic novels have been met with much critical disdain in the eighteenth century and beyond. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (2000) write, “Critics of the eighteenth century tended to make a distinction between useful literature, which illustrated moral truths and did so in a rational and plausible manner, and illegitimate writing, which failed to do either of these things” (173). Of course, Gothic narratives fell into the latter category.

In “The Lady of the House of Love,” the first reference to Tarot is in the second paragraph. The Countess is in an

antique bridal gown, the beautiful queen of the vampires sits all alone in her dark, high house . . . she counts out the Tarot cards, ceaselessly construing a constellation of possibilities as if the random fall of the cards on the red plush tablecloth before her could precipitate her from her chill, shuttered room into a country of perpetual summer and obliterate the perennial sadness of a girl who is both death and the maiden. (93)

It is quite remarkable that the Tarot, a form of knowledge often relegated to the occult, and thus oftentimes not worthy of serious critical inquiry, is the very tool the Countess uses in her “attempts to evade” her destiny (94). As there is excellent criticism on the story’s

relationship to fairy tales, the Gothic narrative, the body of vampire narratives, theories of monstrosity, psychoanalytic theory, and feminist revisionist work, it seems evident that over three decades since the story's publication, the importance of Tarot to the story has been overlooked in critical work because it is an occult tool—a type of othered truth. In fact, the Countess

is indifferent to her own weird authority, as if she were dreaming it. In her dream, she would like to be human; but she does not know if that is possible. The Tarot always shows the same configuration: always she turns up La Papesse, La Mort, La Tour Abolie, wisdom, death, dissolution. (Carter, "The Lady. . ." 95; see Figures 4, 5, 6 at the end of this chapter)

Thus, Carter's monstrous, Gothic Countess is *more* than an embodied repository of cultural anxieties or a symbol of insatiable lust because her inherent unease and ennui *haunt* her.

And, in her haunted, anxious state, she seeks escape and solace in the Tarot—she "resorts to the magic comfort of the Tarot pack" and "constantly construct[s] hypotheses about a future which is irreversible" (95). There is a doubling here, an element so prevalent in Gothic literature, in the notion that those who read Gothic texts often approach them as an escape from the ordered, sometimes confining nature of their own conditions. In essence, the Gothic text, albeit often unsettling and incongruent with the lives readers may want for themselves, provides a type of "magic comfort" because readers enter into an alternate world for a moment, and are free to return to their own. In a similar way, the Countess consults the Tarot—something that holds the potential for revealing a life different than her own. And in those moments of shuffling the cards, she is free to ponder the possibility of an alternate reality—one beyond her own "Gothic eternity" (95).

## The Unsuspecting Hero in “The Lady of the House of Love”

Like any characteristically Gothic narrative, “The Lady of the House of Love” is full of description and the details reflect the extreme conditions of the narrative’s characters. Carter uses precise descriptive exaggerated language to challenge readers’ expectations of categories such as beauty or virginity. Her words push at the limits of representation as we are invited to imagine the Countess’s hair that falls “down like tears” as the narrator explains she is “so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the imperfection of the human condition” (94). The Countess’s “beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness” (94). This early description of the Countess also calcifies conceptions of monstrosity as something that deviates from “natural or conventional order” (“Monstrous,” def. 1a). Further separating her from a comfortably defined existence, while at the same time evoking sympathy, the Countess is likened to “a haunted house,” terrorized by ancestors who “sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes” and is forced to inhabit interstitial space as she “hovers in a no-man’s land between life and death, sleeping and waking” (103). Despite her desire to do otherwise and, perhaps, become fully human, the Countess “helplessly perpetuates her ancestral crimes” by seducing, drinking the blood of, and ultimately killing young men who initially can “scarcely believe their luck” when she leads them to her bedchamber (93).

In *Vampirella*, the Countess introduces herself as “the lady of the castle” who is both the “Sleeping Beauty and the enchanted castle; the princess [who] drowns in the castle of her flesh” (90). Her words marry fairy tale magic and the Gothic device of imprisonment, as the space in which we are accustomed to witnessing the violation and enclosure of the

female heroine is transformed and fractured. The castle still imprisons the heroine, but Carter plays with doubling again as the Countess is both haunted by her history and prescribed fate and the Gothic convention. The play and short story are different in many ways, but in both forms, the Countess is discontented; she is a rebel and outcast within her own realm. Carter explains that the short story is “leaner, more *about* itself, less about its own resonances”; and, where the play is about “vampirism as a metaphor,” the story is about a “reluctant vampire” (10). A “reluctant vampire” rebels against established notions of vampirism as the manifestation of rampant, rapacious desire. The “reluctant vampire” is arresting and provocative. The reluctant Transylvanian Countess represents an old order, one perceived to be beholden to blood and land and magic in the midst of a changing world at war. It is a world in which nations seek to expand their empires through imperialism and rampant militarism and alliances between nations are varying degrees of fragile entanglements. And, Carter writes that the First World War is “more hideous by far than any of our fearful superstitious imaginings” (Preface 10). This War claimed over 8 million lives (from all nations involved) and over 50 percent of those enlisted (from all nations) were killed, wounded, imprisoned, or missing, which together amount over 37 million total casualties (“WWI Casualty and Death” n. pag.). Indeed, the Great War conjures up Gothic images of death and carnage while it carries with it the tensions that birthed the Gothic narrative—the tension between colonizer and colonized, between empires competing for the same raw materials, and the people who lack agency through oppressive regimes that are caught in the midst of such great mechanisms. The War is haunted by these peoples; the War is haunted by soldiers like the Hero of “The Lady of the House of Love” who will meet their fates in the trenches of France. These are the ghosts that haunt our world into the

present. They are proof of “modernity’s violence and wounds,” Avery Gordon (1997) explains, “and a case of the haunting reminder of the complex social relations in which we live” (25). Thus, war is more monstrous than the monsters such as the Countess we are taught to fear.

Moreover, monstrosity, especially in the Gothic mode, exploits diegetic space as it conveys meaning through extravagance and excess, and this meaning, whatever it may be, exists contentiously between two (supposedly) oppositional realms be they the rational and the non-rational, the noble and the peasant, or the beautiful and the horrible. Thus, the Gothic functions as a form that troubles convention, disrupts boundaries, and exposes the repressed realm of the marginal, the in-between, and that which is perceived by dominant powers as monstrous—something that breaks with “natural or conventional order.” As signifiers of the contemporary human condition, the “oppressed and excluded” monsters of the Gothic text, such as the vampire Countess, reveal “the monstrosity of the systems of power and normalization” of this world to which we are subjected (Botting, *Gothic Romanced* 15). Cohen argues,

Through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space. Escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture. (17)

Is Carter’s Countess permanently imprisoned by her fate, beholden to her heritage? No. The Countess “threatens to overstep” boundaries by reading the Tarot. Her relentless use of the Tarot despite the cards’ repetitive arrangement demands recognition of the monster’s desire to know what exists beyond the liminal space created for her. In this monster’s narrative the Tarot is a venue imbued with the potential to transform her fate through its excess of

meaning—through its potential to reveal and warn, reflect and predict a future outside even the boundaries provided by the text. The narrator claims more than once that the Countess's future is "irreversible," yet the Countess, unable to be comforted by anything her existence allows, "resorts to the magic comfort of the Tarot pack" (95). For some time, the weight of the "timeless Gothic eternity of the vampires" (95)—this space created by humans for our safe enjoyment—does threaten to close off the transformative potential of the cards. It is only when boundaries are threatened that transformation may occur.

As explained in my dissertation's introduction, anachronism has been an important Gothic device since the genre's inauguration. Of all the contemporary texts I examine, "The Lady of the House of Love" makes the most conspicuous use of anachronism. In other texts, the anachronisms appear in the actions of characters, the Gothic manors and gardens, or the haunted portrait as in Morrison's *Love*. But in Carter's short story, the anachronism functions as a polyvalent symbol (similar to the Tarot as my discussion below reveals). The narrator's mention that the Countess is the heir of Nosferatu in the following passage exposes the latent influence of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* on the text and, in the same stroke, introduces a telling anachronism: "A chignonned priest of the Orthodox faith staked out her wicked father at a Carpathian crossroad. . . . the fatal Count cried: "Nosferatu is dead; long live Nosferatu!" (95). This anachronism is a sort of postmodern relic—it divulges Carter's self-conscious use of the Gothic mode.<sup>35</sup> F. W. Murnau's film *Nosferatu*, based on Stoker's *Dracula*, appeared in 1922, four years after the end of World War I. As the Gothic is almost always about a confrontation of perceived opposites—of past and present, or make and

---

<sup>35</sup> For further reading about the making and subsequent copyright violations of the film, see Elsaesser.

female, of noble and peasant, the rational and non-rational—this particular reference to Nosferatu is telling. Reading through this anachronism reveals post-World War I Western Europe’s anxieties toward

“Mitteleuropa” and its eastern flank: the Slav peoples in general and those of the Balkans in particular, a world the Germanic west had for centuries studied with fascinating antipathy. And Mitteleuropa also encompassed “the Pale”—the home territories of the eastern Jews whom the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 had forces to move westwards. (Elsaesser n. pag.)

The monster Nosferatu (“nosferatu” translates as “undead” in Romanian) is modeled on Dracula, and reveals Western Europe’s fears about the return of ethnic, racial, and religious others—the “citizens of ‘Fortress Europe’” who “harbour their own nightmare visions of history’s undead heading west from the ‘land beyond the trees’ and beyond” (Elsaesser n. pag.). Of course, this tension and apprehension recall the world in which the Tarot was birthed—as the Middle Ages gave way to the Renaissance and an ever-expanding and increasingly connected world in which Europeans also encounter ethnic, racial, and religious others from the Middle East, and the Far East through exploration, mercantilism, and burgeoning colonization. This anxiety about othered ways of being and knowing is also echoed in the Countess’s final transformation at the narrative’s closing, which I discuss in more depth later in this chapter.

Up to the contemporary moment in the narrative, the Countess has lived off small animals, shepherd boys, and “gipsy lads who, ignorant or foolhardy, come to wash the dust from their feet in the water of the [Countess’s] fountain” (96). Then something different happens and “Jack and the Beanstalk” is invoked—“Fee fie fo fum / I smell the blood of an Englishman” (96)—and the narrator introduces the young English officer who, while visiting friends in Vienna, “quixotically” decides to “spend the remainder of his furlough

exploring the little-known uplands of Romania” and “travel the rutted cart-tracks by bicycle “in the land of the vampires” (97). The latter part of the sentence reads humorously, as the soldier most likely does not expect to meet such a monstrous being. It also reflects the association of Romania and the Balkan lands in general as enigmatic and anachronistic, as well as the fact that disputes over the Balkan lands were some of the key precipitating factors of World War I. The soldier’s intent hints at the reality that wars are often fought by people following orders, fighting for an ideal, and not necessarily always people who know all of the details (such as the physical lands, the lands’ peoples, and so on) of why the war is being fought. Furthermore, the soldier has “the special quality of virginity” (97). This quality is described as

most and least ambiguous of states: ignorance, yet at the same time, power in potentia, and, furthermore, unknowingness, which is not the same as ignorance. He is more than he knows—and has about him besides, the special glamour of that generation for whom history has already prepared a special, exemplary fate in the trenches of France. This being, rooted in change and time, is about to collide with the timeless Gothic eternity of the vampires, for whom all is as it has always been and will be, whose cards always fall in the same pattern. (97)

In this passage, the narrator anachronistically mentions the officer’s fate referring to the outcome of the war, and then, since virginity is associated with young women, complicates the usual pattern of both Gothic and fairy tales. An awakening to sexual knowledge by choice or most often force or the threat of force is often the climax that leads to the misfortune or death of the heroine in such tales. However, in *The Bloody Chamber*, virginity can provide protection, or “power in potentia” (97). With the hero’s arrival in the story, Carter reverses the gender roles and spatial relations of the familiar invasion narrative often found in fairy tales. She also complicates her own readers’ expectations as two other *Bloody*

*Chamber* narratives mentioned below follow the familiar invasion narrative until the narratives' ending.

For example, in Carter's "The Tiger's Bride," a retelling of the "Beauty and the Beast" fairy tale, the story's heroine is The Beast's reward after her father lost a game of cards (51). This circumstance reflects the bride's commodity status and recasts her father as the true beast. The heroine enters The Beast's estate knowing that "they lived according to a different logic than [she] had done until [her] father abandoned [her] to the wild beasts by his human carelessness" (63). This knowledge gives the heroine a "certain fearfulness," but not much because she is a "young girl, a virgin, and therefore men denied [her] rationality just as they denied it to all those who were not exactly like themselves, in all their unreason" (63). In this case, the heroine's virginity gives her an edge over men (such as her father) who assume her sexual innocence is synonymous with a generalized ignorance. This passage also dovetails with the significance of the World War I setting of "The Lady of the House of Love": that the men who create wars in the name of reason and progress, but are often fueled by lust for economic and political power, wage war at the sake of lives—be they civilians or soldiers. The willingness to sacrifice lives for nonmaterial passions seems irrational. In the end, The Beast literally licks the skin off the heroine (67). The heroine transforms into a Tiger because The Beast, who is a tiger whom disguised himself as a monstrous, beastly man up to this point, sees her true, wild nature (67).

Another example is found in Carter's "The Company of Wolves," a retelling of the "Little Red Riding Hood" fairy tale. In this tale, the heroine, based on Little Red Riding Hood, "stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. . . . she does not know how to shiver [in contrast to *Hill House's* Eleanor who instinctively shivers when

she reaches Hill House]. She has her knife and is afraid of nothing” (113-114). Red enters the dangerous, wolf-occupied territory of the woods to journey to her grandmother. We are told her “father might forbid her, if he were home, but he is away in the forest, gathering wood, and her mother cannot deny her” (114). Here, Carter casts the daughter as beholden to the law of her father only when he is present. She is a rebellious heroine whose virginity provides her with protection and strength—not fear and vulnerability. This fact complicates the readers’ expectations that a woman journeying alone should fear her own death or rape (which brings to mind the fearlessness of Jackson’s Eleanor as she left for Hill House). In the end, similar to the heroine of “The Tiger’s Bride,” the Red Riding Hood character comes face to face with the monstrous wolf, who has disguised himself previously as an attractive young man. This story deserves a much more detailed analysis of its ending, but for my purposes here, it will suffice to argue that she “knew she was nobody’s meat” (118). She willingly undresses herself and the young man/wolf and throws their clothing into the fire (which we learn earlier is how to doom a werewolf to an eternal existence as a wolf). Then, in the final moments, the heroine sleeps “sweet and sound” in her grandmother’s bed (whom the wolf has recently eaten despite her pious, Christian life and reliance on her Bible [116]); the heroine rests, “between the paws of the tender wolf” (118). Here, Carter creates a narrative that reveals the strength and ingenuity of the Gothic fairy tale heroine. She needs no wood cutter or other male hero to rescue her from the wolf. And, the grand narrative of Christianity can offer no protection for the girl’s grandmother thus elucidating the fragility of grand narratives in the face of what is perceived as monstrous alterity.

In “The Lady of the House of Love,” Carter’s use of the power of virginity also echoes religious and social groups’ valorization of female virgins and brings to mind the

complications such praise invites. Here, Carter complicates our expectations of a female virgin and, again, we are reminded that the Countess's future is always the same. Yet, with a moment of foreshowing and the allusion to Sleeping Beauty—"A single kiss woke up the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood"—the impossible happens: "The waxen fingers of the Countess, fingers of a holy image, turn up the card called *Les Amoureux* [The Lovers]" (97). Therein lies the germ of revolution: "Never, never before . . . never before has the Countess cast herself a fate involving love" (97; ellipsis in original, see Figure 7 at the end of this chapter). When the Countess sees the card, "She shakes, she trembles, her great eyes close beneath her finely veined, nervously fluttering eyelids; the lovely cartomancer has, this time, the first time, dealt herself a hand of love and death" (97). Through the cards, the Countess at last nears the subversion of the time and space assigned to her. She now bears the potential to break through into the daylight of an alternate way-of-being-in-the-world. Through her obsessive search for truth, she rebels against her outsider status and dares to become something or someone different.

Enclosing the male character, a "blond beauty," in what the narrator calls an "invisible, even unacknowledged pentacle of his virginity" allows him to step over the "threshold of Nosferatu's castle" without shivering in the "blast of cold air, as from the mouth of a grave" even as his bicycle, "his beautiful two-wheeled symbol of rationality vanish[es] into the dark entrails of the mansion" (99). Although he does not shiver (similar to the heroine of "The Company of Wolves"), he does experience a "certain involuntary sinking of the heart" as his bicycle is wheeled away (99). He fears it will end up in "some damp outhouse where they would not oil it or check its tyres" (99). The bicycle was a common mode of transportation during the First World War and, here, the bicycle may

represent the hero's reliance on the grand narrative of rationality and Western Europe's banner of reason (against Eastern European aggression and its traditional association with invaders from the East); as the narrator says, "To ride a bicycle is in itself some protection against superstitious fears, since the bicycle is the product of pure reason applied to motion" (97). The soldier's anxiety about his bike's tires and gears carries with it the suggestion of cultural arrogance as he assumes these Slavic peoples know nothing of how to care for such a paragon of Western rationality. In a few sentences, Carter manages to reflect an entire zeitgeist and the hero is set against the non-rational, supernatural realm of the vampires—the inscrutable Transylvanian highlands viewed as home to dark powers, such as Dracula, that threaten to infiltrate, contaminate, and bring discord to Western Europe. The officer's arrival announces a change of fate that gives the Countess the faintest idea that he, this hero, this light of reason, as it were, may be able to "irradiate" her darkness (103).

When the hero and heroine meet, the contrast between their two respective realms is stark. After she invites the officer into her château, the Countess thinks:

You have such a fine throat, m'sieu. . . . When you came through the door retaining about you all the golden light of the summer's day of which I know nothing, nothing, the card called "Les Amoureux" had just emerged from the tumbling chaos of imagery before me; it seemed to me you had stepped off the card into my darkness and, for a moment, thought, perhaps, you might irradiate it. (103)

In terms of World War I, we can read the passage in a way that privileges the progress and reason the Western allies represent over the radical, irrational Eastern axis—that the fair, blond Englishman will triumph over the dark Slav. But this is a racist, xenophobic reading that does not reflect Carter's mien. Even the embedded "Jack and the Beanstalk" fairy tale, in which the Englishman enters the forbidden monster's (the giant's) abode only to return to his home with what the monster has taken from his people is complicated by the conclusion

of “The Lady of the House of Love.” Although the officer’s arrival ultimately pronounces the Countess’s fate—while disrobing to complete her ritual of seduction, feeding, and murder, the Countess drops her eyeglasses (that protect her from light), cuts herself on their shards, receives a comforting kiss from the naïve officer, becomes human, and dies—we should not read the narrative as one that praises the rational over the non-rational (105-106). After all, it is the *non-rational* Tarot that predicts the young hero’s arrival through the card, Les Amoureux.

### The Monstrous Tarot: Origins and the Gothic Text

If we acknowledge that Gothic texts, as Howard aptly argues, draw upon or transform established literary and socio-cultural “discursive structures”—“fragments of ‘the already said’, both literary and non-literary” (16), then Carter’s incorporation of the Tarot in “The Lady of the House of Love” is apropos. The Tarot also invokes “the already said” while it allows new configurations of meaning, as interpretation incorporates the voices of the querent<sup>36</sup> and reader, along with recognized meanings of the cards, the result of multiple and on-going revisions due to changing discursive and socio-cultural regimes. Barbara Walker (1994) explains, “Like the Bible, the Tarot passed through the hands of many interpreters who kept revising its ‘canonical’ meanings. The process still goes on today. Part of the charm of Tarot cards lies in their fluid adaptability to any creative exposition, verbal or symbolic” (19). The Tarot, as we know it, is distinctly European, but its conception originates in playing cards, brought to Europe from the Islamic world during the last quarter of the fourteenth century, and in the “trick-taking games” introduced in the same period

---

<sup>36</sup> The person who asks to have her cards read.

from Persia and India (Dummett 4). The “gypsies” (who are associated with Romania, but have roots in India) are often credited with introducing Tarot cards, but David Parlett (1990) explains playing cards appeared in Europe in 1371 while gypsies appear in 1411 (39). The origins of the Tarot are still contested and it is clear that the Tarot is inherently heterogeneous. For example, Catherine Perry Hargrave (2000) notes the prominence of the numbers seven and thirteen. Seven is associated with the magic of “old [European] fairy tales” and has been “from time immemorial” the “mystic number of the East” (223). The number thirteen, Hargrave argues, is “invariably Death” and retains its “early Eastern significance of misfortune” in early and modern-day Tarot cards (223). She concludes, “Whether they were brought by merchants or travelers, by soldiers or wandering fortune-telling gypsies, no one knows, but strange emblematic cards appeared, with a very evident allegorical significance and with a distinctly Eastern symbolism” (223).

The contemporary association of the Tarot and the occult arrives in the second half of the eighteenth century within “masonic and illuminist circles”—particularly with Antoine Court de Gébelin who linked the cards to ancient Egyptian priests who purportedly concealed “symbolic instruction in their religious doctrines in the guise of an instrument of play” (Dummett 3). Michael Dummett (1986) maintains that before this period, the cards were “unquestionably invented to play a particular type of game” and until de Gébelin’s claims were accepted by French fortune-tellers and occultists, the Tarot was “never used for any other purpose” (3). Yet, from the beginning, the cards were despised by many church officials due to their association with gaming (3). Hargrave asserts that the Church officials’ attacks on the cards led to the “very early” appearance of “Le Pape,” and “La Papesse” (223). Indeed, these two cards, the modern-day Pope or Hierophant and his counterpart the

Popess or High Priestess, are a part of the earliest deck to correspond with the modern tarot pack, the Visconti-Sforza Tarot—a deck of hand-painted playing cards commissioned by newlyweds Bianca Maria Visconti and Francesco Sforza in approximately 1450 bearing emblems of both families (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 182). There is no doubt that the Tarot's Eastern and Middle-Eastern playing card origins (and the imperial and religious differences of those origins) also represented a threat to the power and influence of the Catholic Church.

The Tarot is monstrous in the same sense as the Gothic text. Drawing from disparate discourses and systems of meaning, the Tarot cards and Gothic texts are fecund—they engender many interpretations and applications. By the simple virtue of their convoluted histories, the two are excessive in nature in addition to being farraginous forms of art. For occultist readers and querents, the Tarot reveals hidden, repressed truths and warns of future occurrences through its imagery (Walker 18-21). In this way, we read the Tarot as we read the monster's body—deciphering the significance of its separate origins congealed into one card, one (monstrous) body. The Tarot requires our attention because if we accept that monsters do embody our anxieties, fears, and fantasies and are essentially abjected parts of ourselves while taking into account that, etymologically, monsters are beings that reveal or warn, how do we read a monster, Carter's Countess, who resorts to her Tarot without fail? Indeed, the word, "monster," is two-spirited in that it combines the Old French and Latin words for revealing or displaying and through its revelation comes a warning (Bissonette 112). Melissa Bloom Bissonette (2010) writes, "The monster can reveal something internal, as the longings of its mother during gestation, or the sin of its conception, or village or nation. The monster might also be a warning, the prophetic embodiment of a nightmare of

progress, the visual emblem of momentous change” (112). Therefore, how do we understand this phenomenon given that the Countess’s Tarot also *reveals and warns*, and thus becomes monstrous in its own right? Understanding may be found in the acknowledgment and interpretation of the cards and in realizing that the Countess is a Gothic heroine who seeks to rewrite the conventional Gothic script through the fulfillment of her desire and her belief in the pursuit of knowledge and outcomes conventionally prohibited to her.

### Reading Through the Monster<sup>37</sup>

It is important to note that the same configuration of Tarot cards shows up so often in “The Lady of the House of Love” that some readers may dismiss them as meaningless. Yet, even though Carter’s text is not illustrated, Tarot imagery haunts its core, and it is clear that the cards should be understood as real artifacts of the text.<sup>38</sup> The Countess reads La Papesse (often referred to as The High Priestess in contemporary decks and La Papessa in the Visconti-Sforza deck), as “wisdom” (95; Figure 4). Wisdom, often gendered female, denotes not only knowledge, but the “capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct” (“Wisdom,” def. 1a). This card suggests a wise woman, or a woman who proclaims to know in excess of what dominant powers approve. Yet, unfortunately, throughout the Western, Christian world such wisdom is often perceived as dangerous,

---

<sup>37</sup> I have been a cartomancer for nearly half my life. For this reason, some contemporary interpretations of the cards lack a secondary source. However, in addition to various sources I cite, I suggest further reading in Sally Gearhart and Susan Rennie’s *A Feminist Tarot*, Watertown, Mass., Persephone Press, 1981; A. E. Waite’s well-known *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* originally published in 1910; and Walker’s *The Secrets of the Tarot* listed in my works cited.

<sup>38</sup> I include images from the French Tarot de Marseille (ca. 1650) as it was and remains a widely popular deck on which many other decks are based. And, also because the Countess’s cards are French and the narrator reveals she speaks French: “the adopted language of the Romanian aristocracy” (100). See Dummett and Moakley for images of the Visconti-Sforza deck.

aberrant, or monstrous. Indeed, La Papesse had long been associated with the legendary Pope Joan until Gertrude Moakley linked the card to Umiliati nun Maifreda da Pirovano in 1966 (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 182). The Pope Joan association mocks “female ambition” and deviates from other female popes of the Tarot who serve as wives to the Pope and provide critique of Papal corruption (Moakley 72). Maifreda was cousin to Matteo Visconti, an ancestor of Bianca Maria Visconti, heiress to the Duke of Milan—the same Visconti who commissioned the Visconti-Sforza deck (Newman, *From Virile Woman* 182). Guglielma, from whom the Gugliemites took their name, was Princess Blažena Vilemína, daughter of King Přemysl Ottokar I of Bohemia (182).

According to Barbara Newman (1995), Guglielma most likely arrived in Milan in the 1260s as a quinquagenarian widow, but there is no account of what happened to her husband. Purported to have been born on Pentecost, and a recipient of invisible stigmata, she “established herself as a freelance holy woman . . . gradually gaining the reputation of a healer and miracle worker” (185). Guglielma’s foreignness raised her above the rivalry between the Torriani and Visconti factions (185). After her death in 1281, Maifreda received visions revealing that Guglielma was an incarnation of the Holy Spirit and she would rise from the dead like Christ (187-188). In the meantime, Maifreda was to be “the new Peter,” the new Pope (188). After twenty years “of priestly duties” including “celebrat[ing] Mass and consecrate[ing] hosts over Guglielma’s grave,” Maifreda celebrated mass on Easter 1300 and went on to repeat the mass on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit incarnate in Guglielma “would rise from the dead and confer blessings on her people” (182,14). Instead of witnessing a resurrection, Inquisitors following up on previous investigations of 1284 and

1296 arrived, took them into custody, and later burned Maifreda and at least two of her followers at the stake (182).

Taking the Maifreda/La Papessa narrative into account enhances our understanding of the Countess's card. This card holds a feeling of secret, alternative, even forbidden ways of living in, moving in, and knowing the world—especially in terms of inhabiting the space of womanhood and pushing beyond boundaries medieval woman encountered. La Papesse holds the narrative of Maifreda and Guglielma who proclaimed a direct relationship with and connection to divinity in a period when only Church officials could make such claims with impunity. The card bears the trace of radical defiance of order—of some entity or belief that threatens to unbalance and disturb what has been established as sacred and proper. The Visconti memorialize their ancestor in the coded language of the Tarot—the Papesse card becomes a requiem for a group of inspired people who were harassed, ostracized, and executed by the Catholic Church who viewed them as a dangerous, non-rational, heretical sect. It is a powerful invasion narrative, indeed. Carter's Countess is like La Papesse, pregnant with the wisdom of forbidden things, unearthly things. And like the woman on her Tarot card—the robed female who encompasses the legendary Pope Joan, Guglielma, Maifreda, or other female popes—the Countess has the ambition to go beyond her assigned fate. We are told, "Everything about this beautiful and ghastly lady is as it should be, queen of the night, queen of terror—except her horrible reluctance for the role" (95). Instead of murdering the men who happen upon her abode, she "would like to caress their lean brown cheeks and stroke their ragged hair" (96)—it appears she would rather *love*. Thus, she endures her reality as represented by the Tarot cards (i.e., La Papesse, La Mort, and La

Tour Abolie), but she also subverts the boundaries created for her through Tarot because she reads her cards with the faith that her fate can change.

