

TINGLES OF TERROR: THE NEO-GOTHIC FICTION
OF MARGARET ATWOOD AND JANE URQUHART

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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TINGLES OF TERROR:
THE NEO-GOTHIC FICTION OF MARGARET ATWOOD AND JANE URQUHART

Submitted by Krista R. Vokey

Under the supervision of Lawrence Mathews, Ph.D.

Completed to Fulfil Partial Requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree (English)



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Although the Gothic novel has its origins in the late eighteenth century, it may be viewed as a socially relevant novel of protest. Traditionally operating as a novel of dissent although ultimately upholding currently accepted social norms, the Gothic novel uses these conventional societal concepts and gender roles against themselves in order to displace them as the existing dominant constructs. This technique continues through to some of our modern neo-Gothic novels.

Both Jane Urquhart and Margaret Atwood have produced novels which focus on Gothic heroines and the means that they use in their relationships to escape from restrictive roles. Despite their need for personal reassurance and stability, their relationships remain uncertain because they justifiably distrust their sometimes seemingly villainous mates. Though they are frequently uneasy, this fear is not primarily of the men involved. Instead, the fear is of being ultimately alone. Sometimes the heroines are content to continue to dream of their Byronic hero based on the Gothic villain while forming a relationship they regard as less important. This Gothic pattern is both created by these women and imposed upon them.

The Gothic works out of the context of a patriarchal social setting. The heroines appropriate the approved social behaviours of the Gothic format in order to attempt to regain some autonomy. They invariably seek the well worn comfort of easily classifiable character types and shrink from confronting the various merging of good and evil in common everyday existence. They sometimes achieve an epiphany. However, most often, the heroine is too overtly involved in her own myth-making to be able to reflect upon internal revelations.

Both Urquhart and Atwood use Gothic techniques to state and to argue the case for the average woman who is caught in a negative social construction. By defining the role of the anti-Gothic heroine, who in both authors is the primary focus rather than mere stereotype, they are increasing the number of possibilities open to her and subsequently, to their readers.

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Chapter One

STRUCTURING A FEMINIST GOTHIC: THE VISION OF ATWOOD AND URQUHART

Traditionally, the Gothic genre has claimed the terrifying and the supernatural as its domain. All of the trappings of horror are inherent within it. However, sophisticated late twentieth-century sociological critical interpretations place the Gothic genre within a social construct which allows for the attempted emancipation of women through this literary form. These subtle methods of social commentary include presenting the patriarchy's socially acceptable situations as a challenge for the Gothic heroine to overcome. The means by which the heroine is able to extricate herself from the morass of fright and of confusion as well as the fact that she can care for herself develops the notion that females are capable of independence despite the common socially imposed expectations that females are powerless. Emily St. Aubert successfully retains her single status against the mounting pressure of Montoni until she is able to choose her own suitor, Valancourt. However, Ann Radcliffe concludes her Gothic novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho, at the point when Emily has made her decision to marry. Once the

commitment to the marriage has been finalized, any concept of female autonomy must be abandoned in favour of subordinating all personal desires to the eventual husband.

Although the Gothic novel has its origins in the late eighteenth century, it still may be viewed as a socially relevant novel of protest. Traditionally operating as a novel of dissent, although ultimately upholding currently accepted social norms, the Gothic novel uses these conventional societal concepts and gender roles directly against themselves in order to displace them as the existing dominant constructs. This technique continues through to some of our modern Gothic novels. As Susan Rosowski notes with particular reference to Margaret Atwood, Gothic novels generally use contemporary social constructs in order to subvert them: "...Atwood turns this tradition back upon itself, confronting the Gothic dimensions that exist within our social mythology" (197). With this original and socially relevant focus, Atwood has created in Lady Oracle a new type of novel--the "anti-gothic"--a term coined by Atwood herself during an interview (Struthers 23-24).

Margaret Atwood and Jane Urquhart are two Canadian novelists who are reworking the traditional Gothic novel. Their novels use

strong Gothic elements which have been, with the notable exception of Lady Oracle, overlooked.

The implementation of Gothic motifs might at first appear to be inappropriate for these two authors. Atwood, in particular, is known as a feminist writer. The same might also be said of Jane Urquhart. Urquhart's female characters are unilaterally unafraid to defy convention and to pursue their own convictions at the cost of alienating themselves from society. As in Atwood, her families do not always claim precedence over the main female character's other personal responsibilities and desires. The authors' female characters seek self-fulfilment instead of maintaining a conventional status quo. Conversely, on the surface, Gothic traditions insist upon the triumph of the social order and upon the ultimate subjection of women: a seemingly unusual genre for the feminist writer to attempt to recreate in the context of the late twentieth century. As well, the Gothic conventions were well established by the close of the eighteenth century, although the genre continued to be developed in the nineteenth century with the composition of such novels as Frankenstein (1818), Bleak House (1853), Dracula (1897), and with the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Therefore, this would appear to be a stale and weary formula.

However, the Gothic novel may not be so inappropriate a choice for Atwood and Urquhart. They are both socially aware of conventionally defined roles for women and are conscious of the restrictions imposed upon women from childhood. As in The Handmaid's Tale, the social order is redefined, and although often the neo-Gothic novels of Atwood and Urquhart end ambiguously and frequently without a positive conclusion, the female--in this case, Offred--has made an effort to subvert the male-delineated social order in terms of her own personal world by means of her valiant escape from Gilead. She has also transgressed the rules of her society by having an affair with one of the other servants. Even though this behaviour has serious and potentially dangerous repercussions, Offred deems the price of the risk to be less than the value of her personal happiness. Offred has transgressed the traditional social expectations of a Gothic heroine.

Gothic literature also makes use of the pattern of the rebellious female. Its heroines are women in circumstances of some distress who have been deprived of male protection. They must therefore rely solely upon themselves if they wish to avoid sexual or physical assault. Typically, the heroines do not ask to be cast in such a role but circumstances have demanded this of

them. They are able to speak for themselves and generally are discerning about the nature of the other characters. As noted by Kay J. Mussell, the female Gothic has not been cast aside by the general female readership. Instead, it has become an ever-popular form of escape literature for women: "It is an escape from powerlessness, from meaninglessness, from lack of identity except through the performance of unstable and unsatisfying roles, and from the covert perception of the hollowness of the promises of social mythology about women's lives" (Female Gothic 67). Both Atwood and Urquhart create worlds of alternate possibilities that combat this social mythology in their novels.

By making use of an accepted format with which many readers are previously familiar, Atwood is able to present a believable, realistic character, Joan, who is confronted with satirical stock situations such as the unsettling experience of being spied upon and/or yielding her virginity to a count. This same type of realistic character reappears in her subsequent novels. Atwood's anthology, Second Words, contains an essay entitled "The Curse of Eve--Or, What I Learned in School". In this article, Atwood comments that up until the nineteenth century the female character was portrayed as the "Solitary Weeper," (note the ironic reference to Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper"), a

passive character whose "only activity is running away." She goes on to say:

Suppose, however, that I want to create a female character who is not a natural force, whether good or evil; who is not a passive Solitary Weeper; who makes decisions, performs actions, causes as well as endures events, and has perhaps even some ambition, some creative power. What stories does my culture have to tell me about such women?" (222-23).

By choosing for a model a superficially conventional form of literature, such as the Gothic novel, Atwood is successfully able to present a redefined prototype of a female character and subsequently is able to develop new social mythologies. Atwood's audience is familiar with Gothic conventions and is therefore able to appreciate her manipulations of them. Therefore, her choice of the Gothic form enters into a dialogue with the perceived codes of behaviour for women which results in alternate paradigms for them. By using a literature of simultaneous subversion and compliance, Atwood is able to develop a new form of literature--the anti-Gothic.

As previously mentioned, the Gothic heroine may also be considered to be a rebel against society's dictates. By using the Gothic motifs, Atwood connects with a body of literature primarily written by women and for female audiences which contains seeds of independence for the discerning reader.

Both Urquhart and Atwood admit to a compelling interest in nineteenth-century fiction. Urquhart describes her literary tastes: "For a long time I found myself attracted to nineteenth, early twentieth century writing...Tangible ghosts in a way...the lure of the past. I also like to read writers of the unreal" (Hancock 32). She also mentions that "...the books that I read as a child still influence me the most...I read Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights when I was nine and I feel precisely the same way about those books today as I did then" (Hancock 25).

Urquhart's use of Gothic is not as immediately apparent as Atwood's, but she reworks the motifs in a style comparable to Atwood's. In her texts, the main female characters, after some initial confusion, make the effort to rebel against conventional codes of behaviour in romantic relationships. This pattern parallels the character constructions of Atwood's Lady Oracle as well as those of several of Atwood's other female characters, such as the women in The Robber Bride. Maud Grady also

introduces an element of the grotesque with her macabre obsession with her cataloguing of body parts salvaged from the Niagara River. Urquhart, like Atwood, reworks the Gothic novel in order to present her vision of a more equitable world for women. The arena of social commentary and social criticism is broadened by incorporating the supernatural elements which are inherent in the Gothic novel, thereby increasing the possibility for alternative realities and experiences for the reader. If one can accept the element of the supernatural as a valid part of reality in this age of science and technology, this acceptance increases the probability that the socially constructed realities imposed on women can be more easily challenged and expanded. As well, the supernatural elements contained in the Gothic form and those which are used by Urquhart and Atwood may be seen as metaphors.

As Margot Northey points out, "...despite the interest in social realism or social analysis in many modern novels, the gothic spirit hovers close by the fictional scene, frequently throwing dark shadows over the landscape and its inhabitants" (69). By reintroducing the elements of Gothic writing, Atwood and Urquhart make use of stereotypical motifs to uncover the darker aspects of our society. The Gothic atmosphere often present in Canadian literature permits a layering of realities

for its readers. This layering expands the realm of the possible by incorporating surreal elements in a quasi-plausible fashion. Thus, alternate models of being become theoretically accessible in the minds of Atwood's and Urquhart's readers.

These alternate models are based upon a combination of romance and realism:

"...Women writers claim their textual space by disruptive tactics, subverting conventions of realism by shifts into fantasy or romance, by mixing genres so that one code is superimposed upon another. Through such split-level discourse they create a doubled vision which is also a characteristically feminine entertainment of simultaneous alternatives" (Howells and Hunter 72).

By concurrently writing upon the levels of both realism and dark romance, both Atwood and Urquhart create paradigms of female awareness. Atwood is able to develop her own version of a realistic female character who is neither purely evil nor deified perfection. Urquhart, with the character of Arianna Ether, removes her from the context of a male-driven relationship and places her within an environment where no action is required at

all. Arianna is simply free to exist and to float about. Therefore, by use of the Gothic form, these two Canadian authors are constructing characters who are impervious to moral censure and are able to portray representations of everyday, slightly flawed females who most frequently do not manage to achieve feats of heroic magnitude.

Rewriting the terms of the social mythology on behalf of its literary heroines must involve the creation of definitions. So in a discussion of Lady Oracle during an interview, Atwood has formalized her redefinition of the Gothic novel as an "anti-gothic" novel.

I think in an anti-gothic what you're doing is examining the perils of gothic thinking, as it were. And one of the perils of gothic thinking is that gothic thinking means that you have a scenario in your head which involves certain roles--the dark, experienced man who is possibly evil and possibly good, the rescuer, the mad wife, and so on--and that as you go to real life you tend to cast real people in these roles as Joan does. Then when you find out that the real people don't fit these two-dimensional roles, you can

either discard the roles and try to deal with the real person or discard the real person (Struthers 23-24).

Effectively, what Atwood is describing here are her efforts to rework the techniques of a previous generation by using an approximation of their own language and symbols. In so doing, she is entering into what Bakhtin identifies as "double-voiced discourse" which is defined as "...another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (324). The full appreciation of this writing--the anti-gothic or the neo-gothic--may best be approached employing an Anglo-American feminist paradigm with consideration of Bakhtin. Although in "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism", Wayne Booth contends that these two critical schools must be mutually exclusive given Bakhtin's unrelenting prejudicial support of Rabelais and of Dostoevsky, Booth overlooks the argument of Anglo-American theory itself which frequently and unavoidably operates within the framework of the patriarchy. The Anglo-American critical focus is concerned solely with the role of woman within the patriarchal historical context.

However, proponents of Anglo-American feminism are generally anti-theorists, as argued by Mary Eagleton in her introduction to Feminist Literary Criticism. Instead of focusing on contemporary critical approaches, the "gynocritic dedicates herself to the female author and character and develops theories and methodologies based on female experience, the touchstone of authenticity. The gynocritic discovers in her authors and characters an understanding of female identity--not that she expects that her authors and heroines to be superwomen, but the essential struggle will be towards a coherent identity, a realization towards selfhood and autonomy" (9). Elaine Showalter expresses her views as follows: "Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture" (131).

Gynocritics attempt to rescue neglected women writers from the graveyards of ignorance. They trace the role of the heroine as opposed to the expected role of the hero. As Nancy K. Miller notes in "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction", with reference to French writers "...the reader's sense of security, itself dependent on the heroine's, comes from

feeling, not that the heroine will triumph in some conventionally positive way, but that she will transcend the perils of plot with a self-exalting dignity" (346-347). In Atwood's "anti-gothic" novel, Lady Oracle, her heroine, Joan, is the ultimate controller of the plot, for she plans all of its machinations with her manipulation of truth. In some respects, Joan takes on characteristics normally attributed to the mysterious male.

However, gynocriticism cannot remain in total isolation from the critical dialogue outside boundaries established by gender, and must therefore, participate within the critical dialogue. Gynocriticism has been attacked for wishing to replace the master narrative with the mistress narrative. Nothing would be changed under a matriarchal literature with the one exception of the title. In this respect, gynesis (French feminist theory) is correct in its gender-neutral critical pursuits because it studies primarily feminine writing in the context of male authors and theorists. Some of the main proponents of this type of feminist theory are Julia Kristeva, Toril Moi and Helene Cixous.

According to Moi,

...the fact that there are no purely female intellectual traditions available to us is not as depressing

as it might have been. What is important is whether we can produce a recognisable feminist impact through our specific use (appropriation) of available material. This emphasis on the productive transformation of other thinkers' material in a way simply restates what creative thinkers and writers have always done: nobody thinks well in a vacuum, nor does anybody ever live in one (119).

By avoiding the history of the previous male theorists and avoiding the study of male writers, gynesis argues that feminism remains marginalized--a sub-form of literary criticism. It is only by appropriating the literary texts into the context of feminist criticism that female writers and critics claim their rightful position within the discipline of literary studies.

For the purposes of this thesis, feminism will be defined as a focus on the identity of the female within the context of the patriarchy and how the role of the feminine is played out within the confines of this environment. However, in accordance with the ideas of gynesis, Bakhtinian analysis will be introduced as a male theoretical framework. It is inappropriate to bypass the critical thought of Bakhtin simply because of his historical contribution to the patriarchy.

Bakhtin becomes a relevant theorist for this thesis in his use of the term "heteroglossia". For Bakhtin, an utterance's meaning is determined by its participation "in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces" (272). Thus, the language of an epoch, of an era, or of a generation is fleeting and elusive. It can never fully signify the same intent to another. He strongly differentiates between poetry and artistic prose by arguing that the poetical expression is one sole personal expression whereas the prose writer in the novel must engage in heteroglossia and thus open the work to a variety of interpretations in using semi-alien language or alien language in the dialogues of characters or in the authorial voice. The very nature of artistic prose necessitates appropriating the language of others and engaging in a multitude of meanings on a number of social strata:

The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages--rather, he welcomes them into his

work. The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master. Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at *different angles*, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embedded and already objectivized (299-300).

Bakhtin is a sociologically oriented theorist. In his argument in "Discourse in the Novel", he gives several examples of how language may be claimed by an author but may still be the apparent property of another. He includes an excerpt from Dickens' Little Dorritt.

In a day or two it was announced to all the town, that Edmund Sparkler, Esquire, son-in-law of the eminent Mr. Merdle of worldwide renown, was made one of the Lords of the Circumlocution Office; and proclamation was issued, to all true believers, that this admirable *appointment was to be hailed as a graceful and gracious Decimus, to that commercial interest which must ever in*

a great commercial country--and all the rest of it, with blast of trumpet. So, bolstered by this mark of Government homage, the wonderful Bank and all the other wonderful undertakings went on and went up; and gapers came to Harley Street, Cavendish Square, only to look at the house where the golden wonder lived (303).

It is Bakhtin's contention that the italics mark the point where "the speech of another is introduced into the author's discourse (the story) in *concealed form*, that is, without any of the formal markers usually accompanying such speech" (303). This is the method used by both Atwood and Urquhart.

Each of these writers incorporates Gothic terminology and Gothic motifs within the context of their own writing. Each of these motifs has unavoidable historical reverberations as well as contemporary significances. Thus, heteroglossia is working on their Gothic elements leading to various interpretations for each class and sub-class of readers of Atwood and Urquhart. It becomes essential that in examining their neo-Gothic fiction, that one has an approximate knowledge of the historical significance of the Gothic novel in order to appreciate the more

current essence of the written word. The recurring Gothic motifs of Atwood and Urquhart are primarily directed towards their female characters, thereby creating a female-oriented novel.

Both authors make use of the elements of the traditionally accepted Gothic novel in their feminist neo-Gothic novels. These elements combine in the swirl of the centripetal and centrifugal forces of Bakhtin to create an original message. This message is a simple one--that females should be able and willing to take responsibility for themselves. The paradigms of the fleeing damsel are outmoded. The former elements of female repression transform into elements of freedom when a subversive genre, which has frequently whispered support for women, is used. For example in Changing Heaven, it is only when she materializes into a ghost that Arianna is truly able to experience freedom. In terms of the traditional Gothic novel, the ghostly spectre is a symbol for regret, sadness, or for revenge. Urquhart is able to transgress the normal expectations of the reader in order to present the alternative message of reclaimed power. Conversely, Atwood's characters are often unable to extricate themselves from the trap of indecisiveness and from the prevailing Gothic model of blushing heroines and virile males.

This type of criticism has not yet been explored in the context of this area and in fact, generally, the element of Gothic writing in Canadian fiction has been overlooked by Canadian critics. There are, however, a few exceptions. The most substantial work completed to date is Margot Northey's The Haunted Wilderness. She notes that the term "gothic" has three main areas of analysis: spiritual, psychological and social. As argued here, she suggests that "...the social connotation of gothicism is played down by critics" (5). In her analysis of Atwood's Surfacing, she defines it as being sociological gothic which the Americans considered to be the "primary evil" (67). The sense of malaise inherent in Gothic works is caused by "two equally dangerous alternatives, the double menace of nature and civilization" (67). In The Haunted Wilderness, Northey concludes that, "By taking us into mysterious spiritual and psychological realms, gothic writers have provided an alternative to the more familiar paths of realistic writers" (110). Although Northey expresses an interest in sociological readings of Canadian Gothic literature, her approach is restricted to this type of reading and she does not consider a feminist approach, which is crucial for reading Atwood.

Margery Fee comments on the work of Margot Northey and of Eli Mandel with reference to their study of the Gothic elements in Canadian fiction. According to her, the search for a unique Canadian identity has been the primary focus of their work. They have developed a comparison between Canada and the Gothic heroine with Canada being pursued by the United States instead of a villain. The only other work related to Canadian Gothic literature is an essay by Atwood, "Canadian Monsters: Some Aspects of the Supernatural in Canadian Fiction"; this approach does not have much relevance to this thesis.