Although contemporary cartomancers often interpret La Mort, or Death as a total external transformation at the end of a cycle in lieu of physical death (Walker 104-105), the Countess's card portrays a "grisly picture of a capering skeleton" which certainly brings morality to mind (101; Figure 5). The Tarot descends from a time in Europe where death was everywhere; people lived through the threat of plague, lost family members and friends, and were encouraged to become acquainted with and accustomed to death (Farley 73-74). For Carter's narrative, La Mort takes on a literal and extended meaning. The Countess represents the old death—the death of disease and rampant contamination that not even the nobility can escape. As a member of the living-dead, the Countess also becomes the personification of the fact that life can never be separated from death. She is the grisly skeleton waiting for her living prey. In her realm, she lives as long as men live and find their way to her. In third paragraph of the text, her voice, "filled with distant sonorities," repeats, "now you are at the place of annihilation, now you are at the place of annihilation" (93); later the intonation repeats before she leads the officer into her bedroom (104). Although the officer survives his encounter, we know that death still awaits him in the trenches of France (e.g., 97, 104, 108). The officer must meet a new death born from the burgeoning entanglements and political interests of the twentieth century (that have roots in relationships and alliances spanning centuries before).

At last, Carter's nominative choice of La Tour Abolie leads me to Gerard de Nerval. In "Notes on the Gothic Mode," Carter is concerned with "verbal structures as things-in-themselves as well as transmitters of meaning," though she adds, "meaning . . . always

tends to dominate structure” (133). I argue that these factors, along with her self-proclaimed continuous engagement with “fiction absolutely self-conscious of itself” underlie her use of “La Tour Abolie” which reveals itself as yet another sort of poignant anachronism (133). Readers familiar with Tarot and French will know that La Tour Abolie is not categorically a Tarot card, but will read the card as The Abolished Tower and make a connection to The Tower card. The Tower card has had many names over the years: from Fire to La Casa del Diavolo (The Devil’s House) to La Maison Dieu (The House of God).<sup>39</sup> “La Tour Abolie” originates in the second line of Nerval’s 1853 and 1854 sonnets “El Desdichado” or “The Disinherited”: “Je suis le ténébreux, —le veuf, —l’inconsolé, / Le Prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie” (1-2; see Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter). But Carter’s readers are more likely to be familiar with the “La Tour Abolie” mentioned in line 429 of the last stanza of T.S. Eliot’s poem “The Waste Land”: “*Le Prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie.*” Published in 1922, “The Waste Land” post-dates the setting and time of “The Lady of the House of Love,” but, it led me to Nerval.<sup>40</sup> Both versions of Nerval’s sonnets tell of a man once noble who has lost love and wealth, and, as a result, he has been disinherited of tradition, of happiness (Kristeva 144). In general, the poem’s overwhelming feeling of loss, and its images of crumbling edifices and deprivation bring to mind the sad state of the Countess and her dilapidated lair where “dark red figured wallpaper is obscurely, distressingly

---

<sup>39</sup> There is a fascinating history of this card’s name much too long for this chapter. Farley argues that in the case of the Visconti-Sforza Tarot, the Tower is representative of the della Torres, bitter rivals of the Viscontis who eventually came to ruin. The della Torres’s coats-of-arms often depicted towers similar to the one on the Tower card. The fire from heaven could be interpreted as divine intervention leading to the collapse of della Torres power (Farley 88). See also Dummett 6-7, Farley 84-88, Moakley 99.

<sup>40</sup> I am sure that Carter was familiar with both poets. Of course Eliot is well known to American and Britons alike. Nerval is more familiar to Europeans. Carter mentions Nerval in her radio play about a “Victorian painter of fairy subjects named Richard Dadd,” *Come unto these Yellow Sands* (Preface 11).

patterned by the rain that drives in through the neglected roof and leaves behind it random areas of staining, ominous marks like those left on the sheets by dead lovers” (94). Although the gender roles are reversed when we consider the poem and Carter’s narrative together, sections of the poem retain uncanny similarity to the plot of the short story and the Countess’s translation of her card, “dissolution.” The Countess and what she represents has, in effect, been disinherited by the world the officer represents. Her castle is in ruin—a state of perpetual disintegration. Her realm and Nerval’s poem resemble a requiem, a literary dirge to the many ruins of the conditions of life, society, and the disavowal of what falls outside the easily contained. The officer’s innocent curiosity speaks to a subconscious longing to encounter the non-rational (i.e., he decides to “spend the remainder of his furlough exploring the little-known uplands of Romania” and “travel the rutted cart-tracks by bicycle “in the land of the vampires” [97]).

### Failed Seduction

Referencing “Sleeping Beauty” once more with the phrase “[o]ne kiss . . . woke up the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,” the narrator sets the scene and complicates our expectations surrounding the soldier’s seduction (103). The officer sees her “birdlike, predatory claws” and feels “the sense of strangeness” overcome him fully (103). Here, he fully encounters the Countess-as-monster; he has a “fundamental disbelief in what he sees before him” and this sustains him thinking perhaps “there are some things which, even if they *are* true, we should not believe possible” (103-104). The narrator reveals

since he himself is immune to shadow, due to his virginity—he does not yet know what there is to be affair of—and due to his heroism, which makes him like the sun, he sees before him, first and foremost, an inbred, highly strung girl child, fatherless, motherless, kept in the dark too long. . . . And though he feels unease, he cannot feel

terror; so he is like the boy in the fairy tale, who does not know how to shudder, and not spooks, ghouls, beasties, the Devil himself and all his retinue could do the trick. (104)

“This lack of imagination,” the narrator concludes, “gives his heroism to the hero” (104).

Alas, we are reminded again of his impending death: “He will learn how to shudder in the trenches. But this girl cannot make him shudder” (104). Here, the soldier’s virginity reflects the intent and tenets of rational projects and grand narratives of positivism and imperialism. Such projects and narratives seek to remain virginal, as it were, in a pure, unadulterated state unencumbered by otherness, by difference.

In the next moment, the Countess is still beholden to her own scripted narrative—the narrative readers expect of a monstrous being like herself. She pays out the fate of the soldier in her mind even though her Tarot cards have suggested a different outcome. She reflects,

Embraces, kisses; your golden head . . . of the sun, even if I’ve only seen the picture of the sun on the Tarot card, your golden head of the lover whom I dreamed would one day free me, this head will fall back, its eyes roll upwards in a spasm you will mistake for that of love and not of death. The bridegroom bleeds on my inverted marriage bed. Stark and dead, poor bicyclist; he has paid the price of a night with the Countess. . . . Tomorrow, her keeper will bury his bones under her roses. The food her roses feed on gives them their rich colour, their swooning odour, that breathes lasciviously of forbidden pleasures. (105)

Here, the conventional image of blood on the wedding sheets indicative of the woman’s virginity is transformed into the blood of the Countess’s prey. The Countess’s roses, just as the cereus plant in Shani Mootoo’s novel discussed in Chapter Three, transform decaying matter into specimens of sublime, excessive beauty so typical of the Gothic mode. The scent from the Countess’s roses that can travel freely in the air, uncaged like the Countess’s lark or the Countess herself suggests the fragility and permeability of the containers in which we

place otherness as Botting suggests in the aforementioned passage. The image of the rose returns again at the end of the narrative.

Yet, *Les Amoureux* is indeed the card that announces a shift in the fate of the Countess and that of her presumed prey (Figure 7). For contemporary readers, this card denotes an important decision concerning a relationship or other life-changing event and the need for careful discretion and guidance in making the choice, as the result of one's decision will most often affect the course of one's life significantly. Historically, the card depicts either two lovers and Cupid or two lovers, Cupid, and an official. In the early Italian decks, the card is called "L'amore" (Love) and depicts a blindfolded Cupid (Dummett 112). Moakley addresses the blindfold citing Erwin Panofsky, who argues it is "because love is inferior to the intellect," and Edgar Wind, who argues it is "because love is superior" (77). I believe the latter is true in relation to Carter's narrative. Her Countess is, after all, the lady of the house of love. Moakley also notes that the love represented in *Les Amoureux* breaks from the cold, rigid courtly love tradition (77) and, thus, I argue it depicts the love between two people who open fully to an *other* and enter the vulnerable space of love.<sup>41</sup> Until *Les Amoureux* appears, the "house of love" has been a house of subterfuge, of hereditary wanton desire. Deep, romantic love has no place in the Countess's domain. Nevertheless, her persistent desire to evade her fate by way of the Tarot proves triumphant, which is apropos as the ancestral names of the Tarot are *trionfi*, *triumphi*, or *triumphs*.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, when the Countess dies in *Vampirella*, she says, "I always knew that love, true love would kill me" (114).

---

<sup>41</sup> An *other* here refers to another person—i.e., one's partner.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Parlett 240-241.

Before her death in “The Lady of the House of Love,” in her bedroom, her familiar place of seduction and murder, the Countess “is shaking as if her limbs were not efficiently joined together” (105). The knowledge *Les Amoureux* provides is profound and cannot be ignored. It is the knowledge she has rebelliously and obsessively sought out in her place of exile, her place of annihilation. She “raises her hands to unfasten the neck of her dress and her eyes well with tears. . . . She can’t take off her mother’s wedding dress unless she takes off her dark glasses; she has fumbled the ritual, it is no longer inexorable” (105). In the next moment, the Countess’s glasses “slip from her fingers and smash to pieces on the tiled floor. There is no room in her drama for improvisation; and this unexpected, mundane noise of breaking glass breaks the wicked spell in the room, entirely” (106). Like Eleanor in *Hill House*, she breaks the spell and has a different experience of the world before her. She reaches down to retrieve the shards in “awed fascination” as she has never seen her “own blood” (106; emphasis in original). Instead of taking advantage of her vulnerability in a sexual manner, as would most certainly happen in a typical Gothic tale, the virginal officer “brings the innocent remedies of the nursery; in himself, by his presence, he is an exorcism. . . . And so he puts his mouth to the wound. He will kiss it better for her, as her mother, had she lived, would have done” (106). This action is too much. She wakes to life like Sleeping Beauty and her “painted ancestors turn away their eyes and grind their fangs. How can she bear the pain of becoming human? The end of exile is the end of being” (106).<sup>43</sup>

In this moment it is love—the opening to alterity, the relinquishing of boundaries, the loosening of restrictive histories—that triumphs. Love triumphs in the fraction of time in

---

<sup>43</sup> Portraits are common in many Gothic texts including Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, mentioned in this dissertation’s Introduction, and Morrison’s *Love*, discussed in the final chapter. In these two narratives and Carter’s, portraits are animated.

which the solidier is no longer prey, no longer a soldier, but caretaker. Love triumphs when the Countess is no longer a strange, othered monster, but an injured being in need of compassion. Here, although gender roles are reversed, the scene also evokes the third stanza of Nerval's sonnet "El Desdichado": "Suis-je Amour ou Phébus ? . . . Lusignan ou Byron? / Mon front est rouge encor du baiser de la reine;" [Am I Cupid or Phebus? . . . Lusignan or Byron? / My brow is still red from the kiss of the queen" (9-10; ellipsis in original; Kristeva's translation).

In *Erotic Infidelities: Love and Enchantment in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber* (2014), Kimberly J. Lau interprets the Countess's death differently. Lau interprets the story's line, "The end of exile is the end of being" (106) as evidence that, for the Countess and her Sleeping Beauty kin, "the supposedly liberating kiss is not the harbinger of an alternative sexual freedom of the type Carter celebrates in *The Sadeian Woman* (1979) but rather a certain death . . . the symbol of fairy-tale love, a kiss that leads only to a conventional happily-ever-after" (Lau 114). First, from *The Sadeian Woman*, Lau cites, "*In his diabolic solitude*, only the possibility of love could awake the libertine to perfect, immaculate terror. It is in this holy terror of love that we find, in both men and women themselves, the source of all opposition to the emancipation of women" (114; emphasis added). In the first part of this passage that I have italicized and Lau has omitted, Carter is referring to the The Marquis de Sade and Sadeian orgasm. Carter writes that in the "possibility of love" there is power enough to provoke terror, a sublime experience. I maintain that the power of love is in love's ability to open one person to another. It is not romantic or sexual love, but love in its simplest form—love that creates equality between persons despite their differences in a single moment. When the Countess dies in *Vampirella*, she says, "I always knew that love,

true love would kill me” (114). And that love, enables her death, her freedom, and her transformation.

Second, Lau writes,

Fairy-tale love—foretold by the Countess’s tarot cards, enacted in the kiss, projected into the future by the hero—is the death of female animal drive, the death of female sexual desire, not the love that Carter believes to be a possible impetus to complete freedom. . . . Carter’s vampiric sleeping beauty learns, this love is not the love of fairy tales, and female animal drives and sexual desires cannot be autonomous when circumscribed by the pornographic fantasies of a male-dominated culture. . . . Carter exposes the misplaced cultural longing for, and faith in, a fairy-tale love [as in the Grimms’ happily-ever-after structure]. (114-115)

First, some context is necessary here as Lau references Carter’s thoughts on pornography and love in *The Sadeian Woman* (1979). In the latter text, Carter writes, “Pornography involves an abstraction of human intercourse in which the self is reduced to its formal elements” (4) and “pornography must always have the false simplicity of fable; the abstraction of the flesh involves the mystification of the flesh” (16). Thus, Lau is correct to argue “female animal drives and sexual desires cannot be autonomous when circumscribed by the pornographic fantasies of a male-dominated culture,” as we have seen repeatedly in Gothic narratives in which women often have little to no choice in the way they express their sexual desire. Yet, it is not the soldier himself who circumscribes the Countess’s sexuality. Yes, the soldier may represent systems greater than himself that mark the vampire as monstrous, insatiable, and sexually obscene, but in the text, he is also a figure in the card, *Les Amoureux*. He is a hero, but he is also a lover. Denying his complicated nature denies what Gordon calls “complex personhood” (4) just as seeing the Countess only as a monstrous, vampiric automaton limits her ability to transcend her condition.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> See page 17 of the introduction where I discuss “complex personhood.” See also chapter three.

Furthermore, the text does not indicate the soldier's desire to have sex with the Countess. Her sexual desire and animal drives are governed by her status as vampire. It is the Countess who is acting in the realm governed by her ancestors and grand narratives about the dangerous, inscrutable peoples and beings—the monsters—that live outside Western Europe. In fact, the Countess plans to seduce the hero: "She will assure him, in the very voice of temptation: 'My clothes have but to fall and you will see before you a succession of mysteries'" (104). She bids the young officer to follow her, "Suivez-moi!" she commands (105). In the next moment, "The handsome bicyclist, fearful for his hostess's health, her sanity, gingerly follows her hysterical imperiousness into the other room; he would like to take her into his arms and protect her from the ancestors who leer down from the walls" (105). In the Gothic text, Carter argues, "Character and events are exaggerated beyond reality, to become symbols, ideas, passions," so it is understandable that Lau does so ("Notes" 134). But this circumstance creates the opportunity to read through the Gothic monster as Cohen suggests to reveal another level of meaning.

Third, Lau does not interpret the Countess's cards—the brief mention in the passage above does not take into account the complexity of *Les Amoureux*. Lau argues, "[T]he fatality of the hero's kiss underscores the eternal liminality of women's position in a male-dominated society, caught forever between virgin and whore, between dead and deadening. Deadened in her state by her lack of agency, the Countess's only escape is mortal death" (114). Lau believes that for Carter, this death is more suitable than "the equally deadening future the hero imagines for her" (114) citing the following passage:

We shall take her to Zurich, to a clinic; she will be treated for nervous hysteria. Then to an eye specialist . . . and to a dentist. . . . We shall turn her into the lovely girl she is; I shall cure her of all these nightmares. (107)

Yes, the soldier's plans indicate his desire to transform the Countess into a conventionally ideal woman, but instead of reading his words as fully misogynistic, I would suggest that he does realize that she is unhappy in her current state (he does not realize she has died). Treatment in Zurich could point to contemporary psychological advances in the treatment of hysteria—perhaps the talking cure or some other sort of palliative care. The soldier's desire to change the Countess is multifaceted; it reflects his heroism, his rationality, his compassion (that some readers may interpret as misogynistic) and his belief in positivism. Yet, we should remember that Countess's life up until this point was a living nightmare. She was caught between her ancestral drives and society's role in casting her as outsider.

The morning following the failed seduction, the officer awakes alone to larksong (the Countess's lark had been set free) after sleeping on the floor, for he tucked the Countess into bed—further suggesting his genuine concern for the Countess's well-being. The hero finds a lightly blood-stained negligée and “a rose that must have come from the fierce bushes nodding through the window” (106). The roses, fed by dead lovers' remains, were originally planted by the Countess's mother and are “almost too luxuriant,” “obscene,” and intoxicating (98). These roses both permeate and define boundaries—they shield the Countess's realm from the outside world (“incarcerat[ing]” the Countess [95]) and fearlessly enter the space where the rational hero, the virginal soldier, remains. Eventually, he finds the Countess sitting “at her round table in her white dress, with the cards laid out before her. . . . the cards of destiny that are so fingered. So soiled, so worn by constant shuffling that you can no longer make the image out on any single one of them” (107). In death, the Countess looks older, less beautiful, and fully human. In death, the cards' faces are blank. (Could this suggest that it is the Countess's *faith*—arguably the ultimate acknowledgement

of the non-rational—that engineers her release?) The Countess’s last words are prosopopeial: “I will vanish in the morning light; I was only an invention of darkness. And I leave you as a souvenir the dark, fanged rose I plucked from between my thighs, like a flower laid on a grave” (107).<sup>45</sup> The Countess may no longer be a monstrous vampire, but she is in no way conquered. But, rather, she is free. Her desire has been fulfilled. I do not agree with Lau when she claims the Tarot presents the Countess’s belief in fairy-tale love. The Countess only wants someone to come “irradiate” her darkness and provide an alternative to her imprisoned state (103). Unlike Jackson’s Eleanor, the Countess does not express the desire to live happily-ever-after with her hero. Ultimately, it seems, Carter’s text suggests there are times when rationality and scientific knowledge are useful, but there are also times when breaking from the conventional or prescribed ways of believing and acting becomes necessary means to liberation. It is when we solely marry ourselves to either category, be it rationality or non-rationality—that we become deadened us to life’s possibilities.

### Annihilation and Transformation: Escaping the Gothic House

It seems that monsters always escape utter annihilation and are reborn as something else, and when they come back, Cohen writes, “they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, *human* knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the outside” (20). The officer, the hero, the emblem of rationality, who comes, in effect, to *exorcise* the archaic, and triumph over the non-rational, still clings to the material of the past. Or rather, this othered

---

<sup>45</sup> Prosopopeial/prosopopoeial is the adjective form of prosopopeia/prosopopoeia which conveys an “imaginary, absent, or dead person speaking or acting” (“Prosopopoeia, Prosopopeia,” def. 2”).

rose and all it represents is discovered at the root of the hero's person. For, in the narrative's final paragraphs, the officer returns to his regiment's barracks and finds a rose tucked in his cycling jacket's breast pocket—near his heart, his core—and “Curiously enough, although he had brought it so far away from Romania, the flower did not seem to be quite dead and, on impulse, because the girl had been so lovely and her death so unexpected and pathetic, he decide[s] resurrect her rose” (107). Sometime later, he finds his “spartan quarters brimm[ing] with the reeling odour of a glowing, velvet, monstrous flower whose petals had regained all their former bloom and elasticity, their corrupt, brilliant, baleful splendour” (108).

Of course, the rose is a well-known multifaceted symbol. Secrecy, love, fertility, passion, purity, death, and life all fall under the symbol of the rose.<sup>46</sup> Lau argues the rose is a “*vagina dentata*” and like “Nosferatu's plague-infested rats, the Countess's rose travels from east to west and portends the widespread death of hundreds of thousands of young men,” becoming a “promise of death” (106). Yet, the Tarot cards that have reflected and reshaped the Countess's life in the narrative complicate this reading. If using the Tarot was the only way the Countess asserts rebellious agency in her stifling world, it becomes more difficult to read the rose in a way that sets the Countess's realm against the West. The rose is indeed an excessive, even monstrous, symbol apt to represent the Countess. Yet, by resurrecting the Countess's rose, the officer calls attention to the fact that our boundaries are often not as neat as they seem. Indeed, this profane, beautiful, and sublimely unnatural rose expels its essence in a purported bastion of rationality and order—a barracks. The final sentence of the

---

<sup>46</sup> For an interesting history of the rose as a symbol, see “A Brief Study of the Rose Cross Symbol” by Fra. Thomas D. Worrel, VII<sup>o</sup> “A Brief Study of the Rose Cross Symbol” available here: <http://www.sricf-ca.org/paper3.htm>.

short story reveals the officer's fate: "Next day, his regiment embarked for France," yet, beyond the diegetic space of the text, we may surmise the Countess's rose endures (108).

"The Lady of the House of Love" suggests that reading through our monsters reveals more monstrosity by way of acknowledging othered, repressed, and polyvalent ways of knowing. Carter's inclusion of the Tarot calls for recognition of esoteric forms, forms of the non-rational that leave us with more than one answer, more than one reference. Carter maintains the Gothic mode is one that "retains a singular moral function: that of provoking unease" while asserting, "I think that it is immoral to read simply for pleasure"; thus, it becomes difficult for readers and critics to disregard the conspicuous Arcana ("Notes" 134).<sup>47</sup> The Countess's preternatural rose, this emblem of the monsters we have created, calls for us to embrace the monstrous alterity that pushes at the limits of our realities, our truths, our discursive regimes, and to resurrect it, invite it in, and allow its fragrance to perfume the barracks of our lives.

---

<sup>47</sup> Arcana is a common term for Tarot cards.

Figures 4-7:

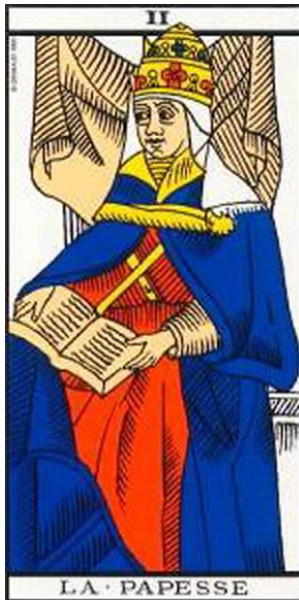


Figure 12



Figure 13

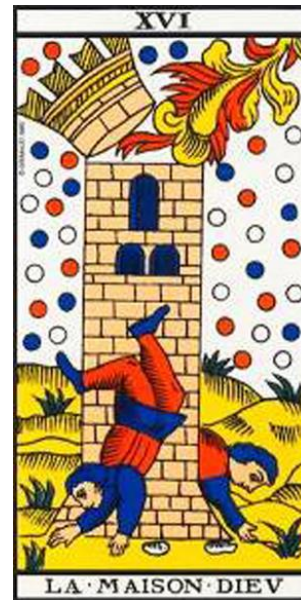


Figure 14

Figure 4: The Papesse (La Papessa/The Popess) holds a holy text which attests to her wisdom and spiritual discernment. Some decks identify the text as the Torah. This card is now more commonly titled, The High Priestess.

Figure 5: This example of La Mort (Death) is nameless, which is common in some versions of the Marseille tarot deck and many others.

Figure 6: La Maison Dieu (The House of God) depicts divine fire breaking apart a lofty, man made structure. This structure is sometimes associated with the Old Testament's Tower of Babel; hence the card's more common title, The Tower, or Carter's name for the card, La Tour Abolie.



Figure 15

Figure 7: L' Amoureux (Les Amoureux/The Lovers) depicts a marriage. Some versions of the card do not include an official while in others Cupid is not represented.

Appendix 1:

Gerard de Nerval's poem, "El Desdichado" ("The Disinherited"), 1854 version:<sup>48</sup>

Français:

Je suis le ténébreux, —le veuf, —l'inconsolé,

Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie:

Ma seule *étoile* est morte, —et mon luth constellé

Porte le *Soleil noir* de la *Mélancolie*.

<sup>48</sup> This translation is Julia Kristeva's as found in *Black Sun* (140-141).

Dans la nuit du tombeau, toi qui m'a consolé,  
Rends-moi le Pausilippe et la mer d'Italie,  
La *fleur* qui plaisait tant à mon cœur désolé,  
Et la treille où le pampre à la rose s'allie.

Suis-je Amour ou Phébus ? . . . Lusignan ou Byron?  
Mon front est rouge encor du baiser de la reine;  
J'ai rêvé dans la grotte où nage la sirène...

Et j'ai deux fois vainqueur traversé l'Achéron :  
Modulant tour à tour sur la lyre d'Orphée  
Les soupirs de la sainte et les cris de la fée.

English:

I am the saturnine—bereft—disconsolate,  
The Prince of Aquitaine whose tower is destroyed:  
My only star is dead, and my constellated lute  
Bears the *Black Sun* of *Melancholia*.

In the night of the grave, you who brought me solace,  
Give me back Posilipo and the sea of Italy,  
The *flower* that so pleased my distressed heart,  
And the arbor where the grapevine and rose combine.

Am I Cupid or Phebus? . . . Lusignan or Byron?

My brow is still red from the kiss of the queen;

I have dreamt in the cave where the siren swims...

I've twice, as a conqueror, been across the Acheron;

Modulating by turns on Orpheus' lyre

The sighs of saint and the screams of the fay.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### “LIFE REFUSING TO END”: TRAUMA, EMBODIMENT, AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE GOTHIC IN SHANI MOOTOO’S *CEREUS BLOOMS AT NIGHT*

Spectrality or hauntology—the state and contemplation of being neither alive nor dead, of confounding borders and boundaries—does have the effect of questioning social restriction and immobilization, of getting around and beyond gatekeepers.

- María DeGuzmán, *Buenas Noches, American Culture*, 77

In spring of 2012, I attended a friend’s annual garden party in the pastoral town of Graham, North Carolina. Upon my departure, my host offered me a night-blooming cereus, and I hesitantly accepted. Without blooms, the cereus is not the loveliest to behold. It is large and unwieldy. Its serpentine feelers shoot out from the plant’s base and branches in search of a support, a wall, something to hold onto, something for grounding, or something to which it can bond. That summer, something began to happen: tubular buds formed, and my anticipation for the cereus’s blooming increased. I had an idea of how the flower would look based on the cover of Shani Mootoo’s novel, but I was not truly prepared. When the plant bloomed midsummer—two ghostly white blooms on one night and another fist-sized bloom a week later—the event was magical. Conveying a sense of ecstasy, the blooms’ scent perfumed my entire home. Those spectral blossoms were truly exquisite, almost profane in

their beauty.<sup>49</sup> (See the cereus plant in various stages in Figures 8-10.) Witnessing the effusion of this plant, I now understand why Mootoo chose the cereus as the centerpiece of *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996). The debut novel is decidedly Gothic, distinctly Caribbean, and

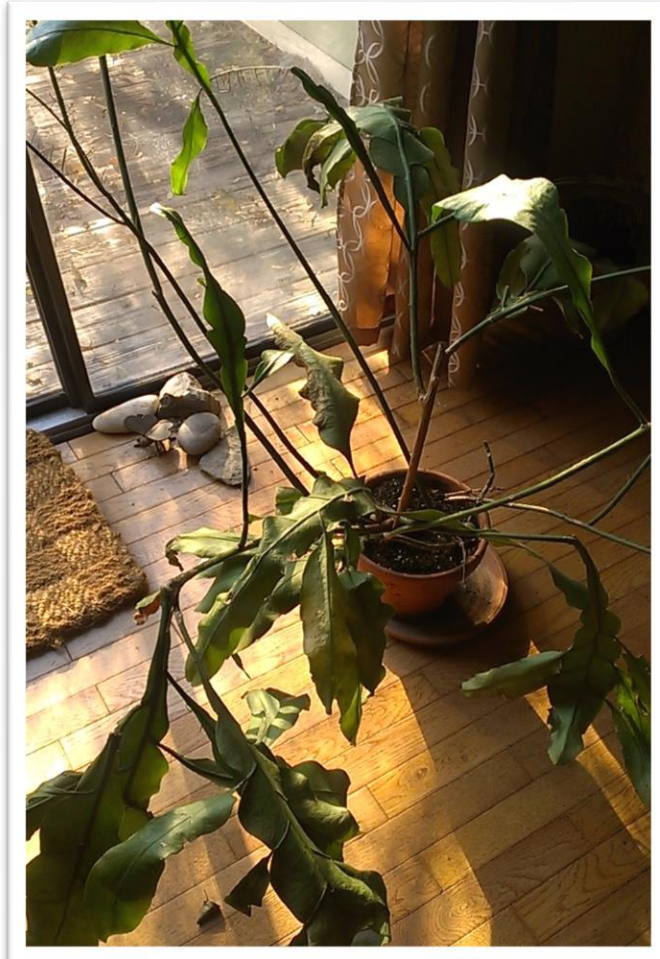


Figure 16: Cereus cactus plant sans blooms.

set in Paradise, Lantanacamara, a locale modeled on Trinidad where Mootoo grew up.<sup>50</sup> The cereus's sublimity is in its form and production. It is unassuming, wild, and weed-like with its propensity for climbing and escaping the boundaries of its container; yet, it is extraordinary. Its duality mirrors the novel's form as Mootoo's text is one in which we must acknowledge and embrace the potential within the unexpected that transforms into something terribly beautiful, something nearly sublime.

<sup>49</sup> Esteemed gardener Irene Virag describes the night-blooming cereus cactus, *Epiphyllum oxypetalum*, as "strange but romantic" (G15). Virag narrates its blooming as a transformation from an Ichabod Crane figure into the personification of its common name, the Queen of the Night. Even though there are many species of night-blooming cereus, this particular species has green, gangly leaves like the cereus plant Gardener Mr. Hector describes (5). The cereus plant I own is also an *Epiphyllum oxypetalum*. See Virag's May 28, 2000 article in *Newsday* about witnessing her neighbors' cereus plant bloom. When I read this I was amazed at the similarity between her descriptions, Mootoo's words, and my own experience.

<sup>50</sup> The night-blooming cereus is native to Sri Lanka and now can be found in Central and South America (some sources claim it is native to these new world locations) (Purak n.pag.).



Figure 17: Tubular bud on the cereus plant.



Figure 18: Cereus blooming at night.

Mootoo consciously engages recognizable Gothic aesthetics, discourse on the Caribbean at the height of European imperialism in the new world—discourse that is still recognizable today—and the problem of women and other traditionally marginalized groups existing within both contexts. Mootoo’s employment of the cereus and the figuration of its promised blooming encapsulates a larger message and suggests a new way to think about the long-standing relationship and tension between beauty, terror, horror, and sublimity within the Gothic and the Caribbean. Perhaps what makes this novel so different from other Gothic texts including Jackson’s *Hill House* or Carter’s “Lady of the House of Love,” or other literature about the Caribbean in general, is the way in which Mootoo uses the Gothic mode, its violence, its decay, its tangled overgrown gardens populated with exotic flora and fauna, to provide a psychological and material space of transformation. In Jackson’s novel, for example, the garden space is populated with ghostly images, and

Carter's Countess's garden is fed by the decomposing matter of her dead prey. The roses surround and entomb the Countess. In *Cereus*, Mootoo revises and rehabilitates these feared and maligned Gothic aesthetics and provides a haven, a sort of paradise, for the novel's protagonist, Mala Ramchandin, its Gothic heroine. Mala lives an embodied life within a decay-filled, Gothic garden, and within that space, she is not bereft of the transcendental. Indeed, she embraces the ecstatic experience. This space of the terrific sublime becomes a necessary avenue to dealing with and transforming the pain of her traumatic past—specifically her abandonment by her mother and her aunt (her mother's lover), which leads to more traumas: incest, physical and psychological abuse, and additional abandonment by her sister, Asha, and lover, Ambrose.

### Beauty, Terror, and the Gothic Caribbean

The Caribbean has long been associated with picturesque beauty and represented as a virgin paradise ripe with potential. Late-eighteenth-century landscapes convey idyllic locales with laborers surrounded by plantation buildings in the foreground and an endless expanse beyond suggesting even more lands to be conquered and tilled.<sup>51</sup> Of course, the dark edge of such aesthetic discourse is the reality of the massive clearing of vegetation to make way for plantations, the removal of indigenous peoples from their lands, and the importation of slave labor to work fields of cane, tobacco, and other cultivated commodities. Hence, with the figuration of paradise, there is the taint of ruthless imperialism, ravaged landscapes, the horrors of slavery, the threat of slave revolt (as the

---

<sup>51</sup> See Casid's study of late-eighteenth-century landscapes and their meticulous compositions (e.g., 57–74) in *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization*. Her analysis of Thomas Vivares's engravings based on George Roberston's paintings is notable. See also Figure 12 at the end of this chapter.

Haitian Revolution exposed the fragile fabric of the system on which an enormous amount of capital was based), and the hazard of flora and fauna in vast not-yet-colonized territories. Matthew Lewis's posthumous *Journal of a West-India Proprietor* (1833) provides an example of the relationships between beauty, exploration, terror, and enslavement in the Caribbean region. He writes of the beauty of Jamaica and its environs throughout his journal and is often taken with the "very picturesque appearance" of, for example on January 1, 1816, "the beauty of the atmosphere, the dark purple mountains, the shores covered with mangroves of the liveliest green down to the very edge of the water" (51). The beauty is held in tension with the rough terrain of the colony and the danger its roads and weather present. On another occasion, he writes, after a long, arduous journey, "the beauty of the scenery amply rewarded us for our bruised sides and battered backs" (159). The voyage to the Caribbean was, of course, a risky enterprise, and, on his way back to London from Jamaica, Lewis died at sea in 1818. The April 1834 *Edinburgh Review* of Lewis's *Journal* begins with harsh criticism of Lewis's fiction, "The 'Monk' [*sic*] with all its notoriety, was a poor book, which, like persecuted sedition, was perhaps rather raised than depressed by its demerits; and never could have been regarded as dangerously seductive, if it has not been banished from decent drawingrooms" (75); nonetheless, the allure of the forbidden, the corruption of innocence, and the representation of the unrepresentable won readers. The *Review* praises Lewis's sensitivity to the reason he was in Jamaica in the first place—he had inherited a plantation and was responsible for its maintenance and its slaves: "It is highly creditable to Lewis's feelings, what even the noisy gaiety, which his arrival and the subsequent holiday created, could not blind and reconcile him to the sight and sound of slavery" (79). Therein lies the irony of Lewis's previous entry in which the beauty of scene makes up for the

bruising and battering of their bodies. What about the bruised and battered bodies of the human chattel forced to work in the midst of all that beauty? Even though Lewis's slaves may have endured less hardships than the average slave forced to work in the notoriously brutish Caribbean plantations, their reality was full of the threat of terror and the knowledge that their bodies were not their own.

The *Review* highlights an important series of events. While Lewis is away for three weeks, one slave, Mr. Toby, refuses to load a cart with sugar cane and receives six lashes. Lewis returns and writes, "But as his fault amounted to an act of downright rebellion, I thought that it ought not by any means to be passed over so lightly, and that Toby ought to be made to mind" (Lewis 382). Lewis feigns to ignore the slave for a few days, but as soon as the slaves were dismissed by the governor for Easter holiday, Mr. Toby is ordered to be locked up alone in a room in the estate's hospital. The result is telling, "Toby had not minded the lashes; but the loss of his amusement, and the disgrace of his exclusion from the fête, operated on his mind so forcibly, that [upon his release] . . . he sat motionless, silent, and sulky" (382). Thus, Lewis concludes,

I am more and more convinced every day, that the best and easiest mode of governing negroes (and governed by some mode or other they must be) is not by the detestable lash, but by confinement, solitary or otherwise; they cannot bear it, and the memory of it seems to make a lasting impression upon their minds; while the lash makes no longer than the mark. (383)<sup>52</sup>

It is well-known that solitary confinement is detrimental to human psychological processes and Lewis's actions inflict terror, in the Burkeian sense of the term, "an unnatural tension

---

<sup>52</sup> In Michel Foucault's discussion of Philadelphia's Walnut Street Prison, modeled on prisons at Ghent and Gloucester, he writes, "From 1797, the prisoners were divided into four classes: the first for those who were explicitly condemned to solitary confinement or who had committed serious offences in the prison" (*Discipline and Punish* 126).

and certain violent emotions of the nerves” (“How the Sublime is Produced”). Of course, Lewis’s infliction of terror on his slave stems from his own fear of the slave’s rebellious action. Lewis fears the slave’s assertion of his personhood and seeks to quell that seed of resistance with a form of psychological torture.

Another interesting account of the tension between paradise and its bitter underpinnings is found in Leonara Sansay’s semi-autobiographical Gothic novel, *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808), set in post-Revolution St. Domingo (present-day Haiti) and the surrounding islands. Sansay reflects: “St. Domingo was formerly a garden. Every inhabitant lived on his estate like a sovereign ruling his slaves with despotic sway, enjoying all that luxury could invent, or fortune procure” (70). It is apparent that such excess breeds terrible horrors and scenes just as perverse and sinister as those of Gothic fiction. Sansay writes of a Creole wife who orders a slave to cut off the head of her black maidservant because she “thought she saw some symptoms of *tendresse* in the eyes of her husband” toward the woman; the wife then proceeds to serve the severed head to her husband at dinner (70). Sansay’s recollection is an example of the ultimate punishment—death, but according to Carolyn E. Fick (1990), in St. Domingo, “[p]unishment, often surpassing the human imagination in its grotesque refinements of barbarism and torture, was often the order of the day” (34). Similar to Lewis’s writings about his travels, when Sansay visits the Basilica de Nuestra Señora del Cobre in Cuba, she reflects, “The site of the temple is picturesque, and the scenery, that surrounds it, beautiful beyond description, standing near the summit of a mountain at the foot of which lies the village” (142). Yet, shortly her visit to the Basilica, Sansay notes the contrast between Cuba’s landscape and St. Domingo’s ground that “was in the highest state of cultivation” (144). And, in observing

such difference, she gestures toward what Jill Casid, in *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (2005), calls colonial relandscaping, which involved the transplantation of plants, people, machines, “tools of violence,” and building materials from Asia, Africa, Europe, and other parts of the Americas (87). It also involved European methods of clearing, “boundary division, and signs of authority” that created a

gardenlike spectacle of variety and harmony, a union of the decorative and the useful that turns the sugar plantation into a site of aesthetic consumption by the device of converting the planter’s or colonist’s gaze into that of a traveler, a stranger distanced from the violence of colonization. (87)

Even though such colonial relandscaping reshaped and permanently altered the Caribbean landscape, in contrast to the increasing industrialization of Britain and Western Europe, the Caribbean remained a seductive new Eden, full of lush beauty and opportunities for capital for the prospective planter. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (2002) argues that it is in Caribbean writing that a “postcolonial dialogue” with the Gothic elucidates the genre’s themes and aesthetics “most completely and suggestively”; and, the interplay of the Caribbean Gothic with the generic conventions of its European predecessors has come to engage and interrogate the “very nature of colonialism itself” (233).<sup>53</sup> These passages from Lewis and Sansay convey the particularly insidious nature of colonization, slavery, imprisonment and confinement, labor exploitation in the Caribbean, and the recurrence of unspeakable crimes in settings of unspeakable beauty. And, in these settings, there is often no redemption. Thus, Eden has two aspects.

---

<sup>53</sup> In both Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, consider that Edward Rochester’s marriage to first wife, Bertha/Antoinette, has almost everything to do with capital and politics of influence and inheritance.

The duality of the Caribbean appears in Gothic texts set in Britain as well. In the earliest British Gothic novels, such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), false nobles, Italians, and other European foreigners are villains who disrupt social order and often succeed in bringing about terror, murder, and betrayal. However, by the 1790s, the expanding British Empire introduced a new host of potentially threatening characters into the literary landscape: the racial, social, and natural *others* of the colonies (Hogle 5).<sup>54</sup> In *The Monk*, Ambrosio, is bitten by the deadly "Cientipedor" —a "serpent," as it were, "[c]oncealed among the Roses" (71)—in a garden with his malevolent seductress, Matilda (who has been masquerading as Rosario, a young initiate of the monastery Ambrosio oversees). After this bite, and Matilda's subsequent saving of his life, Ambrosio falls from grace and, in the end, rapes and murders Antonia, who is none other than his sister. What's interesting about this trajectory is that Lewis adds

---

<sup>54</sup> In his discussion of the political economy of the Caribbean region, Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr. (2001) notes how what is now the U.S. South, or the South, and the other spaces bordering the Caribbean Sea "developed under the tutelage of several different European empires" and acknowledges a "certain unity to its development and in its patterns of historical evolution" (127). Woodward argues the Caribbean "came to be the classic region of plantation society and development, the area to which Europeans came first to plant colonial enterprises, and from which they left last. Thus did the colonial Caribbean become the great laboratory of imperialism in the Americas" (127). As a result, imperial and capitalist interests have had a greater effect on the "economic and political development" of the region than the peoples who actually live there (127). Both Woodward and Paravisini-Gebert point to the region as one where colonialism and its tenets become thoroughly entrenched and expressively played out. It seems the colonial age—or rather, the age of European Imperialism, born from the rise of mercantilism and the eventual failure of traditional feudal systems—resurrected a new feudalism more demoralizing and static for its laborers than before. The restrictions, codes, and mores of monarchical systems that fostered an essentially two-class system, that of nobles and that of peasants, the systems that led to the crystallization of wealth to a sector of individuals of certain bloodlines, ultimately birthed a restlessness for more wealth and the creation of the merchant class. Yet, the opportunities to begin life and wealth anew in a new world brought tyranny and worse to new groups of people. For example, Woodward notes that indentured laborers from the "old country" were "generally less adaptable as field hands on sugar plantations than African slaves" (129). As employing indentured servants was not a profitable enterprise and the rise of mercantilism spawned new capitalist and imperial endeavors, it was simply better business to establish an institution founded on forced, exploitative labor. See Woodward's discussion on the development of the colonies and their respective empires from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the present day in *The South and the Caribbean* (127-145) followed by David Eltis's commentary (145-149).

the footnote: “The Cientipedoros are supposed to be a Native of Cuba, and to have been brought into Spain from that Island in the Vessel of Columbus” (72). Thus, as Paravisini-Gebert explains: “With the inclusion of the colonial, a new sort of darkness—of race, landscape, erotic desire and despair—enters the Gothic genre” (229). At the zenith of European imperial expansion, powers such as the British Empire became increasingly dependent on the economic successes of its colonies principally through African slave labor and then later, in the wake of Britain’s Slavery Abolition Act in 1834, indentured servitude with the first arrival of East Indian laborers in 1845 (Leonce 1).<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Abbott terms indentured servitude a “peculiar new institution,” and notes how it is widely accepted as a new form of slavery based on the belief that “plantations and free labor were incompatible” (313). Indentured servitude ensured that emancipation would “transform the social and economic structure of the sugar colonies” of the sugar industry in the British West Indies as it “undermined the bargaining power of black workers whose efforts to negotiate fair wages were stymied by an abundance of cheap imported labor” (313). In Trinidad, for example, conditions were so horrid that it was common for laborers to endure twenty-two hour workdays and unremarkable to find workers’ corpses in the cane fields and surrounding forest (316).<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> East Indian indentured servitude ended in 1917 (Leonce 1).

<sup>56</sup> See Abbott pp. 313-348 for more information about the conditions and practices of indentured servitude in the Caribbean and specifically in Trinidad.

## Traumatic Origins: Mootoo's Gothic Caribbean

In Mootoo's novel, Mala is the granddaughter of Indian indentured servants who gave up their son, Chandin Ramchandin, to be raised by the Thoroughlys, white Christian missionaries, in the hope that he would live a successful life outside of cane field labor. Chandin falls in love with his adoptive sister, Lavinia, and his desire for her is rebuked and forbidden by his adoptive parents. Lavinia leaves for the mainland and plans to marry her white adoptive first cousin. Feeling confused and betrayed, Chandin marries Sarah, a West Indian woman, and they have children: Mala and Asha.<sup>57</sup> When Lavinia returns to the island unmarried, she rekindles her friendship with Sarah and the two women fall in love. Images of the human body and the theme of embodiment are prevalent in Mootoo's novel. In this chapter, I discuss scenes that relate to Mala's embodied experiences in her transformative Gothic space in depth. However, it is important to note that more than one character's ability to read body language initiates a series of events in the text. When Mala notices the relationship developing between her mother Sarah and Aunt Lavinia, she

---

<sup>57</sup> Chandin and Lavinia's relationship and the Thoroughly's reaction points toward the Gothic's preoccupation with race and class. H. L. Malchow (1996) examines the relationship between and mutual influence of nineteenth-century Gothic fiction on racial discourse and argues that both the literature and the discourse are "shaped in large part by the audience they had in common, by the social and sexual, as well as racial, apprehensions of the literate middle and lower classes" (5). He continues explaining that the Gothic genre is defined by characteristics that "resonate strongly with important aspects of the nineteenth-century literature of racial prejudice, imperial exploration, and sensational anthropology" through "themes and images meant to shock and terrify, and a style grounded in the techniques of suspense and threat" (5). Ultimately, Malchow asserts, "Both the gothic novel and racist discourse manipulate deeply buried anxieties, both dwell on the chaos beyond natural and rational boundaries and massage a deep, often unconscious and sexual, fear of contamination, both present the threatened destruction of the simple and pure by the poisonously exotic, by anarchic forces of passion and appetite, carnal lust and blood lust" (5). Although Malchow's study focuses on Gothic images of race in nineteenth-century Britain, his statement is applicable to many examples of Gothic fiction—especially that of the U.S. South and the Caribbean. Mootoo employs Gothic "themes and images" that "shock and terrify," and she represents anxieties about the fears associated with racial contamination—through the relationship between Chandin and Lavinia—and the limits and extents of "natural and rational boundaries" through Chandin's rape of his daughters and, later, through the attitude of community toward Mala and her caretaker, Tyler.

becomes frustrated because her mother and aunt “seldom spoke any more [during Lavinia’s visits] except in soft, abbreviated sentences. They seemed to communicate more with their eyes, and long looks” (56). One day when she sees her aunt’s “fingers grasping [her mother’s] waist” there is an immediate understanding of something, but “save for a flash of an image of her father’s face in her mind, she had no words to describe what she suddenly realized was their secret” (56). Of course, we can understand her absence of words as a result of her not knowing the word for or about the existence of same-sex desire, but it seems that something else also happens in this moment. By seeing her father’s face, Mala understands she must shield this truth from him, because, according to societal norms, he should be in Lavinia’s place. She takes on the heavy responsibility of hiding the truth from, trying to distract him from seeing the chemistry between Sarah and Lavinia’s bodies. Though the love between the women itself is not traumatic, the burden of keeping their secret is too large for Mala to hold, and their love exceeds the limits of language through the signs of their bodies. In essence, their love tumbles over boundaries, and in its excess betrays their furtive desire. After the affair has been going on for some time, Chandin discovers the truth on a trip to the sea by watching his wife and adoptive sister’s body language through Lavinia’s camera viewfinder: “In the midst of their laughter and frivolity, he did not fail to see Lavinia place herself behind Mama, and he saw Mama press herself against Lavinia. . . . He saw it only because, that day, he intended to” (58). After this revelation, no one speaks on the ride home, which certainly conveys the significance of the body in the novel. Words do have some importance—but they only constitute a part of a narrative. Both the body’s language—the language of the affective or more feminine, womb-like imaginary realm—and spoken or written language—the language of the symbolic realm—are important. Later,

we see how important this interplay is between Mala and her caretaker Tyler at the Paradise Alms House, which is something I will not discuss in detail here. However, it is important to note that Tyler interprets Mala's emotion by reading her body's signs. For example, he interprets her "swinging her legs" as a sign of her happiness (102).

Although Lavinia is largely absent from the novel, it is through her that the cereus plant enters Mala's life. In love with the "freedom and wildness in Sarah's garden, so unlike her mother's well-ordered, colour-coordinated beds," Lavinia gives Sarah clippings and "whole plants ripped from Mrs. Thoroughly's garden" (53). These "well-ordered, colour-coordinated beds" represent a desire to monitor and police otherness and engineer an idealized beauty. It is the result of the colonists' desire to transplant the metropole and create what Casid calls an "imperial picaresque" inscribing a perceived ideal value on the reshaped landscape.<sup>58</sup> Of the cereus plant, Lavinia explains, "Only once a year. . . . [t]he flowers will offer their exquisite elegance for one short, precious night" (54). Lavinia's desire for the wild, non-normative, queer beauty of Sarah's garden reflects her own queer desire, and her ultimate desire to remove Sarah and her children from the patriarchal, Christian, heteronormative (false) Paradise. In contrast to Mrs. Thoroughly's garden, Sarah's garden is a space of boundarylessness and excess—tenets of both the Gothic and the sublime. Longing to be together freely as lovers and as a family, Lavinia and Sarah plan to run away together with Mala and Asha, but an unfortunate series of events prevents their success. Namely, Mala runs back to the house for a bag she had prepared full of seeds, shells, and a night-blooming cereus cutting originally given to her by Lavinia (62). As a result, the two

---

<sup>58</sup> See Casid's discussion of the "Imperial Picaresque" and other methods of relandscaping in the second chapter of *Sowing Empire*, "Transplanting the Metropole" (45-93).

girls are left with their father. Thus in some way, it is the promise of the plant's ecstatic emanation—those exotic, extraordinary, fragrant flowers—that transforms Mala's life and sets her on the arduous path of enduring traumas that befall the most tragic of Gothic heroines. Many of these heroines endure rape, violent death, or both. Matilda in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is killed by her father. Antonia in Lewis's *The Monk* is raped and murdered by her brother. And in Stoker's *Dracula*, Lucy Westenra succumbs to vampirism requiring her gruesome decapitation and reburial. Yet, in the absence of her mother, and in the midst of wildness and decay, the same promise of the night-blooming cereus transforms Mala's life once more and breaks from the usual trajectory that ends with the Gothic heroine's death.<sup>59</sup> Chandin, devastated, succumbs to alcoholism and begins to rape his daughters nightly. Asha escapes, Mala endures, and when Mala becomes a young woman, she falls in love with Ambrose, a West Indian childhood friend. The consummation of their love leads to some of the most traumatic events in Mala's life: the most physically violent rape she ever experiences by her father, Ambrose's discovery of the truth and his subsequent abandonment of her, and Mala's killing of her father. Mala drags her father's still-dying body into her mother's former sewing room and shuts him up there. After these events, Mala never passes another night in the house and sleeps on the verandah or in her garden instead. In many ways, what happens to Chandin and the violence he perpetrates on his daughters attests to the effects of what and the sociologist Avery Gordon (1997) terms "the unhallowed dead of the modern [imperialist, capitalist] project" (22).

---

<sup>59</sup> Years later, in her own garden, a space that connects her to the absent maternal—the motherless daughter is a theme so common in early Gothic narratives—Mala anxiously awaits the plant's blooming one night each year, in the same way, perhaps as she awaits the return of her mother.

After Sarah and Lavinia leave town, Chandin never returns to church or his teaching duties. He is fearful that the women will return for Mala and Asha and guards them like a tyrant. He makes them sleep in his bed and the incest begins when, while half asleep, he mistakes his daughter Mala for his estranged wife. The scene begins:

One night he turned, his back to Asha, and in a fitful, nightmarish sleep, mistook Pohpoh [the name for Mala's child-self] for Sarah. He put his arm around her and slowly began to touch her. Pohpoh opened her eyes. Frightened and confused by this strange, insistent probing, she barely breathes, pretending to be fast asleep. She tried to shrink away from under his hand. (65)

But, instead of succumbing to reason and maintaining the boundaries of his fatherhood, he gives into his corrupt desire:

Suddenly, awakening fully, he sat up. Then he brought his body heavily on top of hers and slammed his hand over her mouth. She opened her eyes and stared back at him in terror. . . . Glaring and breathing heavily like a mad dog, he pinned her hands to the bed and forced her legs apart. (65-66)

Chandin's actions are horrific and beyond redemption, but they are entangled with his self-hatred and the pain he feels from his rejection by Lavinia and the way the Thoroughlys made him feel inferior. As his desire grows for Lavinia, he begins to "hate his look, the colour of his skin, the texture of his hair, his accent, the barracks, his real parents and at times even the Reverend and his god. It began to matter to him that he and Lavinia were not in fact siblings" (33). He comes to realization that no matter what the boys at school did for her, Lavinia "would fall in love only with a boy like herself" (34). (Of course, it appears the true reason Lavinia remains uninterested in her fellow school boys and later her cousin is that she is a lesbian.)

The complex matrix of *things* both present and unseen that makes up a particular socio-economic-historic experience and has a noticeable effect on the real experience of life is a part of what Gordon examines and names "ghostly matters." They are all the things

that construct one's experience that swim just beneath the surface of one's being. For Gordon, these *things* make up "complex personhood," a concept that implies the complexity and value of each life. It means that "the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward" (4). Chandin's complex personhood is enmeshed with the aims and desires of the colonialist machine. Chandin's selection by the Thoroughlys is viewed as a "lucky" development (28). In a conversation between two indentured laborers that reveals Chandin and his family must convert to Christianity, one worker admits conversion would be out of the question for his family and the first laborer responds:

What you talking? What you mean you don't want to do that! If it is the only way for your child to get education and not have to work like a horse sweating and breaking back in the hot sun for hardly nothing, you wouldn't convert? . . . We looking after our own self, because nobody have time for us. Except the Reverend and his mission." (28-29)

The result of Chandin's conversion and education is the deep shame he develops for his parents and for himself. Again, Chandin's deeds cannot be excused or forgiven, but his own complex personhood is worth noting. Indeed, Chandin's trajectory elucidates the devastating effects of the colonialist project, and, points back toward the shift in Gothic literature during the 1790s. Fred Botting (1996) explains, "In the 1790s, as fears of Gothic fiction are bound up more and more with processes of representation, the locus of evil vacillates between outcast individuals and the social conventions that produced or constricted them" (*Gothic* 90). And, as the Gothic is concerned with boundaries and transgression, we see that the community's concern with racial purity in the Caribbean Gothic is not unlike the concern about miscegenation in the Gothic narratives of the U.S.

South made evident through Reverend Thoroughly's disapproval of Chandin's feelings for Lavinia. Even though Chandin and Lavinia are adoptive siblings, it is clear that the Thoroughly's disapproval is based in racist and classist colonizer-colonist ideology as they freely approve of Lavinia's engagement to her first cousin.<sup>60</sup> Poisoned and imprisoned by the socio-historical horizon in which he lives, his desire for Lavinia ridiculed and scorned, Chandin eventually corrupts and vitiates the boundaries of the father-daughter relationship.

Similar events occur in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) when Cholly Breedlove sees his wife, Pauline, in the gestures of Pecola washing dishes at their kitchen sink. Like Chandin, Cholly is well aware that he is raping his daughter. He crawls "on all fours" like a dog toward Pecola, takes her in his arms, and the "confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his anus. Surrounding all of this lust was a border of politeness. He wanted to fuck her—tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold" (128). He lets his fingers "dig into her waist, The rigidity of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat, was better than Pauline's easy laughter had been" (128). In an explicit moment of narrative excess, we are told, "The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear. His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made—a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat" (128). Both Morrison and Mootoo create scenes that deeply unsettle readers, scenes that make readers feel like illicit voyeurs while at the same time provoking feelings of sorrow, sympathy, and disgust. Both Pecola and Mala are terrified,

---

<sup>60</sup> Here, *Absalom, Absalom!* comes to mind: Charles Bon (as imagined by Quentin who has his own incestuous yearnings) declares to his half-brother Henry, "*So it's the miscegenation, not the incest which you can't bear*" (372; italics in original).

confused, and cognizant that something is not right. This is the dark fate of the Gothic heroine. Similar to Chandin, Cholly has been humiliated and dehumanized throughout his life. Both are products of exploitative, racist, classist, labor systems. Similarly, in Morrison's text, white men watch young Cholly and his girlfriend Darlene, with whom he has sexual intercourse for the first time. They interrupt the two lovers and shine a light on them in the dark, telling Cholly to "get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good" (116). Of course, Cholly can only pretend to perform as his fear and humiliation overcomes him. Both Morrison and Mootoo create despicable father figures for the daughters in their narratives, but the reader cannot help but consider the psychological harm done to these two men as they came of age. Their traumas do not excuse their actions, but they do add texture and complexity to the canvas of their lives.<sup>61</sup>

After Asha escapes her family home, Mala becomes a young woman, and despite her father's continued sexual abuse, she comes to love Ambrose. As pubescent children, the two had one sexual encounter that did not involve intercourse. Mala instructs Ambrose to suck her breasts and when his penis stiffens, she uses "this hardness to arrive at her intended destination before he could even unbuckle his belt" (96). Mala hurries away from the encounter in Ambrose's bedroom. She leaves, "as though it were nothing at all" (96). This phrasing is significant, as we see it earlier in the text before a forced sexual encounter with her father:

"Asha," [Chandin] called out from the drawing room. "Ash." Asha's body trembled as if she were naked in an icy wind. Pohpoh clamped her hand over Asha's mouth. "Stay!" Pohpoh snapped. "Don't move. I'll go. Shhh, he too drunk. He'll never know the difference. Go to sleep. You close your eyes and go to sleep. Asha baby. Nothing will happen to you, I promise." Pohpoh unwrapped herself from Asha and

---

<sup>61</sup> The similarities between Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Mootoo's novel suggest Morrison's debut novel may have been one source of inspiration for Mootoo while she wrote her own first novel. Moreover, Mootoo names Morrison's *Beloved* as one of her "favourite books" (Mootoo qtd. in Nagra n. pag.).

went. As if it were nothing at all.” (67)

These scenes show us that Mala has learned to dissociate emotion from sex, since all sexual encounters with her father have been violent and unwanted. The welcome desire of an encounter with Ambrose does not cohere with the reality of the sexual encounters she is forced to endure with her father. Yet, years later, when Mala crosses the gulf of her fear and gives into her desire and she and Ambrose do have sexual intercourse, her agency emerges as she “moved against his hardness. . . . [i]t was his first time, and her first time with someone of her own choice. . . . [and for] the first time Mala felt no pain” (218).