There have been several studies completed which concentrate specifically on the Gothic in Atwood, with references to Lady Oracle and Surfacing. In "Atwood Gothic", Eli Mandel discusses her poetry as well as Surfacing, contending that the Gothic aspects of her work arise mainly from her preoccupation with totemic animals and her customary fascination with mirrors and reduplication. Although Mandel's original premise of the influence of Gothic writing upon Atwood is correct, since the date of publication of this essay in 1977, Atwood's development of the Gothic genre has far exceeded the scope of Mandel's argument. Other critics of Atwood's use of Gothic motifs include Sybil Korff Vincent, Susan Rosowski, and Arnold and Cathy

Davidson. Their studies will be mentioned in the chapter on Lady Oracle.

In order to fully appreciate the manner in which Atwood and Urquhart have integrated the Gothic style into their work, one must have an understanding of the Gothic techniques. Generally speaking, the techniques which originally developed in the eighteenth century became universal in their application and, very quickly, were essential in creating the horrifying atmosphere that so delighted and still entertains its readers.

Gothic literature had its origin in Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764). This novel contained much of the eventually traditional established formula for Gothic novels such as an exotic location far removed from England both in space and in time, ghosts, threatening male figures, heroes, and inexplicable events (such as bleeding statues). Walpole does not attempt to placate the reader at the conclusion of his novel by offering implausible explanations for the supernatural events as some of his followers did.

In Ann Radcliffe's novels, virtue is always rewarded by a happy marriage. Young innocent ladies who are at the mercy of cruel men and who proclaim their virtue and innocence never seem to be harmed, escaping unscathed. Emily in The Mysteries of

Udolpho and Ellena in The Italian both manage successfully to attract the appropriate valiant heroes and to disarm the would-be villains. Of these pioneers in the Gothic genre, Radcliffe is the most well-known eighteenth century Gothic writer today-- possibly because of Northanger Abbey, Jane Austen's satire of The Mysteries of Udolpho.

By the time that Austen was writing her spoof of Gothic novels, the characteristics of the Gothic novel had become generally established in the minds of its readers. They were familiar enough with the Gothic conventions to enjoy the mockery being made of them in the naivete of Catherine Morland. The readers of the Gothic novel were attuned to the traditions that had been implemented by Horace Walpole and that had been further refined under the craft of Ann Radcliffe. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Gothic novel as a genre had gained momentum.

In Gothic fiction, the characters are not generally well developed. For example, the main characters usually consist of an innocent, virtuous marriageable young lady who, early in life, is wrenched from the protection of her family of origin and who frequently is consigned to the dubious care of an alternate protector. The heroine has only herself to rely upon in the

inevitable trials which confront her in the dangerous machinations of the plot. Although there is a gallant and brave man who is desperately in love with her, circumstances and villains conspire to force distance between the two. Quite frequently, this young lady and young man are uneasily related. They are not quite brother and sister but have been brought up in the same home by the identical father. (Often, the mother has passed away or met with a mysterious fate. If she is still alive, there is usually a relationship of conflict established between the mother and the daughter.) From The Castle of Otranto onwards, incest becomes an underlying aspect of Gothic literature.

Generally, the hero and the heroine were both born of noble families. The main objection to Ellena by Vivaldi's family in The Italian is that she is of humble birth. However, all is revealed and it is discovered that the actual conditions surrounding the family are more exalted than was previously understood. Normally the revelation of identity is due to a coincidence such as a unique birthmark, as in the instance of Theodore in The Castle of Otranto.

Other characters include the villain, the priest who dispenses frequent advice, a trusted friend, the loyal servant

and monsters or grotesque humans. An example of a monster would be the creature which Frankenstein has created--itself a corruption of humanity--or the character of Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights who is originally considered to be less than human by the family. These are examples of the fascination with the creation of life which Gothicism holds as one of its tenets well as its rejection of the traditional class structure in Bronte's Catherine's championing of Heathcliff--a character who is an outcast from society.

Gothic novels transgressed the polite boundaries of society and, at the time of their inception, inspired strong negative reactions. In The Monk, for example, "Monk" Lewis described such atrocities as the rape of a young girl in a tomb by a young man, Ambrosio, who later manages to sell his soul to the devil in order to escape from the Inquisition: "...the appearance of The Monk in 1796 made its author a showpiece at all the literary parties of that London season, though it also shocked the official guardians of morality so deeply that for perhaps a hundred years it remained bootleg reading" (Fiedler 129).

The characters tend to be portrayed in definitive roles--either evil or good--and the plot is usually developed in formulaic patterns. As S.L. Varnado states, "If they were to

succeed, all respectable Gothic novels had to show evidence of moldering castles, underground passages, clanking chains, and ghostly visitants. Once worked out, the formula became inflexible" (26). Events unfold rapidly amidst a vast outpouring of emotion. Characters gnash their teeth, emit horrendous groans at opportune moments, and foam at the mouth.

Despite the apparent departure from reality throughout the course of the book, at its conclusion, the normal social order is restored. Supernatural forces have either been adequately explained or have been appeased by the vindication of the offended ghost and they vanish under the tranquil peace of the new order. In this way, Gothic literature proceeds from Shakespeare's Hamlet. The appearing ghost, the violent reaction of Claudius at the play and the lethal treacheries of deposing a king and murder are all similar in scope to the traditional Gothic novel.

Writers of our generation have taken the Gothic novel and have proceeded to use it in innovative ways. For example, Atwood in Bluebeard's Egg and Lady Oracle develops characters who, despite being apparently confined to a stereotypical Gothic role, manage successfully to escape to create a new definition of themselves. This tradition of a female experiencing a profound

personal change occurs for the first time in Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice: "Jane Austen's heroines are the first in English fiction to undergo serious moral change" (Spacks 115). Austen, writing at the same time as the main flurry of the production of Gothic novels, has an important point to illustrate here. During this period of literary activity, the emerging female writers were developing their own personal self-awareness. This concept of redefinition of self may be associated with the women writers who were breaking authorial ground on their own during the emergence of the dark novel of romance. Developing a new significance for the neo-Gothic form, critics in their turn have created perspectives on the Gothic novel beyond its original intent to horrify.

Many critics have read Gothic novels using a variety of methods. Some of the more useful commentaries include the work of Ellen Moers, G.R. Thompson, Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, Robert Kiely and Elizabeth MacAndrew.

Ellen Moers, a pioneer in the field of feminist literary studies, views Frankenstein as primarily a birth myth and relates it to Mary Shelley's own tragic experiences as a mother: "Here, I think, is where Mary Shelley's book is most interesting, most powerful, and most feminine: in the motif of revulsion against

newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences" (93). A novel such as Frankenstein contains no main female character with the exception of Victor's adopted sister, Elizabeth. When one considers the biography of Mary Shelley (as Moers does), one is struck by the hideous intermingling of birth and death which surrounded her throughout her life. The monster which forever remains nameless is both the hunter and the hunted for Victor Frankenstein. Their destinies are inevitably linked together. When we examine the Gothic texts of Atwood and Urquhart, we notice that very few of the female characters are mothers. Maud and Mary are the only ones of Urquhart's characters who have children. Maud's child is abnormal and Mary abandons her children in her search for her demon lover. Is it likely that in order to claim the role of Gothic heroine one must cast aside a maternal role? The answer would appear to be affirmative.

G.R. Thompson takes the perspective that the historical Gothic genre is primarily distinct from the works by men. His approach reinforces the style that Urquhart and Atwood both employ--a flowing movement of mystery:

Their [*these books*'] appeal was not intellectual but emotional. The reader is not invited to unpick a knot, but to enjoy the emotion of mystery; the knot, indeed, is not unpicked at all; at the appointed hour an incantation is breathed over it, and it dissolves, for the methods of an enchantress are not those of Sherlock Holmes (262).

With the possible exception of Joan Foster, both of the Canadian writers weave a spell over their fictional world by establishing their main character as the possessor of otherworldly qualities. The novels are not resolved into a happy or into a tragic conclusion but have an indefinite resolution. For S.L. Varnado, the power of the Gothic arises out of the idea of the numinous proposed by Rudolf Otto. The numinous is "man's underlying sense of supernatural fear, wonder, and delight when he is confronted by the divine" and "is...the essential goal of the Gothic writer" (12). Thus, the Gothic evokes an emotional response in the reader which is the desired end--not the content itself. A strong emotional response is frequently the reader's reaction as a result of reading the neo-Gothic novels of both Atwood and Urquhart. By invoking identifying emotions on the part of the

readers for the characters, they are able potentially to effect change in their readers by eliciting hope in alternate realities.

Bayer-Berenbaum says of the revolutionary spirit of Gothicism that,

Gothicism allies itself with revolutionary movements because it cannot tolerate any restriction upon the individual, and thus Gothicism is not merely revolutionary but anarchistic in its sympathies. As all forms of order disintegrate, the Gothic mind is free to invade the realms of the socially forbidden (43).

In a period when religious and social order was disintegrating, it became a way to reflect the current reality as well as a method to contain the supernatural or Godhead closer to the individual. Revolution was the ideal mode of expression for a society primarily concerned with the individual and freedom. The decay in the Gothic setting reflects the decay rampant in the morality and politics. The fervour of the times becomes the emotional expression in the villain and in the heroine--each determined that their way was the one to be followed. Neither was afraid of a resulting clash, as is demonstrated in Emily's

persistent refusals to fall in with the demands of Montoni. Emily would not agree to marry the man whom Montoni was determined that she would marry despite the various unspoken threats of dire repercussions if she did not obey his commands.

Kiely makes a telling observation on the characters of the traditional Gothic novel in his study of the Romantic novel that will be part of the analysis of Joan in Lady Oracle. He states that, in the Romantic novel, "the reader discovers the expected array of Byronic heroes and persecuted heroines, but he also discovers that they each have their mundane, unimpressive, and even comic side" (26).

With respect to Urquhart, Elizabeth MacAndrew comments that, "The central device in Otranto became the most famous of all Gothic devices: the identity of the castle or house with its owner. The castle in Walpole's novel is Manfred" (13). In The Whirlpool, Urquhart reverses this device by giving the tent to Floda who leaves before the more solid structure being erected gives more power to David. As well, MacAndrew reads the Gothic novel in psychological terms. This brand of criticism will come into use throughout the following chapters.

Finally, Urquhart's use of Gothic techniques is enhanced by Coral Ann Howells' explanation of the critical idea of emotion in

Gothic fiction. The development of the feelings of the characters is assisted in its description by the device of landscape. The Gothic world for Howells is constantly experiencing the possibility of inherent collapse. Its stability is drawn into question. She, too, reads conventional Gothic texts psychologically.

A negative perspective on the Gothic novel comes when it is associated with the dubious class of the popular novel. Originally, these novels were written to satiate a burgeoning middle class who were apparently insufficiently educated to enjoy the classics and poetry. This group usually consisted of primarily a female audience. Therefore, according to the educated male upper classes of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, if a piece of literature was to be presented to the common reader with no claim to literary pretensions, then it must by association be considered less than appropriate for study. Unfortunately, this stigma against the Gothic novel was long lasting. In the first line of her preface, J.M.S. Tompkins expresses her opinion clearly: "A book devoted to the display of tenth-rate fiction stands in need of justification" (v). Before Tompkins was able to delve into the Gothic genre, she felt the need to explain her rationale for choosing such an apparently

disreputable form. All too frequently, the Gothic novel has had to be defended from public perception that it was a mediocre genre, as the work of Tompkins illustrates, although the image of the Gothic novel is now beginning to change perceptibly in a positive manner.

Some of these critical approaches are not relevant for the purposes of this study. David Punter for example, has taken a psychoanalytic approach with Freudian readings. He suggests that we are so preoccupied with the study of the Gothic novel because we are fascinated by the possibility that we too, are in potential danger:

What we have in those writings are two sets of depictions of psychotic states of mind; the 'dreadful pleasure' evoked by Gothic fiction...it is also the terror that we may be in danger of losing our minds, that the madness exemplified in the text may end up by removing some of our own usual life co-ordinates and leaving us adrift, the victims of a transgression which can no longer be healed (7).

According to Leslie Fiedler, another psychoanalytic critic, the Gothic is a genre which replaces the theme of love in the

Sentimental novel with terror and which represents the symbiotic nature of the maiden and the villain:

...the flight itself figures forth the essential meaning of the anti-bourgeois gothic, for which the girl on the run and her pursuer become only alternate versions of the same plight. Neither can rest before the other--for each is the projection of his opposite--anima and animus--actors in a drama which depends on both for its significance" (131).

For Fiedler, the Maiden in flight represents "the uprooted soul of the artist" (131). Although these readings of Gothic novels are appropriate regarding the original texts for the reasons previously outlined, the feminist societal approach is a more appropriate means for broadening the understanding of contemporary Canadian works. The psychoanalytic approach would severely limit our readings of these texts by reducing our understanding of Atwood's and Urquhart's female neo-Gothic heroines.

Atwood and Urquhart are able to rewrite these familiar Gothic patterns in order to revive them in original creations which provide meaning for modern readers. For example,

Urquhart's main character in The Whirlpool manages to successfully extricate herself from the stereotype of Laura Secord, a role which her husband inevitably demands of her. Joan of Lady Oracle overcomes her personal limitations as a Gothic heroine and potentially becomes more able to participate in the actual world without reliance upon the security of lies.

In The Saturated Self, Kenneth Gergen argues that in this postmodern world in which we are immersed, our sense of self is vanishing due to the quantity of information that we are expected to assimilate daily. As well, we are battling two views of the self--the romantic and the rational. The Gothic novel becomes more relevant in light of this current debate because it is precisely these opposing elements which the novel attempts to integrate. Gose suggests that the genteel emotions of the Augustan Age were acceptable topics for novels but that the stronger emotions were the territory of the Gothic novel:

The gothic novel paid lip service to the mild emotions of sensibility--pity, sorrow, generous feelings--but mainly as a cushion for its leaps into the ruder chasms of sensation--hatred, fear, and terror. Atmospherically also, the gothic novel moved away from fictional realism. Instead of being

content with the contemporary, the natural and the everyday, these novels cultivated the past, the supernatural, and the mysterious (21).

Despite the consensus about the characteristics of the Gothic novel, there are many differing views about the validity of its position in the current canon. However, the Gothic novel, a vehicle of expression that has both denigrated and praised female abilities, is an emerging presence in Canadian fiction and is being used to rewrite the female experience as seen in according to Atwood and Urquhart. The social conventions that have been followed by women for several hundred years may not in fact be solely imposed by a socially dominant patriarchy but instead, may be the result of a long established pattern and accepted by women themselves. This statement is especially true for the neo-Gothic writing of Atwood.

Although the virtues ostensibly praised by the Gothic writers are the servitude of women and their subservience to men, the female characters demonstrate an intelligence and versatility which would seem to indicate the separate virtue of independence. Emily St. Aubert, despite repeated attempts on the part of the various villains in The Mysteries of Udolpho, is able to keep her

virginity intact for her impending marriage to Valancourt. This is relevant to Catherine in Wuthering Heights as well. She is initially inclined to marry Edgar Linton for social position and for money, but her emotional expression of love for Heathcliff gives her the only respectable escape from an unhappy marriage possible in that era--death.

In the following chapters, fiction by Urquhart and Atwood will be examined in the context of their Gothic content and the means by which ideas of Gothic relevance will be explored. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, Gothic heroines who are often imprisoned in castles or houses are considered to be "captured, fettered" (83). In Canadian Gothic fiction, we will see how the heroines manage to escape from both male and societal constraints.

Current Canadian writers have developed the Gothic form in new ways through which they are able to make current applicable social commentary using a well-understood medium. These writers include not only Atwood and Urquhart but also include Robertson Davies, Margaret Duley, Sheila Watson and Mordecai Richler. It is this innovative treatment of an accepted historical genre by Atwood and Urquhart which will be examined here. Even though the original tradition has many sexist stereotypes, its females were

quite adventurous in many ways, exploring uncharted ground for the times and despite all the odds, they managed to retain their virginity and their integrity by a combination of both luck and ingenuity. The heroines demonstrated courage and resourcefulness under trying circumstances. Our heroines present us with new paradigms and models to emulate and upon which to reflect when Canadian writers explore common fears and threats both physically and psychologically within the context of an imperfect society needing improvement. Some of our previously conceived ideas may require to be reformulated. Are the patterns of the meek and fleeing heroine really being imposed upon women or conversely, do women settle for a well-known role? If, as Atwood would seem to suggest in her novels and collections, the latter is true, then these new paradigms and models must be forged by women who are courageous enough to break with the comfortable confines of conventions. The patterns for which Urquhart would appear to be arguing consist of the quest for a unique identity within the blurring confines of a relationship and the need to abandon oneself to one's instincts instead of maintaining a rigid behavioural code. If one could find a link between the two novelists, perhaps it would be that they are both concentrating on transformation and the fusion of opposites even

though neither of these is always possible. The females in question have the choice between personal change or blending personalities with their loved one while retaining individuality.

In this thesis, a total of five primary texts will be studied. For Atwood, the chosen works are Lady Oracle and Bluebeard's Egg. The first, Lady Oracle, will open up a theme that will continue throughout the Atwood chapters: a theme of longing to know a secret and to break away from the expected story. Yet the longing experienced by many of Atwood's characters is exacerbated by their complete inability either to act or to perceive the reality which surrounds them. As well, in Atwood's neo-Gothic, women are primarily presented in terms of their connection to men, and often the females are portrayed as victims who are fleeing from menacing situations. Lady Oracle provides the stock Gothic elements and twists them to create a satire of pathos in the character of Joan. Although the most obviously Gothic of all of Atwood's writings, the subsequent texts continue the development of many of the devices used in Lady Oracle; other Atwood texts, such as Wilderness Tips and The Robber Bride could be discussed in terms of their Gothic content but the limitations of space precludes any analysis.

Jane Urquhart's three novels, The Whirlpool, Changing Heaven, and Away will provide the material for an analysis of her neo-Gothic texts. Each of these three novels has a unique voice. In The Whirlpool, there are three simultaneous plots which swirl around each other in a manner very similar to the main symbol of the novel--the whirlpool itself. Each of the three main characters experiences significant change by the novel's conclusion. Urquhart focuses more on the romantic aspect of the Gothic novel instead of upon its more malignant components. Unlike the traditional Gothic heroine, the protagonist never adheres to the role which society expects from her, immediately transgressing the normal realm of the Gothic heroine. Urquhart effects the change in this character by emphasizing her insistence upon the world of dreams. Fleda refuses to compromise and to comply.

In Urquhart's second novel, the subject under scrutiny once again is the Gothic romance. With her concentrated focus upon the blending of emotion and weather/landscape, Urquhart tries to reconcile the teetering balance between males and females with the question of how two people may be one relationship. Although she explores the more evil sides of love in Arianna's murder, Urquhart's characters in their quest for fulfilment never seem to

be as malicious as some of Atwood's characters. Ultimately, their search for significance is completed with acceptance before becoming unified with the living earth.

Finally, Urquhart in Away considers the question of non-threatening demon lovers and feminine self-gratification. This is the least Gothic of her writings and she incorporates a fairy tale framework to assist in the telling.