Mootoo draws out the beauty of the moment. She writes,

It was the first time she felt what it was like to be touched and to have her nipples licked and tasted as though they were a delicacy. And though she has been forced to touch her father countless times, it was the first time she explored and felt on the tips of her fingers and the palm of her hand what a penis was really like. . . . They lay on the kitchen floor. Ambrose was propped on an elbow, his other hand caressing her pubic hair and delicately slipping a finger between her lips, amazed at her wetness.” (219)

Here, Mootoo reemphasizes the mutual desire between the lovers. So often in Gothic texts, sex is forced, incestuous, or between an unsuspecting person and his or her lover’s doppelgänger. Mootoo creates a scene so perfect, it borders on a sublime experience as Ambrose “felt completely weakened. He had never experienced a dizziness so pleasant” (218). Mala fully relishes the beauty of the loving encounter and yields to the magic that exists between two willing sex partners: “This time she had no goal in mind. This time she let him touch her for his pleasure too. She met, mirrored and embraced his passion” (218).

Yet, Mala’s bliss does not go unpunished. As is common in Gothic texts and especially those set in the Caribbean, beauty is often held in tension with overwhelming horror. The consummation of Mala’s love with Ambrose leads to two additional significant

traumatic events in her life. These events are arguable more traumatic than the traumas of losing her mother, aunt, and sister, and first rape. The first event is Mala's punishment for "cheat[ing] on her father," as Chandin rapes her repeatedly over the course of the night—it is the most violent succession of rapes she ever experiences (224). After discovering Mala has been intimate with Ambrose, seeing a man leaving by way of the back stairs, he confronts Mala by smelling her hands. Like an animal, he smells out the evidence of sexual congress. He promises a terrified Mala that he will "show [her] what hurt is" (221). The following passage is lengthy, but worth reproducing here:

Instead of hitting [Mala] he unbuckled his belt and unzipped his trousers. Mala ducked down and tried to slide past him. This infuriated him further. It was the first time she had ever tried to defy him.... He pushed her to the sink and shoved her face down into the basin, pressing his chin into her back as he used both hands to pull up her dress. He yanked out his penis, hardened weapon-like by anger. He used his knees to pry her legs open and his feet to kick and keep them apart. With his large fat fingers he parted her buttocks as she sobbed and whispered, "Have mercy, Lord, I beg, I beg." He rammed himself in and out of her. He reached around and squeezed her breasts, frantically pumping them to mimic the violent trusting of his penis.... He lowered his huge frame astride her, pulled her up by her hair and shoved his penis into her mouth. She choked and gagged as he rammed it down her throat. When she went limp, he took the weapon out of her mouth and spurted all over her face.... She shut her eyes and cried out loudly. It was the first time since that very first time when she was a child that she felt so much pain.... He raped her three more times that night. He made her stay in his bed. Next morning he got up as usual. (221-223)

During this violent rape, Chandin throws furniture, tears down curtains, flings ornaments at the walls and uses a frying pan to destroy kitchenware and the pictures in the drawing room. His actions echo those on the day Sarah and Lavinia absconded. On that day, he "swiped the kitchen counter, sending pots and pans and cutlery crashing to the floor," shatters plates, cups, and glasses, and "tore through the house smashing ornaments," and destroys pictures of Sarah and Lavinia (64). The pain of his betrayal triggers a powerful meeting with

rememory for both him and Mala.<sup>62</sup> As Mala begs him for mercy, she has already remembered the feeling of realizing her father had discovered the truth about her mother and aunt (221).

Moments before the vicious rape, while watching Ambrose leave down the back stairs, Chandin mumbles to himself, “A man tiefing my baby? He brave to even try. I ent go let nobody tief my woman again. No man, no woman, no damn body go tief my property again. I go kill he. I go kill she too, if it come to that. I go kill meself too. I sharpenin’ cutlass tonight” (220). There is grim symbolism invoked by his reference to a cutlass. He does indeed take a cleaver from the kitchen into Mala’s bedroom while he rapes her, but the true weapon is his penis, “hardened weapon-like by anger” (222). His words also reveal that his relationship with Mala mirrors the master-slave dynamic in which one person has complete power and ownership over another. Women and men suffered sexual violence within the system and the dehumanization inherent treating human beings as property help enable such violence. Furthermore, the excessive description of sexual abuse in the novel is difficult to read. As Marianne Liljeström and Susanna Paasonen discuss in *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings* (2010), the last twenty years or more of cultural and literary theory have focused heavily on texts and have transformed very material things, such as landscapes and

---

<sup>62</sup> The phrase “rememory” refers to the phenomenon Sethe experiences in Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) (e.g., 7, 43). For example, Sethe describes the impulsive, persistent experience of Sweet Home, a site of many unpleasant, traumatic experiences, that comes “rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on the farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty” (7). Sethe also explains the phenomenon to Denver, “Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Others things you never do. . . . Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world” (43). In brief, rememory is the memory and the physical site of memory imprinted by the psychic energy of people, events, or things. I note that rememory is akin to “emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared” that Morrison describes in her essay “The Site of Memory” (77).

bodies, into “texts to be interpreted or ‘decoded’ without accounting for their materiality” (1). The two argue for critical consideration of the “contagious affects and dynamic experience between texts and readers” (1-2). They suggest a way of reading and interpretation that understands the interdependent relationship between materiality, affect, embodiment, and textual analysis (2). Mootoo wants the reader to experience Mala’s pain—to experience a sort of “contagious” affect. The Gothic violence of the text transforms casual readers into witnesses of horrific trauma. Considering Gothic writing’s long history of provoking emotional responses from its audiences, it becomes clear that Mootoo is consciously engaging not only the conventions of Gothic narratives, but she also acknowledges the power of those conventions on readers. Gothic conventions have the power to affect social change. As Ellen Malenas Ledoux (2013) argues, the power of reader response made “an indelible mark on the discourse and activism . . . surrounding seminal issues such as women’s property rights, population pressure, public health, and abolition” that preoccupied early Gothic audiences (4).<sup>63</sup>

My initial response to the scene quoted above was a conflagration of inadequate words: disgust, pity, rage, offense. In line with Liljeström and Paasonen’s concerns, I wondered how ethical a response could be to this section of the text. The Gothic text is provocative by nature, but is Mootoo’s excessive detail necessary to produce what Ledoux calls a “raised consciousness” (1). How could I interpret this event? I could not ignore the materiality of experience that Mootoo represents in Mala. I could not simply transform her abused, broken, and violated body into a text “to be interpreted or ‘decoded’ without accounting for [its] materiality” (Liljeström and Paasonen 1). Mala represents the pain,

---

<sup>63</sup> See p. 6 in the introduction.

violation, and materiality of real victims. In a 2000 interview with Lynda Hall, Mootoo reveals that some events and characters in the novel are based on her life experiences. She was sexually abused by one of her grandfather's friends as a child and was silenced about these events by her grandmother. Through this experience, she learned that words, her "first love," were getting her "into trouble," so she wrote coded poetry and later created art and worked with film (109). In her late twenties, in therapy, she began to speak about her childhood sexual abuse. Reflecting on this time, Mootoo reveals, "Validation was almost intoxicating, and I found myself driven to find the most correct words, phrases, sentences, analogies, and stories to unequivocally tell and explain to myself and to others what had happened to me" (109). These two passages may explain parts of *Cereus Blooms at Night's* form and function. Mootoo's silencing was traumatic in addition to the originary trauma of her sexual abuse. In order to work through both traumas, she gives voice to her story in therapy and through written words. The Gothic, excessive narrative space in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is the result of a working through of trauma and a pouring out of bottled language. Because the pain has grown to gargantuan proportions, her description of Mala's violation must be unsettling, grotesque, and excessive. It must be transgressive and largely uncensored. The text must be Gothic.

The second of these significant traumatic event occurs when Ambrose visits Mala the day following their lovemaking and discovers of the truth about her father's forced, incestuous relationship with Mala. Unable to cope with the revelation of Mala's abuse, he abandons her to the devices of her father. Reeling from her loss and fighting for her life with her father, she rages and mortally wounds her father by repeatedly slamming a door into his head. After her father is unconscious, she pushes his body down the stairs, drags him into

the sewing room, and locks the door with a key left behind years ago by her mother, effectively burying him alive (229). Indeed, the live burial is common in Gothic novels. Eve Sedgwick (1986) writes, “The live burial that is a favorite conventual punishment in Gothic novels derives much of its horror not from the buried person's loss of outside activities (that would be the horror of dead burial [*sic*]), but from the continuation of a parallel activity that is suddenly redundant” (20). The redundancy is in the prisoner’s daily rituals and in the waiting and watching shared by both prisoner and prison guard (20). We cannot see Chandin counting down the days until his death or any rituals of survival he may have engineered. In many Gothic novels, this is the space of the heroine and we witness her often monotonous existence peppered with attempts to escape that are usually coordinated with an outsider-hero. Mootoo reverses and revises the paradigm and removes the possibility of escape for Chandin. It is worth noting that the sewing room—a domain of woman’s labor—is Chandin’s final resting place. This space of her mother’s domestic labor ultimately becomes Mala’s assurance that her father can harm her no more (yet it is clear that Chandin still holds some, albeit ghostly, power).

Still, as a result of her traumas, like the promise of the cereus plant, Mala is transformed. But she is not transformed into beauty, but, rather, into disassociation and isolation by her excessively Gothic trauma. Unsure of the fate of his lover, Ambrose returns to Mala’s house three times before he decides he can no longer face her animal growling or her menacing guava stick brandished in fury and confusion. The physical and psychological force of such traumatic events radically shifts Mala’s experience of being-in-the-world. Reflecting on the visits that mark the beginning of Mala’s seclusion Ambrose says,

I did go back the following day.... She had no idea who I was.... She just screamed sounds that had no meaning, and she beat the air in front of her with that stick, and it

occurred to me then, and the thought broke my heart, that my sweet one's mind had flown out of her head.... Mala, my sweet Mala, had aged overnight and was keeping her hair as wild as a worn-down, coconut-fibre broom. (235)

Unable to process the traumatic events, both physical and psychological, that compose her life, Mala's capacity for language breaks down. As Elaine Scarry explains in her landmark text, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), one's experience of physical pain cannot be shared and pain both resists and destroys language, which leads to "an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language" (4).

Through the novel's representation of incest and rape in explicit, excessive detail, Mala's characterization, and Mala's excessive garden landscape, Mootoo creates a distinctly Gothic mood. And, because a substantial amount of *Cereus Blooms at Night* invokes the Gothic, the narrative choice to employ excess is apropos. Botting puts forth simply, "Gothic signifies a writing of excess" and Gothic writing "remains fascinated by objects and practices that are constructed as negative, irrational, immoral, and fantastic" (*Gothic* 1-2). He explains further: "Gothic excesses transgressed the proper limits of aesthetic as well as social order in the overflow of emotions that undermined boundaries of life and fiction, fantasy and reality" and from the "often incestuous tendencies of Gothic villains there emerges the awful spectre of complete social disintegration in which virtue cedes to vice, reason to desire, law to tyranny" (4-5). We see Chandin's dream of an ideal life, his design, crushed; we witness the collapse of virtue into vice, the failure of his reason to tyranny as his transgressive desire moves the text into the particularly unsettling space of incest. Chandin's fall brings to mind characters like Lewis's Ambrosio, Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, and lecherous antagonists of the Radcliffian type. Furthermore, in the tradition of ghastly,

violated women of earlier Gothic and U.S. Southern Gothic novels, Mala becomes a witch-like pariah: a woman deemed both inscrutable and dangerous.

By the novel's present "[e]veryone in the village seemed to have finally forgotten about Mala. The generation of children who harassed her by calling names and pelting her with mango seeds had grown up. Their children preferred to chase each other within the confines of their own yards" (113). But, when children do pass by her yard, they walk on the "other side of the street, glancing through her fence—not to see her but to make sure she did not see them" because the children's parents claim Mala "possess[s] the ability to leap her fence, track an offending child into its hiding place and tear out its mind" (113).<sup>64</sup> Children swear they see her on occasion and "their sightings became the substance of frenetic dreamings at night" (114). Here we see how Mootoo operates within and outside of established paradigms. Unlike the early Gothic, which placed ancient castles and draughty manor houses in secluded mountainsides or forgotten forests, and more like her literary predecessors set in the U.S. South, Mootoo invokes the Gothic in an otherwise average community, thus bringing to mind the anxieties about the secrets and dangers within one's own community that may bleed through perceived boundaries.<sup>65</sup> Like Harper Lee's Boo Radley, Mala is excluded and feared; she is misunderstood like Faulkner's Clytie Sutpen who guards the secrets of the profligate Sutpen estate like a conjured spirit. The community's disrespect, fear, and strategic forgetting of Mala and her untamed garden

---

<sup>64</sup> In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Scout's narration paints a scene similar to Mootoo's with a house with "[r]ain rotted shingles," a yard with weeds in abundance and poisoned pecans that adults and children alike avoided (Lee 8-9).

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Southern short stories and novels such as Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily (1930)," Welty's "Clytie (1941)," and "A Curtain of Green (1941)," and Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) for example, draw much of their power from the tension between community and the aberrant.

demonstrate further the fear of contamination by Mala, who comes to represent the material proof of her father's sexual violence, and becomes akin to a Gothic monster. For Paradise, Mala embodies the threat of the impure, the inexplicable, and the unspeakable. She is imprisoned, virtually buried alive—undead—and relegated to the community's psychological space of things they would rather forget.

Judith Halberstam (1995) argues,

Novels in a Gothic mode transform class and race, sexual and national relations into supernatural or monstrous features. The threat posed by the Gothic monster is a combination of money, science, perversion, and imperialism but by reducing it to solely sexual aberrance, we fail to historicize Gothic embodiments. (21)

Mootoo's text works to illuminate this complex relationship between "money, science, perversion, and imperialism." Mootoo refuses to allow Mala to be only the victim of sexual aberrance. She does this in part by created a complex character in Chandin, and by setting the novel in a Caribbean environment that itself was transformed by imperialist projects and the pursuit of capital at the cost of human lives, human dignity. Mala is none other than a testament to complex personhood. And ghostly matters, so entangled with personal, communal, and imperial histories, pervade the text. Mala's own ghostly matters are made up of her trauma, even as she represents, in part, the community's collective ghostly matters. Even the one person who knows the most truth about Mala, Ambrose, has relegated her to his own space of ghostly matters. He sleeps for a month at a time, waking only to fulfill his duty to his lost love: a delivery of food supplies (235). Later, he realizes his sleep-filled life has been a result of his fear, shame, and indecisiveness. He says, "I slept because I couldn't face myself . . . . I slept to avoid the nausea that seems to sour my insides and the weight of defeat crushing my heart whenever I thought of my inaction . . . . I didn't

merely lose Mala Ramchandin. I lost myself also” (234). Ambrose sleeps to avoid an emotional response so powerful it literally makes him sick.

Ultimately, Ambrose abandons Mala because the truth of her relationship with her father is too much for him to process. His disgust, anger, and sadness force a confrontation with the material fact that Mala’s body, the woman he loved, had been ravaged by her father—the man who should have been her protector. The force of such a break in the natural order of the familial relationship—the rapist father, his ravished lover—is too much. The excess of meaning, the excess of what has happened to Mala shatters his world and his equilibrium ruptures. The ugly truth overwhelms him and forces him into retreat from living a fully embodied life. Instead, he finds solace in the oneiric realm where shifting scenes and no-place landscapes are more appealing than the harsh reality of his being-in-the-world.

#### Mala’s Countercolonial Garden: Mootoo’s Transformative Gothic

Left alone, Mala eventually refrains from speaking altogether, as language no longer serves as a vehicle to affirm her embodiment (until her nurse Tyler at Paradise Alms House works to coax her life’s story from her silence). The transition from language to silence is gradual and it is almost as if she reenters the imaginary—a realm that gestures toward and sometimes touches the sublime:

In the phase just before Mala stopped using words, lexically shaped thoughts would sprawl across her mind, fractured here and there. The cracks would be filled with images. Soon the inverse happened. A sentence would be constructed primarily of images punctuated by only one or two verbalizations: a noun tentatively uttered in recognition, a descriptive word confirming a feeling or observation.... That verbalization, she came to understand, was not the feeling itself but a name given to the feeling...an unnecessary translation of the delight she experienced. (126)

In her 2000 interview with Lynda Hall, Mootoo reflects that Mala

is not, as everyone in the novel thinks, a madwoman, but she is someone who has found extraordinary ways to survive incest and abuse and society's neglect and scorn. Mala gives up verbal language, while I use verbal language to detail her trauma and her triumph. To my mind, her abandonment of language and my use of it are only different sides of the very same coin. (111)

We know that as infants, and again, as the body ages, there often comes an immediate acknowledgement of one's changing body, the stimuli and pulses of one's environs, and, later, the realization of life's fragile impermanence. And, during these phases, there is a more visceral experience of pain and sickness, joy and pleasure. Mala's traumatic youth forces her into a state of being more commonly associated with the very early and very late stages of life—the phases of life unregulated by a school or work week or child rearing, for example. It is in Mala's garden that she regains a renewed relationship with her body and the environment around her.

Mala's companions are the plant and animal inhabitants of her garden; "she and they and the abundant foliage gossiped among themselves. She listened intently" (127). She encourages plants and animals to grow, reproduce, and live freely in her yard. Mala "did not intervene in nature's business. When it came time for one creature to succumb to another, she retreated. Flora and fauna left her to her own devices and in return she left them to theirs" (128). Alone in her garden, Mala seems free of the inscriptions with which society brands her and works outside of any prescribed labor system:

She did not ascribe activities to specific times. When doziness pawed at her, she responded regardless of the time of day or night, curling up in the yard or on the verandah. If she awakened in the height of the night's darkness, she did not force herself back to sleep but arose as though it were daytime. She fed herself when she needed to, voided when and where the impulse knocked. She manoeuvred her half-acre world intuitively, withdrawing, smiling, laughing, fighting, crying, sulking. (127)

Mala's existence, unregulated by any set system defies any colonialist, or postcolonialist, regime. Her labor is her own, and her garden is countercolonial. In her Gothic, countercolonial garden space, Mala thrives against all odds. Casid describes "countercolonial" gardens as spaces that contest the "terrain of imperial landscaping" (191), and Mala's garden does exactly that.

Casid discusses *Cereus Blooms at Night* briefly in the introduction to *Sowing Empire* as an example of a "nomadic garden of queer longing" (xviii). Casid relates the nomadic path of the cereus plant in Mootoo's novel to bell hooks's configuration of a "cartography of desire" and "diasporic landscapes of longing" (hooks qtd. in Casid xvii). The phrase "nomadic garden" dislodges gardening practices from the "desire to return to a past originary garden from which we have been expelled." Casid further employs the term "queer" to position her conception "against diaspora's linkage of heterosexual reproduction forming a family or tribe on the basis of a claim to originary blood ties and homeland" (xviii). She introduces Mootoo's text as one that provides a

way out of the intransigent oppositions of nomadism and the planting of roots or countercolonial and queer practices and gardening within current postcolonial and queer theorization and critique that would allow us to attend to and potentially transform the production of heteronormativity and imperial power through claims to the land and the "natural" [...] (xvi)

Casid points out, "As one whom the Anglo-Indian society of Paradise has abjected," Mala's "gardening practice might seem a kind of hybridizing and intermixing born of neglect rather than a tactics," yet Casid acknowledges that Mala's "self-transformation and seemingly noninterventionist agency is also an actively invasive appropriation—unleashed by the gardener who does not attempt to domesticate or tame nature's uncanny power to decompose" and ultimately, its power to rejuvenate and flourish (xx).

Mala's garden marks a significant departure from the space of first enslaved and then indentured labor in Lantanacamara's cane fields that yield cathected phantoms—unquiet ghosts born from unjust social institutions, both transhistorical and transnational—that continue to haunt the present: animated remains Gordon names “ghostly matters.” Instead of becoming a place that leads to her downfall, like the garden that held the Cientipedora that corrupted Ambrosio, Mala's Caribbean garden becomes the space in which she circumvents the fate of a violated, abused Gothic heroine—the type of heroine such as Lewis's Antonia, who, after being kidnapped, imprisoned in catacombs, and then raped and mortally wounded “resigned herself to the Grave without one sigh of regret,” because, alas, she had been “deprived of honour and branded with shame” and saw death as “a blessing” because she could have never been her beloved's wife (392). (Mala also escapes the fate of women like Faulkner's Clytie, or Welty's Clytie or her Mrs. Larkin in “A Curtain of Green.”)

Instead of succumbing to the living death such traumatic experiences can bring about, in her non-verbal phase, Mala becomes deeply embodied, and acutely aware of her environment:

Every muscle of her body swelled, tingled, cringed or went numb in response to her surroundings—every fibre was sensitized in a way that words were unable to match or enhance. Mala responded to those receptors, flowing with them effortlessly, like water making its way along a path. (127)

When Mala abandons language, she realizes that her experience of being in the world is too effusive, overwhelming, and awe-full to be contained by language, by words. She experiences her garden with her entire body—from her “toes and knobby knees” to the “palms of her withered hands, deep inside her womb, her vagina, lungs, stomach and heart” (126-27). This embodied state of existence, hindered before by her father's reign of terror

and yet, at the same time, the ultimate result of his reign of terror, exceeds the symbolic space of language. Even as she retreats from a human-based social existence, Mala becomes a live wire pulsating with energy and awareness. Thus, Mala enters an organic environment-based existence. She communicates in moans and wails, and makes birdcalls and other imitations of animals. She has entered a fully embodied stage of existence free from the parameters placed on bodies by societal mores. Like a child before entering the symbolic language stage, she is consumed by bodily functions and the world waiting to be discovered around her. Although Casid seeks to dislodge the practice of gardening from an Eden-like original paradise, Mootoo's use of the Gothic genre does call attention to Eden's long-held association with beauty, danger, and loss. Through Mala's countercolonial garden, Mootoo takes the Edenic resonances of the Gothic garden and rehabilitates them, construing the garden as an alternative to the sugarcane field, and as a setting in which human relationships and humans' relationships with nature can be contemplated and lived anew. Mootoo's text does incorporate recognizable Gothic conventions such as the themes of incest and a failed familial legacy, but Mootoo's characters move beyond these paradigms and illuminate methods necessary—specifically the cultivation of countercolonial gardens and uncovering the ghostly matters of Mala's life—to disrupt and break through the pertinacity of exploitative labor systems, institutionalized racism, and homophobia. For instance, in *Cereus*, Mr. Hector, through gardening with Tyler, is able to recover and rehabilitate, albeit in a ghostly way, whose own “kind of funny” (i.e. homosexual) brother who was sent away to escape their abusive father (73). Yet, Mala defies generic conventions by encountering ecstasy and using the space of the terrific sublime to work through the weight of the past. We witness the comingling of awe-full beauty and exquisite pain, a space

that reflects the two poles—one of beauty and the other of terror—that are characteristic of literature about, and representative of, the Caribbean.

One such scene in the novel that reveals the necessity of an excessive, near sublime experience is when Mala ingests “flaming red [bird-pepper] sauce” (132). In a manner so common in Gothic writing, Mootoo purposefully sets the scene and describes in detail the architecture and environs. She creates a Gothic atmosphere that exemplifies the degradation and decay of her mudra house, but instead of casting Mala as fearful of such Gothic trappings, Mootoo brings attention to the promise of beauty held within the cereus plant:

[Mala] enjoyed the smell of rotting, water-bogged wood. It had been at least a decade since the eaves trough came away from the roof over the back stairs. . . . [T]he top steps were coated in a dangerous green and black slime. . . . Before her was the wall of climbing cereus, foliage scaly with age and striped with the mucous trails of buff-periwinkles. The succulents, half a dozen plants in all, had raged over the side of the house, further concealing the boarded-up window of the [sewing] room downstairs. Scattered over the network of spiny, three-sided stems and fleshy leaves were countless buds, each larger than her fist. The sight of the buds made her giddy. She so looked forward to the night of their opening that she decided not to sit idly and wait but to enjoy every moment until then. (130)

Next we see Mala completing a preparation of bird peppers she will allow to ferment for weeks before use in her ritual; the peppers are so hot that handling them causes the “lining of her nostrils [to become] raw” (131). Mala employs the ritual during the rainy season when the memory of the day her mother and aunt left her and Asha behind arrests her:

The time of day would come upon her and deafen her. . . . Insects spawning in pools of water, their drones shouting, *Sarah!*. . . . Time would collapse. Every inhaled breath was a panicked tremble sustained and each exhale a heavy sob. (131-132)

Here, traumatic memory is represented as overwhelming and pervasive. Mootoo’s description falls in line with Cathy Caruth’s discussion of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995). Caruth writes, “To be

traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event,” and essentially PTSD becomes a “symptom of a history that [survivors of trauma] cannot entirely possess” (*Trauma* 5). Trauma wields power through its surplus of meaning. There is the meaning the survivor attempts to make of her life before and after the traumatic event. Then, there is the meaning of the traumatic event itself. Trauma wields power through its ability to break down the boundaries of self, time, and being-in-the-world we construct. Caruth writes that within trauma’s “enigmatic core,” there exists a “delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains” (*Trauma* 5). This incompleteness attests to what Caruth identifies as the “temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment” of traumatic experience; therefore, trauma is not only the “repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site” (*Trauma* 10). Thus, the recurrence of trauma is ultimately the result of one’s inability to grasp the (im)possibility of one’s survival (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 64). Trauma explodes narrative even as it resists narrativization. The traumatic event is ultimately too large for the language that creates it; thus, they tear and threaten to dislodge the seams of a well-ordered narrative—a well-ordered experience (this also may help explain the function of the labyrinthine, circling quality of many Gothic novels including *Cereus Blooms at Night*). Yet, by reasserting itself into the survivor’s life, trauma demands attention and a witness to listen even if language is incapable of describing all the body and mind remembers (and, of course, the witness role is what Nurse Tyler inhabits). Roberta Culbertson (1995) describes this predicament—the unwelcome reenounter with trauma and its resistance to narrativization—as

the paradox of a known and felt truth that unfortunately obeys the logic of dreams rather than of speech and so seems as unreachable, as other, as these, and as difficult to communicate and interpret, even to oneself. It is a paradox of the distance of one’s own experience. (170)

Mootoo's employment of self-harm as a coping mechanism seems even more appropriate when we take into account Culberston's assertion that

[n]o experience is more one's own than harm to one's own skin, but none is more locked within that skin, played out within it in actions other than words, in patterns of consciousness below the everyday and the constructions of language. Trapped there, the violation seems to continue in a reverberating present that belies the supposed linearity of time and the possibility of endings. (170)<sup>66</sup>

This notion of an event trapped within skin seems apropos as Mala literally sheds her flesh during her bird pepper sauce ritual, as if the pain of separating from her skin will cancel out the pain of her abandonment. In all, it seems, through her self-infliction of pain, Mala is able to affirm her survival even if she still experiences symptoms of PTSD.

When the bird peppers have fermented long enough, Mala then ingests them and through the physical pain she is transported *out* of the scene of her originary trauma. She speaks for the first time “in ages” and cries out for her mother not to leave her. The ritual is deliberate:

Mala looked down at the cerise blossoms of the pomerac trees and braced herself. . . . scooped out a heavy clump of raw pepper and shoved the finger into her mouth. . . . She didn't swallow, keeping the fire on her tongue . . . so blistered that parts of the top layer had already disintegrated and other areas had curled back like rose petals dipped in acid. . . . She gasped for air. . . . A thousand bells clanged. Then all sound stopped. . . . blossoms of the pomerac swayed in the breeze. . . . Her flesh had come undone. But every tingling blister and eruption in her mouth and lips was a welcome sign that she had survived. She was alive. (133-134)

---

<sup>66</sup> Culbertson continues, “It at once has a certain pastness, is a sort of ‘memory-knowledge’ as Mary Warnock would call it, and is not past, not “memory”—that is, a personal, narrated account of something completed, locatable in time—at all. Perhaps it is not even remembered, but only felt as a presence, or perhaps it shapes current events according to its template, itself unrecognized” (170). Again, this description of the pertinacity of traumatic memory seems to encapsulate Mala's experience. When “the time of day” descends on Mala, it is the environment, “the light, It was the blueness of the sky. It was the colour in the trees and shrubs in the yard. The dankness of the house. Everything so opaquely saturated with moisture that the sun couldn't shine strongly enough to soak it up,” that brings on the rememory of the original event (131)—Mala isn't even consciously remembering the event.

Keeping in mind that the last line of the passage delineating her bird pepper encounter reads, “She was alive,” we understand that this is one of the methods to which Mootoo refers when she says in her interview with Hall, “[Mala] is someone who has found extraordinary ways to survive incest and abuse and society’s neglect and scorn” (111).

Furthermore, Mootoo’s choice of the pomerac tree and its lovely blossoms is not incidental, and, like the cereus, its presence in the Americas is due to the mechanisms of imperialization as the pomerac is native to Malaysia (Morton n. pag.; see Figure 11). The



Figure 19: The pomerac blossom

pomerac—object of beauty—contrasts starkly with the terrible spectacle of Mala’s physical anguish yet elucidates Mootoo’s unification of the two poles of Caribbean aesthetic representation—the region’s beauty and its horror—into one sublime figuration. Indeed,

Mala’s intrusive rememory of trauma, her experience that cannot be fully assimilated, her moment of (to quote from Julia Kristeva) “violent, dark revol[t] of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside,” the tenebrous fabric of a memory that Mala has “ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable”—is “edged with the sublime” (Kristeva 1, 11).<sup>67</sup> Of course, the sublime, the simultaneous play of terror and pleasure, is yet another way Mootoo employs the Gothic in

<sup>67</sup> This passage from Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) and the one that follows fall in line conceptually with Mala’s transcendental, transformative ritual space.

addition to the work she performs with representations of the Caribbean. Botting explains that terror and horror are the emotions most associated with the Gothic, and

[t]error, in its sublime manifestations, is associated with subjective elevation, with the pleasures of imaginatively transcending or overcoming fear and thereby renewing and heightening a sense of self and social value: threatened with dissolution, the self, like the social limits which define it, reconstitutes its identity against the otherness and loss presented in the moment of terror. (*Gothic* 9)

Mala uses the ritual to combat the assault of traumatic memory and the power of ghostly matters that threaten to overtake her. During the ritual, as her body tries “desperately to cool itself,” at the point of utter agony, the roof of Mala’s mouth bubbles in protest and an “eruption of pain spread into her ears. A thousand bells clanged. Then all sound stopped” (134). Mala’s experience resonates with the Kristevan sublime:

The “sublime” object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory. It is such a memory, which from stopping point to stopping point, remembrance to remembrance, love to love, transfers that object to the refulgent point of the dazzlement in which I stray in order to be. . . . I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where “I” am—delight and loss. . . . [T]he sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be here, as dejects, and *there*, as others and sparkling. (Kristeva 11-12)

Mala’s gruesome ritual imbues her with awe and inspiration, as it takes her to the edge of being and back again; she is released from her abject state as an abandoned daughter, sister, and niece; an abandoned lover; and a victim of repeated incest and violent rape. Within that sublime moment there is “*something added* that expands.”

Mala is a Gothic heroine, yet she is able to step outside that confining space through the ecstatic sublime. Furthermore, Mala’s bird pepper ritual happens in the space of excess—in the physical space of her overgrown garden, and in the psychological space of the sublime—but it does not bring harm to any other person as so much of the excess within more conventional Gothic narratives. Thus, Mootoo challenges and rehabilitates our

expectations for the typical Gothic heroine who has suffered such profound physical and sexual abuse. To outsiders, Mala's garden is far from the conception of a Caribbean paradise; and to readers familiar with the Gothic aesthetic, her garden is easily understood to be a place of danger, a space of rape, incest, and death. Yet, Mala's garden is a space of both splendor and peril, just as her garden is the place where cereus flowers bloom and the place she experiences ecstasy that brings her to the brink of physical collapse, release. For Mala, her wild, Gothic garden is a space of transformation. It and the cereus plant in particular are symbols of wild, unfettered nature, and of beauty in the unlikelyst of spaces. When sixty-two "huge, white cereus buds" bloom one night, Mala sits "upright like a concert director in front of the wall"; and as the night progresses, the "slow dance" of blooms tremble and send a "dizzying scent high and wide into the air" (134). Mala is empowered by the blooms and basks in their beauty and fragrance of the plant with climbing, gangly, inquisitive stalks that bore into the structure of the ageing mudra house.

The disintegration that usually signals a dangerous or hopeless environment for the Gothic heroine becomes a source of renewal for Mala. For example, "every few days, a smell of decay permeate[s] [Mala's] house" (115). This scent is no doubt that of her father's decomposing body among other things. In order to avoid being overwhelmed by the stench, Mala brews "an odour of her own design" (115). The scent is created by boiling empty snail shells, which envelops the house with the "aroma of a long-simmering ocean into which worm-rich, root-matted earthiness was constantly being poured and stirred"; and, as a result, the "aroma obliterated, reclaimed and gave the impression of reversing decay. . . . A pin prick of fresh blood to sharpen the snails' scent . . . [makes] it almost tangible" (115). The ritual rejuvenates the air for days at a time and "[weaves] itself though Mala's hair and

penetrate[s] her pores” (115). The ritual also reveals a positive reimagining of what we may call the “undead.” In Mala’s experience of the world, things and people are not fully obliterated by physical death. Decay, in this sense, brings solace and transforms perspectives.

Mala also repurposes detritus in the sewing room where she has hidden her father’s body. Measuring a “full hand deep,” Mala carries a bucket filled with “every visible corpse off her property, the heap included ants, beetles and cockroaches, different kinds of spiders” (128). Unlike her efforts to neutralize the scent of her decaying father, “[s]he [pays] no attention to the odour rising out of the bucket. The scent of decay was not offensive to her. It was the aroma of life refusing to end. It was the aroma of transformation” (128). In a most revealing passage, we learn that for Mala, “Such odour was proof that nothing truly ended, and she reveled in it as much as she did the fragrance of cereus blossoms along the back wall of the house” (128). Mala’s perception that the odor is the one of “transformation” echoes the novel’s emphasis on the cathected, undead nature of what is thought to be over or dead, but simultaneously underscores the space in which such animated remains can be countervailed. Mala takes the carcasses from the bucket and pins them to the wall of the sewing room crushing fallen insects beneath her feet. These fallen corpses become “fodder for a vibrating carpet of moths, centipedes, millipedes, cockroaches and unnamed insects that found refuge in Mala’s surroundings”; it is the sublime representation of “[d]eath feeding life” (130). Mala’s conception of “death feeding life”—or “life refusing to end”—is even more salient when her father’s corpse is discovered.

The discovery of Chandin's body is brought about by Ambrose's son, Otoh.<sup>68</sup> Otoh begins a personal mission to discover the secret of his father's past with Mala and eventually sees her, meets her, and forms a delicate friendship of sorts with her. His resemblance to his father Ambrose is uncanny, and Mala is transported back in time and eventually takes Otoh to the sewing room, revealing her secret, reassuring him, "He can't hurt you now, Ambrose," while thinking to herself of how she "longed for him to be the king of her garden" (161). Of course, this cannot be, as there is no return to an originary garden. There is no return to a past unstained by the imprint of trauma. Shaken from his experience, Otoh runs away from Mala, yet another abandonment she must endure like an unexpected ripping open of the flesh of wounds covered with tenuous scabs. Otoh loses consciousness, neighbors find him, and all of the commotion alerts law enforcement. Returning to his father and haphazardly explaining what happened, Otoh reveals that he only wanted Ambrose and Mala to be "able to meet again" (170). In a rare eruption of speech, his father responds to Otoh's ordeal:

Well, how else can one look at this rather unfortunate turn of events? Clearly you did not cause trouble. It seems that trouble was lurking like a diseased phantom, waiting to be revealed, and you had the misfortune to have come upon it. Ultimately, I suppose, one is led to fulfill every iota of one's *raison d'être*. And you have just so done. It was your duty, my unfortunate son, to be the man who unleashed the business of an ugly, lurking phantom. (170)

The imagery of a "lurking phantom" is stark. It is some ghostly, ghastly matter that has been repressed, pushed back into the hollow of mournful memory. When the past is not

---

<sup>68</sup> Otoh, Ambrose's son was born Ambrosia, a girl. At age five, Otoh transforms himself into a boy and "the transformation was flawless" (110). Otoh and Tyler develop a romance in part through Otoh and his father's connection to Mala. One day, as Ambrose awakes after a monthly slumber to prepare a delivery of rice and onions for Mala's residence, he falls and is left with a broken pelvis (111). He dispatches Otoh with a new package and "Otoh, intrigued by his father's devotion to a woman whom he had not seen in more thirty years, accepted his inherited task" (111).

dealt with, not worked out, it festers and turns stagnant. In a moment of clarity, Ambrose assures Otoh that he and Mala will meet again, that “endings are but beginnings that have taken to standing on their heads” (171). Here he suggests that what he thought was past, has lived on—quietly—but lived on still. The undead past has now materialized like a poltergeist, fat with the fear of a home’s inhabitants. Yet, a reckoning is near—a reckoning must be contended with.

Officers forcibly enter Mala’s home and ask her if anyone lives in her closed-off sewing room. She answers, “Eh-heh, it have somebody in here. But is okay. He does live there. Is my father” (182). She continues to explain, “He does just lie there, not sick or nothing, just old and wear out, an I still looking after him all these years now. Is a daughter’s duty, Constable” (182). When she opens the door to the room, the officers see a badly decomposed figure in a large wrought-iron bed. During this scene, time and space collapse. Mala is reunited with her child-self, Poh Poh, and protects her from her father who, in their eyes, is a figure with

Skin, which looked grey one minute, red the next, stretched across the hairless cranium, clung to the forehead and cheekbones, defined the contour of a mouth cavity and fell off the precipice of a jaw-bone. From parted black gums a thin purplish tongue flickered as though attempting to lick its lips every few seconds. (183)

This undead thing is the living, breathing, incarnation of Mala’s trauma. She encounters her past and its frightful, undead reality. Chandin is the origin and cause of her ghostly matters. Mala and her child-self watch the figure as its throat makes a “faint noise muffled in cobwebs” and expels another “mangled groan” with more force than before. The figure calls, “Come, child, come” (183). This undead *thing* is an entity full of the “impossible load

of the past” (Rubin 159).<sup>69</sup> He still holds meaning and is threatening to Mala and the girl-child he repeatedly violated. This is the undead mouth of the past that says, “I am still here, and even in death I am not going away.” Yet, the child-self is able to escape the grasp of her father with Mala’s full support and encouragement, and she flies away: “At the top of the hill Pohpoh bent her body forward and, as through doing a breast stroke, began to part the air with her arms. Each stroke took her higher until she no longer touched the ground” (186).

One of the Caribbean Gothic tropes Mootoo may be employing is the figure of the *soucuyant*, the oversexed, threatening, female being of Caribbean folklore who often lives at the edge of a village, leaves her skin at night, turns into a fireball, and enters through the keyhole of homes wherever she pleases. Once inside another’s home, she sucks out their “life-blood (human life essence, or soul)” (Anatol 44-45, 50). Protection from the *soucuyant* can be achieved if one scatters “handfuls of rice or salt on doorsteps and window sills or around the bed of the expected victims; the *soucuyant* must count every grain before leaving, and thus risks getting caught by the occupants of the house” (45). Of note, vis à vis Mala’s bird pepper ritual, is that the people who find the abandoned skin of the *soucuyant* are “advised to sprinkle it with salt or hot pepper” (45). When the *soucuyant* re-enters her skin, “she will either perish in a frenzy of unscratchable itching or her anguished cries will reveal her identity to the community” (45). Thus, it seems, that together with Mala’s physical appearance, the condition of her yard, her ritualistic self-torture, Mala becomes *soucuyant*-like. The *soucuyant* is one those undead monsters we fashion to control undesirable behaviors, to place fear into the hearts and mind of those who

---

<sup>69</sup> I borrow the phrase from Louis D. Rubin, Jr. in his 1956 essay, “The Historical Image of Modern Southern Writing.”

would otherwise be different, or seek out difference. And, as Giselle Anatol (2000) points out, “this being represents women not only as dangerous, but it also comments on a society’s urge to keep women in a domestic space and domestic role. An independent woman, or even a married woman who travels as she wishes, challenges traditional Caribbean mores” (46-48). Anatol notes that there are male versions of this creature (48-49), but, in the Caribbean, the complex relationship between blood, slavery, and the condition of the mother, largely confines the creature to being female (50-51).

However, as Anatol seeks to rehabilitate the figure of the soucouyant, she cites Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988) in which Kincaid endows the skinless soucouyant with a love of bees and flowers (Anatol 53). Mootoo seems to play on these traits and transform them. Mala transcends boundaries and finds a way to cope with her trauma and violation and she sheds her flesh (i.e., “Her flesh had come undone. But every tingling blister and eruption in her mouth and lips was a welcome sign that she had survived. She was alive” [134]). Mootoo also transforms the power of flight into something liberating, not frightening, which is what Anatol has noted in other recent novels by female Caribbean writers (59). In the collapses of time during the invasion, searching, and discovery of her decomposing father by the officers, Mala communes with the girl-child version of herself. She tells her,

I does watch you. . . . Whenever you go out. At night, you know. I see everything, *everything* you does do, *every* house you does enter. But tonight your plans get a little mess up, eh? Things bad at home, Child? I understand. . . . Today is the last day that anybody will ever be able to reach you” (184).

Mala then speaks poignantly, “I old but I not stupid. I don’t have to go far to see everything. I does see how your father does watch you. His eyes just like my father own. You resourceful. I wasn’t. . . . You do for yourself better than me!” (184). Has Pohpoh become

like the soucouyant, going from house to house at night? The image is not clear, but in the end, Mala entreats Pohpoh to fly away (186).

### Exit the Garden, Reenter the World

When Chandin's death is uncovered, Mala's garden is no longer her safe haven. Yet, the transformative Gothic space has done important work. Because she must leave her home and take residence in the Alms House, her environs have become unhomely again, and she must endure another transformation. Unlike Jackson's Eleanor and Carter's Countess, when Mala leaves the Gothic space, she is able to reenter social relationships. She lives. In the final chapter on *Love*, some characters are able to move outside of the Gothic space and reenter the world; but Heed, one of the narrative's Gothic heroines, cannot. Overtly, Mala's final transformation is enabled by Tyler, who tends to her ghostly matters. Those ghostly matters are the persistent state of hauntedness that Mala's rituals have helped her abate—that "animated state" in which Gordon says "repressed or unresolved social [and physical] violence . . . mak[es] itself known" (xvi). But, Otoh also plays an important role as he burns Mala's home to stop further looting of her property. As he escapes the blaze, "swarmed with crazed bats and moths," Otoh clutches the precious cereus clippings behind his back (188). As I have discussed earlier in the introduction to this dissertation,

Haunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. (Gordon xvi)

Gordon's conception of haunting is related to the sort of collapsing of past and present Mala experiences. It is the "diseased lurking phantom" Ambrose names. It is Mala's experience of

her father and child-self and through her re-envisioning her child-self's escape. There is an unresolved, undead violence perpetrated on Mala. This violence, from her father's rape to her abandonment by her mother, aunt, and sister, and then Ambrose, is the result, in part, of exploitative, restrictive social institutions. Mala is indeed traumatized, but even more so, she is haunted. Gordon explains that the term "haunting" describes

those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. (xvi)

This is where Mala's garden departs from its Gothic origins, and the rehabilitated space of Gothic transformation she has cultivated within. Mala's garden is her own space. When Otoh enters her private space and seeks out her secrets, he becomes a catalyst. Emerging from the private, heterotopic and countercolonial category, at the risk of falling back into outmoded Gothic tropes of romance or danger in the space of the garden, Mala must escape.<sup>70</sup> For the narrative to do the transformative work Mootoo intends, Mala cannot remain in her garden indefinitely.

Mala has lived in a countercolonial garden, a Gothic, heterotopic space, and has experienced altered states of existence with her child-self, Poh Poh, in her sublime realm of caustic, ritual pain; and in the pertinacious, undead traumatic past that haunts her. When Mala arrives at the Alms House by court order, sedated and on a stretcher, she is a fragile shadow of a person in ways reminiscent of Faulkner's Clytie.<sup>71</sup> Tyler notes Mala's "clearly

---

<sup>70</sup> Here, I refer to the romance she begins to envision with Otoh as she "longed for him to be the king of her garden" (161).

<sup>71</sup> In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin describes Clytie as a "tiny gnomelike creature in headrag and voluminous skirts, the worn coffee-colored face staring at him. . . . She . . . a small shapeless bundle of quiet clean rags. . . . a handful of sticks concealed in a rag bundle" (385-6).

visible” skeletal structure, the “thin skin draped over protruding bones and sagg[ing] into crevices that musculature had once filled” (11). Yet, at the same time, she is transformed from the “incarnation of fearful tales into a living human being” (11). Unlike many oppressed, forlorn, or disillusioned protagonists of familiar southern Gothic texts, Mala refuses to die. When she awakes from sedation in a new place, her bungalow at the Alms House, she “sobs” like an infant just entering the world conveying that she is alive (13). At the novel’s end, Mala is reunited with Ambrose. Tyler and Otoh’s relationship is “blossoming,” and Mr. Hector, the gardener, is wishing his “kind of funny” (105, 73) brother could meet the two men. By this point, Ambrose and Otoh visit Mala and Tyler often and Tyler takes pleasure in dressing up himself and Mala whom he adorns with a “garland of snail shells about her neck or a crown of wreaths that [they] wove with feathers and the wings of expired insects” (247).

Thus, in the novel’s final pages, Mala has reached the pinnacle of her recovery. She sits in a new garden, re-entering the world of human relationships and interaction, waiting with four other characters for the rare, exotic cereus plant, born from clippings salvaged from her former garden, to bloom. Otoh packs soil around the plant’s base with his bare hands, in white trousers no less, to “show it some attention,” and Tyler imagines, “to honour its place in Miss Ramchandin’s life” (248). Seated with Ambrose, Mala bounces on a bench and points to the sky and traces a

distant flight pattern that she alone could see. She laughed as her eyes followed what her finger described, and waved to whatever it was she saw. She trembled with joy. In a tiny whispering voice, she uttered her first public words: “Poh, Pohpohpoh, Poh, Poh, Poh.” (249)

Mootoo says, “Writing itself is a way of giving the slip to the traumatic aspects of [Mootoo’s] own life-experience” because in the end, “good, truth, beauty and innocence” must “out-smart” the “lower states of existence.” and, she says, “[w]riting, putting words and grammar and meaning to task, is for me a way to begin to comprehend, and to tell, to expose, to appeal, to re-order and to overcome” (Mootoo qtd. in Hall 110-111). Mootoo reveals the violence and warns of its lasting effects, but through the symbol of the cereus and the space of the garden, we find beauty and transformation that does indeed “out-smart” the “lower states of existence.” Mootoo’s narrative repairs her relationship with words, her “first love” (109). And, at the end of *Cereus*, despite everything that happens to Mala and her first love, Ambrose, they are able to find some reconciliation (243-249).

Casid ends her brief discussion of *Cereus Blooms at Night* with the thought that Mootoo’s nomadic gardens of queer longing attempt to visualize how to take the very technologies of colonial relandscaping—hybridizing intermixing and transplantation—not to found another order of sedimenting rules in space and time but as a means of intervention in colonial space. (xxi)

I will add that these subversive countercolonial gardens generate new life and new attitudes, adaptive to future conditions. Here, María DeGuzmán’s conception of a “queer ‘tropics’ of night” speaks to the *esse* of both Mala and the cereus plant: “Spectrality or hauntology—the state and contemplation of being neither alive nor dead, of confounding borders and boundaries—does have the effect of questioning social restriction and immobilization, of getting around and beyond gatekeepers” (77). Mala, spectral and haunted, whose complex personhood has ravaged and reshaped her very existence confounds “borders and boundaries” and gets “around and beyond [the] gatekeepers” who would have her silenced, shut-up, and forgotten. The cereus plant, with its queer beauty, literally bores into walls, is nurtured by detritus, and has a scent so intoxicating that it stirs neighbors from sleep and

coaxes kisses from lovers (138). In a way, Mala is like the cereus, a plant that must rest for a season, and sometimes for many years, before it will bloom again. During its rest, the plant needs warmth, water, and manure in order to flourish again. (The appearance of my own cereus plant during its resting season oscillates in some interstitial space between a vivacious weed and a strained, unkempt houseplant on the precipice of death.)

After reading numerous accounts of others who have witnessed the cereus's effluence, I find a common theme: when the cereus blooms at night, one witnesses a magical happening. From at least Victorian times until the present, people have held viewing parties waiting for the plant's tubular buds to erupt into amazing, perfume-heavy flowers.<sup>72</sup> As Mala, Ambrose, Tyler, Otoh, and Mr. Hector await the transplanted cereus's first blooming, they have faith that the plant will transform from something gangly and unremarkable into something exquisite and extraordinary. They believe in its promise—its potential—just as Mala awaits word from her sister, Asha. The novel's final words are a letter Tyler writes to Asha: "You are, to her, the promise of a cereus-scented breeze on a Paradise night" (249). That promise frames and births so many layers of Mootoo's novel. And, within its depths is the proof that from cathected remains of trauma, from the depths of Gothic decay, something else may emerge—something transformed, *something added*, something sparkling.

---

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Sudhadra Devan's "Cereus Magic" in *New Straits Times* <<http://www.nst.com.my/life-times/health/cereus-magic-1.132911>>, which includes Asian folklore about the plant; Virag's "Cereus Reigns as Queen for a Night" in *Newsday* <<http://www.irenevirag.com/media/cereus.pdf>>; or a whole collection of night blooming cereus stories and photos at Ken Druse's gardening site *Real Dirt* <[http://kendruse.typepad.com/ken\\_drusereal\\_dirt/2006/09/opening\\_night.html](http://kendruse.typepad.com/ken_drusereal_dirt/2006/09/opening_night.html)>.

Figure 12:



Figure 20: *View of Roaring River Estate: Vivares* after Robertson

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *LOVE*: TONI MORRISON'S AFRICAN AMERICAN GOTHIC

It is easily the most empty cliché, the most useless word, and at the same time the most powerful human emotion—because hatred is involved in it, too. I thought if I removed the word from nearly every other place in the manuscript, it could become an earned word. If I could give the word, in my very modest way, its girth and its meaning and its terrible price and its clarity at the moment when that is all there is time for, then the title does work for me.

—Toni Morrison qtd. in Hudson 2

Toni Morrison's 2003 novel, *Love*, is about loving and living in times and spaces touched and shaped by the circumstances and legacies that exemplify a particular kind of Gothic—one recognized through familiar aesthetics, but also a type of Gothic that is uniquely African American. *Love* is a novel Morrison describes as “perfect,” an adjective she uses for *Jazz* (1996) as well (qtd. in Langer 43).<sup>73</sup> Set primarily in Silk, an African American eastern seaboard community, *Love* is mournful, elegiac, and Gothic. We witness the deterioration of black entrepreneur and patriarch Bill Coosey's Hotel and Resort, which in the 1930s-1960s was an upscale destination for blacks, but by the 1990s is only a boarded up, decayed memory of a lost age. Yet, Morrison makes clear that *Love* is “not about the civil rights movement not being a good idea,” for the movement was “absolutely

---

<sup>73</sup> Morrison's adjective “perfect” is mentioned often in reviews of *Love*. See also, for example, Elaine Showalter's review, “A Tangled Web” (2003), or Nicole Moses's review, “Perfect Love” (2003).

necessary”; however, “there was a price” (qtd. in Langer 43). She notes, “There were these fabulous black schools, high schools, insurance companies, resorts, and the business class was very much involved. They worked very hard to have their own resorts . . . they were all black and very upscale. Those stores are gone; those hotels are gone” (43). As the non-linear short, yet labyrinthine, novel reveals, love in all its complex and variegated essence *is* the price.

Like other Morrison novels, *Love* circles, spirals out and in, and covers a large swath of time. The past erupts in surprising ways, and characters’ intentions and words are not always clear and certain—they are hybrid and furtive. *Love*’s main plot centers on two older protagonists—both with traits of the conventional Gothic heroine—Christine Cosey, Bill’s granddaughter, and Heed the Night Cosey (née Johnson), Bill’s widow, who were best friends as children, but are now doomed to occupy the Cosey mansion at One Monarch Street where they scheme against one another, vying to be the unidentified “sweet Cosey child” of Bill’s will (79).<sup>74</sup> Throughout their lives, Christine and Heed are susceptible to the wiles and plans of family, socioeconomic circumstances, the desires of men, and, most significantly, the devices of Bill, a man who is loving, lustful, abusive, and haunting. Bill is the most Gothic element of the novel and other objects and circumstances of the novel are more conspicuously Gothic because of their contingency to him. Bill’s actions and the way the community perceives them also speak to concerns with the multifaceted nature of power and influence, law and lawlessness, society and family, and sexuality. Of course, these themes find a familiar home in the Gothic text, but more important is the fact that Morrison adapts and builds on these themes in an African American context—one that examines the

---

<sup>74</sup> There is confusion about the identity of the “sweet Cosey child” in part because Heed, the wife, refers to Bill as “Papa” and Bill is Christine’s grandfather, Christine being the daughter of his late son.

varied, often troubling, expressions of such themes before, during, and after segregation in the United States south.

In the 2005 Foreword to *Love*, Morrison writes, “Beneath (rather, hand-in-hand with) the surface story of the successful revolt against a common enemy in the struggle for integration (in this case, white power) lies another one: the story of disintegration—of a radical change in conventional relationships and class allegiances that signals both liberation and estrangement” (xi). Disintegration is a theme common in Gothic writing. Fred Botting (1996) writes that “[u]ncertainties about the nature of power, law, society, family and sexuality dominate Gothic fiction. . . . [and] are linked to wider threats of disintegration manifested most forcefully in political revolution” (*Gothic* 5). The 1964 Civil Rights Act that ended de jure segregation was most certainly a twentieth-century socio-political revolution and the significant, permanent changes it wrought still occupy and affect our present age. In contrast to Morrison’s other texts, there is only a small amount of criticism on this novel; thus, with this chapter, I enter the conversation and hope to inspire more. This final chapter explores Gothic aesthetics in play within a text about African Americans by Morrison, an author known for her use of Gothic themes and her creation of complex characters that garner both admiration, empathy, and disgust. As the texts and characters by Shirley Jackson, Angela Carter and Shani Mootoo are haunted and bear clear traces of Gothic aesthetics, so is *Love*. I also consider Morrison’s authorial intention with the aim of demonstrating that Morrison employs the Gothic mode because of its ability to disrupt and provoke powerful emotional responses through its juxtaposition of the non-rational and rational, love and hate, and past and present. With disturbance and unease comes the potential for action.

In the 2004 Foreword to *Jazz*, Morrison writes, “*Beloved* unleashed a host of ideas about how and what one cherished under the duress and emotional disfigurement that a slave society imposes. One such idea—love as perpetual mourning (haunting)—led me to consider a parallel one: how such relationships were altered, later, in (or by) a certain level of liberty” (xvi). Morrison’s exploration of love and her interest in haunting continue with *Love*, which she says is constructed “like a crystal” (qtd. in Hudson 2). Morrison’s Foreword to the novel sets an ethical imperative.<sup>75</sup> She writes,

For among the things Christine, Heed, and Junior have already lost, besides their innocence and their faith, are a father and a mother, or, to be more precise, fathering and mothering. Emotionally unprotected by adults, they give themselves over to the most powerful one they know, the man who looms even larger in their imagination than in their lives. (Foreword, *Love* xii)

In essence, the three women lack protective ancestor figures and fall victim to the power and desire of Bill—someone at least one critic identifies as “classic Gothic hero-villain” (Heise-von der Lippe 176). The ancestor, and as well as the wisdom the figure represents, has been an important trope since Morrison’s beginnings. Morrison’s fiction reminds readers—specifically African Americans—of the dual responsibility to listen to ancestors and act as protective conduits for future generations. In her well-known 1984 essay, “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation” (1984), Morrison argues that the presence of an ancestor becomes a paradigmatic symbol in, and distinctive characteristic of, African American literature. Morrison observes that the “presence or absence of that [ancestor] figure determined the success or the happiness” of characters in works by African American authors such as Ralph Ellison and Toni Cade Bambara (62). She argues, “It was the absence of an ancestor that

---

<sup>75</sup> I read a first edition of the novel, so I did not read the Foreword until I began writing this dissertation. Reading the novel with no sense of direction is a confusing, yet worthwhile endeavor. I believe reading the novel without the Foreword allowed me to see the Gothic aesthetics more clearly.

was frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and disarray in the work itself” (62). Morrison adds that ancestors are not only parents, but “sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom” (61-62). Morrison complicates this idea in *Love* through the naming of chapters: Portrait, Friend, Stranger, Benefactor, Lover, Husband, Guardian, Father, and Phantom; for each character, Bill inhabits one or more of the roles each chapter names. All of these chapters relate in some way to Bill’s character as perceived by himself and others. But they also characterize other characters as in *Stranger* we learn Junior’s history. The chapters Benefactor, Guardian, and Father especially speak to Bill’s complex personhood. Complex personhood connotes “the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society’s problems” and, as such, these stories are “entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward” (Gordon 4).