Urquhart's and Atwood's reworking of classical Gothic motifs will include a focus on the independent resourcefulness of the heroine, an original composition of the prototype of the villain as well as a redefinition of the grotesque, the use of doubles and reflections of characters, the crucial role of the mother in the development of the heroine and the use of landscape in contemporary neo-Gothic literature. These elements will be examined from the perspective of any innovations made to the original form on the part of either author and the apparent purpose underlying the alteration made to the original formula.

Chapter Two

UNRAVELLING THE GOTHIC WEB:

ATWOOD'S LADY ORACLE

Lady Oracle is a complex novel that frequently presents convoluted versions of reality. Its strong Gothic components assist in creating its sometimes confusing structure. Throughout the novel, Atwood uses traditional Gothic motifs to question and to confront prevailing ideologies about women. As the strength of her neo-Gothic novel increases with her use of Gothic elements, the effectiveness of the orthodox Gothic novel is diminished in that Atwood has discarded its customary formula. Thus, she proclaims her novel to be an "anti-gothic" (Struthers 23-24). This reversal results in an intermingling of a parody of the Gothic novel while simultaneously relying on its devices in order to convey her theme. Ultimately Atwood's neo-Gothic message is that females are generally unable to extricate themselves from the rigid structure of these romances, and therefore they remain within the romantic social framework within which they have imprisoned themselves. Despite Atwood's efforts to free her characters from socially imposed definitions, women such as Joan Foster are too mired in social conventions and in

their stereotypically imposed roles to abandon them. Thus, Atwood's characters remain in social bondage despite their occasional glimpses into alternate potential realities. By writing with Gothic elements, Atwood is able to speak with an historic voice, one that still retains popularity with many female readers. Her emphasis on the absence of personal meaning from her characters' lives illustrates the quiet despair that many women who follow conventional romantic paradigms frequently experience.

Lady Oracle satirizes the typical Gothic heroine, in this case, Joan Foster. In some respects, this heroine is akin to Norhanger Abbey in that Catherine Morland is initially described as an anti-heroine: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (1). Despite Joan's somewhat desperate attempts to emulate the classical Gothic heroine in the context of her everyday personal life, the reader inevitably views her as belonging to the realm of pathos due to her constant efforts to escape from her own personal identity and history. Joan wants to avoid exposing any individuality and attempts to dilute her personal responsibility by assuming the role of Gothic heroine, a role which by its very nature reduces the multi-faceted world into a system of simple

duality. Males are either villains or heroes: females are victims or heroines. The nature of this system is one of reliable comfort and Joan ultimately is unable to relinquish her dependency upon it. Throughout the course of the novel, the reader recognizes Joan's foibles and simultaneously is being forced to confront how the Gothic model operates within his/her own personal level of existence. The satire present in this anti-gothic novel serves to explicate the inherent problems within the Gothic framework for women while concurrently emphasizing its overwhelming pervasive modern appeal.

Although Atwood classifies Lady Oracle as anti-gothic, she also connects the novel to the tradition of such novels as A Christmas Garland, Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, and Pride and Prejudice (Struthers 25) all of which are significant in the development of the Gothic genre. By writing an anti-gothic, Atwood is redefining the classical model of the genre. For example, the ending is not the comfortable expected conclusion of convention. Joan, our multi-faceted heroine, is not able to overcome the Gothic restrictions which she has imposed upon herself. By not telling many lies, she falls into her new role in Nurse of the High Arctic. Joan resorts to her typical role as the subservient female at the conclusion.

Gothic novels are normally placed within the confines of the male arena in that the patriarchy is upheld at the conclusion of these novels. This is despite the quasi-rebellion expressed by the main heroine by means of her unconventional exploits throughout the course of the novel. By having Joan fail to achieve the conventionally accepted role of heroine, Atwood has appropriated the historical Gothic language and has imposed a new significance upon it. This layering of the past and the present periods produces the heteroglossia of Bakhtin. A new Gothic language comes into being with Atwood's construction of the anti-gothic. This creates satire along with black comedy. However, Lady Oracle is not a comic/gothic novel, as some would suggest.

According to Sybil Korff Vincent, Atwood has created a sub-genre, the Comic Gothic by arguing that "Unlike the traditional Gothic, which has no humour, this novel abounds in ludicrous images and metaphors" (158). Although Vincent is quite correct in her point that Lady Oracle transgresses the conventional limitations of Gothic literature, the "ludicrous images" inspire more of a feeling of pathos than of humour. Joan is living her life according to male precepts and is unable to extricate herself from her socially imposed personal vision of her sexually objectified body. It is the trauma associated with the attempt

to exist in accordance with both Gothic regulations and ideals that causes Joan to become a tragic heroine as opposed to the blissful Gothic heroine. Lady Oracle does not conclude with an impending marriage, for example, and Joan does not recognize the restrictions under which she is placing herself.

Yet other critics such as Barbara Rigney and Nancy J. Peterson bypass the Gothic elements in favour of an emphasis on fairy tales, while still others, like Jerome Rosenberg, only briefly mention the Gothic elements present in the work. While many of these critics (i.e. Clara Thomas and Pamela S. Bromberg) do study the novel from a feminist perspective, they miss the crucial feminist argument presented in Atwood's use of Gothic motifs. For example, Arnold E. Davidson and Cathy N. Davidson do examine the novel in terms of its Gothic content but their primary focus is upon the intermingling of fantasy and reality as well as duality: "If men have a dual role in women's lives, then women must exhibit a corresponding duality. They must either be victims or heroines--sometimes threatened, sometimes saved" (172).

Those critics who have studied the Gothic presence in Lady Oracle have varying perspectives upon it. For Gayle Greene, the "recycling [of] the materials of Gothics, women's fear of mothers

and men, and reworking the conventions of Gothics, with their disastrous implications for women leads to "happier ends" (Changing the Story 189). Although Atwood does rework "images conventionally associated with female doom", she does not "transform them into symbols of power" (Greene 189). Greene's primary focus is upon these standard female symbols (i.e. the mirror and sewing) instead of upon the Gothic elements themselves. Ann McMillan would agree with Greene that the ending is somewhat positive, being "ambiguous yet hopeful" (63) in that Joan has attained a modicum of self-awareness. She classifies Lady Oracle with Austen's Northanger Abbey as a "mixed Gothic" (57) throughout which "the transforming eye represents a transitional stage in the moral awareness of the heroines, who begin by naively modelling themselves on heroines of Gothic fantasy and, in so doing, narrowly miss the dismal fates allotted to heroines of Gothic naturalism" (49-50). McMillan defines the transforming eye as being the simultaneous occurrence of the heroine's creation and recognition of her saviour as hero. She agrees with the contention of this thesis that the enemy for Atwood is men and that this apparent "clarity is obscured by recognition of complicity. There can be no villains without victims" (60).

Susan J. Rosowski reads Lady Oracle as a Gothic search for identity: "These birth-death struggles of the self that run throughout Lady Oracle represent the relationship between the individual and her social mythology: the individual creates and destroys characters in response to that mythology. To find her personal identity beneath those creations, she must seek, therefore, in myth, for the two are inextricably fused" (204). Rosowski's reading of the novel as sociological Gothic is a useful starting point for an analysis of Lady Oracle, as Joan unravels her way through the maze of deceit that she has created in the guises of her various personae. As Rosowski points out: "In Lady Oracle, Atwood turns this tradition [the Gothic tradition] back upon itself, confronting the Gothic dimensions that exist within our social mythology" (197).

In this chapter, the role of the heroine in the Gothic context will be closely studied. How does Joan simultaneously play out the classical Gothic definition of a heroine while creating a parody of that same role? Why does Joan Foster do this? Her part will be examined in the context of the following areas: the theme of persecution, the elements of disguise and the grotesque, Joan's physical inappropriateness in relation to her desired position as heroine, the supernatural element, mazes

and sexuality along with the quest motif, mirrors and, finally, mothers in Gothic fiction. An attempt will be made to understand how Atwood reworks commonplace characters, deeds and situations in order to demonstrate how they produce Gothic surroundings within an apparently realistic context.

The "Gothic dimensions" within the everyday framework have a negative impact upon Joan. One of the means by which this becomes apparent is through Joan's carefully crafted lies told in order to preserve her secrets. Every traditional Gothic novel would contain some secrets which the heroine would attempt either to uncover or to conceal. Throughout the course of the novel, Joan tries to do both.

She keeps the illusions in place even for her husband. When Arthur proposes to her and reveals that he is apparently aware of the extent of her lies, Joan is relieved to know that he has only uncovered one of several layers: "But how annoyed he'd be if he discovered he'd only made it as far as the first layer...I decided to postpone my revelations to some later date" (LQ 198-199). Joan is symbolically buried in lies in a similar manner as she was previously disguised in an overweight body. She, like Charlotte (the heroine of Joan's latest Costume Gothic), is striving to find the centre of the maze--the reason for being.

Joan is an atypical heroine, at first buried in her layers of fat, but she undergoes a metamorphosis from a metaphorical mothball to an attractive young lady in order to come into her inheritance from her Aunt Lou. Even though she physically develops into the role of a more typical heroine, Joan still retains her unconventional status. The lies that she relates are another indication of her individuality because most Gothic heroines are willing to speak only the truth. It is interesting that in her extreme efforts to apply the veneer of the Gothic heroine to herself, Joan manages only to emphasize her own individuality by failing to incorporate all of the appropriate Gothic attributes. Even though she is a very unusual Gothic heroine, (for example, she seduces Arthur, a total contravention of the established rules), she still perceives typical Gothic events surrounding her.

Joan experiences persecution from her mother--the Gothic malignant maternal figure. She discovers cakes and baked goods left around the house by her mother in order to tempt her to abandon her diet. This malignant maternal character appears to take perverse pleasure in Joan's obesity. Eventually, when Joan's mother realizes that Joan will be successful and plans to move out, she loses control and attacks Joan. "Then she took a

paring knife from the kitchen counter--I had been using it to spread cottage cheese on my RyKrisp--and stuck it into my arm, above the elbow" (LO 124).

These attacks are not restricted only to her mother but extend to her other relationships as well. For example, as the Polish count's jealousy mounts, he becomes increasingly violent towards her: "Paul was beginning to frighten me" (LO 161). Her involvement with the Royal Porcupine along with his grotesque art eventually leads to Joan being stalked by an unknown person. This is an event which is paralleled in her own Costume Gothic novel. She finally concludes that the perpetrator is Arthur: "Malevolence was flowing towards me, around me...It had to be a single person, with a plan, a plot that had some end in view...It was Arthur...I was afraid now, almost afraid to move; what if he woke up, eyes glittering, and reached for me?" (LO 294-295). It is at this point that she realizes that, "Every man I'd ever been involved with...had had two selves: my father, healer and killer; the man in the tweed coat, my rescuer and possibly also a pervert; the Royal Porcupine and his double, Chuck Brewer; even Paul, who I'd always believed had a sinister life I couldn't penetrate. Why should Arthur be any exception?" (LO 295). Joan

finds it extremely difficult to accept the complex nature of reality, especially in terms of the men in her life.

The theme of persecution is a common one in Gothic writing. Frequently, the persecution is the threat of physical damage as in the example of Emily and Montoni, but as Jane Austen so cleverly satirizes the Gothic genre in Northanger Abbey, sometimes the villain is only imagined. Catherine's concept of the horrific murder of Mrs. Tilney by her husband, the General, is one that re-emerges in Joan's own fantastic imaginings about her mother's death. She has visions of her father pushing her mother down the stairs and thinks that he is faking his grief over her demise:

I had a sudden image of him sneaking out of the hospital, wearing his white mask so he would not be recognized, driving back to the house, letting himself in with his key, removing his shoes, putting on his slippers and creeping up behind her. He was a doctor, he'd been in the underground, he'd killed people before, he would know how to break her neck and make it look like an accident (LO 179).

Because this satire is so obvious an allusion to Austen, one must accept the fact that this is one aspect of Lady Oracle that is anti-gothic. As Ildiko de Papp Carrington argues: "In both novels, the heroines' false theories are punctured by the widower's insistence that they loved their wives. Thus the cruel Gothic husband is shown to be a figment of the heroine's imagination" (71).

Atwood is satirizing Joan's fantasizing. Although this vision of Joan's father may be pure fabrication on the part of his daughter, the threats which she is receiving daily cannot be so easily explained. Even though wild imaginings must be discounted, Gothic fears are not always of the mind. Women in society are victimized frequently by "dark strangers" and often, these men are ambiguous. Joan must accept that human nature is dual, even multi-faceted. The simplicity of Gothic virtues and vices does not hold true in a real environment. Joan is receiving dual messages. She has truly been attacked by her mother. This is not a figment of her imagination, but the increasingly violent potentials of Paul and Arthur may well be the result of fertile imaginings. But in Gothic novels, the imaginings of the heroines frequently result in their discovering that these fabrications are, in fact, not exaggerated and do

exist. It is possible that Joan's father is capable of murder as Joan has previously been told. Unlike in conventional Gothic tales, no ghost appears to inform Joan of the truth and no secret revelatory manuscript is unwittingly discovered. Joan is caught in a paradox for which there appears to be no resolution. Although she is indeed guilty of presuming that Gothic qualities of good or evil exist for everyone, the more malignant of these are perfectly plausible possibilities. No one is ever as one seems to be. Atwood is creating a dichotomy between the expected plot and the actual plot of Lady Oracle. If we discount Joan's feelings of malaise, then we too are guilty of the Gothic tendency to judge superficial appearances. Just because Paul, Arthur and Chuck Brewster appear to be benevolent characters, does not mean that they are what they seem to be.

Some critics have thought that in light of Joan's heroic ineptitude, the evil characteristics attributed to her male companions are incongruous impossibilities. It is true that the novel is a burlesque in which all of Joan's precautions and disguises are complete mishaps. She is unable to successfully rid herself of her clothes, nor is she able discreetly to disguise herself effectively by removing her distinguishing trademark of long red hair. In the writing of Costume Gothics,

Joan is aspiring to attain heroine status for herself. She has a Gothic perception of herself and wishes for her life to be as romantic as Charlotte's and Felicia's. In response, Redmond is suitably enigmatic and dangerous. From Joan's perspective, Redmond expresses duality by the very fact that he is male, and as mentioned, Joan views all men as subtly sinister. On the other hand, the two women express different sexual identities and values which are dissimilar.

Joan begins to express sympathy towards Felicia who combines the roles of both the wronged and unfaithful wife throughout the writing of the novel--a feeling which is deemed to be inappropriate by Joan, even though she herself has engaged in an affair with the Royal Porcupine:

Sympathy for Felicia was out of the question, it was against the rules, it would foul up the plot completely. I was experienced enough to know that...I was getting tired of Charlotte, with her intact virtue and her tidy ways...Even her terrors were too pure, her faceless murderers, her mazes and forbidden doors (LO 321).

The reader assumes that Joan is achieving an epiphany and is becoming more able to claim her own power. However, immediately following this scene, she imagines herself being acted upon again as the victim of an insidious plot by the local Italian people: "I should never have told him I had money. I could see it all now, the plot was clear. They'd intended it, from the very first...I'd be roped and helpless...Would they kill me...Or would they keep me in a cage?" (LQ 329). These masks adopted by Joan are her disguises which assist her to retain a feeling of control over her relationships. It is an ironic statement that Joan's bungling of her various disguises is in fact the reason that she must return home, both to rescue and to explain. Her secret identities are forced upon her by the values propagated by her society. It is not respectable for one to write Gothic novels nor to be overweight. Since the ostensibly Gothic heroine creates her own havoc when perpetrating these disguises, men are thereby absolved of bringing chaos into Joan's life. Joan introduces chaos herself in her efforts to meld with her contemporary patriarchal society. Instead of fleeing from a villain, it would be of more benefit to Joan to flee from herself. This is what she is indeed attempting to do by creating her various characters and histories, each one personally crafted

for her current partner. By utilizing these disguises, Joan never permits the actual nature of her partner to emerge either. Thus, she is both victim and perpetrator.

Joan's attempts at various disguises such as her concealment behind pseudonyms (Lady Oracle and Louisa K. Delacourt) and her physical disguise in Terremoto, are not the only bases for considering her to be a Gothic heroine. Elements of the grotesque also emerge. These occur during the childhood episodes: Joan's dancing experience, her Brownie friends, and her vision of the Fat Lady. Each of these combines persecution with its more horrific aspects. When Joan is forced to play a mothball in her dance recital by Miss Flegg and her mother, she begins her life of disguises. Effectively, she steals the show with the audience responding more to her impromptu dance of rage than to the more conventional and formulaic butterflies. However, this does not compensate Joan for the intense pain of the experience. She is led to question the purpose of transformation: "So what if you turn into a butterfly? Butterflies die too" (LO 114). The Brownie group with which Joan becomes associated ends up being a travesty of the originally intended purpose. In an interesting play, Atwood uses the traditional nomenclature of the groups of six--Pixies, Gnomes

and so on. This incorporates the realm of fairyland into reality, and from there develops the truly grotesque behaviour on the part of the little girls towards Joan. She is mentally and emotionally humiliated by the cruel acts which they insist that she perform: "I had to crawl around in the snow, barking like a dog, or throw a snowball at a passing old lady..." (LO 55).

This sadistic behaviour of girls towards one another is developed further in Cat's Eye. Also in that novel, Elaine, acting as the heroine, develops the peculiar talent of being able to faint at will in order to evade the more distressing childish tortures that she was forced to undergo. The painful sequence reaches its climax for Joan when the three children tie her up and leave her to be rescued by a male stranger who conceivably could be the "bad man" who had exposed himself to her the previous week.

Joan, herself inclined towards the grotesque, is symbolically connected to the Fat Lady, who is seen as an object of ridicule. She creates a fantasy of a circus during which the Fat Lady has to make a perilous crossing on a wire and where a fall meant certain death: "The crowd...howled, pointed, jeered; they chanted insulting songs...You'd think I would have given this Fat Lady my own face, but it wasn't so simple. Instead she had the face of Theresa, my despised fellow sufferer" (LO 101-

102). By associating the element of the grotesque with the apparent heroine, Atwood is able to create a powerful statement concerning the societal position of women. A satire of the conventional woman is established so that the reader is forced to confront the stereotype. An overweight woman is so rarely the focus of literary exploration that when it occurs and when that particular woman is constantly romanticizing about herself, it becomes a source of both confusion and black comedy. Joan is constantly persecuted but the source of that oppression is for the most part, herself. Joan views the extra weight as a disguise of safety. Once it has vanished, she feels very lonely: "I longed to be fat again. It would be an insulation, a cocoon. Also it would be a disguise. I could be merely an onlooker again, with nothing too much expected of me. Without my magic cloak of blubber and invisibility, I felt naked, pruned..." (LO 141). However, the weight and her original identity are not so easily abandoned: "...the imagined--and dreaded--corpse of the old, fat Joan is indeed a murdered victim that returns to haunt its killer, the Joan who revised her past and deleted that self" (McKinstry 63). This first form of suicide foreshadows the feigned murder which directs the plot of Lady Oracle and provides the impetus for Joan's retreat to Terremoto, Italy. It also is

an example of the supernatural when Joan's vivid imagination experiences the recreation of the Fat Lady at points throughout the narrative. These monstrous creations become more autonomous, seeking power from the self, and Joan becomes haunted by the ghosts of these murdered identities clamouring for recognition. In order to regain control over herself, Joan must exorcize them. Unfortunately, she does so by re-immersing herself in a new alternate role, her inevitable realignment with another forthcoming social myth in the guise of a novel (Nurse of the High Arctic) at the end of Lady Oracle.