It is helpful to consider *Love* in light of Morrison’s previous work—many of which employ Gothic aesthetics. *Love* revisits and builds on themes from Morrison’s oeuvre including *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1997). *Love* also names the subject of so many of Morrison’s novels, and a subject familiar to the Gothic narrative: love. For example, in *The Bluest Eye*, love becomes perverse, corrupted, and too closely tied with lust and desire. As a result, Pecola Breedlove and her rapist father Cholly turn to self-hate. (And we see a similar trajectory in Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* as discussed in chapter three.) In *Song of Solomon*, self-love is achieved through connecting with one’s ancestors, which leads to family-love and the love

of one's community. Morrison's trilogy, *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*, immediately precede *Love* and center on theme of who is the beloved, or who or what is the object of love and loving in each novel. In *Beloved*, it is parental or "mother-love," in *Jazz*, the focus is on "couple-love"—the "reconfiguration of the 'self' in such relationships" and the "negotiation between individuality and commitment to one another" (xviii). In *Paradise*, self-love, woman-love, and community-love and the love of the divine fill the text. *Love* combines the many textures of love we find in Morrison's oeuvre and acknowledges the slippage that occurs in the space of love. What people think of as love is complex and can easily transform into lust, base desire, and something akin to hatred when the labyrinthine elements of living in a society with others enters the equation. Unlike the brief moment shared between the soldier and the Countess in Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love," as this chapter's epigraph elucidates, love in Morrison's *Love* is given time to grow, be shaped by circumstances, and mutate into a variegated, indeed a monstrous construct.

In addition to a narrative about Heed and Christine and the history of what led them to hate each other so intensely, *Love* is also a novel about Junior Viviane, a trickster, heroine, and anti-heroine whom Heed hires as a personal assistant to help write Heed's memoir, dye her hair, bathe her, and ultimately fabricate a will explicitly naming her the rightful beneficiary.<sup>76</sup> Junior is desperate, reckless, and sinister, and her mechanisms ultimately lead to Heed's death. Romen Gibbons, a brief hero at the novel's beginning and end, is a young man learning to navigate the world outside his protective grandparents, Sandler and Vida. Romen does handyman chores for the Cosey women, both his

---

<sup>76</sup> For a reading of Junior as a trickster figure, see Susana Vega-González's article, "Toni Morrison's *Love* and the Trickster Paradigm" in *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 18 (2005): 275-289.

grandparents worked for at the Cosey Hotel, and his grandfather Sandler was Bill's confidant. Romen and Junior have a passionate, sometimes sadomasochistic sexual relationship. There are other characters, ghostly, yet essential to the novel, such as L, Bill's faithful cook. Although her full name is withheld from readers, we may assume it is Love as she is named for "*the subject of First Corinthians*" (199; ellipsis in original).<sup>77</sup> Celestial, the "sporting woman" with whom Bill falls deeply in love, is another ghostly character (188). (May, Christine's mother, tells Christine and Heed, "Stay as far away from her as you can. . . Cross the road when you see her coming your way. . . . Because there is nothing a sporting woman won't do" [188].) And, then, there arguably is the ghost of Bill himself. There are a number of Gothic elements in *Love*—from its structure to its events and characters. We can identify the imprisoning or otherwise Gothic house (the house on Monarch Street and the Cosey Hotel), the doppelgänger (e.g., Junior), and the active, animated ghost (Bill). Morrison also incorporates and revises Southern Gothic themes. One of the most complex and telling objects Morrison incorporates from a Gothic literary past is a portrait of Bill. It is animated and haunted; it is a posthumous presence of the founding patriarch. The presence and influence of this portrait, along with the novel's characters and setting, compose an arresting Gothic narrative as Morrison draws out and exaggerates familiar Gothic aesthetics in her novel that reflect the conditions and themes that have governed Gothic narratives since Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

---

<sup>77</sup> In this chapter, all of L's words are presented in their original italics unless otherwise noted.

## *Love's First Pages: L's Prologue and African American History*

*Love* opens with L's italicized words. At first encounter, L's voice is reminiscent of the narrator in *Jazz*: omniscient yet opinionated, knowledgeable yet detached, intimate yet longing. L's prologue is almost mournful as she tells the reader of changing times, the history of Silk and Up Beach—its people, its land, its politics. Throughout the novel, readers are presented with scenarios related to the multifaceted experience we term love. The first words are full of lust and desire: "*The women's legs are spread wide open, so I hum. Men grow irritable, but they know it's all for them. They relax. Standing by, unable to do anything but watch, is a trial, but I don't say a word. My nature is a quiet one, anyway*" (3). These five sentences are full of meaning—meaning that doesn't become fully clear until one reads the novel again. Here, L reveals the sexual freedom of the contemporary age—perhaps a gentlemen's club or nightclub. It isn't as if these places haven't existed in the American landscape for some time; but rather, beginning a novel with such a scene speaks to the moment: sex sells, sex is no longer something we hide as it may have been in the early days of Silk. L laments, "*Before Women agreed to spread in public, there used to be secrets—some to hold, some to tell. Now? No*" (3). But, this opening also speaks to the nature of one of the novel's main conflicts and to one of its elements that renders it aesthetically Gothic. Bill is a sexual predator and a man, who like so many other Gothic villains, is driven by his lust, his desire, or his design and violates an innocent woman (or women).<sup>78</sup> In 1942, Bill, the wealthiest black man in the town, quietly chooses eleven-year-old Heed for his new bride. She is 41 years his junior. He boldly marries her in a public ceremony and then entrusts her with important aspects of his hotel

---

<sup>78</sup> Here I refer to characters by Walpole, Radcliffe, or Lewis, for example, previously discussed in this dissertation. Bill's determination to eventually reproduce a male heir to maintain his empire, as it were, brings to mind the ruthless behaviors of Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen and Mootoo's Chandin Ramchandin (discussed in chapter three).

business. Through his predatory, pedophilic marriage, Bill initiates Heed into the secrets of adult sexuality and relationships and steals from her her childhood and the ability to learn on her own what secrets are hers to hold, or hers to tell.

In the quoted passage above, L also reveals her inability to speak or interact with the men and women she observes. She uses the word, “unable,” which implies she physically cannot speak despite her proximity. When readers discover L is deceased, this passage makes more sense. L becomes the ghost of an era who views the present with contempt—but also longing. At the end of the prologue, she reveals her mixed constitution:

*They [Christine and Heed] live like queens in Mr. Cosey’s house, but since that girl [Junior] moved in there a while ago with a skirt short as underpants and no underpants at all, I’ve been worried about them leaving me here with nothing but an old folks’ tale to draw on. I know it’s trash: just another story made up to scare wicked females and correct unruly children. But it’s all I have. I know I need something else. Something better. Like a story that shows how brazen women can take a good man [Bill] down. I can hum to that. (10)*

The prologue acts as an introduction to the world of *Love and Silk*. This small, isolated African American town feels the influence of the major changes of the twentieth century just as the sea waves lap its shores. Once the sand is touched by the water, the beach is never exactly the same. Some grains are lost while new ones are deposited. The end of the prologue also sets reader’s expectations for the novel and centers the novel on Bill and the narrative of his demise that is somehow related to his relationships with “brazen” (dangerous, bold, independent) women. By the end of the novel, we understand that L herself is a brazen woman in terms of her involvement with Bill’s death and his will. After reading the novel, it becomes clear that Morrison wants readers to question the narrative of a “good man” and by extension calls for us to question and reevaluate narratives of identity and, ultimately, narratives of history.

Here, it is important to note that Morrison is again recovering parts of African American history often neglected or suppressed by the conventional American education. The Cosey Hotel, Silk, and their environs are modeled on Florida's American Beach.<sup>79</sup> Founded in 1935, American Beach provided African Americans with "beach access in a resort atmosphere" as during racial segregation, blacks were not allowed on the majority of beaches in the U.S. South (Chase n. pag.). In its founding year, Jacksonville's Afro-American Life Insurance Company (AFRO) Pension Bureau bought 33 acres of Amelia Island's shorefront property where A. L. Lewis, Afro's president, hosted company events and invited employees to use the beach. The Bureau subdivided the land and sold parcels to shareowners, company executives, and community leaders. AFRO bought 183 more acres over the years and in 1940, with many lots unsold, began selling property to the wider African-American community. After the end of World War II and the building boom, American Beach was an attractive location for entrepreneurs who began building restaurants, motels, guest homes, and night clubs. Many African Americans had summer homes there as well. American Beach drew patrons and residents from all over the United States and on the beach, in a friendly environment, one could enjoy small snacks, ice cream, "surf fishing and shell gathering, beauty contests and automobile races" (Chase n.



Figure 21: American Beach ephemera

<sup>79</sup> My sincerest thanks to Randall Kenan for pointing out that the town I described in *Love* reminded him of American Beach. For an in-depth history of American Beach and A. L. Lewis see Justine Tally's 2011 excellent chapter, "Toni Morrison's *Love*: The Celestial Whore and Other Female 'Outlaws.'"

pag.) Excursion buses operated between nearby minority communities and American Beach, so day visitors benefited from its proximity (see Figure 13 above). The A. L. Lewis Motel, Williams's Guest Lodge, and Cowart's Motel and Restaurant were the main lodging establishments, but vacationers could also room with or rent out homes from locals. After nightfall, live music and entertainment could be found at the Ocean-Vu-Inn, which also offered dining and dancing. (See Figures 14-16 for American Beach photos.)



Figure 22: View of American Beach



Figure 23: American Beach vacationers



Figure 24: Group of women at American Beach

American Beach was transformed in 1964 when Hurricane Dora damaged and destroyed many homes and businesses. The damage was significant, but the community was

affected more so by the Civil Rights Act (Chase n. pag). According to historian Marsha Dean Phelts (1997),

The civil rights legislated in 1964 had opened all public facilities to African Americans. Former American Beach vacationers and day-trippers now frolicked on Miami Beach, raced up and down the wide sands at Daytona, wore out the cobblestones of Savannah, and rode high at St. Simons Island. All along the shores of the East Coast, blacks explored areas that had once been off limits. The three-day weekends at American Beach shrank to one day; the Sunday visitors and day-trippers no longer stayed overnight. Loaded buses no longer caused a bottleneck at the crossroads. With so little business most of the restaurants and resort establishments closed. (120)

It is a painful, dark irony that the same legislation that allowed blacks more freedom and equality damned the community that had catered to and provided safety, culture, entertainment, and comfort for them for thirty years. By the 2000s, American Beach is mostly bereft of motels and restaurants; property taxes and land values continue to rise, and many properties are for sale. Some of the community's original homeowner's descendants have maintained properties, but most have sold and left the once-booming community. Part of the land is now a part of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve and other places have been registered with the National Register of Historic Places" (Chase n. pag). The result is the "price" Morrison bemoans, and it seems the story of places like American Beach are best told in the Gothic mode—a type of "extreme fiction" Jerrod Hogle (2002) argues is equipped to resolve or at least confront some of the most important quandaries and internal and external anxieties of society and culture (4).

We find the first descriptions of the Cosey Hotel and Resort in L's prologue. Forty years prior, the hotel was "*full of visitors drunk with dance music, or salt air, or tempted by starlit water*"—the "*best and best-known vacation spot for colored folk on the East Coast*" (6). In the novel's present, however, that image has transformed into a scene of decay and

dilapidation, but there is a latent beauty—a sort of nostalgic romantic image so germane to the Gothic novel. Except for L and fish shacks, L writes,

*Up Beach is twenty feet underwater; but the hotel part of Cosey's Resort is still standing. Sort of standing. Looks more like it's rearing backwards—away from hurricanes and a steady blow of sand. Odd what oceanfront can do to empty buildings. . . . Hills of sand piling in porch corners and between banister railings. . . . Foxglove grows waist high around the gazebo, and roses, which all the time hate our soil, rage here, with more thorns than blackberries and weeks of beet red blossoms. The wood siding of the hotel looks silver-plated, its peeling paint like the streaks on an unpolished tea service. The big double doors are padlocked. . . . nobody has smashed their glass panels. Nobody could stand to do it because the panels mirror your own face as well as the view behind your back: acres of chive grass edging the sparkly beach, a movie-screen sky, and an ocean that wants you more than anything. No matter the outside loneliness, if you look inside, the hotel seems to promise you ecstasy and the company of all your best friends. And music. The shift of a shutter hinge sounds like the cough of a trumpet; piano keys waver a quarter note above the wind so you might miss the hurt jamming all those halls and closed-up rooms. (7)*

The passage above is intricate and voluminous. Morrison alludes to the Gothic images present in her own canon and the scenes and moods associated with Gothic literature in general. The decaying hotel conjures the familiar Gothic image of a decaying estate and imbues it with life despite its state of disintegration. Morrison does not go as far as Jackson does with Hill House and suggest that the Cosey Hotel is inherently sinister, but she does indicate that the building is full of “hurt” despite its (once) grand architecture. Of course, this hurt is the result of disintegration on multiple levels—from the immorality of Bill’s pedophilic marriage and its myriad consequences to the origins of his wealth that built the hotel and resort, as his father was a police informant working against his own people.

Furthermore, like Jackson, Carter, Mootoo, and numerous Gothic writers before them, Morrison conveys meaning through her choice of flora surrounding the hotel. Reading flora reveals another level to interpreting an already complex narrative. Like Walpole and Carter, Morrison employs the rose; its properties of beauty, danger, love,

secrecy, fertility, purity, and death mirror the space of the Cosey Hotel.<sup>80</sup> And, similar to Jackson's choice of oleanders in one of Eleanor's paracosms, Morrison chooses a plant known for its beauty and its poison: the foxglove. In regulated doses, foxglove or digitalis is medicinal and used for heart health. It is also associated with "youth and stateliness" and when given as a gift, conveys wishes that the recipient will "heal from any ailment or trauma, and to regain [her] happy, youthful vitality" ("Foxglove Flowers" n. pag.). Later, the dilapidated hotel proves to be a place of passion, danger, and death, but it is also the scene of recovery and positive transformation—it is the place where Heed and Christine experience a healing of their hearts.

In L's prologue (quoted above) readers may not immediately recognize her mention of flora, but rather that this early description of the abandoned hotel is deliberate and woven together to produce a specific feeling. That particular feeling is loss. *Love* is many things, and it is most certainly a novel about the widespread effects of social (and environmental in this example) change. Morrison's use of Gothic aesthetics here and in the novel proper speak to Ellen Malenas Ledoux's (2013) central argument that, as I have previously discussed, Gothic writing's complex relationship between authorial intention and readers' response wields the power to impact social policy.<sup>81</sup> In the case of *Love*, Morrison uses Gothic conventions to represent the aftermath of racial integration in the United States in towns like Silk, Up Beach, and the actual American Beach while drawing attention to the fact that what was lost was once grand because of patriarchy, racist policies, and the basic human needs to survive and love. That is, African Americans went to American Beach and places

---

<sup>80</sup> See p. 25 of the introduction and chapter two—especially p. 130.

<sup>81</sup> See p. 6 of the introduction.

like it because they weren't welcome anywhere else and places like American Beach fostered happiness and conviviality.<sup>82</sup>

### *Love's Gothic Women: Junior, Heed, and Christine*

After L's prologue, Junior enters in the first chapter, Portrait. She enters Christine and Heed's world because she seeks freedom from poverty and abuse. The third chapter Stranger reveals her history. Through the novel's various characters, Morrison delineates the multifaceted nature of African Americans, their communities, and their histories. Doing so refutes the monolithic stereotypes and generalizations society-at-large places on them. Junior was born in the Settlement, a rural community "a planet away from One Monarch Street" (53). Labeled "rurals," people who live in Settlement discourage girls from attending school, shun those born there who leave its boundaries, and are generally feared by outsiders (53-55). Junior's father abandons her mother and Junior longs for him. Her mother tells her, "Oh, he weren't nothing, baby. Nothing at all" (55). Junior's desire for a father renders her more susceptible to Bill's influence, which I discuss below. The trajectory of Junior's life changes when she gives a baby cottonmouth snake to her Jewish friend, Peter Paul Fortas (who lives outside of Settlement), and her teenaged uncles demand she return the snake to "its rightful home" (57). Her uncles threaten to "break [her] pretty little butt" and "hand [her] over to Vosh," an "old man in the valley who liked to walk around with his private parts in his hand singing hymns of praise," and chase her into the woods (57). Thinking she will find Peter's house, she leaves the cover of the woods and ventures out into the road—the space of men and violence—where her uncles, "idle teenagers whose brains

---

<sup>82</sup> According to the American Beach Museum, this is made evident in A.L. Lewis's motto for American Beach, which was "recreation and relaxation without humiliation" ("About Us").

had been insulted by the bleakness of their lives,” hit and run her over with their truck (57-58). Of course her uncles lie about what happened and make themselves into heroes saying they had “found her sprawled on the roadside” most likely hit by a “town bastard too biggedy to stop” (59). Junior is only ten years old. Her toes are crushed and her foot is forever disfigured like a hoof. Anya Heise-von der Lippe (2009) argues Junior is “cast, both ethically and aesthetically, in the mold of a psychopathic monster” and this violence and the resulting disfigurement has an effect on her “evolution as a psychopathic personality” (177).

Heise-von der Lippe’s reading may be too severe, though, and it may be more useful to see the hoof as an indication of Junior’s trickster qualities as “hoof” brings to mind an animal. Read this way, we can understand Junior’s disfigurement as the birth of her trickster self and the catalyst that leads to her decision to run away at eleven. When Junior runs away, she commits the “settlement version of crime: leaving, getting out” (59). Junior enters “Correctional” for shoplifting and remains there until she is eighteen. When she is released, she adds an “e” to her name “for style” (59). Susana Vega-González (2005) points out that her decision to change her name, at one point considering “June,” mirrors the “mutability” of the Yoruba trickster god Esu whose names include Legba, Esu/Eshu Elegbara (278). It is important to consider that Esu is the “guardian of the crossroads” (Gates qtd. in Vega-González 278). (And, Junior’s injury does happen in a road that essentially leads to a sort of crossroads in her life.) The fact that trickster gods are associated with heightened sexuality (278) is also reflected in Junior’s relationship with Romen (discussed below). More pertinent to the Gothic aesthetics of the novel is considering the hoof’s allusions to Pan, the “Greek god of forests and wilderness” or the Devil, the familiar Christian antagonist. Vega-González footnotes,

Both connections relate nonetheless to the spiritual dimension of this novel. On the one hand, Junior epitomizes the female wilderness, freedom and transgression that Morrison is so interested in; on the other hand, the implicit reference to the devil would imply Junior's embodiment of evil and sin in a patriarchal system. However, as we can see in our analysis, Morrison dismantles the borders between evil and good, blurring the received clear-cut notions of such binarism. (286-287)

The latter half of that passage becomes clearer as the novel progresses, but the freedom wilderness is associated with brings to mind the early Gothic heroine's journey into the forest in order to escape a sexual predator or to seek out some hidden truth about her identity. Indeed, Junior is chased into the woods like an eighteenth-century Radcliffean heroine.

Thus, Junior's childhood is Gothic. She is virtually imprisoned within her community, is physically abused, and lives under the threat of sexual violence (e.g., from Vosh). Her uncles who act as an aggregated symbol for the conventional older male villain who imprisons the heroine, stalks her movements, abuses her psychologically, physically, or sexually—most often the abuse is a combination of all three. This trope reaches back to Walpole's *Otranto* when Isabella escapes antagonist Manfred's advances into a "subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle" to a church (27). George Haggerty (2006) argues that in Gothic writing, "terror is almost always sexual terror, and fear, and flight, and incarceration, and escape are almost colored by the exoticism of transgressive sexual aggression" (2). The same is true for Junior. More specifically, Settlement invokes the isolated town familiar to the Southern Gothic with its grotesque characters and its themes of violence, alienation, and futility (Boyd 311). Mary Boyd (2002) writes,

Many southern Gothic tales utilize similar myths of southern society: an inbred, patriarchal plantation aristocracy, built upon and haunted by a racist ethic, besieged by civilization and democracy, and, ultimately, defeated—as much by its own

intransigence as by external forces; and an inbred lower class living in extreme isolation in closed communities, which are plagued by economic impoverishment, educational ignorance, religious fundamentalism, racial intolerance, genetic deformities, perverted sexuality, and unrequited violence. (311)

Boyd argues that the horror evoked by these circumstances is often the “reader’s perception that these characters not only accept their limitations but also sometimes promote these social ills as their best characteristics” (312). Settlement embodies many of these classic Southern Gothic themes, but in a way that embodies an African American experience. Although by the mid-nineteen eighties, slavery and the plantation society had been abolished, its effects linger on. Instead of a white patriarch or heir struggling with the effects of such history, there are communities of black people navigating the world the plantation society and its tenets bequeathed them. Settlement is an isolated, African American impoverished community in the late twentieth century because of racism and prejudice in general and institutionalized racism by way of de facto and de jure segregation. The intransigence of the community conveyed through Junior’s uncles and her own mother’s actions is the result of the failure of Reconstruction and the progress and equality, both racial and social it promised.

For example, *Love*’s narrator (not L) reveals that Settlement is quite the way it was in 1912 when the jute mill was abandoned and those who could leave left and those who could not (the black ones because they had no hope, or the white ones who had no prospects) lolled on, marrying one another, sort of, and figuring out how to stay alive from day to day. They built their own houses from other people’s scraps, or they added on to the worker cabins left by the jute company: a shed here, a room there. . . . and if they hired out in a field or kitchen, they spent the earning on sugar, salt, cooking oil, soda pop, cornflakes, flour, dried beans, and rice. If there were no earrings, they stole. (54)

Settlement is a virtual prison of despair. It represents the people and ways of life many Americans would like to forget exists. It is the wound that cries out; it bears the taint of

America's collective shame.<sup>83</sup> Settlement's persistence into the late twentieth century is an encounter with the uncanny.

Another iteration of the uncanny is the doppelgänger or double. Originally a "defence against annihilation" and an "insurance against the extinction of self," according to Freud (1919), the double has become an "uncanny harbinger of death" (142). It is no coincidence that Junior responds to Heed's advertisement for "COMPANION, SECRETARY SOUGHT BY MATURE, PROFESSIONAL LADY. LIGHT BUT HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL WORK," because Junior is Heed's doppelgänger.<sup>84</sup> The doppelgänger is common in Gothic writing and Morrison makes the relationship prominent. Frederick S. Frank (1987) describes the motif as

a second self or alternate identity, sometimes, but not always, a physical twin. The Doppelgänger in demonic form can be a reciprocal or lower bestial self or a Mr. Hyde. Gothic doppelgängers often haunt and threaten the rational psyche of the victim to whom they become attached. (435)

Heed marries Bill at eleven; Junior is the same age when she flees Settlement. Each woman's mannerisms and diction reveal to the other the impoverished origins from which she has escaped (24-28). Furthermore, Heed cannot write or perform many basic tasks for herself, as her arthritis has deformed her hands. Perhaps this deformity marks her as someone who has been affected by the weight of her past as Junior's deformed toes attest to her own desolate history. After Junior lists all the things she can do for Heed ending with, "I

---

<sup>83</sup> I borrow the image of a wound crying out from Cathy Caruth's discussion of the nature of trauma in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996).

<sup>84</sup> Arguably, Heed and Christine are also doppelgängers. Showalter sees similarities to Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and points out, "More or less sold to the old man by her shiftless parents, the illiterate Heed learns to be a lady and to fight with Christine for primacy in the Cosey family; as adults their childhood roles are reversed, with Heed the heiress and Christine her servant. Their relationship is almost gothic in its ferocity and passion, as if they were African-American female versions of Cathy and Heathcliff" (n. pag.).

need a job and I need a place to stay. I'm real good, Mrs. Cosey. Really real good," Heed subconsciously recognizes a sort of kinship with Junior, but she does not fully realize it: "[Junior] winked, startling Heed into a momentary recall of something just out of reach, like a shell snatched away by a wave. It may have been that flick of melancholy so sharply felt that made her lean close to the girl and whisper, 'Can you keep a secret'?" (27). Here, Heed not only sees her younger self in Junior's eagerness, but she also mourns for her broken friendship with Christine—the main person from whom she wants Junior to keep secrets. (Her words also echo L's prologue: "*there used to be secrets—some to hold, some to tell*" [3].) By the end of the novel, Junior does become demon-like; she manipulates and takes advantage of Heed's desperation.

Heed is from Up Beach, a town that in the 1940s was akin to Junior's hometown, Settlement. Her parents are characterized as unapologetically shiftless; and for her family, the Johnsons, "*shiftlessness was not a habit, it was a trait; ignorance was destiny; dirt lingered on by choice*" (138). They are "*poor and trifling*," and the Johnson girls are "*mighty quick in the skirt-raising department*" (139). Yet, when light-skinned, grey-eyed, "slippery"-haired Christine meets seven-year-old dark-skinned kinky-haired Heed, who is wearing a man's undershirt, on Silk's white sand beach—all because she "wander[s] too far . . . down to big water and along its edge where waves skidded and mud turned into clean sand"—the friendship is instant (191, 78). Even though May (who later blames integration for ruining the Cosey Hotel's business [104]) initially tells her "Go away now. This [beach] is private," Christine calls for her to "Wait! Wait!" (78). The two girls fall in love and experience *philia*—a type of

love that encompasses deep friendship and loyalty.<sup>85</sup> Yet, things change when fifty-two year old Bill buys and marries Heed. May is frightened that Heed's status as wife and the sex matrimony demands will taint Christine: "*her home was throbbing with girl flesh made sexy, an atmosphere that Christine might soak up faster than a fruitcake soaks up rum*" (139). Christine is eventually sent to a private boarding school, and Heed learns how to navigate her new life the best she can.

Like Junior, Heed will do anything to survive. Morrison uses Christine and Heed's relationship to demonstrate that, within a racially segregated society, African Americans had a complex system of social stratification. Boundaries were maintained to keep the trace of poverty—a condition that marks a direct connection to the abolished plantation society—at bay. The Coseys and their hotel guests sought to separate themselves from that reality, and Heed emerges to become a constant reminder of what they would have rather buried. Bill marries Heed because he wants to have another son; both his first wife and son died. To marry Heed, Bill pays Heed's father "two hundred dollars" and gives her mother a "pocketbook": something Christine says to Heed's face in their secret language, pig Latin, "Ou-yidagay a ave-slidagay! E-hidagay ought-bidgay ou-yidagay ith-widagay a ear's-yidagay ent-ridagay an-didagay a andy-cidagay ar-bidagay" [You a slave! He bought you with a year's rent and a candy bar] (193). As Heise-von der Lippe rightly observes, this accusation lacks "metaphorical distance in an African American context" and is an "absolute one" (175). Furthermore, there is another parallel between Heed and Junior here

---

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Moseley defines philia love: "Aristotle elaborates on the kinds of things we seek in proper friendship, suggesting that the proper basis for *philia* is objective: those who share our dispositions, who bear no grudges, who seek what we do, who are temperate, and just, who admire us appropriately as we admire them, and so on. *Philia* could not emanate from those who are quarrelsome, gossips, aggressive in manner and personality, who are unjust, and so on. The best characters, it follows, may produce the best kind of friendship and hence love" (n. pag.)

considering that Junior's uncles threaten to give her to the old man, Vosh, who sings hymns while walking "around with his private parts in his hand" (57). The juxtaposition of Vosh's genitals and hymn singing is poignant and suggests that righteousness, or someone who purports to be a "good man" can be a degenerate person. When Heed is sold to Bill, the transaction reveals that no one is truly acting in Heed's best interest. Her parents are no better than Junior's uncles. Bill, the community's benefactor, seems no better than Vosh.

Bill is both hated and loved by the people around him. Susan Neal Mayberry (2007) argues, "If Morrison has the courage to connect Cholly and Mr. Henry and Soaphead Church [in *Bluest Eye*] with the most heinous of crimes against nature, just as she will do with Bill Cossey in *Love*, she also has the clarity to contextualize their pedophilia in terms of white Western tenets of sexual repression, competitive ownership, physical beauty, and romantic love."<sup>86</sup> She points out that Bill is reactionary to his father's actions and legacy. For example, Bill employs black people from Up Beach, but has to pay off white policemen and the liquor man during prohibition to keep his resort operating (68) which contrasts with his father's status as a "[w]ell paid, tipped off, and favored" courthouse informer for fifty-five years (68). Thus, the "*cops paid off the father; the son paid off the cops*" (68). Bill spends his inheritance on things his father "cursed": "*good times, good clothes, good food, good music, dancing till the sun came up in a hotel made for it all*" (68). Thus, Bill is a complex character—his behavior an example of his complex personhood. Bill is a patriarch and his marrying a pre-pubescent girl proves he feels he is above basic moral expectations. It also may reflect this desire to atone for the originary trauma he experiences while he spies for his informant father (44-45). Bill's

---

<sup>86</sup> Mayberry's chapter "Laying down the Law of the Father: Men in *Love*" in her book, *Can't I Love What I Criticize? : The Masculine and Morrison*, provides excellent Lacanian readings of the men and their relationships in the novel.

report that a man has left by the back door of the house his father tells him to watch leads to that man being “dragged through the street behind a four-horse wagon”; a group of crying children run after the wagon and a little girl as “[r]aggedy as Lazarus” trips in “some horse shit and fell” (45). People laugh and Bill says he does “[n]othing at all” (45).

This incident haunts Bill throughout his life perhaps reflecting his desire to remove the shame from his complicity in the original girl’s humiliation (and if he did indeed laugh with the others—that shame as well). He may have seen Heed as an incarnation of that “[r]aggedy as Lazarus” girl, for he admits after marrying Heed that his attraction had to do with wanting to “raise her and [that he] couldn’t wait to watch her grow” (148). Heise-von der Lippe argues that by marrying Heed, he “evokes the Edward Rochester . . . type of older, sexually experienced hero-villain a nineteenth- or twentieth-century heroine might encounter in a Gothic Romance,” and his “jovial benevolence towards the young girl and his positive image in the local black community are the only positive aspects of his difficult character” (176). In short, he is the “classic Gothic hero-villain”; L suggests as much: “*You could call him a good bad man, or a bad good man. Depends on what you hold dear—the what or the why. . . . He was an ordinary man ripped, like the rest of us, by wrath and love*” (Heise-von der Lippe 176; Morrison, *Love* 200). But, as in *The Bluest Eye* (and similarly in *Cereus Blooms at Night*), the pedophile or perpetrator of incest is not someone whose actions we are supposed to excuse.

As in her other works, again Morrison draws on familiar Gothic and Southern Gothic motifs, as well as those found in *The Bluest Eye* such as pedophilia and incest. In addition to the obviously disturbing act of marrying prepubescent Heed, before their marriage he touches her inappropriately. Christine and Heed are enjoying a day at the beach

when Heed goes to retrieve playing jacks from Christine's room in the Cosey Hotel. On the way, she bumps into Bill, "the handsome giant who owns the hotel and who nobody sasses" (190). He then proceeds to "[touch] her chin, and then—causally, still smiling—her nipple, or rather the place under her swimsuit where a nipple will be if the circled dot on her chest ever changes" (191). Heed runs to tell Christine what happened, but Christine has seen her grandfather standing "in her bedroom window, his trousers open, his wrist moving with the same speed L used to beat egg whites into unbelievable creaminess"; he does not see her with his eyes closed, and Christine cannot assimilate what she has just witnessed (192). She vomits and neither girl can talk about what has happened: "It was the other thing. The thing that made each believe, without knowing why, that this particular shame was different and could not tolerate speech—not even in the language they had invented for secrets" (192). It is important to note that the location where Bill masturbates, Christine's room, and the closeness of the girls' relationship gestures toward incestuous desire. This type of unfulfilled incestuous desire is akin to Quentin Compson's desire for Caddy in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). By *Love's* present time, Heed and Christine's relationship seems irrecoverably broken, and even though Bill has been dead for over twenty years, his influence continues to haunt them through his contested will and through Junior's relationship with his portrait.

#### Portraiture and the Gothic Novel: *Love's* Anachronism

Bill's portrait is one of the most anachronistic Gothic elements of the novel. Portraits are an important element of Gothic writing. As I discussed earlier, a portrait helped bring Horace Walpole's authorship of *Castle of Otranto* to light and an enduring tradition of

portraits in various shapes and sizes persists in Gothic writing. In her exhaustive study, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835* (2012), Kamilla Elliott examines the variety of forms and functions of portraiture in Gothic literature from Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Charles Maturin, and Matthew Lewis to Mary Shelley and Jane Austen. For centuries, the aristocracy and royalty commissioned portraits to honor and memorialize their family members. Portraiture has long been associated with wealth, status, power, and inheritance. Historically, portraits have helped police “access to spaces, resources, and privileges” (3). During the rise of the literary Gothic from 1764-1835, the middle class was ascending and subsumed the practice of commissioning portraits, which had been until that point widely reserved for the upper classes (Elliott 3-6). The rise of middle-class portraits dovetailed with the “extension of access, resources, and privileges to the middle and middling classes,” and, in turn, was used to “keep the lower orders down and to classify and control nonnormative identities”—this usage escalated over the course of the nineteenth century (3).<sup>87</sup> During 1764-1835, as commerce and transatlantic trade and travel increases, boundaries between the aristocracy and middle classes become indistinct and bleed into one another “often overlapping economic, professional, social, ideological, and educational spectrums” (4). Members of the upper class now range from “royalty to newly made gentry; and middle classes stretch from those newly created gentry though educated professionals, entrepreneurs, and industrialists to shopkeepers and tradesmen and those teetering on the brink of the laboring classes” (4). By adopting the practice of commissioning portraits, as Elliott explains, the middle class utilized “ideologies of portraiture [to] infiltrate and co-opt as well as debunk and assault aristocratic ones” (5).

---

<sup>87</sup> The middling classes include farmers, tradespeople, and shopkeepers and similar professions (Elliott 295).

Thus, like the Gothic novel, the middle class's use of portraiture was subversive—to varying degrees. So, although Britain's "age of portraiture" underwent "unprecedented downward mobility" in terms of its subjects and those who had access to identify subjects in portraiture, "[c]ontinuities between portraits and identity were [still] reinforced by a pervasive rhetoric that figured persons as portraits and personified portraits and by ideologies that deemed persons to inhere in their portraits" (3).

For example, in *Otranto*, the portrait of Manfred's grandfather animates and intercedes as Manfred advances to "seize the princess" Isabella with intention to rape her (26). The portrait "utter[s] a deep sigh and heave[s] its breast"; then the portrait begins to move and Manfred witnesses it as it, famously, "quit its panel" and "descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air" (26). Manfred cannot believe what he has just seen and wonders if "the devils themselves [are] in league against [him]" and then says to the portrait, "[I]f thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against thy wretched descendant"; before he can finish his sentence, the portrait sighs again and entreats Manfred to follow it (26). Manfred does and enters a room to which the "door [is] clapped-to with violence by an invisible hand" (26). Here, the portrait represents the shame Manfred will bring to his lineage (about which he has lied) and a warning that Manfred's base desire and lust for undeserved political power will not be tolerated by forces greater than him. Later, Otranto's lost heir, Theodore, is recognized by his resemblance to his grandfather's portrait. In this narrative, portraits "rework social legitimacy and entitlement" (Elliott 8).

Another example is Angela Carter's "Lady of the House of Love," in which animated portraits of the Countess's ancestors observe and pass judgment on the Countess's actions. The story's second paragraph reveals their presence: "the beautiful queen of

vampires sits all alone in her dark, high house under the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom, though her, projects a baleful posthumous existence” (93). When the British soldier arrives, “the painted eyes of family portraits briefly flickered” and when he kisses the Countess’s wound, “[h]er painted ancestors turn away their eyes and grind their fangs” (100, 106). Like Manfred’s ancestor, the Countess’s ancestors disapprove of actions that will bring shame or ruin to the lineage. Though becoming human and dying, the Countess escapes her prescribed fate. Written in a different era, Manfred’s ancestral portrait acts to ensure the rightful heir will return to the house of Otranto; thus restoring the true nobility. Although these ancestors do not share the same benevolence of Morrison’s ancestor figure, all of these ancestors do provide structure and instruction for expected behaviors. Carter’s uses portraits to convey what Chris Baldick (1992) names the “tyranny of the past”—the weight of which threatens to “stifle the hopes of the present . . . within the dead-end of physical incarceration” (xix). That is, the maintenance of outmoded ways of existing that limit possibility for liberation and change. Bill Cosey’s portrait functions in a similar way to the portraits in both Walpole and Carter as it most certainly represents the persistence of the past into the present, but it also polices the politics of inheritance through Junior (which I explain below). Although Elliott’s work focuses on Gothic writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, her claim that, in addition to sometimes reflecting “contemporary and historical practices of picture identification,” these Gothic narratives may also “enter debates over who should be represented by portraiture, how portraiture should represent them, and how portraits should be read” (9). Furthermore, she argues that these narratives may “remythologize and revolutionize picture identification” by granting it “unprecedented and unsurpassed

authority as a site of power, entitlement, access, knowledge, identity, desire, terror, criminalization, and social revolution” (9). Bill Cosey’s portrait in Morrison’s twenty-first-century novel manages to project many of these characteristics.

Readers first encounter Bill’s portrait in Portrait. Junior interviews for her job with Heed whose room is “overbright, like a department store,” similar to the kitchen where Junior meets Christine, the brightness of the room contrasts with the darkness of the hallway and staircase (25). Junior assumes that “each woman lived in a spotlight separated—or connected—by the darkness between them” (25). Heed’s room is crowded with furniture: “[a] chaise, two dressers, two writing tables, side tables, chairs high-backed and low-seated” (25). And, all of these items are “under the influence of a bed behind which a man’s portrait loomed” (25). The latter seems to anthropomorphize the portrait and ascribe to it a threatening, ominous quality. Morrison calls attention to the portrait through its first description, the name of the chapter, and through its anachronistic presence, as the commissioning portraits tie Bill to a former age and the wealth or social ascendancy attached to the practice mentioned above. When Junior goes to sleep in her new employer’s bed, she feels a “peculiar new thing: protected,” which is far removed from the terror she experienced at Correctional. In reality, Junior moves from one space of imprisonment to another. Yet, when she enters One Monarch Street—another enclosed, Gothic space despite its artificial light—she feels at home: “protected.” Like *Hill House*’s Eleanor, Junior has been searching for home and a sense of belonging her entire life. At Correctional the “nights were so terrifying” with dreams of “upright snakes on tiny feet [that] lay in wait, [with] their thin green tongues begging her to come down from the tree” (29). Thus, Correctional is akin to

Eden, but it is a dangerous, fallen Eden invoking the danger associated with many gardens in Gothic writing.

In Junior's dreams, "once in while there was someone beneath the branches standing apart from the snakes, and although she could not see who it was, his being there implied rescue" (29). She would endure and freely enter these nightmares if only for a "glimpse of the stranger's face"—a face she never saw as he eventually "disappeared along with the upright snakes" (30). But, now, at One Monarch Street, something has shifted:

[D]eep in sleep, her search seemed to have ended. The face hanging over her new boss's bed must have stated it. A handsome man with a G.I. Joe chin and a reassuring smile that pledged endless days of hot, tasty food; kind eyes that promised to hold a girl steady on his shoulder while she robbed apples from the highest branch. (30)

Thus, the new space begins to become the home she never had. But, the imagery is suggestive of another possibility: it seems that Junior does not consider the fact that the stranger she longed for in her Correctional dreams eventually disappears with the menacing, "upright snakes." (Upon a second reading of the novel, here, readers will perceive Morrison's deft foreshadowing.)

The next morning, Junior reflects, "Some of the education at Correctional was academic; most of it was not. Both kinds honed the cunning needed to secure a place in a big, fancy house on Monarch Street where there was no uniformed woman pacing in the half-light of a corridor or opening doors any old time to check" (59). For Junior, the Cosey house on Monarch Street is a diametrically opposite space, and the legacy of Bill solidifies her sense of security: "[a]s soon as she saw the stranger's portrait she knew she was home" (60). He stands in for the father she never knew and in her dream, she rides his "shoulders though an orchard of green Granny apples heavy and thick on the boughs" (60). The Cosey

house becomes the new Eden where she can eat boldly from forbidden fruit—or the comfortable life that Settlement and Correctional had denied her—supported by her deity-like father figure. Correctional taught her to “[g]auge the moment. Recognize a change” and to say to herself, “It’s all you. And if you luck out, find yourself near an open wallet, window, or door, GO! It’s all you. All of it. Good luck you found, but good fortune you made” (118).

Junior thinks that Bill, her “Good Man” in the portrait agrees; and “as she knew from the beginning, he liked to see her win” because they “recognized each other the very first night when he gazed at her from his portrait” and became acquainted in her dream (118). That same morning, she longs to see him again to “catch another glimpse of his shoulders” in the portrait over Heed’s bed. As she borrows a suit from Heed’s closet, she wants to “undress right there in Heed’s bedroom while he [Bill] watched” (118). But, Junior does not. Instead, Heed directs her to eat breakfast and return right away, but on her way back, she receives another sign that Bill is indeed interested in her:

On her way back to Heed . . . she knew for sure. In the hallway on the second floor she was flooded by his company: a tinkle of glee, a promise of more; then her attention drawn to a door opposite the room she had slept in. Ajar. A light pomade or aftershave in the air. She stepped through. Inside, a kind of office. . . . She stroked ties and shirts in the closet; smelled this shoes; rubbed her cheek on the sleeve of his seersucker jacket. Then, finding a stack of undershorts . . . [undresses and] stepped into the shorts, and say on the sofa. His happiness was unmistakable. So was his relief at having her there, handling his things and enjoying herself in front of him. Later . . . Junior looked over her shoulder toward the door—still ajar—and saw the cuff of a white shirtsleeve, his hand closing the door. Junior laughed, knowing as she did that he did too. (119)

Immediately after this encounter, Junior sees Romen outside and considers him a “gift” from Bill (116). She then proceeds to seduce Romen, introduce him to rough sex, and

ultimately lie to and manipulate him (62). She only sees him as a “bonus” on her path to ultimately convince the rivaling women to “leave things to her” (120).

It is unclear if Bill’s portrait has come to life and like Manfred’s grandfather in *Otranto* or the Countess’s ancestors in “The Lady of the House of Love,” or if he is actually haunting the Cosey house, or both; however, it is clear that like Jackson’s Eleanor, what Junior is experiencing is very real to her, and Bill becomes an entity that actively haunts Junior while he lives on through the memories of those who knew him. Elliot argues that “theories of immanence governing portraiture tighten” the relationship between subject and image, image and ghost, and that “subject and image, sign and substance” inherit in each other (109). She explains further, “Since imaging and inherence *themselves* inhere in each other, when the portrait images the body, which images the soul, such imaging attests to their inherence” and the “ghost” is “always already in the portrait” (109). In other words, the historical portrait adds not only legitimacy to one’s person or status, but it also ensures immortality (akin to the first type of doppelgänger); therefore, in the early Gothic novel, for example, the portrait is always haunted by the person (and ultimately the lineage) it represents. When Junior first encounters the portrait, Heed tells her, “That’s him. It was painted from a snapshot, so it’s exactly like him” (26). This line and Elliot’s claims about portraiture suggests that Bill’s ghost may have indeed emanated from its painted frame. Junior is immediately taken with the portrait, but other characters react in different ways. In the novel’s present, Christine tries not to “shiver before the ‘come on’ eyes in the painting over that grotesque bed” (97). Yet, like Junior, years before, Vida, Romen’s grandmother, needed the security of a job, so she “believed a powerful, generous friend gazed out from the

portrait hanging behind the reception desk” (45). Perspective matters because the narrator says Vida’s reaction “was because she didn’t know who he was looking at” (45).

In fact, the portrait was painted from a photograph in which Bill is gazing off to someone else—Celestial, the woman he loved and had an affair with for many years who was also a “sporting woman,” or prostitute (188). In the final pages of *Love*, L reveals that Celestial was the true beneficiary of the will and that L killed Bill and changed his will to preserve his legacy and pride lest his love and desire win out (200-201). Here, L takes on the role of arbiter and executioner:

*I just had to stop him. Had to. . . . They never saw the real thing—witnessed by me, notarized . . . leaving everything to Celestial. Everything. Everything. Except a boat he left to Sandler Gibbons. It wasn’t right. If I had been allowed to read what I signed in 1964 when the sheriff threatened to close him down, when little children called him names and whole streets were on fire, I might have been able to stop him then—in a nice way—keep him from leaving all we had worked for to the one person who would have given it away rather than live in it or near it . . . blown it up rather than let it stand as a reminder of why she was not permitted to mount its steps but was the real sport of a fishing boat. Regardless of what his heart said, it wasn’t right. . . . There wasn’t but one solution. Foxglove can be quick, if you know what you’re doing, and doesn’t hurt all that long. (200-201)*

Significantly, the foxglove returns to the text. The plant is only referenced in L’s prologue and in these final words. It seems fitting that she uses the plant, a cardiac toxin that can kill and heal, to bring death to the man whose heart’s desire was a request with which she disagreed. L admits that if she had read the will in 1964 instead of 1971, she would have realized what she thought was “*self-pity and remorse was really vengeance, and that his hatred of the women in his house had no level. First they disappointed him, then they defied him, then they turned his home into a cautionary lesson in black history*” (201). The Cosey women dared to disappoint the patriarch, they dared to do other than he demanded, and they dared to challenge his predatory desire.

By deeming Celestial undeserving of his wealth, L inserts herself into the politics of property—specifically “women’s status as property vs. women’s control over property,” a theme central to the Gothic, especially the female Gothic (Sweeney qtd. in Heise-von der Lippe 175). To L, Celestial was not a worthy beneficiary. Her status as prostitute and other woman denied her the right to Bill’s legacy. L acts out of a sense of loyalty to Bill’s legacy—to the image he created for himself and the image she cherished. Yet, at the same time, L acknowledges that he is not the good man she thought he was. At the moment she decides to kill him, it seems for L, the idea that Bill is a “good bad man” or a “bad good man” crystallizes (200). Fearing change, L seeks to maintain some level of status quo through altering the will. Maintaining or restoring the status quo is a common theme in many eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels. That is, after chaos and terror, there is a return to the status quo. Yet, Morrison does not allow for such an easy conclusion, as the status quo was broken to begin with. Morrison uses Junior, in all her complicated motivation, to unsettle and disturb the Cosey women, and ultimately, to have a role in repairing the primary love relationship that was severed by a man’s lust for power and women—the *philia* love between Heed and Christine.

#### (Re)discovering Love

The final scenes of *Love* exhibit the continual push and pull of annihilation and transformation in Gothic writing I have discussed throughout this dissertation. Desperate to forge the will and identify herself as the “sweet Cosey child,” Heed asks Junior to take her to the abandoned Cosey Hotel to look for a menu in the hotel’s attic (like the one L used to forge Bill’s will). While they search for a menu, “Junior smells baking bread, something

with cinnamon” and asks if Heed smells something; Heed admits, “Smells like L” (175). Thus, another ghostly presence inserts herself into the character’s lives. Here, L seems to inhabit the role of Morrison’s benevolent ancestor. Christine notices that Heed and Junior have left the house at Monarch Street; and because Heed never leaves the house, she can surmise what Heed is planning to do. She goes to confront Heed and Junior and when her eyes meet Heed’s in the attic, “[o]pening pangs of guilt, rage, fatigue, despair are replaced by a hatred so pure, so solemn, it feels beautiful, almost holy” (177). Junior

[s]enses rather than sees where Heed, blind to everything but the motionless figure before her, is heading—one footfall at a time. Carefully, with the toe of her boot, Junior eases the piece of carpeting toward herself. She does not watch or call out. Instead, she turns to smile at Christine, whose blood roar is louder than the cracking, so the falling is like a silent movie and the soft twisted hands with no hope of hanging on to rotted wood dissolve . . . and the feeling of abandonment loosens a loneliness so intolerable that Christine drops to her knees peering down at the body arching below. (177)

Here is the moment of transformation. Heed falls through the attic into Christine’s childhood bedroom, Christine runs to Heed’s rescue, and then holds her in her arms. In “light sifting from above each searches the face of the other. The holy feeling is still alive, as it its purity, but it is altered now, overwhelmed by desire. Old, decrepit, yet sharp. . . . There in a little girl’s bedroom an obstinate skeleton stirs, clacks, refreshes itself” (177). The room is a like a grave, its “solitude . . . like the room of a dead child, the ocean has no scent or roar” (184). The furniture in the room is “disintegrating along with the past,” and the “landscape beyond this room is without color. Just a bleak ridge of stone and no one to imagine it otherwise” (184). Like Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Morrison imbues a Gothic space with transformative power. Albeit only for a short time, a Gothic space in *Love* becomes a space of positive transformation.

The women reconcile and let go of the broken love turned to hatred by circumstance, by conniving, and by perverted lust. Heed reveals that, although she had no say in the matter, she hoped marrying Bill would allow her to be with Christine: “I wanted to be with you. Married to him, I thought I would be” (193). In Heed’s last moments, they recover their childhood language and the most secret of code phrases, “Hey, Celestial” (187). This phrase holds within it radical power. As children, Heed and Christine hear a man call out, “Hey, Celestial” to a young woman wearing a red sundress:

His voice had humor in it, a kind of private knowing along with a touch of envy. The woman didn’t look around to see who called her. Her profile was etched against the seascape; her head held high. She turned instead to look at them. Her face was cut from cheek to ear. A fine scar like a pencil mark an eraser could turn into a flawless face. Her eyes locking theirs were cold and scary, until she winked at them, making their toes clench and curl with happiness. (188)<sup>88</sup>

After May warns Christine and Heed to stay away from Celestial, they become fascinated and try to “imagine the things she does not hesitate to do regardless of danger. They named their playhouse after her” (188). From that point on, whenever either girl wants to say “Amen” or “acknowledge a particularly bold, smart, risky thing, they mimicked the male voice crying, ‘Hey, Celestial’” (188). In the end, Celestial is the type of “*brazen*” woman who can take a “*good bad man*” down (10, 200). And so is Junior. Her scheming leads to the rediscovery of love between Heed and Christine. In her final moment, Heed reflects on the beauty of the stars at the beach when they were children: “Love,” she says, “I really do” (194). Christine’s last words to Heed are, “Ush-hidagay. Ush-hidagay. [Hush. Hush]” (194). The novel closes with L revealing the truth about Bill’s will and his death, along with the fact that she herself is dead (although readers discover a few pages earlier during Heed and

---

<sup>88</sup> The fine scar indicates that Celestial is the same nine- or ten-year-old girl from whose face Billy (Bill’s late son) removes a homemade fishhook under the watchful gaze of his father, Bill (101). I am indebted to Mayberry for noting this connection in her chapter on *Love*.

Christine's reunion that L died while cooking at the café where readers believe she has been working). L is visiting Bill's tombstone with Celestial who is also deceased. L adds that Celestial is "*offended by the words on his [Bill's] tombstone and, legs crossed, perches on its top so the folds of her red dress hide the insult: 'Ideal Husband. Perfect Father.'* Other than that, she seems content" (201).

As Heed and Christine rediscover their love, Junior has a first encounter with romantic love—a feeling beyond the sexual attraction she feels for Romen. Overcome by the aroma of L's ghostly "baking bread," Junior returns to One Monarch Street to seek out her "Good Man" (177). Junior cannot tell what he thinks, but she is convinced "he would laugh when she told him, showed him the forged menu his airhead wife thought would work, and the revisions Junior had made in case it did. . . . It was a long shot . . . but it might turn out the way she dreamed" (178).<sup>89</sup> But, she cannot find him in any of the usual places, so she goes "directly to him" and "[t]here he was. Smiling welcome above Heed's bed. Her Good Man" (178). She seeks Bill's approval, and her anxiety reveals the possibility that she knows she has disappointed him. (In fact, later she admits, "the Good Man vanished from his painting altogether, leaving her giddy and alone with Romen" [196].) When Romen visits for a tryst, but notices the Cosey women are not home, Junior tells him that Heed is visiting her granddaughter. Next, Junior invites Romen to have sex in Heed's bed, underneath Bill's portrait. Romen resists because of "that face hanging on the wall," so they have dangerous bathtub sex instead (179). Later, Junior admits that she left Heed and Christine at the Cosey Hotel. Romen is alarmed, but with her "dead," "sci-fi" eyes, Junior is unfazed and initiates more sex. Again, Romen is uneasy and says, "I hate that picture. Like screwing in front of

---

<sup>89</sup> Junior revises the will and names herself as beneficiary in the event of Heed's death.

your father” (179). Twice Romen resists the gaze of the portrait, which suggests that he is not susceptible to the destructive influence of the past that Bill represents. Romen’s character holds promise for a different type of man, one governed by discretion over lust and power because when, Romen asks Junior about the Cosey women again, and Junior tells him the truth (“Clearly, just the facts” [196]), he comes to their rescue. The revelation is engendered by Junior’s transformation. Perhaps as Heed opens to love, she is able to as well—she is her doppelgänger after all. Reflecting on her blossoming, unexpected love for Romen, Junior feels the “jitter intensified and suddenly she knew its name. Brand-new, completely alien, it invaded her, making her feel wide open and whole, already approved and confirmed” (196).

In a 2003 interview with Pam Hudson in which Morrison talks about her new novel, *Love*, she reveals,

The idea of a wanton woman is something I have inserted into almost all of my books. . . . An outlaw figure who is disallowed in the community because of her imagination or activity or status—that kind of anarchic figure has always fascinated me. And the benefits they bring with them, in spite of the fact that they are either dismissed or upbraided—something about their presence is constructive in the long run. . . . In *Love*, Junior is a poor, rootless, free-floating young woman—a survivor, a manipulator, a hungry person—but she does create a space where people can come with their better selves. (2)

This is one message of *Love*: an encounter with otherness can inspire us to create something greater or better in ourselves; and perhaps through that inspiration, we can work to shape a better world. Such an encounter can also be transformative and liberating (consider the encounter between the Countess and the soldier in “The Lady of the House of Love”). Both Celestial and Junior are “wanton,” “rootless, free-floating” women. Some characters are fascinated by them and others fear them. It is important to consider that Heed and Christine’s most secret code phrase is “Hey, Celestial.” This phrase embodies the two girl’s

acceptance of otherness, which mimics their original openness to one another despite their difference in socio-economic status.

### Contextualizing *Love*

Although not often discussed together, Carter's and Morrison's approaches to writing fiction and its purpose bear similarities. David Jones calls attention to the two authors' views on their craft in his chapter "Art Unseduced by Its Own Beauty: Toni Morrison and the Humility of Experiment" (2014). Jones cites Morrison's 1983 interview with Nellie McKay in which she responds to a line of questioning about criticism of her work and its play with literary structure, genre, and the importance of the capturing orality of language in black people's speech and their stories with the following:

No author tells these stories. They are just told—meanderingly—as though they are going in several directions at the same time. I had to divide my books into chapters because I had to do something in order for people recognize and understand what I was doing. . . . I'm not experimental, I am simply trying to recreate something out of an old art form in my books—the something that defines what makes a book "black." And that has nothing to do with whether the people in the books are black or not. (Morrison qtd. in McKay 152-153)

Morrison wants to create something new, something of substance and relevance for contemporary readers and beyond, out of a well-loved fabric. She specifically seeks to create something that reflects the unique experiences of African Americans and believes that doing so does not make her a writer more concerned with experimentation than one who is trying to tell a story in the best way possible. Jones argues that because Morrison positions herself at "some remove from this trend toward fiction's parodic self-examination, Morrison's understanding of the purpose of innovation was ahead of its time" (211). Because Morrison

qualifies her stance, she also admits that “experimentation is not synonymous with the activity of achieving stylistically distinctive or ethically challenging fiction” (211-212).

Interestingly, in “Notes from the Front Line,” a piece published in the same year, 1983, Carter admits to situating herself “politically as a writer” (a feminist writer at that) and that she presents “a number of propositions in a variety of different ways” while leaving the reader space to “construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of [Carter’s] fictions” (37). Carter adds parenthetically, “Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (37). Carter feels

free to loot and rummage in an official past, specifically a literary past. . . . This past, for me, has important decorative, ornamental functions; further, it is a vast repository of outmoded lies, where you can check out what lies used to be à la mode and find the old lies on which new lies have been based. (41)

Carter’s revolutionary bent is not synonymous with experimentation as she is also concerned with producing “stylistically distinctive or ethically challenging fiction” as “The Lady of the House of Love,” for example, exhibits. Indeed, both authors acknowledge an ethical responsibility that comes with writing fiction, and both authors craft complex texts that leave no room for simple analyses. Both Carter and Morrison traffic in the “literary past” which always bears parentage in real life and the Gothic mode is such a space. Similar to Carter’s narrative, Morrison’s novel mourns a period many did not realize was lost or repressed. As Carter’s Countess’s speech from beyond death is a testament to her transformation and a reminder for us to acknowledge the marginal realities, truths, and beings amongst us, L’s spectral voice conveys the message in kind while bringing to light the

specific struggles that haunt and permeate the lives of African Americans and African American communities in the twentieth century and beyond.<sup>90</sup>

This specific concern with African American experience is something noted by many critics. For example, in her 2003 review of the novel, Elaine Showalter observes that Christine's life history away from Silk alone is enough to spur an entire novel and that, "In the hands of, say, Philip Roth, this life history would afford opportunities for rich, sardonic and profound reflection on human experience in the 20th century, beyond nationality, race, sex, age, class, and ethnicity" (n. pag.). Yet, she adds,

Morrison's imaginative range of identification is narrower by choice; although she would no doubt argue—and rightly—that African-American characters can speak for all humanity. But in *Love*, they do not; they are stubbornly bound by their own culture; and thus, while *Love* is certainly an accomplished novel, its perfection comes from its limitation. (n. pag.)