Her moment of metamorphosis occurs when two events simultaneously occur: the death of Joan's Aunt Lou and the misdirected arrow which stabs her. As one of the conditions of her will, Aunt Lou has dictated that Joan will have to lose one hundred pounds in order to inherit two thousand dollars. Her new position as heiress is consistent with the Gothic conventions. However, normally, the inheritance would occur at the end of the novel and would provide a legitimacy to an impending marriage for a poverty-stricken young couple. Often, a new identity is also revealed at the same time of the inheritance and the heroine will be informed that she is indeed the rightful heiress of a noble family who have been victimized by some evil, scheming relative.

Atwood has reversed this convention by placing the inheritance near the beginning of the book and by causing the inheritance to lead to Joan's propensity to conceal her real identity in various disguises and multifaceted versions of reality.

When Joan is ill after the arrow incident, she recognizes the grotesque nature of her own body: "In my lucid moments, and when I was convalescing, I thought about her other message to me, the one in her will...Did it mean she hadn't really accepted me for what I was, as I thought she had--that she found me too grotesque...?" (LO 120). Aunt Lou has been active in society in her capacity both at work and in connection with her personal life as a mistress. She would prefer for Joan to participate within society instead of being ostracized. Thus, Joan's only positive mentor is exposed to be a villain, one who has betrayed Joan's trust in a way which her boyfriends/husband had never done consciously.

Symbolically, Joan is hit with Cupid's arrow, which is a humiliating experience as it was a purposeful, vengeful practical joke. Once this happens, Joan loses thirty pounds during her blood poisoning illness caused by the wound and begins her transformation: "Strange men, whose gaze had previously slid over and around me as though I wasn't there, began to look at me

from truck cab windows and construction sites; a speculative look, like a dog eyeing a fire hydrant" (LO 122). Like Sally of "Bluebeard's Egg", Joan is slowly being coerced into becoming a participant in life instead of a complacent observer. By becoming a more active participant, Joan is tacitly agreeing to take on the more orthodox female role as a victim with predatory men eyeing her. This is an occupational hazard of Gothic heroines who attempt to retain their innocence and virginity at all costs. Joan successfully manages to reverse that conventional role once she has convinced herself to leave the Polish count and has initiated a physical relationship with Arthur.

At the onset of her illness, Joan faints in her family living room, a conventional reaction of the Gothic heroine which enables her to escape from particularly uncomfortable situations. Prolonged illness is a technique frequently utilized for a Gothic heroine to indicate either trauma or emerging change as well to demonstrate clearly that the heroines are easily shaken and are of a delicate nature. Ironically, it is Joan's "fleshy" nature that reduces the severity of the illness and which then shows her inherent hardiness--a trait not found in many of Gothic heroines.

Like any respectable Gothic novel, Lady Oracle contains a strong component of the supernatural. For example, Joan has the

ability to perform automatic writing. It is this talent that catapults her to fame in Lady Oracle. The poetry which is produced in a state of trance is extremely enigmatic and cryptic in style. Two main characters emerge: "At first the sentences centred around the same figure, the same woman...She was enormously powerful, almost like a goddess, but is was an unhappy power...Then another person, a man, began to turn up...This man was evil, I felt, but it was hard to tell. Sometimes he seemed good. He had many disguises" (LO 224). These people are herself and her ideal Byronic hero.

Joan is introduced to the supernatural by her aunt who takes her to see Leda Sprott. During this visit, Joan is told by Leda that she has great abilities because she has seen the astral body of her mother during the session even though her mother is still alive. Unlike her reaction to her Aunt Lou's death when Joan felt that the arrow was a sign and that she could have somehow saved her aunt, her mother appears to her several times and at the moment of her death:

I saw that she was crying, soundlessly, horribly; mascara was running from her eyes in black tears. Through her back I could see the dilapidated sofa; it looked as though the

stuffing was coming out of her. The hair on the back of my neck bristled, and I leapt back through the front door, shut it behind me, and leaned against it. It was her astral body..." (LO 173).

Normally, Gothic spectres are one of two categories: they are either benevolent spirits who are resting uneasily because of some injustice or they are seeking revenge. However, in this neo-Gothic, it would seem that Joan has invoked her mother's spirit, as Leda Sprott has previously informed her that she possesses psychic abilities. Once again, we see that Joan does have a certain amount of power should she choose to make use of it. Yet Joan is unable to separate herself from her mother. This is the quintessential task which confronts her because in order to forge her own identity, Joan must break from her mother's influence upon her. Normally, Gothic heroines have the separation imposed upon them by the death of their mother. Joan is accorded more responsibility for her own development but she initially refuses to accept it. By having Joan's own mother haunt her, Atwood continues her anti-gothic strain in Lady Oracle. Instead of an offered external reward such as a prestigious birth, Joan's mother is asking for something from

Joan--perhaps forgiveness. Joan needs to release her mother in order to free herself.

In her involvement with the supernatural, Joan is engaging in a quest for a fulfilment of self. Some critics such as Annis Pratt link the quest with the maiden in flight motif. She classifies the rape trauma as an archetype. Although Joan herself is not raped in the course of the novel, she consistently writes in her Costume Gothics of near escapes and of threatening men. Pratt illustrates her point by using the analogy of the green-world motif--a kind of idyll which is brutally invaded by a male intruder: "Such traumas characterize the plot structure of gothic novels where women heroes experience adventures in quest of true chivalry in combination with the horror of pursuit and victimization by male villains" (25).

Both Charlotte and Felicia in Joan's fictional world are fascinated with the maze, which is bordered with hedges. During one scene, Felicia uses the maze for a sexual encounter with one of her servants. When Joan is relating to Arthur the story of her first sexual encounter to Arthur--a complete fabrication--she describes it as happening in the woods and even includes the details of pine needles. She also makes the telling comparison between herself and Arthur. "That was the difference between us:

for Arthur there were true paths, several of them perhaps, but only one at a time. For me there no paths at all. Thickets, ditches, ponds, labyrinths, morasses, but no paths" (IQ 169). The difficulties inherent in finding her own way in the world's mazes without any guiding trails as while being constantly pursued (at least in her imagination) explains Joan's initial reluctance to lose her disguise of fat. When she is in disguise, there is no attention of that sort paid to her with the one exception of John, who made his intention to marry her clear from the first stages of their relationship. Joan has no true path, as is clearly evidenced from her various disguises.

The archetype of the fleeing female is historically a very powerful one. Like the nymphs and goddesses of Greek mythology, Joan has to undergo a transformation in order to evade her pursuers. Symbolically, she enters the underworld when she creates her own elaborate death with the assistance of two friends. Some critics have compared this underworld motif with the myth of Demeter and Persephone. It is especially relevant when one considers the nature of the symbiotic relationship between Joan and her mother.

Like Demeter, Joan's mother is unable to exist without the presence of her daughter. The descent motif, however, does not

provide a means for attaining insight for Joan although it is only when she enters the dreamlike world of Terremoto that she is able to contemplate her life and begin to take control over it. Interestingly enough, it requires that she physically attack a male intruder before she begins to attain the modicum of self-awareness which Atwood attributes to her--"three quarters of an inch" (Struthers 25). Although she intends to reconstruct her life independent of the scenarios of her Gothic imaginings, Joan immediately lapses into the realm once again when she attacks the investigative reporter. However, like her own heroines, Joan is incapable of achieving a level of self-knowledge or of understanding. Only fleeting moments of self-awareness are possible.

An example of such a moment of awareness comes in the maze when Felicia refuses to enter into the door of the maze when directed to do so by a woman with long, red hair who looks suspiciously like Joan. She is now in the "central plot" (LO 341) This is the so-called moment of confrontation--Joan's opportunity to attain the ephemeral moment of epiphany. All of the past Lady Redmonds are a version of her fictional reality and their mistake has been to avoid navigating the maze: the arena of life. The effort on the part of Felicia to memorize her way is

useless. It is an attempt at controlling the events of life--an impossibility. Joan, like Felicia, must become lost in order to find an exit from the morass of confusion which she has created in her life. Joan is forced to deal with the various identities that she has created in order to avoid dealing with reality. The presence of the women is similar to "Bluebeard's Egg", with the three deceased wives who have been contained in the locked room. They have been both physically and psychologically confined by a powerful wizard. In the instance of Joan, she has played the role of the wizard for herself.

Once the door has been opened, Redmond undergoes a series of transformations which are indicative of the various relationships that Joan has experienced. Felicia/Joan says that she knows the true identity of the man behind the door and immediately, "The flesh fell away from his face, revealing the skull behind it; he stepped toward her, reaching for her throat..." (LO 343). This man progressively takes on the various aspects of all of the men that Joan has known and thus, she is being psychologically threatened by them again.

The inherent power of the typical menacing Gothic villain is his mystery and secrecy. Once that disguise has been penetrated, the only strength on which he has to rely, is the threat of

physical violence towards women. Parallelling that reaction, Joan is also challenged by her various alter egos and in turn, acts violently towards the intruder by hitting him over the head with the Cinzano bottle. This is a satire of the customary defense of the heroine whose normal weapon would be a candlestick or a poker. The humour is carried through to the Costume Gothics. "Charlotte pulled away, seeking wildly for some object with which to defend herself. She seized a weighty copy of Boswell's Life of Johnson..." (LQ 129).

Joan has not told many lies. Her story is related relatively truthfully to the reporter. Joan herself notes that, "In a fairy tale I would be one of the two stupid sisters who open the forbidden door and are shocked by the murdered wives, not the third, clever one who keeps to the essentials: presence of mind, foresight, the telling of watertight lies" (LQ 170). It is precisely the telling of these lies which leads Joan to the conflict she faces within the context of the maze.

In the maze as well as Joan's defined reality, there are three faces of herself--Joan Foster, Louisa K. Delacourt, and Lady Oracle. These are reminiscent of the three faces of the Triple Goddess--the Virgin, the Mother, and the Hag. These are the aspects that are, according to myth, a part of every woman

throughout the course of her life and are a natural part of her evolution. The triple aspect coincides with the triple mirrors that reappear throughout the novel. However, Joan is unable to express these different aspects of herself in a unified whole and has to split them into various identities. She is able to perceive the contradictions of personality inherent in her relationships as evidenced in Redmond's transformations, but she sees herself as separate individuals in the context of the monstrous women in the maze. Mirrors make up an important part of the story. Unlike Joan, they cannot lie. Joan, as a child, views her mother as she does her makeup and later on, she in her turn makes use of the same device. She is fascinated by the mirror when she is in the process of losing her weight. "At home, I spent hours in front of the mirror, watching as my eyebrows, then my mouth, began to spread across my face" (LQ 122). Joan depends on the mirror to enter into the spiritual realm for her poetry writing. "I went into the mirror one evening and I couldn't get out again. I was going along the corridor, with the candle in my hand as usual, and the candle went out" (LQ 225). (The candle being inadvertently extinguished is a conventional Gothic device, as in the example of Catherine

Morland whose candle went out while she was exploring the locked chest late at night.)

Frequently, mirrors present a revelation--a tantalizing glimpse into a world distant from reality. Mirrors present a hint of the supernatural world and this is indeed where Joan ventures throughout the composition of Lady Oracle. However, Atwood utilizes them to illustrate reality as well--a redefinition of Gothic motifs. Mirrors represent physical reality and transformation in the conventional Gothic. During the episode of the mothball, Joan relies on the mirror to provide an honest appraisal: "Afterwards I pulled the laundry hamper over so I could stand up on it and look into the bathroom mirror. My made-up face had run, there were black streaks down my cheeks like sooty tears and my purple mouth was smudged and swollen. What was the matter with me?" (LQ 46). This honest confrontation with the mirror leads to her feeling "naked and exposed, as if this ridiculous dance was the truth about me and everyone could see it" (LQ 47). Joan feels that she has been betrayed by her mother to Miss Flegg, an indication that their relationship is precarious and is one of distrust. However, this image of Joan with "black streaks" on her cheeks is a striking parallel between herself and her mother. Although Joan cannot

trust her mother as demonstrated by this incident, she also cannot trust herself.

Later on in the novel, this scene is repeated in a supernatural context which echoes of Wuthering Heights with Cathy's ghost attempting in vain to enter the bedroom occupied by Lockwood. During that episode, he cruelly rubs her wrist on the broken glass thereby causing it to bleed and refusing her admittance to the room. That scene echoes in Joan's own repudiation of her mother's ghost: "Then I saw that she was crying, soundlessly, horribly; mascara was running from her eyes in black tears" (LQ 173) and "She was crying soundlessly, she pressed her face against the glass like a child, mascara ran from her eyes in black tears...She stretched out her arms to me, she wanted me to come with her..." (LQ 330). However breaking the Gothic tradition, Joan arises to unlock the door to give her mother entrance. This is the symbolic gesture for Joan to claim her own personal freedom.

Shortly afterwards, Joan realizes that it was her mother who had been haunting her throughout her life in order to attain her freedom: "It has been she standing behind me in the mirror, she was the one who was waiting around each turn, her voice whispered the words. She had been the lady in the boat, the death barge,

the tragic lady with the flowing hair and stricken eyes, the lady in the tower...She needed her freedom also; she had been my reflection too long" (LQ 331).

Greene cites Modleski's and Kahane's arguments that the mother is the central, driving force behind a Gothic novel: "This, then, is the menacing secret at the heart of the claustrophobic castle--the mother, who represents entrapment, engulfment, and whose repression is the *basis* of the structure" (173). This version of the Gothic novel would indicate that Atwood is indeed creating an anti-gothic literary work. The "perils of gothic thinking" here would indicate that the heroine necessarily is less powerful than the matriarch. This is the basis of the plot in Radcliffe's novels, where the scheming older woman is able to control the outcome of the heroine's life; for example, Madame Cheron, as Emily's aunt, behaves in this manner once Emily's parents have died. Traditionally, the heroine is at the mercy of seemingly omnipotent characters. In a sense, this is a reflection of patriarchal reality. The concept of entrapment by the mother would mean an imbalance of power in the favour of the mother. This is the situation until Joan begins to lose her weight. Although Joan does gain power, she eventually (cast in the role of Felicia--the dispossessed wife), melts "like

invisible ink" when rejected by her husband and is also consumed by the ghost of the Fat Lady, who is resurrected from Joan's cast off clothing: "She rose into the air and descended upon me as I lay stretched out in the chair. For a moment she hovered around me like ectoplasm, like a gelatin shell, my ghost, my angel; then she settled and I was absorbed into her. Within my former body, I gasped for air. Disguised, concealed..." (LQ 322).

Molly Hite has presented the case that the mirrors which reflect Joan's mother teach the child that to be feminine, one needs to be multi-dimensional to be attractive to men:

...the mirrors that allow her mother to make herself into the requisite object of masculine desire, and thus to make herself into an exemplary mirror that will reflect back exactly what the phallogocentric culture wishes to see, are transformed by the dream into portals leading to the revelation of feminine monstrosity, of woman irreducibly multiple" (161).

She draws the further analogy that the rite of passage which Joan undergoes in Brownies is a "travesty" of the use of female bonding (162). Atwood uses the Brownie mirror ritual as a means

to illustrate that Joan is unable to accept herself as a unified, individual: "Twist me and turn me and show me an elf/I looked in the mirror and there saw ... (myself!)" (LO 58). Joan is a Gnome, who are conventionally portrayed as grotesque. Immediately following this description of Brownie rituals, Joan relates how the three girls with whom she is forced to walk to and from Brownies victimize her. She "admired Elizabeth and feared the other two, who competed for her attention in more or less sinister ways" (LO 53). The result of her trust in these young girls is the encounter with the daffodil man as well as the retribution of her mother.

Like the stereotypical Gothic heroine, Joan is completely at the mercy of her persecutors--the three aspects of the female experience as well as the physical embodiment of female monstrosity. The rescuer/daffodil man in the pattern of Gothic villains/heroes is impossible to truly know: "...he was elusive, ..sending out menacing tentacles of flesh and knotted rope, forming again as a joyful sunburst of yellow flowers" (LO 61). Joan's mother punishes her in a way which she has never done before, by slapping her across the face. When Joan is returned home, her mother is described as being distraught: "Her

hair was flying, she did not have gloves on, and when she came closer I could see that she was enraged" (LQ 60).

These three distinct revelatory episodes primarily are concerned with trust. Joan has received three extremely disparate reinforcements of who she is: a victim. This all occurs after she has looked into the mirror to see herself. She begins to align herself with the Gothic heroine, who is also victimized but who is also desirable and beautiful. Joan is expected to offer her power up to those who wish to victimize her.

The story of Joan, as noted by various critics, reflects the Costume Gothics. These Costume Gothics reveal Joan's secret-- the fact that she has no individual self-concept. Joan is always more than what is normally expected from the masculine establishment: she is overweight, she is flamboyant and exuberant in the guise of Felicia, and she has layers of secrets which men are unable to penetrate. She, like Felicia, attempts to mould herself in the guise that she assumes the men will find desirable. For example, when Joan first meets Arthur, she frantically searches for material about which to converse: "Faint with lust, I went to the public library...and took out all of Bertrand Russell's books I could find" (LQ 166).

Frequently Gothic writers make use of the *doppelganger* technique. This is the case in Frankenstein where the monster is the repository of evil for Victor. Victor himself presents only a pure and cheerful aspect to the world at large and never allows himself to be considered to be evil or to commit questionable acts, whereas he considers the monster who remains forever nameless to be wholly evil. The monster takes on all of Victor's negative characteristics. What Victor fails to realize is that they both possess virtues and vices. The final epiphany allows for true recognition on either side and death is therefore able to occur for both of the characters. Such is the moment of insight for Joan when she encounters the female characters in the maze.

However, her epiphany is brief and by the end of the novel she has relapsed into her original mode of being. Joan is unable to incorporate the two apparently disparate aspects of her personality: the real and the fantasized. The two parts never merge to create a whole. Like the traditional Gothic heroine, she needs to retain her sense of trust in the integrity of the traditional model in order to maintain a coherent sense of identity, albeit a dangerously false one. Joan never quite realizes that she also is responsible for her own destiny. The

stale model of a virtuous and retiring heroine at the mercy of forces stronger than her own needs to be rejected in favour of a new form of heroine: one who is able to take and to retain power. However, the dangers of claiming personal responsibility are too overwhelming for Joan and so, the more potent threats inherent in our social structure persist as she faithfully travels an established patriarchal path.

Chapter Three

TALES OF ENCHANTMENT:

THE GOTHIC PRESENCE IN BLUEBEARD'S EGG

In Violent Duality, Sherrill Grace mentions that the tale of Bluebeard has a "specific importance" for Lady Oracle and Stalked by Love. "In both, the wealthy rapacious male has murdered his previous wives and his present mate faces a similar fate if she enters a forbidden place. The forbidden place is a locked room in the story of Bluebeard and the maze in Stalked by Love" (119). It is appropriate that Atwood would turn her attention to this fairy tale with its strong Gothic components. By integrating these elements of the Gothic in her collection of short stories, Atwood continues her themes of the quest of fear and for inner knowledge as previously developed in Lady Oracle. She incorporates these Gothic elements, as well as many others, into the context of everyday life with all of its inherent mundane attributes such as washing dishes. Atwood's focus on how these traditional systems impact on the current lives of real women is the subject of Bluebeard's Egg.

Although Atwood implements Gothic elements in both her short stories and her novels, she usually denies us the satisfaction of a tidy resolution which is the standard Gothic closure. With the ambiguity inherent in her work, Atwood is giving power to the reader to construe a personally relevant reading. The customary Gothic motifs are redefined to reflect Atwood's personal philosophy. This philosophy would appear to be that although women have been victimized by a patriarchal system for centuries, at this point in their development, they have to begin to assume responsibility for destroying old models of repression. These models of repression have been established in the literary context for generations and it is now time for their repudiation outside of the confines of the literary model. The conventions of Gothic novels have gained such autonomy that women have attempted to emulate their paradigms outside the text itself. These conversions are not restricted to the imagination. Over time, women have internalized these conventions and have come to expect them to reflect reality. Thus, Atwood turns the Gothic tradition upon itself by making use of its elements to create a tone of uncertainty and to present a more confusing realistic depiction of relationships and of the female role.

She makes use of Bakhtinian dialogic in order to accomplish her task. This necessarily involves the use of parody. As noted by Suzanne Kehde, "The context of parody may free submerged voices in the fiction of writers whose authorial intentions are...ambiguous" (29). By inverting stereotypical Gothic motifs, Atwood creates parody which, in turn, allows the marginalized voices of her female characters to be heard and considered by her readers. Underneath the dominant discourse in Gothic literature, the females were effectively silenced. However, Atwood develops a new means of Gothic expression whereby the Gothic elements are employed to give authority to the female voices while relegating the male voices to a minor role. Thus, the focus is primarily upon the presentation of the female characters given that they possess the dominant voice.

However, practically renouncing these traditional tenets is a more difficult task to accomplish than it would appear to be simply because these familiar models provide a definitive role to women who would otherwise be charting new territory. As Atwood admits in an interview with Joyce Carol Oates, with respect to Lady Oracle: "...I've always wondered what it was about these books that appealed--do so many women think of themselves as menaced on all sides, and of their husbands as potential

murderers? And what about that 'Mad Wife' left over from Jane Eyre? Are these our secret plots?" (75). She continues with further reference to Lady Oracle: "The hypothesis of the book, insofar as there is one, is; what happens to someone who lives in the 'real' world but does it as though this "other" world is the real one?" (75). Although these comments pertain directly to Lady Oracle, they are also relevant to Bluebeard's Egg. Atwood continues to explore the same questions in her various characters throughout her collection.

Atwood is interested in the concept of duplication and of doubles. She explains her version of the idea as a different type of ghost story:

You could have a sort of primitive myth in which dead people are as alive as living people and they're just accepted. Nobody is too surprised by it because it happens all the time. Or you can have the Henry James kind, in which the ghost that one sees is in fact a fragment of one's own self which has split off, and that to me is the most interesting kind and that is obviously the tradition I'm working in (Gibson 18).

This idea may be extended to the idea of "shades" which is another classical form of the ghost. Frequently, Atwood's female characters are only a pale reflection of what they could be. Their only self-definition is created by their relationships with their husbands. This is the case for Betty, a title character in Bluebeard's Egg who, although she appears to be nondescript, is the more fascinating person for the narrator: "It is the Bettys who are mysterious" (BE 114). In their extreme devotion to their husbands, their inner selves are never openly revealed. In true Gothic style, this could be interpreted as a strong fear of what would result if they risked personal disclosure. As well, Betty is surrounded by menace by her association with Fred's brother who had murdered his wife: "...she was a woman who had narrowly escaped death...A lurid aura of sacrificial blood surrounded her" (BE 111). Betty is still being defined in terms of the actions of the men who have beset her.

When Atwood makes use of the conventional Gothic elements, she is providing the female reader with their frequently desired pattern of male/female relationships. By leaving the relationships unresolved, Atwood is successfully able to present their alternate versions. This enables the narrator in "Betty" to avoid successfully the label of being pretty in favour of

being smart, even though Betty herself has been doomed by male betrayal.

Gothic novels are based upon a predictable sequence of events which can be summarized very briefly. The heroine, who personifies strong moral values, is abducted or pursued by the villain. After experiencing supernatural events and many personal trials throughout which she maintains her integrity, she is rescued by her true love and they marry. Although this Gothic world is melodramatic and unbelievable, it is an easily imagined one. One has the security that everything will conclude as it should. This is precisely the security that Sally, the protagonist of "Bluebeard's Egg", desires to exist in her own world with her husband, although conversely, she fears betrayal from the same hands. From Sally's perspective, he is both her potential benefactor and her potential destroyer.

In "Bluebeard's Egg", Atwood combines Gothic techniques with the well known fairy tale of Bluebeard. The patterns of both genres are similar in that the female characters are usually presented as virtuous innocents or as jealous schemers. The pure maidens are usually persecuted by evil women or by their malicious husbands or villains until rescued by a young gallant. By juxtaposing the Bluebeard tale with the Gothic format, Atwood

emphasizes the strength of her female characters. It is the unusual situation in the tale of Bluebeard that the third wife is able to rescue herself instead of passively awaiting to be delivered. Therefore, the responsibility of the female is clearly placed in her own personal domain and a theme of independence is introduced.

For example, in "Uglypuss", Becka is the tragic heroine who has very little power over her boyfriend, Joel. She, in order to regain some self-respect and to exercise her revenge over his betrayals, reverses the pattern of violence by destroying some of his furniture. She also abuses his cat. She completes these destructive acts so that she can reclaim her emotional independence from Joel. However, she still carries the emotional scars of that relationship: "My heart does not bleed, she tells herself. But it does" (BE 93). Although Becka tries to rescue herself from her oppressive relationship by acting aggressively instead of being passive, she is ultimately unable to free herself from her personally imposed emotional bonds. Her means of extricating herself is to claim the oppressive role.

In this collection, Atwood is not obviously attempting to construct a path away from restricting roles. Instead, she is offering vignettes of women's lives. By presenting women who are

unable to break away from conventional identities, Atwood gives power to the reader to create their own definitions. In the short story, "Significant Moments in the Life of my Mother", Atwood describes the difficulties involved with change. The change can occur from one generation to the next. The traditional mother is very disturbed by the angst-ridden daughter whom she had raised: "It struck me, for the first time in my life, that my mother might be afraid of me. I could not even reassure her, because I was only dimly aware of the nature of her distress, but there must have been something going on in me that was beyond her: at any time I might open my mouth and out would come a language she had never heard before" (BE 18). Thus, the role of the heroine is altered from one generation to the next from being compliant in a male-structured environment to voicing her personal ideas.

"Bluebeard's Egg" contains these Gothic elements: the fleeing heroine, storytelling, the quest for forbidden knowledge, landscapes, the villain and his forbidden chamber and the maze motifs. Sally is searching desperately for a definition of security and in a sense, her search epitomizes a common need of many women. She is the fleeing Gothic heroine, while simultaneously she is also intimately connected with the world of

the fairy tale in her role as Bluebeard's third wife. Sherrill Grace, in Violent Duality, suggests that the distinction between fairy tales and gothic romance is that "...where the romance provides escape from reality, the fairy tale usually develops the real nature of things" (118). In Bluebeard's Egg, Atwood is demonstrating that the romance novel is also capable of posing questions concerning the "real nature of things." This is the basis of the quest with which Sally concerns herself--"What is indeed real?"

From the beginning of the story, we notice that Sally is devoid of personality. In a sense, it is almost as though she is not there because all of her thoughts revolve around her husband, Ed, and who he is. We see her only in relation to Ed and in her own self-imposed stereotypical roles.

He's a child of luck, a third son who, armed with nothing but a certain feeble-minded amiability, manages to make it through the forest with all its witches and traps and pitfalls and end up with the princess, who is Sally of course. It helps that he is handsome (BE 116).

Sally is the passive heroine who is the deserved prize after Ed has conquered all of the prescribed trials. As usual in the pattern of Gothic literature, she is the helpless female at the mercy of the dominant male forces. Her lack of power increases the impact of the Gothic element in the story since her behaviour as a heroine is stereotypically passive as the Gothic heroine was also initially portrayed until the adventures began. Sally makes repeated and utterly futile attempts to understand Ed. Her efforts are hopeless because the extent to which she wishes and/or needs to know him is impossible to achieve with any other human being. Her own personal identity is intimately connected with Ed. Interestingly enough, Sally is capable of reversing the stereotypical role in which she has placed herself near the beginning of the story. She becomes both the pursuer and the clever heroine: "His obtuseness is a wall, within which he can go about his business, humming to himself, while Sally, locked outside, must hack her way through the brambles with hardly so much as a transparent raincoat between them and her skin" (BE 117).

Sally aligns herself with the compassionate "equally clever and witty heroine" in formulaic mystery novels. She strives to combine the characteristics of the passive female victim

previously discussed with the positive aspects of the innovative and courageous character of Bluebeard's third wife.

Her alignment with both the fairy tale world and the Gothic realm may be seen in terms of Sally's own search for identity. She is empty, defining herself in relation to Ed. She even refuses to admit to obtaining any enjoyment from her various evening courses. Her personal reality is defined by her participation in the conventional models provided by Gothic writing. She has to resort to such prescribed definitions of reality in order to discover herself. Without an externally imposed identity in the form of a Gothic heroine, Sally would be even less certain of her personal identity than she is of her current confusion. In Margaret Atwood, Barbara Rigney explains the phenomenon, which can be viewed in relation to Sally:

"Protagonists are always explorers through tradition and myth in search of a new identity and in search of a voice, a tongue, a language, an art, with which to proclaim that identity" (10).

The lack of identity experienced by Sally is the fundamental reason that she is seeking refuge behind a socially approved role.

Atwood blends in yet another relevant Gothic motif, storytelling. Almost immediately, we are told that Sally wants

to hear the "whole story" concerning Ed's previous two marriages; this is in fact the tale of Bluebeard. Often in Gothic literature, one will find that a place or a character will be attributed with evil associations by the means of oral storytelling by a guide before the heroine actually comes into contact with them. As in the case of Melmoth the Wanderer, the novel consists almost entirely of the relation of tales. Without exception, the tales are horrific. As well, if the stories are told near the conclusion of a Gothic novel, they can rectify a situation gone wrong and explicate any remaining confusion.

Ed does not want to relate his story to Sally: "His protestations of ignorance, his refusal to discuss the finer points, is frustrating to Sally, because she would like to hear the whole story" (BE 118). His refusal to explain what has gone wrong in his previous marriages may be an indication that the story is too horrible to be related, thereby intensifying the potential for evil. It may also be an indication that an explanation may never be forthcoming and that this relationship is potentially doomed. The idea of stories frequently resurfaces throughout the plot: the incidents which Sally relates about her boss, the fiction she is trying to write, and the remarks about Ed's dense nature which she confides to Marylynn. Atwood becomes

quite specific concerning the retelling of the Bluebeard tale. Not only does she include a detailed version in the text but Sally comments upon the telling of the tale, which occurs in her class, to Ed: "'You should have seen us,' Sally said afterwards to Ed, 'sitting in a circle, listening to fairy stories'" (BE 136).

The relating of stories is sometimes crucial to the plot development of a Gothic narrative. It links distant events and imbues soon-to-be visited locations with mystery and menace. Throughout the course of "Bluebeard's Egg", Sally is trying to compose her own story and is combining Gothic paradigms into her own life by having Ed as the menacing Bluebeard. Although she is not in any physical danger, she experiences a severe threat to her emotional well-being. The creation of Sally's story parallels the efforts of Atwood. As Sally writes her story based on a well travelled plot, Atwood, too, is revising the same structure. At the end of "Bluebeard's Egg," Sally is forced to confront the possibility that she will never completely be secure in her relationship with Ed. This is a complete contradiction of the traditional Gothic. As Sally is coming to this realization, Atwood is simultaneously untying the safety net of Gothic endings for her readers. Once again, she refuses to provide an alternate

support for her characters. Instead, they are left to flounder. This creates a stronger impact upon the reader, allowing for a personal revision of the prevailing mythology. The pathos of the characters such as Sally is increased when they are unable to extricate themselves from such obviously damaging situations. Therefore, their stories may never be written or told.

An integral aspect of Gothic writing is the concept of forbidden knowledge. In theory, the heroes and heroines are supposed to accept the secrets as a given and are not supposed to untangle them. One exception to this is Emily St. Aubert in The Mysteries of Udolpho, who destroyed her father's papers as according to his dying request without perusing their contents. However, for the most part, hidden information was investigated and eventually revealed. This is true in Radcliffe's The Italian where the characters are frequently uncovering previously unknown information. In the case of Bluebeard's wives, they continued to attempt to unravel his secret by entering the mysterious chamber. Sometimes the secret may be related to the true origins of the birth of a child. This is the case for Edmund in Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron. There is nothing so fascinating as forbidden knowledge, and Atwood develops this theme in

"Bluebeard's Egg" with the inquisitiveness of Sally concerning the true nature of Ed's thoughts.

Similar to other Gothic heroines, Sally is incapable of understanding, or of accepting the concept of the forbidden for its own sake. While she is pondering the development of her story for her night class, she considers having the secret room remain empty. However, "it would leave her with the problem of why the wizard would have a forbidden room in which he kept nothing" (BE 139).

From the opening of "Bluebeard's Egg", we associate Ed with the character of the wizard. He possesses all of the power over Sally, simply because he refuses to expose the forbidden secret of himself to her. Sally wishes to control his essence so she will control much of the power within the context of the relationship, but she in her turn, does not want to divulge any of her personal intimacies to him. She is worried when Ed comments that he knows what she thinks but is quickly placated when his ideas are solely based upon her own offered information: "If that's all he's going on, she's safe" (BE 141).

From the beginning of the story, Edward is associated with a wild garden. We are told that Sally wished to have a cultivated garden but that Ed preferred the natural state (BE 115). Once

again, we can see the Gothic influence emerge. Landscapes in Gothic literature can be extremely important in the establishment of the atmosphere. They reflect either the safety or the danger of the local environment for the heroine. As well, some critics have commented on the origins of the Gothic novel as being the conflict between the social classes, or as Leslie Fiedler argues, the conflict between nature and civilization. Evil in the American Gothic novel is attributed to the native and to the landscape as noted by Fiedler. If one extends this parallel to the Canadian Gothic novel, then Ed's desire becomes particularly significant. This wish on Ed's part for a natural garden indicates his potential evil; conversely, Sally seeks the security of civilization.

Later, the image of Ed as a wizard is introduced in relation to his power over nature. He has magical abilities to heal, according to Sally's perceptions of his inner private world which she is attempting to invade.

Ed's inner world is a forest, which looks something like the bottom part of their ravine lot, but without the fence. He wanders around in there, among the trees, not heading in any special direction. Every once in a while he

comes upon strange-looking plant, a sickly plant choked with weeds and briars. Ed kneels, clears a space around it, does some pruning, a little skilful snipping and cutting, props it up. The plant revives, flushes with health, sends out a grateful red blossom. Ed continues on his way. Or it may be a conked out squirrel, which he restores with a drop from his flask of magic elixir (BE 133-134).

In order to be a wizard and to possess various secret powers, one also must have ready access to arcane knowledge. In this area, Ed's practical life as a heart surgeon serves to identify his real power over life and death. He returns life to the seriously ill and creates health from illness. His professional identity is yet another facet of Ed's character into which Sally cannot delve freely as she cannot understand the specialist's knowledge, skill and language. However, she makes an effort to understand the environment and the power which he wields by visiting to have an examination herself.

The examining room is very important for Atwood's Gothic. There is a pervasive aura of sinister domination of which Ed is the master. The female hearts which he scrutinizes are fully exposed by virtue of his medical equipment. His inspection is a

complete invasion of privacy, a symbolic rape which leads to the feeling of helplessness of the patients. His dominance encourages the reader to believe that Ed has the power to see into the private recesses of the female heart: "He seemed so distant, absorbed in his machine, taking the measure of her beating over there all by itself, detached from her, exposed and under his control" (BE 128). He also points out the "defects of their beating hearts" (BE 129). Ed retains more of the power over the bodies of the patients than they are able to comprehend for themselves, an arcane knowledge. The secret knowledge which is possessed by Ed continues the idea that Sally is excluded from something forbidden. The restricted information becomes scientific in its nature; this continues the parallels with Victor Frankenstein. (Atwood further develops her ideas about Frankenstein in her poems in Animals in that Country.)

In the Gothic context, the room assumes an aura comparable to the scientific atmosphere surrounding the creation of the monster by Victor Frankenstein. An interesting detail is that the heart is represented in black and white, the same type of opposition which so strongly separates the two moralities of Gothic characters: "Then Sally was possessed by a desire to see her own heart, in motion, in black and white, on the screen...and

though this was the kind of thing Ed would normally evade or tell her she was being silly about, he didn't need much persuading" (BE 127). Thus, Ed assists in creating a simple dichotomy for Sally; she is either a victim or a heroine while he is either a villain or a hero. She is unable at this point to distinguish between the two extremes. Sally, like Joan Foster, does not understand the nature of duality.

One is reminded by Sally's own observation that the room, which parallels the forbidden chamber of Bluebeard, is dangerous for women. Yet, although she realizes its menace, she is still willing to enter the room--a risk that is often taken by traditional Gothic heroines: "Nevertheless this transaction, this whole room, was sexual in a way she didn't quite understand; it was clearly a dangerous place" (BE 128). The women are often quite willing to surrender themselves to him and use their hearts as a ploy to interest him. Sally herself has confessed to this technique. "Thinking back on this incident makes her uneasy, now that she's seen her own performance repeated so many times, including the hand placed lightly on the heart, to call attention of course to the breasts" (BE 121).

Since she is psychologically playing the role as the third wife of Bluebeard as well as the actual wife of Ed, Sally is well

aware of the dangerous undertones of the marriage. If she exhibits too much curiosity, she too will suffer an awful fate. She has already compared herself to the intelligent heroine of the mystery novels and to the desired princess. In reality, she is an astute woman as well. If she succumbs to the demands of curiosity, Sally will be unable to escape from her imprisonment, unlike the ingenious escape of the third wife, and will suffer the aftermath of divorce. She has to put her intelligence to good use in order to uncover only what she needs to know about Ed's forbidden secrets and to abandon the rest as futile. Her own needs and identity are being ignored while she searches so desperately and so fruitlessly for Ed. Sally is shrewd enough to recognize the dangers which could occur and describes them in accurate language: "What if he wakes up one day and decides that she isn't the true bride after all, but the false one? Then she will be put into a barrel stuck full of nails and rolled downhill, endlessly, while he is sitting in yet another bridal bed, drinking champagne" (BE 118). This perceptive comment once again places Ed in the role of a potential Gothic villain. Ed's dubious nature neatly mirrors the confusion that Joan Foster feels about the men in her life. Atwood is arguing against the lack of security that many women experience in relationships in

her development of these ambiguous vaguely menacing male characters.