Showalter's words speak to Morrison's vision, which she has reiterated in countless interviews—Morrison writes about black experiences for black people. Discussing her latest novel, *God Help the Child* (2015), Morrison says,

I'm writing for black people . . . in the same way that Tolstoy was not writing for me, a 14-year-old coloured girl from Lorain, Ohio. I don't have to apologise or consider myself limited because I don't [write about white people]—which is not absolutely true, there are lots of white people in my books. The point is not having the white critic sit on your shoulder and approve it. (Morrison qtd. in Hoby n. pag.; brackets in original)

What is also clear from Morrison's commitment to telling African Americans' stories is that she finds the Gothic mode useful although she may dislike the term and its connotations.

---

<sup>90</sup> As in Jackson's *Hill House*, *Love* calls for a reevaluation of our grand narratives of domestic bliss and the American Dream. It seems that in a stratified, racist society, the achievement of such dreams or the adherence to such narratives comes at a costly price corrupting Bill, Heed, Christine, and Junior in the process. Like *Cereus Blooms at Night*, in *Love* we see that costly price is the disintegration of the family unit—incest and pedophilia and the elevation of one man's desire over the needs of a girl for whom he should be a benevolent ancestor figure.

Teresa A. Goddu discusses the latter in *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (1997).<sup>91</sup> She writes, “The gothic’s typical association with the ‘unreal’ and the sensational . . . has created a resistance to examining African American narratives in relations to the gothic” (139) and cites Alice Walker who dislikes the generic label because it “conjures up the supernatural” and Walker says what she writes has “something to do with real life” (Walker qtd. in Goddu 140).

Morrison is “reluctant to have her writing described as gothic” and in a 1988 interview says she “dislikes the term *black magic* used in conjunction with her work” because it implies the absence of intelligence (140; emphasis in original). Thus, Goddu explains, the Gothic’s “apparent lack of connection to reality and intellectual purpose has made it troubling to use in conjunction with African-American writers” (140). Yet, five years earlier, before the publication of *Beloved* (widely described as a novel with strong Gothic overtones), Morrison explains,

I also want my work to capture the vast imagination of black people. That is, I want my books to reflect the imaginative combination of the real world, the very practical, shrewd, day to day functioning that black people must do, while at the same time they encompass some great supernatural element. . . . it does not bother them one bit to do something practical and have visions at the same time. So all parts of living are on an equal footing. (Morrison qtd. in McKay 153)

Certainly the idea that the supernatural or nonrational somehow lessens the serious endeavors of fiction is unwarranted as Gothic texts often deal explicitly with serious issues of the abuse, oppression, and marginalization of women and social minorities—the Gothic becomes necessary because it reflects the realities of those forced to suffer under the weight

---

<sup>91</sup> Note that Goddu’s book is published the same year as Morrison’s *Paradise* and years before the publication of *Love*—two novels that have rich, Gothic themes.

of its confining mansions and lecherous villains. Ultimately, the Gothic is a “mode intimately connected to history” (Goddu 139).

More specifically, Goddu explains, African Americans (and I add blacks in the Caribbean and other slave-holding counties) have endured the realities of Gothic horrors for centuries. Goddu endnotes Gladys-Marie Fry’s study *Night Riders in Black Folk History* (1975) as one example of how the Gothic has “long been allied with reality” in black American’s lives (187). Fry’s study details how during slavery and Reconstruction, the “supernatural was used by whites as a form of psychological control of African Americans. . . . a master designating haunted places or the Ku Klux Klan riding as ghosts through the night, the supernatural kept African Americans literally and figuratively in their place” (Goddu 187). Rather than the master’s “stage effects” it was “the institutionalized power that lay behind” such effects (187). Thus, Goddu proposes

instead of accepting traditional readings of the gothic as unrealistic and frivolous, thereby excluding African-American narratives from this genre, we should use the African-American gothic to revise our understanding of the gothic as an historical mode. Re-viewing the gothic through the lens of African-American transpositions and recognizing that the gothic itself is a dynamic and contradictory mode whose tropes and conventions can be used for a variety of ends makes visible the American gothic’s relationship to history. (140)

The power of institutionalized racism through defacto and dejure segregation and the effects of integration on African Americans are the mitochondria of *Love*. Its main characters have all experienced their effects, which shape their personalities, actions, and realities in one way or another.

## CODA: HAUNTED NARRATIVES, TEACHING GOTHIC

Early in my research on Gothic literature, its origins, development, and continued evolution, it became clear that Gothic literature affected people. Its often revolutionary or marginal status was in part because its content was understood to be taboo, too shocking, or prone to influence poor behavior and habits—especially in women. But, also, Gothic literature is a safe medium. It allows its readers to glimpse the grim, gory, and grotesque, the immoral, the non-rational, and the supernatural—it allows readers to encounter all these things from a safe distance. Readers may enter into the narrative, empathize with the characters, transport themselves to the wilds of Britain, the Caribbean, or any other dark, foreign, or remote place, but leave the narrative with their persons intact. That is what all reading allows for in a way—the temporary escape into other lives and other ways of being and experiencing the world, but the Gothic novel carries with it the added experience of encountering something terrific—something that frightens, disturbs, or pierces. And then, while experiencing that moment that comes after seeing or feeling something sublime, and knowing an escape has been made, the experience leaves an indelible mark. What I am describing, of course, echoes Kant, Burke, Kristeva and others. But, what is even more amazing than having come back from such an experience myself, is witnessing and reading about such experiences from my students.

Over the years, I have taught many Gothic works of literature: novels, short stories, and poetry. Through discussion, reflection, and formal literary analysis, students moved by the plights of characters such as Eudora Welty's Clytie, Randall Kenan's Clarence, or Shirley Jackson's Tessie Hutchinson ask why these characters cannot survive within their communities. In an analysis of Jackson's "The Lottery," one first-year student writes, "Drawing on Gothic themes, Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery' offers a criticism of tradition and reveals the ease [with which] acts we may consider immoral and unjust are committed without conscience by the mob through its juxtaposition of a familiar setting with a terrifyingly barbaric ritual." "The Lottery" never fails to elicit strong reactions from my students. They cannot fully grasp the logic behind sacrificing someone for the assurance of crops because that is what had always been done. Of course, that cognitive dissonance is Jackson's intention. She wants us to interrogate our traditions and realize them for the anachronisms they often are. But, each time, my students are taken so aback. I could even say that they were somewhat horrified. But, even more so, they were excited, elated even about what they perceived to be utter immorality of the characters' the blind adherence to the society's narrative of prosperity on the page. They were especially disturbed by the complicity of the children—even Tessie Hutchinson's son, Davy.

In general, in my courses, I have found that Gothic texts provoke critical, socially conscious thinking. Because Gothic literature is full of tension between old and new regimes, danger and beauty, and also highlights how gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status can affect one's ability to fulfill his or her potential, students are inspired to think critically about the injustices of their own society. These anecdotes relate to the conception and purpose of this dissertation. Ultimately, my dissertation aims to address a question that

has occupied my thoughts since its beginnings. That question is “Why Gothic?” Earlier in the introduction to this study, I argue that Carter, Jackson, Mootoo, and Morrison write within the Gothic mode to advocate for a reality where women and other social minorities can be treated fairly and achieve a state of being that is the result of their own fashioning. By doing so, these contemporary women writers continue within and expand on a long literary tradition of writers who realize the power of Gothic writing and its potential to effect real change. Ledoux calls this phenomenon “dissident reading” as Gothic literature “draws attention to the existence of multiple, sometimes irreconcilable, approaches to reality” through the destabilization of a “cohesive linear historicity” (11). This destabilizing force not only invites “alternative interpretations of the past,” but its subjects and events—the material that makes the Gothic Gothic—wield emotional power. Gothic writing appeals to sensibility and arouses readers’ “passions” in order to elicit “sympathy for suffering” and cultivate empathy (11). Affecting readers in such a way “aids individuals in making moral judgments” (12). In line with Morrison and Carter, Ledoux believes the Gothic text’s “particular appeal to emotion has the power to influence politics” and the “very psychological and physical violence that makes Gothic writing sensational, alluring, and profitable is also what empowers it to challenge its broad audience to imagine a world changed for the better” (12).

Through Eleanor’s creation of paracosms and abdication to Hill House, Jackson admonishes readers to beware of seductive grand narratives that silence their own inner voices. *Hill House* also suggests the world outside old structures, old ways of living and being in the world entrap and imprison, and being different and color-full like Theodora can open the way to a more liberating life. Carter’s “The Lady of the House of Love,” calls for

readers to be open to other ways of knowing, and, through such openness, one may encounter the very thing that can set one free of old patterns, constricting modes of being, and imprisonment. The short story also encourages readers to embrace otherness and realize its essence already permeates our lives—the boundaries are not as neat as convention would have one believe. Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* calls attention to the Caribbean's new forced labor—indentured servitude—after the end of African enslavement and the complex societies and psychologies it birthed. Through Mala, *Cereus* reveals that from pain and trauma, new hope and new life can be reborn. Finally, in *Love*, Morrison brings attention to the places like American Beach and the oft-forgotten or repressed African American histories they hold. As in Jackson's *Hill House*, *Love* calls for a reevaluation of our grand narratives of domestic bliss and the American Dream. It is evident that in a stratified, sexist, racist society, the achievement of such dreams or the adherence to such narratives comes at a costly price corrupting Bill, Heed, Christine, and Junior in the process. As in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, in *Love* we see that costly price is the disintegration of the family unit—incest and pedophilia and the elevation of one man's desire over the needs of a girl for whom he should be a benevolent ancestor figure. Morrison also reminds us to simply love as children do—without prejudice or fear—and to be open to those people that disturb, for they may startle us out of hatred and help us create better versions of ourselves—better versions of the world.

Moreover, these narratives support Botting's claim that in the period after the mid-nineteenth century, Gothic narratives center on the "bourgeois family" and situate this unit as "the scene of ghostly return, where guilty secrets of past transgression and uncertain class origins are the sources of anxiety" (114). Home becomes unhomely, *unheimlich*, and "traces

of Gothic and Romantic forms . . . appear as signs of loss and nostalgia, projections of a culture possessed of an increasingly disturbing sense of deteriorating identity, order and spirit” (114). In Jackson, Carter, Mootoo, and Morrison, we see these situations and themes as Eleanor loses herself to the sinister Hill House; the Countess and her Tarot cards represent Western Europe’s anxieties about the threatening, foreign identities and non-rational narratives they believe characterize Eastern Europe; Chandin is haunted by his Indian-ness and acts out his self-hate through the rape and abuse of Mala; and Heed, Christine, and Junior are all haunted by the past Bill represents while the novel itself calls attention to the loss of African American spaces and histories encompassed by places such as American Beach.

This dissertation also gestures toward what the work I believe these four women writers are performing. Their narratives, imbued with Gothic aesthetics—monstrous and pregnant with the material of the past—trouble us. Yet, at the same time, we want to ingest these narratives and glimpse the terrific sublime. This disturbance, this action that forces us to interrogate the mechanisms of the past and their effect on the present, imparts an ethical responsibility. After having seen the past, having witnessed the effects of its undeadness, we accept the gift of its wisdom. We must work to actively construct a more just future.

## WORKS CITED

- Abbott, Elizabeth. *Sugar: A Bittersweet History*. Toronto: Penguin, 2008. Print.
- "About Us." *American Beach Museum*. 2015. Web. 8 November 2015. <<http://www.americanbeachmuseum.org/>>
- Aguirre, Manuel. *The Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Symbolism*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990. Print.
- Anatol, Giselle. "Transforming the Skin-Shedding Soucouyant: Using Folklore to Reclaim Female Agency in Caribbean Literature." *Small Axe* 7 (2000): 44-59. Print.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1992. Print.
- Baldick, Chris. Introduction. *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*. Ed. Chris Baldick. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.
- Barnes, Djuna. *Nightwood*. New York: New Directions, 2006. Print.
- Becker, Susanne. *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999. Print.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage, 1977. Print.
- Bissonette, Melissa Bloom. "Teaching the Monster: *Frankenstein* and Critical Thinking." *College Literature* 37.3 (2010): 106-120. Print.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Shirley Jackson*. Bloom's Major Short Stories Writers. Broomall, PA: Chelsea House, 2001. Print.
- Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- . *Gothic Romanced: Consumption, Gender, and Technology in Contemporary Fictions*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Boyd, Molly. "Gothicism." *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*. Eds., Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, and Todd W. Taylor. Baton Rouge: LSU P, 2002. 311-316. Print.
- Brennan, Matthew C. *The Gothic Psyche*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997. Print.
- Burke, Edmund. "How the Sublime is Produced." *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*. *The Harvard Classics, 1909-1914*. Bartelby.com. 2001. Web. 14 November 2013. <<http://www.bartleby.com/24/2/405.html>>

- Cameron, Ed. *The Psychopathology of the Gothic Romance: Perversion, Neuroses and Psychosis in Early Works of the Genre*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010. Print.
- Carter, Angela. *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings*. London: Vintage, 1992. Print.
- . "Notes from the Front Line" *Shaking a Leg: Journalism and Writings*. London, Chatto and Windus, 1997. 36-43. Print
- . "Notes on the Gothic Mode." *The Iowa Review* 6.3/4 (1975): 132-134. Print.
- . Preface. *Come Unto these Yellow Sands*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985. 6-13. Print.
- . "The Company of Wolves." *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. New York: Penguin, 1993. Print.
- . "The Lady of the House of Love." *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. New York: Penguin, 1993. Print.
- . *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. New York: Penguin, 2001. Print.
- . "The Tiger's Bride." *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. New York: Penguin, 1993. Print.
- . *Vampirella. Come Unto these Yellow Sands*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1985. 83-116. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. Print.
- . *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. Print.
- Casid, Jill H. *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization*. Minneapolis, U of Minnesota Press, 2005. Print.
- Chase, Larry. "History of American Beach." *National Park Service*. April 2003. Web. 28 April 2015. <[http://www.nps.gov/foca/learn/historyculture/ambch\\_history.htm](http://www.nps.gov/foca/learn/historyculture/ambch_history.htm)>
- Clery, E. J. Introduction." *The Castle of Otranto*. Ed. W. S. Lewis. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- . Notes. *The Castle of Otranto*. Ed. W. S. Lewis. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- . *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley*. Horndon: Northcote House Pub, 2000.

Print.

Cohen, Jeffery Jerome, ed. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis, U of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.

Culbertson, Roberta. "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-Establishing the Self." *New Literary History* 26.1 (1995): 169-195. Print.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. Print.

DeGuzmán, María. *Buenas Noches, American Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2012. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Dummett, Michael. *The Visconti-Sforza Tarot Cards*. New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1986. Print.

Eliot, T. S. "The Waste Land." Bartleby.com. n.d. Web. 16 April 2014. <<http://www.bartleby.com/201/1.html>>

Elliott, Kamilla. *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2012. Print.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.

Eltis, David. Commentary. *The South and the Caribbean*. Jackson: UP of Miss, 2001. 145-149. Print.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Six Degrees of Nosferatu." *Sight and Sound* (February 2001): N. pag. Web. 16 April 2014. <<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/92>>

Farley, Helen. *A Cultural History of the Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009. Print.

Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!*. New York: The Modern Library, 1993. Print.

---. *Requiem for a Nun*. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2011. Print.

Fick, Carolyn E. *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*. Knoxville: U of TN P, 1990. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2012. Print.

"Foxglove Flowers." *FlowerInfo.Org*. Web. 8 November 2015. <<http://flowerinfo.org/>>

foxglove-flowers>

- Frank, Frederick S. *The First Gothics: A Critical Guide to the English Gothic Novel*. New York: Routledge, 1987. Print.
- Frankl, Paul. *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McIlintock. New York: Penguin, 2003. Print.
- Geismar, Maxwell. "The Haunting of Hill House, by Shirley Jackson." *Saturday Review* (31 October 1959): 19, 31. Rpt. in. *Shirley Jackson. Bloom's Major Short Stories Writers*. Harold Bloom, Ed. Broomall, PA: Chelsea House, 2001. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard UP, 1993. Print.
- Goddu, Teresa. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia, 1997. Print.
- Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print.
- Haggerty, George E. *Queer Gothic*. Chicago: U of IL P, 2006. Print.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995. Print
- Hall, Lynda. "Shani Mootoo: An Interview with Lynda Hall." *Lesbian Self-Writing: The Embodiment of Experience*. Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2000. 107-114. Print.
- Halsall, Paul. Introduction. Suger. *Book of Suger Abbot of St. Denis on What Was Done During his Administration*. Medieval Sourcebook. 23 November 1996. Web. 8 February 2015. <<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/sugar.html>. >
- Hargrave, Catherine Perry. *A History of Playing Cards and a Bibliography of Cards and Gaming*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000. Print.
- Hattenhauer, Darryl. *Shirley Jackson's American Gothic*. Albany: SUNY, 2003. Print.
- Heise-von der Lippe, Anya. "Others, Monster, Ghosts: Representations of the Female Gothic Body in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Love*." *The Female Gothic: New Directions*. Eds., Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 166-179. Print.

- Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, Martine. *Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics*, Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2013.
- Hogle, Jerrold E. "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.
- Hoby, Hermione. "I'm writing for black people . . . I don't have to apologise." *The Guardian*. 25 April 2015. Web. 28 April 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/25/toni-morrison-books-interview-god-help-the-child>>
- "Horace Walpole." *Strawberry Hill: Horace Walpole's Gothic Castle*. n.d. Web. 7 July 2015. <<http://www.strawberryhillhouse.org.uk/horace-walpole.php>>
- Howard, Jacqueline. *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach*. New York: Oxford, 1994. Print.
- Hudson, Pam. "The Truest Eye." *O, The Oprah Magazine* (November 2003). Web. 28 April 2015. <<http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Toni-Morrison-Talks-Love>>
- Jackson, Shirley. "Experience and Fiction." *Come Along with Me*. New York, Penguin, 1995. Print.
- . "Fame." *Just an Ordinary Day*. Eds. Laurence Jackson Hyman and Sarah Hyman Stewart. New York: Bantam, 1997. Print.
- . *The Haunting of Hill House*. Ed. Joyce Carol Oates. *Shirley Jackson: Novels and Stories*. New York: The Library of America, 2010. Print.
- Jones, David. "Art Unseduced by Its Own Beauty: Toni Morrison and the Humility of Experiment." *New Directions in the History of the Novel*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 211-222. Print
- Khankoje, Maya. "To Bend but not to Bow." *Herizons* (Summer 2007): 29-31. Print.
- Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia U P, 1989. Print.
- . *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia U P, 1982. Print.
- Langer, Adam. "Star Power." *Book* (November/December 2003): 40-46. Print.
- Lau, Kimberly J. *Erotic Infidelities: Love and Enchantment in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2014.

- Ledoux, Ellen Malenas. *Social Reform in Gothic Writing: Fantastic Forms of Change, 1764-1834*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Warner Books, 1960. Print.
- Leonce, Helena. "Shared Memory: Trinidad and Tobago's East Indian Immigration Records." *National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago*. 2007. Web. 14 July 2013.
- Lewis, Matthew. *Journal of a West-India Proprietor, kept during a residence in the island of Jamaica*. Hathi Trust Digital Library. n.d. Web. 11 November 2014.  
<[http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b83902;view=1up;seq=1](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b83902;view=1up;seq=1)>
- . *The Castle Spectre*. Università di Parma. 2 February 2000. Web. 13 January 2015.  
<<http://www2.unipr.it/~dsaglia/Lewis/CastleProsp.html>>
- . *The Monk*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.
- Liljeström, Marianne and Susanna Paasonen, eds. *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.
- Lilley, James D. *Common Things: Romance and the Aesthetics of Belonging in Atlantic Modernity*. New York: Fordham UP, 2013. Print.
- Lootens, Tricia. "'Whose Hand Was I Holding?': Familial and Sexual Politics in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*." *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*. Ed. Bernice M. Murphy. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005. 150-168. Print.
- Malchow, H. L. *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford: Stanford, UP. 1996. Print.
- Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis, MN: U of MN P, 1994. Print.
- Mayberry, Susan Neal. *Can't I Love What I Criticize?: The Masculine and Morrison*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2007. Print.
- McKay, Nellie. "An Interview with Toni Morrison." *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 138-155. Print.
- Moakley, Gertrude. *The Tarot Cards Painted by Bonifacio Bembo for the Visconti-Sforza Family: An Iconographic and Historical Study*. New York: NY Public Library, 1966. Print.
- "Monstrous" Def. 1a. *OED Online*. December 2002. Oxford U P. Web. 8 May 2010.
- Mootoo, Shani. *Cereus Blooms at Night*. New York: Grove Press, 1996. Print.

Morris, Jan. Introduction. John Ruskin. *The Stones of Venice*. Ed. Jan Morris. Boston, Faber and Faber, 1981. Print.

Morris, Roderick Conway. "The Gothic Pioneer Horace Walpole Finally Gets His Due." *The New York Times* 22. March 2011. Web. 15 July 2015. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/arts/23iht-rartberry23.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/arts/23iht-rartberry23.html?_r=0)>

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage, 2004. Print.

---. Foreword. *Jazz*. New York: Vintage, 2004. Print.

---. Foreword. *Love*. New York: Vintage, 2005. Print.

---. *Love*. New York: Knopf, 2003. Print.

---. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*. Ed. Mari Evans. New York: Anchor, 1984. 339-345. Rpt. in *What Moves at the Margin*. Ed. Carolyn C. Denard. Jackson: UP of Miss., 2008. 56-64.

---. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 2003.

---. "The Site of Memory." *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*. Ed. Carolyn C. Denard. Jackson: UP of Miss., 2008. 170-186. Print.

Morton, Julia F. 1987. Malay Apple. p. 378–381. In: Fruits of warm climates. Julia F. Morton, Miami, FL. in "Malay Apple." *NewCROP: the New Crop Resource Online Program*. Purdue University Center for New Crops and Plant Products. 18 July 2011. Web. 7 August 2013.

Moses, Nicole. "Perfect Love." *January Magazine* (Jan 2004). Web. 28 April 2015. <<http://www.januarymagazine.com/fiction/lovmorrison.html>>

Moseley, Alexander. "Philosophy of Love." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Web. 8 November 2015. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/love/>>

Mussell, Kay J. "'But Why do They Read Those Things?': The Female Audience and The Gothic Novel." Ed. Juliann E. Fleenor. *The Female Gothic*. Montréal: Eden Press, 1983. Print

Nagra, Nav. "The Pleasures of Reading Different Lives: An Interview with Room's 2015 Contest Judge Shani Mootoo." *Room Magazine*. 2015. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.roommagazine.com/blog/rooms-2015-contest-judge-shani-mootoo>>

Nelson, Victoria. *Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard UP, 2012. Print.

- de Nerval, Gerard. "El Desdichado." Rpt. in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Julia Kristeva. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia U P, 1989. 140-141. Print.
- Newman, Barbara. *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*. Philadelphia: U of PA P, 1995. Print.
- Newman, Judie. "Shirley Jackson and the Reproduction of Mothering in *The Haunting of Hill House*." *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*. Ed. Bernice M. Murphy. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005. 199- Print.
- Oppenheimer, Judy. *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1988. Print.
- "Paracosm." Dictionary.com. *WordNet® 3.0*. Princeton University. n.d. Web. 13 March 2014. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/paracosm>>.
- Parlett, David. *The Oxford Guide to Card Games*. New York: Oxford, 1990. Print.
- Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth. "Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: the Caribbean." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. New York: Cambridge UP. 2002. 229-257. Print.
- Phelts, Marsha Dean. *An American Beach for African Americans*. Gainesville, FL: UP of FL, 1997. Print.
- "Prosopopoeia, Prosopopeia" Def. 2. *Dictionary.reverso.net*. *Collins English Dictionary*. 2000. Harper Collins. Web. 6 September 2014.
- Radcliffe, Ann. "On the Supernatural in Poetry." Eds. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles. *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*. New York: Manchester UP, 2000. 163-171. Print.
- . *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. Continuum. 2004. Print.
- Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999. Print.
- Richardson, Bonham C. "The South and the Caribbean: A Regional Perspective." *The South and the Caribbean*. Jackson: UP of Miss, 2001. 3-20. Print.
- Rubin, Jr., Louis D. "The Historical Image of Modern Southern Writing." *The Journal of Southern History* 22.2 (1956): 147-166. Print.
- Ruskin, John. *The Stones of Venice*. Ed. Jan Morris. London: Faber and Faber, 1981. Print.

- Sanger, Carol. "Girls and the Getaway: Cars, Culture, and the Predicament of Gendered Space" *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 144 (1995): 705-756. Print.
- Sansay, Leonora. *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo*. Ed. Michael J. Drexler. Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2007. Print.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. New York: Methuen, 1986. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night*, Act II, Scene III [O Mistress mine, where are you roaming?]. Academy of American Poets. n.d. Web. 27 February 2015. Poets.org. <<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/twelfth-night-act-ii-scene-iii-o-mistress-mine-where-are-you-roaming>>.
- Showalter, Elaine. "A Tangled Web." *The Guardian*. 28 November 2003. Web. 28 April 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/nov/29/fiction.tonimorrison>>
- Stein, Karen F. "Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic." Ed. Juliann E. Fleenor. *The Female Gothic*. Montréal: Eden Press, 1983. 123-137. Print.
- Suger. *Book of Suger Abbot of St. Denis on What Was Done During his Administration*. *Medieval Sourcebook*. 23 November 1996. Web. 8 February 2015. <<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/sugar.html>>
- Tally, Justine. "Toni Morrison's *Love*: The Celestial Whore and Other Female 'Outlaws.'" Eds., Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego and Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz. *Cultural Migrations and Gendered Subjects: Colonial and Postcolonial Representations of the Female Body*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars P, 2011. 13-26. Print.
- Thorton, John. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.
- Vega-González, Susana. "Toni Morrison's *Love* and the Trickster Paradigm." *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 18 (2005): 275-289. Print.
- Virag, Irene. "Cereus Reigns as Queen for a Night." *Newsday* (28 May 2000): G15. Print.
- Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. Ed. W. S. Lewis. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Walker, Barbara. *The Secrets of the Tarot: Origins, History, and Symbolism*. New York: HarperCollins, 1984. Print.

Warner, Marina. *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.

"Wisdom" Def. 1a. *OED Online*. December 2002. Oxford U P. Web. 6 September 2014.

Woodward, Ralph Lee, Jr. "The Political Economy of the Caribbean." *The South and the Caribbean*. Jackson: UP of Miss, 2001. 127-149. Print.

"World War I Casualty and Death Tables." PBS.org. n.d. Web. 27 March 2015. <[http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath\\_pop.html](http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html)>

Image Credits:

Figures 1-3:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic\\_architecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_architecture)

Figures 4-7:

<http://www.tarotlore.com/>

Figures 8-10:

Jameela F. Dallis

Figure 11:

"Syzygium malaccense, Mangunharjo Orchard, Dlingo, Yogyakarta" by Crisco 1492 - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Commons -

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Syzygium\\_malaccense,\\_Mangunharjo\\_Orchard,\\_Dlingo,\\_Yogyakarta.jpg#/media/File:Syzygium\\_malaccense,\\_Mangunharjo\\_Orchard,\\_Dlingo,\\_Yogyakarta.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Syzygium_malaccense,_Mangunharjo_Orchard,_Dlingo,_Yogyakarta.jpg#/media/File:Syzygium_malaccense,_Mangunharjo_Orchard,_Dlingo,_Yogyakarta.jpg)

Figure 12:

*View of Roaring River Estate*: Vivares after Robertson -

<http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/work.aspx?obj=16816>

Figures 13-14:

<http://www.abfla.com/1toct/people/blackhistory3.html>

Figures 15-16:

<http://firstcoastmagazine.com/news/cruising-state-road-a1a/>