The fundamental issue behind Sally's need to have access to Ed's every thought is the ancient issue of power; she wants to be certain that he wants her. Once she is sure of all of his actions and thoughts, he will be stripped in his turn of the power which Sally has allowed him to wield over her and she will become the potentially evil figure. Sally will become the one who may dispose of him if she so desires. Her craving to possess Ed's secret is explicitly revealed in the context of the telling of the Bluebeard tale, since Sally is the personification of the third sister.

When the wizard returned he at once asked for the egg. This time it was spotless. "You have passed the test," he said to the third sister. "You shall be my bride."...The wizard no longer had any power over her, and had to do whatever she asked. There was more, about how the wizard met his comeuppance and was burned to death, but Sally already knew which features stood out for her (Atwood 139).

Yet although conquering Ed is the epitome of Sally's goal, simultaneously it will also be the destruction of her world. She is caught in a paradox rarely explored in the early Gothic texts. This paradox is that in the realization of her own desires, Sally will necessarily have to forego her relationship which is part of her defined self. Traditionally, there was no split permitted between a woman's self and her relationship. In the Gothic novel, the marriage completely fulfilled the heroine. Sally, also, wants this type of marital fulfilment, but it is impossible to achieve if she is to pursue her own goals.

There are repeated references to the maze motif throughout the story, which is a predominant feature in the Gothic novel. In "Bluebeard's Egg", the maze is associated with danger while the characters are wending their way through it. Once the centre of the maze is found, or the solution to the puzzle is found, reality will inevitably shift. The context of the maze alters throughout the progress of the narrative. Sometimes Sally is at the centre of the maze, sensing the approaching menace of Ed and his invincible secret: "Sally hears the back door open and close. She feels Ed approaching, coming through the passages of the house towards her, like a small wind or a ball of static electricity. The hair stands up on her arms" (BE 129). However,

Sally is certain that once she deciphers the code, her security will be demolished and the maze will be destroyed. If the puzzle is solved, the essential purpose of Sally's life will disappear unless she is able to assume independently the responsibility of her own life and needs without having to pursue another.

But what is it that she's afraid of? She has what they call everything: Ed, their wonderful house on a ravine lot, something she's always wanted. (But the hill is jungly, and the house is made of ice. It's held together only by Sally, who sits in the middle of it, working on a puzzle. The puzzle is Ed. If she should ever solve it, if she should ever fit the last cold splinter into place, the house will melt and flow away down the hill, and then...) It's a bad habit, fooling around with her head this way. It does no good. She knows that if she could quit she'd be happier (BE 134).

When Sally reflects upon her situation, she realizes that her life is precarious. Her marriage is not solid, and like the third sister, she may have to sacrifice Ed in order to redeem herself. If she manages to attain ultimate power over Ed, then

she must contemplate the impossible for herself, becoming an independent and resolute person. Once Ed has given Sally the potential key to his forbidden mental chamber when she discovers his possible intimacy with Marylynn, the house does begin to melt and Sally's world is irrevocably altered. Atwood gives us an interesting analogy when Sally is shocked into the realization that Ed may not be only the imagined sinister Gothic figure. We are referred back to the context of the examining room with its malevolent overtones: "There's a roaring sound at the back of her head; blackness appears around the edges of the picture she's seeing, like a television screen going dead" (BE 144). The cessation of the image on the television screen demonstrates the control over the heart that Ed has previously illustrated. Sally's heart may now be successfully destroyed, with the shattering of her cherished image. This image is linked to one of Sally's images of Ed in a snapshot:

Right now the kids are receding, fading like old ink; Ed on the contrary looms larger and larger, the outlines around him darkening. He's constantly developing, like a Polaroid print, new colours emerging, but the result remains the same: Ed is a surface, one she has trouble getting beneath (BE 133).

It is as if the photograph has finally ceased producing new colours with the final blackness surrounding Ed's effigy. There is nothing left to uncover about Ed. Now Sally must contend with two potential ominous figures of betrayal: Ed and Marylynn. She is becoming the solitary, persecuted maiden.

However, we must not forget that Sally herself still has a certain amount of power. She was the original clever heroine who 'rescued' Ed. She assumes that she has the higher intelligence of the two, which is an inherent connotation of control. In Conversations, Atwood herself makes an intriguing comment on her preference for Grimm's Fairy Tales to her interviewer, Bonnie Lyons.

Lyons: In another interview you remarked that the book that influenced you the most was Grimm's Fairy Tales.

Atwood: Probably, because I had pretty well memorized them by the time I was six. One of the interesting things was that there were a lot of quite active female characters, whereas if you get the watered-down version, you just get Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty.

Lyons: Were these female characters active in positive ways? The last time I looked at them I thought the stepmother was very important but very bad.

Atwood: Yes, the stepmother is bad, but there are active princesses. And if anyone is passive, it's the prince. You know, he goes home and his mother casts some sort of spell on him, and the princess has to go through all these interesting machinations to get him back. She rescues him; she's the one that has the magic powers. She's the one with the magic cloak, and if you throw it down, it becomes a forest full of trees (Ingersoll 224-225).

When Sally is faced with the very real probability that Ed is not as he seems, she is forced to expand her world beyond the traditional Gothic world. Sally's moral rigidity of opposing forces collides to create confusion. Is Ed the hero or is he the villain? Is Marylynn the evil manipulator or is she the loyal friend? Atwood creates an innovation of the stereotypical Gothic characters. Normally the true natures of these characters are evident in their portrayal of definitive traits of either good or of evil, but Atwood denies us the comfort of absolutes by

creating ambiguity in previously clear characters. Sally is being denied access to a simplistic world and is being forced to participate within the context of the actual world, something which she finds extremely difficult to do. Sally's desire to maintain her environment in absolutes is simplistic and childlike. The events of "Bluebeard's Egg" are, in some ways, a description of her coming of age. Sally's maturation mirrors the development of females in general and their efforts to grasp a new type of reality.

In a symbolic move after the scene with Ed and Marylynn, Sally begins to scrape the dishes: "This is unlike her-usually she sticks right with the party until it's over..." (BE 145). This is contrary to her usual role of creating simmering concoctions. From the opening sentence, Sally has been strongly aligned with the imagery of cooking. Therefore, it is natural in the context of the various allusions in "Bluebeard's Egg" to develop the analogy of the witch's cauldron, especially if we consider Sally as containing a substantial reserve of power in the form of her intelligence. Her level of insight has been exposed to some doubt, and Sally abandons her creative efforts when she literally throws away the remains of supper.

The conclusion of "Bluebeard's Egg" is enigmatic, yet another variation on the traditional resolutions. There is no final definitive scene between the hero and the heroine, neither has she been rescued by the hero. Like Joan in Lady Oracle, Sally has achieved a modicum of insight by arriving at the maze's centre, but there are no easy solutions.

Sally lies in bed with her eyes closed. What she sees is her own heart, in black and white, beating with that insubstantial moth-like flutter, a ghostly heart, torn out of her and floating in space, an animated valentine with no colour. It will go on and on forever; she has no control over it. But now she's seeing the egg, which is not small and cold and white and inert but larger than a real egg and golden pink, resting in a nest of brambles, glowing softly as though there's something red and hot inside it. It's almost pulsing; Sally is afraid of it. As she looks it darkens: rose-red, crimson. This is something the story left out, Sally thinks: the egg is alive, and one day it will hatch. But what will come out of it? (BE 146)

In this, our last description of Sally, we see her being menaced by the egg after she has lost control over her heart. In one sense, Sally has relinquished her small power when she ceases to create the wonderful and the magical food. Yet the egg itself is described in terms which lend themselves to the picture of a heart. Throughout the story, Sally has associated the egg with Ed because it is so closed and unaware, precisely the roles into which Sally has been cast.

There are two futures being offered as choices to Sally. She has the options of exercising her personal independence or of becoming a ghostly image fluttering around. The latter would be a betrayal of her nature but the former may prove to be too daunting for Sally to accomplish, especially when one considers that her difficulties lie partially in the fact that her world no longer be simplified: "She can't say anything: she can't afford to be wrong, or to be right either" (BE 145). In her typical style, Atwood refuses to give any strong hints about the eventual outcome, which forces the reader to draw personal conclusions. With emphasis upon transformation motifs, Atwood has chosen an appropriate symbol in the egg--fertility and rebirth. However, as Sally has associated Ed with the egg, there could be a more ominous reading of the eventual hatching of the

egg; it could eventually produce a monster as a derivation of Ed's potential abandonment of Sally.

Like everyone, Sally is nervous about change and wonders apprehensively what the future will contain for her. However, her inability to confront Ed upon her discovery would lead one to believe that Sally is frozen and cannot break free of her self-imposed limitations. She sacrifices her power for the simple security of being with Ed. It is Sally's responsibility to claim her own life through the egg and to vanquish the power which has controlled her life. Metaphorically, in the context of the Bluebeard tale, males have dominated her sisters and methodically destroyed them. Unless Sally is able to reclaim her inherent heritage, she will be unable to resurrect her fallen sisters. All will be lost. Sally will have been completely unable to follow her Gothic model. Instead, she will have to follow a reinvented pattern of the Gothic--one from which the comforts have been removed. This model involves a lack of clarity and removes the common goal of the heroine--marriage. Marriage has been toppled from its status as an invincible institution and has become a choice. The new heroine has only herself on whom to rely. There will be no dashing hero rushing valiantly to save her. Although she may have lost security and to some degree,

safety, the new heroine has claimed independence and freedom from male definitions.

Frank Davey argues in his article, "Alternate Stories", that in Atwood, there are always two stories--a literal and an allegorical level (10-12). The characters live in the official, real story but simultaneously function in the psychological story which is only marginally understood by the characters. Because of this inability to understand themselves, couples are unable to increase their level of intimacy and remain forever isolated from one another. These comments are most applicable to "Bluebeard's Egg". However, they also carry through to other stories in the collection. The reiteration of the Bluebeard and Gothic motifs is visible in other stories, in varying degrees.

The most obvious Gothic parallels to "Bluebeard's Egg" may be found in "The Sin Eater". Joseph is the magical healer who possesses all of the power over his female clients. He, like Ed, has enjoyed gardening, which connotes the arcane knowledge of a wizard. In fact, Joseph dies while pruning a tree. Joseph too, has three wives who all attend the funeral, along with the narrator.

Joseph is also an enigma to his clients, a confusing melange of light and dark; but the narrator, like Sally, is unable to

accept the duality of existence: "I want Joseph to remain as he appeared: solid, capable, wise, and sane. I do not need his darkness" (BE 215). She desires only the positive aspects of existence from Joseph: she does not want any questionable characteristics. Joseph is required by her to be a hero; she does not want any vagaries included in her definition of him. The narrator wants Joseph to be a certainty--a person from whom she is able to seek refuge. She also wants to be removed from the complexities of life, but as Joseph tells her, it is a futile dream: "'This world is all we have', says Joseph. 'It's all you have to work with. It's not too much for you. You will not be rescued'" (BE 215-216). This is, of course, Sally's fondest wish. What both women must realize is that they are the only ones who can rescue themselves. Joseph is not a young lover willing to combat the forces of evil to rescue the narrator; she cannot place herself in the role of a young maiden. The Gothic elements present in "Bluebeard's Egg" often echo throughout other stories in the collection. Atwood is attempting to develop a new context for the mythology of women, free from the conventional restraints of stereotyped versions of female characters.

References to the Middle Ages are numerous throughout the collection--appropriate allusions when one considers the huge

influence that the Middle Ages exerted upon the Gothic form. The medieval quest becomes an important element for Atwood because she combines it with the quest for female autonomy. This particularly holds true for "The Scarlet Ibis." Christine's marriage is saved by their visit to the bird "preservation". They experience a frightening event in that their boat begins to leak during their journey up the river. Christine and her daughter are not saved by Don (the non-heroic husband) but by a grotesque "angel" who is able to plug the leak by sitting in the hole. Upon arriving at the bird sanctuary, Christine has an epiphany: "She felt she was looking at a picture, of exotic flowers or of red fruit growing on trees, evenly spaced, like the fruit in the gardens of mediaeval paintings, solid, clear-edged, in primary colours. On the other side of the fence was another world, not real but at the same time more real than the one on this side..." (BE 178). This trip becomes a story which Christine relates frequently to guests. It is a positive tale because it describes the magical transformation of that relationship.

The story is aligned with the quest motif that often is integral for the Gothic heroine--a search for both physical safety and for relationship security. Christine is anchored by

the physical presence of her husband and child and has now achieved happiness in the traditional role of stereotypical womanhood after being exposed to the perils of drowning on the river on the voyage out.

Yet other stories contain elements of the grotesque and of alienation. The narrator of "Unearthing Suite" says,

Not for the first time it occurs to me that I could not have been born, like other people, but must have been hatched out of an egg. My parents' occasional dismay over me was not like the dismay of other parents. It was less dismay than perplexity, the bewilderment of two birds who have found a human child in their nest and have no idea what to do with it (BE 240).

Atwood explores the themes of difference of and interchangeability. In "Hurricane Hazel", the narrator is very conscious of being different from other girls but at the same time, she is expected to play the conventional role as the passive heroine: "It's likely that I was put into Buddy's life by Trish so that Trish and Charlie could neck in the back seat of Buddy's car at drive-in movies, but I doubt that Buddy knew this. Neither did I, at the time" (BE 27). She represents the Gothic

perception of how women are considered to be non-entities with respect to their lives outside of relationships.

The supernatural plays a part in the other stories as well. For example, in "Unearthing Suite" the conclusion concerns itself with the apparently miraculous visit of a fisher. Yet this supernatural occurrence is not one of Gothic familial retribution or revenge but a sign from nature which reaffirms the family structure:

For my mother however, this is something else. For her this dropping--this hand-long, two-fingers-thick, black hairy dropping--not to put too fine a point on it, this deposit of animal shit--is a miraculous token, a sign of divine grace; as if their mundane, familiar, much-patched but at times still-leaking roof has been visited and made momentarily radiant by an unknown but by no means minor god (BE 258).

This religious significance can be seen within the Gothic context because Catholicism took a dominant role in such early works as Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto. The cast of characters usually included a priest who was sometimes of an evil nature as in the case of The Italian. Schedoni, who schemed to

gain personal advancement and to murder Ellena, was a monk.

Another example is plotting Ambrosio of The Monk.

In "Uglypuss," Becka combines elements of the Gothic with mythology: "She feels smaller, diminished, as if something's been sucking on her neck. Anger is supposed to be liberating, so goes the mythology, but her anger has not freed her in any way that she can see" (BE 89-90). In many of these stories, women are being defined in male terms. For example, in "Spring Song of the Frogs", two of the female characters are anorexic and in "Uglypuss", Becka is unable to express her anger towards Joel appropriately. In both of these cases, Gothic components are integrated into the text. In the first, the women are grotesque parodies of themselves and in the second, Becka takes on the role of the villain. Atwood is illustrating here the dangers of violating the conventional patterns of behaviour, either by taking the socially acceptable form of beauty to the extreme or by expressing a valid anger. Each of these two stories contains a type of mutated female, a Gothic version of a monster who may threaten men.

The Gothic theme of mazes is repeated throughout the collection. In an admittedly semi-autobiographical story, "Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother," Atwood re-

emphasizes the claim Gothic genre has on females. Although life conformed to the socially acceptable male hierarchy, the secret and ostensibly the power of the house, belonged solely to the women's domain. Atwood begins to take explicit note of the Gothic at the very beginning of the collection, another indication of its importance. The aura of mystery pervades the house with a surging sense of menace. The house has become the prototype for a Gothic castle which is frequently critically considered to be a psychological symbol for the main characters. The fact that its physical structure was so confusing also suggests a comparison with the maze; the search for its centre mirrors the search for self and for happiness:

In this house there were many rooms. Although I have been there, although I have seen the house with my own eyes, I still don't know how many. Parts of it were closed off, or so it seemed; there were back staircases. Passages led elsewhere...The structure of the house was hierarchial, with my grandfather at the top, but its secret life--the life of pie crusts, clean sheets, the box of rags in the linen closet, the loaves in the oven--was female. The house, and all the objects in it, crackled with static electricity;

undertows washed through it, the air was heavy with things that were known but not spoken (BE 3).

The element of secrecy is important to the Gothic because it increases the suspense as well as the terror. Yvonne, the main character in "The Sunrise," is extremely mysterious. No one knows anything about her, including her age. Her stalking of men for use as her models is vaguely menacing. One is reminded of the prototype of a vampire, especially while considering that she will buy a tulip to "drink its blood until it dies" (BE 234). The other characters are constantly speculating about Yvonne and trying to uncover her secret. The only one which we discover is the same one which Yvonne herself is willing to expose: "My secret is that I get up every morning to watch the sunrise," she says. This is her secret, though it's not the only one; it's the only one on offer today" (BE 234). We are reminded by this statement that females are often overly burdened with secrets which may not be related to others. The Gothic heroine's inner life is completely private: known only to herself. Yvonne also has a concealed room where she is free to plan and execute her eventual death. The knowledge of how to die is described by

Atwood as "arcane" (238). Like Sally, Yvonne carries within her the seeds of her own destruction.

The Gothic principles used by Atwood in Bluebeard's Egg are effectively combined with the tale of Bluebeard to emphasize the inherent power of the choices which women have to make. By providing a model familiar to a large number of her female readers, Atwood gives her readers a level of comfort before addressing the question of the appropriateness of the model and redistributing the female balance of power. At the same time, Atwood explores and successfully depicts the sense of unease experienced by many women within the confines of relationships. She could not have chosen a more powerful means of expression than the Gothic model whose very form explores the darkness of fear and the darkness of love.

Atwood continues with her Gothic innovations in more recent works such as Wilderness Tips and Robber Bride but there is insufficient space to examine these texts here.

Atwood's choice of the vehicle of the Gothic is very apt and powerful. The Gothic is a complex genre written about women by women. It develops culturally acceptable norms but it also simultaneously inverts them by creating intelligent and resourceful heroines. By relying upon standard symbols and

archetypes, Atwood is able to continue her feminist theme of social oppression. This oppression is not necessarily inflicted upon females but may in fact be self-imposed. Females accept the cultural stereotypes which are publicly enacted daily. When cultural icons are used in a subversive manner and when they were developed to be used in such a way, the effect of the protest intensifies even more. By utilizing an accessible genre, Atwood enables her literature to reach the majority of female readers and therefore, increases the probability that her readership will comprehend her symbols and her motifs.

Tragically, Atwood's ultimate message appears to be that although women are able to recognize their self-imposed difficulties, we are unable to disassociate ourselves from these same constraints. We continue to learn and to teach the Gothic myths and fairy tales of villains and virtuous maidens to our children. Consciously, we are aware of the self-destructive nature of these models of behaviour. Unconsciously, we cannot break away from the all pervasive allure of these archetypal patterns. Thus, the anguish of Joan and the multitude of other Atwoodian characters is to languish forever in an unfulfilling destiny while hovering, claiming and then relinquishing self knowledge in cyclical patterns. In order for Sally and for Joan

to rise above stereotypical lives as Gothic heroines, they must be willing and able to reclaim their personal destinies and to release themselves from the outmoded patterns which bind them.

Chapter Four

THE CHAOS OF THE WHIRLPOOL:
REDEFINING HEROINES AND VILLAINS

Critics have expressed varied opinions on Urquhart's The Whirlpool. Alice Van Wart sees it as an obsessive novel (47-48). Sherie Posesorki agrees with Van Wart concerning its "death-related obsessions" but classifies it also as "romantically morbid" (26). Elin Elgaard contends that the novel suggests an intense, visionary world (487) while Joanna Burkhardt reads it as a "longing for a return to the womb" (127). Each of these reviews contends that the whirlpool is the main image in the novel and determines many of the characters' actions. The closest to a neo-Gothic reading of The Whirlpool is Posesorki's with her comments on the "...major leitmotivs of...dreams, obsessions, death, and their relationship to the production of art" (26) but she too, misses the crucial elements of the Gothic in The Whirlpool. In fact, what Urquhart is actually attempting is to demonstrate how the production of literary art affects life.

When one considers the absence of critical discussion of the novel's Gothic aspects in these reviews, it is not surprising to observe that Jane Urquhart's use of Gothic is much more subtle than Atwood's. For example, whereas Atwood explicitly states that Joan writes Costume Gothics and Sally is obviously placed in the dangerous position of being Bluebeard's third wife, Urquhart plays with the Gothic elements implicitly. She draws upon the novel, Wuthering Heights, as well as upon the romantic Gothic more than Atwood does. Elements of fairy tales, as in Atwood's Bluebeard's Egg, also emerge in Away in the opening episode with Mary and the drowned sailor. Urquhart's heroines are much more in control of their destinies than Atwood's female characters. Whereas Atwoodian characters vacillate between forging their own way and remaining within the confines of a seemingly destructive relationship and ultimately forego pursuing their own individuality, Urquhart's heroines have the personal means to transgress the social norms by abandoning their relationships for their own self-actualization. The natural perils of unidimensional thought which become so obvious in the characters of Lady Oracle and Bluebeard's Egg are not restrictions placed on Urquhart's heroines. Both Mary and Fleda of The Whirlpool voluntarily emerge from their relationships ready to explore

alternative social roles. Polly (Arianna) of Changing Heaven is not quite so adventurous, but she also learns of the dangers which correspond to an overly intense relationship. Atwood's characters find no solace in attempting to merge their identities with their perceived heroes. In fact, it would seem that their heroes/villains appear in more menacing roles than in Urquhart's writing. Urquhart's heroines, although socially constricted, are not bound by their own unidimensional constructs of reality. They still yearn for the romantic ideal but will not passively await its arrival. For example, Mary will actively seek the love of her demon lover at the cost of relinquishing her family. Urquhart's characters do search for a form of spiritual melding but this merging is achieved through their spiritual amalgamation with the landscape as opposed to a negation of identity in favour of another's personality and needs. The heroine's search for the forbidden knowledge of herself becomes integral in Urquhart's use of Gothic elements.

Although Urquhart is attempting to present the role of the heroine in a different manner from Atwood, their ultimate purpose in choosing the Gothic elements is the same. They both are presenting the need to reject the classical model of relationships offered to women through this type of novel.

Although the patriarchy is inevitably upheld at the conclusion of the historical Gothic novel, these Gothic novelists were exploring original roles for women throughout the development of the plot--thus, the subversive nature of their version of the Gothic novel becomes apparent. Once again varying Atwood's technique of not providing an epiphany for the floundering heroine, Urquhart offers an innovative departure from the conventional Gothic structure. She does this by incorporating the elements of the self-reliant heroine and of the displacement of romantic love into her novels as the primary means of initiating change in the lives of her heroines.

Fleda is The Whirlpool's neo-Gothic heroine who is ensnared in an unhappy marriage. When she is confronted with Patrick's forbidden love for her followed by his total rejection of her, Fleda discovers her own inner strength and is able to abandon her husband, David, in order to pursue her own desires. In the context of the time of the novel, this reclamation of individuality is commendable. Instead of presenting marriage as the happy ending, Urquhart conversely suggests that the end of that marriage itself is the means to attaining personal fulfilment. Fleda, once cast aside by Patrick, becomes more closely aligned with the landscape and cannot bear the idea of

living within the constraints of a house or within the corresponding social role of a wife. Instead of subordinating herself to the needs of her husband, Fleda insists upon the importance of her own identity. The search for her inner knowledge is therefore a forbidden one because she undertakes it at the cost of her social obligations to her husband. Fleda has been caught in an impossible situation of extremes. David considers her to be his wife and does not entertain any thoughts that she may harbour personal aspirations. Patrick worships Fleda and sees her as idealized perfection. He even refuses to speak to her about his voyeuristic activities. Once she broaches the topic, she has sullied his image of her and is no longer worthy of his silent adoration. In both cases, Fleda is viewed only in the context of her relationship with the men. They do not see her as an independent, intelligent woman.

Patrick, a poet, plays a crucial role in the development of Urquhart's neo-Gothic novel. The qualities normally associated with the classical heroine are often attributed to him. Thus, with this role reversal, he becomes a Gothic anti-hero. Patrick is consumed with his own expectations of behaviours being consistent with gender. He idealizes Fleda but insists on his definition of her as being the only correct one. This insistence

aids Fleda with her refusal to conform to male standards any longer. It simultaneously creates difficulty in understanding Patrick because this rigidity on his part suggests villainous characteristics. Patrick is not only an anti-hero; he is also a villain in his conspiracy to relegate Fleda to a life of subservience. Patrick is a crucial aspect to Fleda's decision to abandon her male-imposed female persona. It is therefore impossible to examine The Whirlpool without studying Patrick's part.

Maud Grady, the predominant female in the alternate plot of The Whirlpool, is also socially defined. She is not permitted to take part in the village's social activities because people frequently assume that she is trying to assure the success of her business. She feels public censure to such an extent that she assumes the black crape of a mourning woman for the requisite two years despite its extreme discomfort. Maud is preoccupied with morbid thoughts and is raising an autistic child. In her job as undertaker, she is able to pursue her ghoulish hobby of collecting remnants from the victims of the nearby whirlpool and classifying them. This occupation introduces the element of the Gothic grotesque to the novel.

Maud is only able to participate in life when her son rearranges her collection of artifacts. Her focus then shifts from a macabre concentration on the dead to a vital relationship with her son. As illustrated previously with Fleda, Maud only actively begins to seek for self-actualization once her marriage no longer exists. She is assisted with her efforts by her association with the landscape when she gardens. When Maud attempts to observe events, she realizes that she always misses them: "It seemed to her that only in her absence could miraculous transformations occur; only while she slept or lapsed into forgetfulness. Then the river released its dead, the child spoke, her garden blossomed, the season changed. But never under her direct gaze" (W 155). This quotation reiterates Urquhart's argument that true meaning is found only in the absence of one's physical or spiritual aspects. One may only experience pure spirituality and epiphanies while totally melded with something Other, such as the landscape. For Maud, the moment of realization occurs when "dreaming" (W 215) and she is able to participate in her son's life. Her alienation from him has been overcome successfully.

From the chaos of being acted upon externally by others comes peace but this peace is difficult to attain for the female

characters of The Whirlpool. The chaotic surroundings in which the characters find themselves are very indicative of the Gothic novel. They, particularly Maud, live in a precarious world where death makes frequent unexpected calls, as in the example of the dying bride.

Maud carried Sam's story around with her for the rest of the day, thinking about costumes. Lord, she thought, they are always dressing you up as something and then you are not yourself anymore. This young girl, the frozen, immobilized bride, coerced into it and then dead and unable to ever grow beyond it. No one now would even remember her name.

Anecdotally, she would always be the bride, the one who was married and buried in the same breath (N 149).

The female role of bride and wife was extremely crucial to creating a definition of the female self. In this story, the name of the bride was not mentioned. She is known only by her role with respect to men. As Maud notes, the costumes are required in order for the women to exist. Urquhart uses this anecdote to illustrate the symbolic death of every girl once she

married. Once donned, the costume of the wife may never be removed. Maud herself has to undergo a transformation period from wife to widow, which is also symbolized by her widow's weeds.

Fleda and Maud have clear social definitions of their female selves. Fleda is the wife of a major and is therefore expected to entertain. However, she is no longer able to accept the expectations of others that were imposed upon her: *"As if I wanted furniture now, or anything else. The silver stays in darkness, locked in a vault in town. I don't want it either. I've forgotten which fork is used for what. I couldn't survive an afternoon tea. It took no time for all of that to fade away. Remember manners?"* (X 219) Fleda has objected to imposed behaviours from the beginning of the novel. Maud has tried to incorporate them into her life by avoiding being at locations that might cause gossip and by being very discreet about her profession. Fleda discards social conventions while Maud eventually rises above them. Both of these characters must flout expected roles in order to fulfil Urquhart's design of developing anti-heroines.

In traditional Gothic novels, one of two character systems normally is used. There may be the heroine, pursued by the

villain and rescued by the hero, or the heroine may deal only with one man whose true nature cannot be determined to be either good or evil. Usually, any dubious attributes are explained or justified at the conclusion and he is able to marry the heroine. In The Whirlpool, we have the former situation. If Fleda is classified as the neo-Gothic heroine, then Patrick is the hero. He attempts to rescue her from an unhappy situation, but when she violates his unwritten code, he abandons her emotionally. Initially, though, Fleda does see him as her potential saviour. They become connected through the whirlpool. Although he is perceived by Fleda to be the heroic figure, in reality, he takes on the qualities associated with the typical heroine. He is much more idealistic, for example, than Fleda who prefers to know him as he really is. Patrick does not want to see any of Fleda's personal characteristics. She must remain as an abstract figure to him.

Both plots are dominated by the overriding presence of the whirlpool, which presents a reflection of chaos and confusion in nature. The whirlpool, as explained by David, was apparently formed when one of the river's forks was filled in. The river's current still follows the ancient river bed and as a result, the whirlpool is created. It is an image of danger, power and

confusion. The whirlpool claims victims constantly and yields them begrudgingly to the River Man--another grotesque character who makes his living by dredging frequently mutilated remains of brave adventurers from the waterway. Patrick himself eventually succumbs to its lure and to its mystery in a futile effort to completely understand it and to become one with it. It is only by directly referring to the whirlpool that Fleda and Patrick are able to finally comprehend what they both desire. Fleda admits in her journal that she wants Patrick to touch her when she is considering the nature of the whirlpool:

No, you have to enter the whirlpool by choice. You have to walk toward it and step into it. Or you have to be pushed.

It's only the ocean's maelstrom that you slip into by chance, moving in a straight line from this to that. Perhaps I've always waited for the demon lover to leave the maelstrom and enter my house, through some window while I slept on...innocent and unaware.

One moment you are dreaming, the next terrifyingly awake, on board a ghost ship bound for God knows where...away from home.

Away from home...it is the open sea, the damp, a storm approaching and the inevitable shipwreck.

Interesting that the demon attacks only architecture.

In the woods it is knights, dragons, and ladies who are eventually set free.

Perhaps you have to be lodged in order to be dislodged (W 176).

Fleda is yearning for the romantic ideal in her relationship. She wants the elements of danger and uncertainty. However, Patrick, in the guise of a demon lover, will not provide them. He does not seduce her into leaving David. Instead, Fleda makes her own conscious decision when her lover repudiates her. The image of the demon lover invokes Bram Stoker's Dracula. He too travelled by ship through raging storms. Even though he was an evil monster who preyed upon the innocent, both Mina and Lucy (women whom Dracula attacked) develop an unwilling attraction for him. Another predominant image explored here is the medieval setting of knights and ladies. Perhaps Patrick is seen to be the liberator of Fleda, who is hemmed in by historical facts and the soon-to-be built house. Patrick is not able to release her from

the constrictions of her mismatched marriage nor from his own personal idealization of her. Ironically, however, he does free her when she is rejected by him in his efforts to return her to the world of his own personal imaginings. Fleda admits that "he was not the dark man she had dreamed about during her childhood, not the one who arrived one morning and obliterated the past with his passion" (W 157). The dangers of the maelstrom cannot be avoided. Even if the demon lover had removed himself from its swirling currents, it is impossible that they would ever extricate themselves from the storm. However, entering the whirlpool by choice reveals a desire for change: a change that risks death. Fleda eventually symbolically decides to enter the whirlpool herself in order to flee from the demands of being forced into being someone that she is not.

By introducing the whirlpool as a topic of conversation, Fleda allows an element of unregulated discourse to intrude and it is Patrick who is placed on the defensive and who experiences a feeling of being besieged. This is typically a female role but Fleda has claimed the initiative by speaking of the forbidden. She has transgressed the protocol of her position as a deified perfected woman and she is punished by Patrick for this breach. Since he has been secretly viewing Fleda, he has been unwilling

to see her as a flesh and blood creature. He is much more interested in her image as a mysterious, elusive woman--she is placed in a Muse-like role. David, as well, considers both Fleda and Laura Secord (his own version of the ideal woman) as focal points in his thoughts. This corresponds with the Anglo-American approach of seeing the female as the centre of a feminist literature.

Immediately following their conversation about the whirlpool, Fleda attempts to force the mundane into Patrick's fantasy world: "He was like a walled village that had been sacked and burned, just when it was feeling most secure, when it was full of provisions and all the people and livestock were safe behind the drawbridge" (W 182). This is a medieval Gothic image of the siege and the untouchable damsel.

Conversely it is the male, not the female, who is associated with the image of the walled fortifications. Patrick has been emotionally invaded when Fleda destroys his needed dreams of her. Urquhart has redistributed the balance of power from the male to the female. Previously, Patrick has contributed to his dominating role in his illicit watching of Fleda. However, in her confrontation of him, he has been damaged and exposed. Not only has she been revealed as powerful, his own sense of

invulnerability has been shattered. Fleda has refused to abide by his arbitrarily imposed rules.

Fleda's otherworldly status is negated. Her reality which has been extended when Patrick introduces her to a new context of relationships, is further broadened. Patrick has forced her to see beyond the confines of her marriage. This does not correspond with traditional Gothic heroines whose lives are definitively prescribed for them upon marriage. The poet refuses to look at Fleda once the relationship has been verbalized and he constantly attempts to demystify her by bringing her into the world of the mundane by casual conversation, by revealing all as prose that had been previously magical poetry. The delicate mysterious nature of their relationship is destroyed. Fleda feels that her demon lover is doing the most harmful act in erasing her, by causing her to vanish and to diminish in importance in his life. Ironically, it is the poet who is eventually sucked physically into the maelstrom of the whirlpool. It is the dark current of the whirlpool that reflects the inner waters of the human beings and the ebb and flow of their relationships. It is as if the human beings are being swept along the whirlpool's course with very little control over their own destiny. They have to navigate successfully the inherent

dangers of the whirlpool. For some, these dangers are avoided by trying to attain a conventional social reputation.

Appropriate clothing is a means to establish social control and to regulate behaviour. Both of the female protagonists are defined by the males in the novel in exterior ways by the way they dress. Fleda feels criticized by the two male characters for her choice of clothing: "I have a new skirt--pale blue silk with white braid. David says that it's ridiculous that I should want to wear it here in the woods...Nothing is ever military enough for David or illusive enough for Patrick" (¶ 175). Maud Grady wears the expected black crape widow's weeds for the first two years following her husband's death, even though she experiences several risky encounters because of her veil. In Gothic literature, the heroine is expected to follow a certain prescribed role. Any deviation from that role is considered to be unacceptable. David's gift of Patmore's Angel in the House to Fleda is yet another example of how women were expected to be subordinate to their husbands.

However, in rebellious Gothic fashion, Fleda refuses to behave as expected. The Major's reaction when she is late illustrates the conventions imposed on women: "But she understood his need for punctuality and always returned in time.

Why should she choose this day to make an exception to rules she had learned so well?" (¶ 227). She insists upon being her own person and, in so doing, is able to maintain her purity and her integrity. She leaves David because he persists in relegating her to the role of Laura Secord and because he fails in truly knowing and understanding her.

She, like Atwood's Molly in Wilderness Tips, breaks free from the world of the men by concentration on a word of a hymn, "Though Your Sins". Fleda is gaining more power over her own voice and language. Her moment of change occurs with the reverberation of a single syllable. Urquhart uses irony in her approach. Although Fleda is trying to write her own story, she finds a single word to illustrate her alteration: "She shrugged and turned away from both men, the neutrality of the word wool still hanging in the air and finally entering her mind. She stopped at that moment, responding to either one of them" (¶ 212). By reclaiming the female domain in the use of the word, "wool," Fleda becomes an autonomous figure. The reference to the scarlet coloured sins evokes other images as well: "...the sinful, bloody scarlet hearts depicted in Papist lithographs, a pair of bright red mittens lying in a snowdrift, white sheep sinfully butchered, stained this time irregularly with their own

blood" (W 211). These are all contrasting images of purity and desecration. The irony of the origins of the hymn should also be noted; the hymn being sung is one from the Christian patriarchal system. The word "wool" also suggests connotations of sacrifice. Perhaps by ceasing to care about either of the men, Fleda is refusing to be the sacrifice for the easing of these men's lives. Thus, Urquhart is exploring the idea of a stronger anti-Gothic heroine with Fleda's antipathy for catering to men.

The word "wool" is the final step in Fleda's assertion. As proposed by Michelle Masse in In the Name of Love, Gothics are ultimately subversive: "Throughout the Gothic, husbands' beliefs in their own entitlement lead to wives' physical and psychological destruction as they fail to merge their identities entirely with their husbands'" (26). It is by clinging to the familiar words of the hymn and the reiteration of the word "wool" that Fleda becomes a discrete entity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick contends that language is integral to the development of separateness of the Gothic heroine because the concentration on the "unutterable" and on the "unspeakable" emphasizes the inability of the heroine to communicate effectively:

Of all the Gothic conventions dealing with the sudden, mysterious, seemingly arbitrary, but massive inaccessibility of those things that normally should be most accessible, the difficulty the story has in getting itself told is of the most obvious structural significance...A fully legible manuscript or an uninterrupted narrative is rare; rarer still is the novel whose story is comprised by a single narrator (13, 14).

Fleda's reclaiming of the female word, "wool", is even more appropriate when one considers that she spoke the unutterable to Patrick concerning their unspoken relationship. Despite the constant flux of points of view which creates difficulties in getting the story told, one single word changes reality for Fleda.

Throughout the novel, it is Maud's son who is the more intuitive about the significance of language. Simultaneously, Maud is also beginning to possess more insight through her son's disordering of her classification of objects removed from floaters. Her obsession with death has impeded her ability to experience life. Maud finally comes to realize that the ghoulish power which she has invested in the relics of death is wrong:

"...Maud perceived that he was the possessor of all the light and that it was she, not he, that had been the dark wall" (N 215). She finally understands that the accumulation of objects represents the more tragic and grotesque part of life. They themselves should not contain power for her. They have been her demons.

Both she and Fleda have repudiated the form of living death decreed for them by the virtue of their gender. Maud is not participating in the role of a heroine. She is neither being pursued nor is actively seeking romantic love. Maud, by being portrayed as a completely non-heroine, is opposed to Fleda who may be described as an anti-heroine; Urquhart is providing a contrast between Gothic paradigms and realistic paradigms. Maud has utterly repudiated acting out a literary form in her life.

Conversely, Browning wishes the opposite to be true. He regrets his lack of impulsivity and that he has not lived his life in accordance with the accepted pattern of a poet. At his moment of death, Browning is able to envision the Romantic concept of emotion which is so connected with the Gothic intensity. This is a strong contrast to his initial reaction: "Empty Gothic and Renaissance palaces floated on either side of him like soiled pink dreams...He had trouble recording the words"

(¶ 8). Browning, like the Major, lives his life in an obviously predictable manner. Upon entering his bed that night, he compares himself to Shelley, but is unable to conceive of the Gothic terrors which intensify the experience of being alive:

And, as he lumbered into bed alone, he remembered that Shelley would have had Mary beside him and possibly Clare as well, their minds buzzing with nameless Gothic terrors. For a desperate moment or two Browning tried to conjure a gothic terror but discovered, to his great disappointment, that the vague shape taking form in his mind was only his dreary Italian duke cawing, predictably, once again into focus (¶ 13).

Once Browning has experienced the vision of Shelley's head appearing before him, (which is much the same as the portrait of Manfred's disapproving grandfather in The Castle of Otranto), he is able to experience his dying revelations.

Patrick expresses the same need for purity in his life as a poet. He also needs the comfort of abdicating responsibility. Thus, he plunges into the whirlpool and accomplishes a romantic death. David, lacking the insight of Browning and Patrick, does

not comprehend his need to follow a prescribed route and never tries to expand his emotional horizon. Thus, the males' ingrained experiences are a strong contrast to the revolutionary ones of the women. Although two of them desire to create variety in their lives, they are unable to undertake change.

As Fleda has previously noted, one has to enter the whirlpool by choice. This is the situation for Patrick who makes the conscious decision to swim the whirlpool. Instead of following Fleda's lead to enter the whirlpool in a symbolic sense, Patrick physically immerses himself in the Niagara River and commits suicide. In a sense, Patrick considers that he is making a journey:

This swim would be a journey into another country, a journey he would choose to make in full knowledge that he had no maps, that he hardly spoke the language...Patrick chose the vacuum, the neutrality. The softness of water and the sound it makes, the places it goes. All decisions having been made thousands of years ago (W 221-222).

Patrick manages to abdicate any responsibility for himself in his quest for peace. Fleda, while bravely negotiating a symbolic

whirlpool, is searching for a lost self. Patrick's Romantic ideals are not conventional--the attainment of peace--but his suicide is very Romantic. Fleda's flouting of convention also resembles Shelley's own impulsive lifestyle.

The doubles or the multiple personae of the main female characters demonstrate how these imposed identities are created by the females' relationships with men. In each instance, Fleda is being treated a certain way in the context of her role in relation to the males who surround her. She must confront these socially constructed identities by gazing at herself in the looking glass, as Joan Foster must complete an inner study in her very personal and symbolic subterranean maze, in order to fully understand herself. As Ilkido de Papp Carrington comments on Atwood, "The persistent reappearance of these *Doppelgänger* is another sign of the inner conflict of both the protagonists and their creator, who controls the potential chaos of conflict through her rigidly disciplined narrative structure" (40). It is by finally separating herself from the ghostly double that the female protagonist "defines her identity" (Carrington 40). It is by viewing herself in the mirror that Fleda fosters an inclination to leave her life of constriction: "But undressing at night, when she caught glimpses of her breasts and thighs in

the glass, she understood that this desire of hers had not diminished, had only become less centralized...an idea that had become part of the grey landscape in which she lived" (N 218).

In The Whirlpool, Urquhart makes use of the Gothic device of the *doppelganger* to some degree by introducing the motif of Laura Secord. The device of the *doppelganger* allows for the search of self-knowledge to continue because the character is unable to avoid a confrontation with the *doppelganger* embodying the worst attributes of society. Laura Secord is Fleda's *doppelganger* as constructed by Fleda's husband. Laura Secord represents the patriarchal ideal of womanhood which Fleda is currently rejecting. Fleda's husband is fascinated by the purported bravery of this legendary woman and he is constantly exhorting Fleda to act in a manner that would be in accordance with the behaviour of his idol. His obsessive behaviour goes so far as to insist that Fleda dress in a mudstained torn dress that he fondly assumes would be comparable to the one that Laura Secord would have worn. In response to a query from Fleda concerning the potential resemblance between herself and Laura Secord, her husband's comment is, "Well, I imagine her looking exactly like you, but wilder and in greater disarray, of course after her valorous trek through the woods." McDougal pulled his wife down

beside him on the bed and said, 'Then I imagine that Fitzgibbon would be strangely moved by her appearance" (N 53).

In the conversation from which this above quotation is taken, Urquhart is using several different Gothic conventions to reinforce the notion of the *doppelganger*. First, she is re-emphasizing the lack of power on the part of the wife, who is not permitted to refuse her husband intimate relations. Despite her initial unwillingness, he is able to initiate and have sex with her: "He made love, for all his kindness, like a man fighting a short, intense battle, a battle that he always won" (N 53). Although Fleda has personally repudiated her role as the Angel in the House (significantly, the boat named the "Angel" is the only craft that she launches that does not return), she has not as yet been able to make that break from social conventions publicly or privately.

As well, she is symbolically taking on the role of the Other in the guise of Laura Secord who is the type of woman whom she most abhors--the Angel in the House--even though Secord has accomplished a significant heroic feat. This version of sexuality is similar to the role of the symbolic black veil in the Gothic tradition when the heroine is terrified about what might be behind it. As Sedgwick argues, "The flesh..seems

valueless without the veil" (145). Unless Fleda concurs with her husband's expression of sexuality by making use of the veil/dress, then in a sexual context, she is completely lacking in value. By appropriating the role of Secord, Fleda is forced to confront her *doppelganger* and cast aside the more insidious elements associated with an idealized woman.

Patrick, in turn, manipulates Gothic conventions by secretly viewing Fleda from different unique angles: "Patrick was finding new ways to look at her--shadows and reflections...Picking up Fleda's hand mirror, he adjusted it so that he could see her even though his back was turned. He could see all of her although she could see only his eyes in the mirror" (167). He is not interested in seeing Fleda. He is only interested in seeing her as a variation of herself. Thus, he is continuing his attempted domination of her. The technique of using mirrors is one that Atwood frequently employs as well. All of this role playing gives Fleda the incentive to want to leave her marriage. Fleda manages to accomplish this feat at the conclusion of The Whirlpool when she abandons both Patrick and David physically and emotionally. Like Joan, she has to learn to dance independently for she too, is an artist--a writer--as is manifested in her journal entries. The whirlpool is the overriding unifying

element in the novel: "...you have to enter the whirlpool by choice. You have to walk towards it and step into it. Or you have to be pushed" (W 176). Fleda identifies with the power and the strength of its currents because of her own personal inner power as well as the association of artistic creativity with water.

Urquhart's pool is comparable to Atwood's mazes. It is the origin of ultimate knowledge while it also carries the potential of ultimate peril. Patrick dies while braving the attempt to conquer its mysteries. Fleda has no need to physically challenge the whirlpool because she has confronted and vanquished the other ghosts of herself. She is able to carry the meaning of the whirlpool with her in order that she may continue to create her own personal brand of female writing as Joan does in her poetry texts and in her *Costume Gothics*. Fleda includes pieces of herself in her writing, whereas Patrick's poetry is empty and void of meaning, as Fleda discovers when she finally is able to peruse it.

The antagonistic contrast between the men and Fleda continues beyond the male concepts of David's conquering and Patrick's formulaic writing versus her comprehending and truly creative journal writing to the landscape itself: "The idyllic

life in nature appears again in Gothic fiction, where it is invaded and destroyed by a dark, albeit ambiguous, force" (MacAndrew 35). Fleda is associated with the landscape and with the whirlpool: "Perhaps the woman was the landscape" (W 103). Ultimately Fleda does become integrated with the landscape, but it is ironic that it is Patrick who initially makes the connection between the two. She dreams frequently about falling from a great height into water--possibly the whirlpool. One dream is described by the Major: "...she said the whirlpool lived in the house...though she couldn't see it. As long as she was in the house she was always being pushed around it in a circular fashion from room to room" (W 101).

In traditional Gothic writings, this menacing force which invades and ravages the natural pristine landscape is the male villain. Valancourt in The Mysteries of Udolpho, for example, is associated with the natural environment, while Montoni remains inside in order to propagate more terrors upon the virtuous Emily. Frequently, the landscape appropriately reflects the persona of the male. Valancourt is only present in the civilized surroundings of France while Montoni is primarily connected with the remote and savage landscape of northern Italy. Emily is associated with the hero or the villain and his subsequent

landscape. Originally, this parallels Urquhart's intent in The Whirlpool when Patrick is introduced in the context of the natural environment and David is associated with architecture. The sharp contrast created at the beginning in order to demonstrate the apparently divided roles of hero and villain evolves into a strong similarity between the two. The differences become blurred.

Of the three main characters in the love triangle plot, Fleda is the most comfortable in the natural environment. She has relegated the building of the house to the realm of impossibility and thinks only of her dream house. She has discarded the trappings of society. David sees the construction of the house in terms of impacting and changing the landscape, "Architecture making its geometric statement on the landscape" (X 228). However, it is Patrick who experiences the most chilling dreams about the boundaries inherent in his uncle's farm house. Once again, this reverses the stereotypes of the Gothic conventions as Urquhart continues with reference to the besieged walled village as a description of Patrick.

And so it continued, through the stuffed and billowing forms in the parlour, to the

horizontals of the bedrooms with their large and frightening mirrors in which, Patrick believed, anything at all might appear. Any one of the ground floor rooms could be entered into from the outside, but Patrick chose, as a form of thrilling self-torture, to follow the emotionally charged route of rooms that led to rooms that led to rooms, as if he were an explorer on the verge of a great discovery.

In his dreams, despite the fact that they were recurring, the discovery always came as a surprise. At the end of the parlour, in the position normally occupied by a large window, Patrick would find a door. His feeling of surprise would soon be replaced by one of intense curiosity and he would pull it open to be confronted with a narrow staircase which led, as might be expected, to rooms that led to rooms that led to rooms--a replica, in fact, of the ground floor of the house, except that the contents would be entirely scrambled (W 190).

This entire discomfiting journey through what should be a familiar house is a Gothic reenactment of the pursuit. Patrick assumes the role of the lost heroine who is searching for "a great discovery." Urquhart continues with her reversal of Gothic conventions by placing Patrick in the more vulnerable position of having his personal boundaries exposed. Eugenia DeLamotte in Perils of the Night explains the experience of Gothic horror as being terror concerning boundaries: "...the fear of terrible separateness and the fear of unity with some terrible Other" (22). This is particularly appropriate when considered in the context of a feminist reading of Gothic texts, for it is consistently the personal symbolic and physical boundaries of the females which are being invaded by the men. For example, Fleda's spaces are constantly being invaded by Patrick when he is spying on her. She is being violated without even being aware originally of this secret assault. However, once she does become aware of the observation of the poet, she does not confront him with her realization, since she is comfortable in the knowledge that he is secretly viewing her through the woods.

Patrick is the character who experiences the most trauma in being controlled by outside influences, as is demonstrated by the

above reference to his dream. Fleda walks away from the men's strong exertion of power on her while David revels in being constrained by social precepts; for example, he retreats to the ordered confines of the local museum when seeking emotional comfort. The two men are the ones who are primarily concerned about boundaries and attempt to shut away the world. As DeLamotte notes, "The psychological, moral, spiritual, and intellectual energies expended in the engagement with the forces of violence are generated by an anxiety about boundaries: those that shut the protagonist off from the world, those that separate the individual self from something that is Other" (19).

Fleda is not constrained by any physical or social boundaries, and is, as previously mentioned, primarily associated with the landscape. Normally, it is the female who is under forced restraint by the design of a scheming male and this would indeed appear to be the intention of David McDougal in his house construction. When Fleda forsakes him, he is thwarted in these plans. Although he is cast in the role of a villain, his crime is one of insensitivity and stupidity more than conventional Gothic crimes of evil and revenge. It is Patrick who is cast in the guise of the pursued Gothic "heroine" in his frightening journey through the everchanging house of his dreams of nocturnal

travels. This reversal of roles serves to illustrate Fleda's power. She is able to transcend the customary stereotypical demands by refusing to be a victim. Patrick, although he too chooses the whirlpool and is therefore able to recognize the ultimate significance in the journey, is too overtly bound by the houses in his life to escape from their pervasive social confines. He idealistically believes for a significant portion of the novel in Fleda's mystery and perfection: an appropriate vision for the Gothic hero concerning his heroine. Upon realizing that she wished to transcend the necessary limitations of such a relationship, he is forced to retreat, much as David's Americans flee from the valiant British troops. Patrick, too, is forced to confront his *doppelganger* in dreams, but he doesn't arrive at a definitive epiphany as does Fleda.

In Our Ladies of Darkness, Joseph Andriano discusses "The Feminine in The Monk" In reference to Agnes he states, "Like a lamia, she draws energy from the person she haunts, enervating him. A boundary between haunter and haunted therefore breaks down" (42). Patrick's and Fleda's dreams of one another are forms of haunting because they are so consumed with the nature of the other that they must feed mentally on that concept. Patrick's energies are being consumed by his thoughts of Fleda

and his illusion of his control over her existence. His focus on Fleda drains him of his natural energies. Everything is her. He wants to sustain the inherent boundaries which exist to serve his idealization of her but they begin to disintegrate since Fleda also "was haunted, almost constantly now, by the idea of the poet watching her. She was fascinated..." (W 157). When Patrick becomes aware of her mutual reciprocation of interest, Fleda dissolves and changes into someone ordinary because the boundaries have indeed become blurred and insubstantial. She has drawn all of the energy from him that he is able to give. He reclaims his boundaries with his decision to swim the whirlpool: "...Patrick considered how there was always a point where one set of circumstances ended and another began. Boundaries, borderlines, territories" (W 221).

By integrating Gothic devices in The Whirlpool, Urquhart has effectively extended the scope of her novel. Using the echoes of historic texts familiar to all, she has reworked motifs and plots to present an original alternative for female readers. Relying solely on the domain of terror and horror, Urquhart is able to utilize its traditional expressions to define common difficulties in the female experience, such as the inability to communicate and the lack of physical space: "That the gothicists of the past

created an artistic vision intended to reveal the bleaker facets of the human soul is a given; such an impulse is very much alive in contemporary British and American fiction..." (Morrow xiv).

Although Urquhart does not deal with such traditional Gothic themes as madness and pure evil, by presenting crucial gender issues in this genre, she infuses them with additional significance and importance for her audience. By inverting Gothic motifs, Urquhart makes a powerful argument for redefining a social context for women. Her anti-heroes/heroines illustrate the necessity of transgressing social norms in order to pursue a quest for self-knowledge. The concentration upon the anti-heroic role of Patrick compels her readers to assess their own expectations of male/female behaviours. Urquhart offers positive alternate suggestions to what would otherwise be intolerable situations.

Chapter Five

CHANGING HEAVEN: URQUHART'S GOTHIC TUMULT

Changing Heaven is a novel about change and about power. However, in this work, most of the power is already possessed by the women. In Urquhart as well as Atwood, women tend to be depicted in powerful, almost shamanistic, roles. Symbolically, the painting by Tintoretto of *St. George and the Dragon* as introduced by Arthur, the quasi-villain, represents this power and also reflects Gothic modes:

In the foreground of the painting a menacing, hysterical princess is thrust towards him by something she is trying to escape from; her voluminous clothing struggling with her away from threatening weather, dark landscape, and the languid corpse of a young, nude man...The dragon is not nearly as frightening as the emotions of the princess...looking at the poor, dutiful, underrated saint, and then at this huge whirlwind of a princess, he is certain that the story is all about her (CH 61).

Once again, the thread of role reversal becomes apparent in Arthur's description of the piece of art. The imminent peril is not originating from the dragon but from the maiden--an experience that Arthur himself undergoes within the context of his relationship with Ann, a Bronte scholar. It is she who seizes the full control of the relationship. In many ways, she abandons social conventions in her hunger for the perfect relationship. She plays out the role that she wishes for Arthur to assume.

In no other novel examined here do we meet as strong a female character as Ann Frear. She, although replaying the role of the Gothic heroine and being ruled by love, takes ultimate control over Arthur. She may be compared to a lamia in her efforts to consume him. This is an appropriate characterization for Ann, given that we are in the world of Bronte's Wuthering Heights, a world which Catherine Earnshaw ruled with her passion. Just as Ann is an inverted heroine, so Arthur is an inverted villain. They both enact the extreme roles of their reversals in that as an anti-heroine and as an anti-hero, Ann and Arthur each depict the attributes appropriate for the other. Arthur, for example, takes on the characteristics of passivity and

helplessness which are the reversal of the normal qualities for a hero.

In this novel, Urquhart's purpose is to demonstrate that the stereotypes no longer are applicable. The power to hurt and the power to cause pain are the domain of women as well as men. Although Ann casts herself as Catherine, she does not wish to have the same tragedy occur because of an irrational, headstrong passion. She settles quite happily with John and Arthur's marriage remains intact. They all recover from the wounds inflicted. Unlike Wuthering Heights, no lives are irreparably damaged.

In The Whirlpool Fleda presents an escape from prescribed social roles while Maud, who remains within the community, is able to transcend her own personal limitations. Although Urquhart's message has remained constant in her second novel, she has approached the idea of transgression a little differently. The female characters of Changing Heaven are less idealized than those of The Whirlpool. Despite the atmosphere of the supernatural which greatly influences the novel's development, with respect to Ann, the conclusion is perhaps more positive than the former novel. Urquhart is presenting us with a new pattern: that of women who have succumbed to the seductive lure of the

Gothic paradigm but who have overcome its fascination. Thus, the plot of Wuthering Heights is rewritten without the tragedy of passion, and real-life emotions begin to dominate Ann's world. The ghosts become one with the landscape. What has begun as a tumultuous Gothic romance concludes with the simplicity of peace.

As in The Whirlpool, the structure of Changing Heaven is based on a variety of alternating stories. It is a complex layering of two different pasts and the present. Each of these different frames is connected to the novel, Wuthering Heights: a novel of dark romance and passionate evil. Arianna M. Ether, (born Polly Smith), develops an intimate friendship with its author's ghost once she herself has been killed by her lover, Jeremy. They exist in a shadowy manner on the moors of the novel and possess the supernatural abilities to alter time as well as to haunt should they so desire: "The ghosts and howling wind add atmosphere but not much substance" according to Ann H. Fisher (109) and Janice Kulyk Keefer concurs when she finds these episodes "seriously weaken the structure" of the novel, but she does acknowledge Urquhart's use of "our darker and deeper emotions" (32). Both of these critics have missed the main aspect of the novel--its undercurrent of Gothic darkness.

The second story which is contained in the time frame of the present concerns Ann Frear, a Bronte scholar, who has fled to Haworth, the locations of the parsonage of the Brontes' on the Yorkshire moors, after a disastrous love affair, in order to pursue her lifelong fascination with Heathcliff and Catherine. The layering of realities and the fragmented divisions which exist between them develops Urquhart's Gothic theme of constant revelation and the ultimate connection of seemingly random occurrences, as frequently explored in Gothic tales. For example, it is through being present in a ghostly sense at the retelling of her biography that Arianna finally understands the truth concerning her demise. John and Ann do not quite grasp the significance of the roaring wind outside of the cottage: "'No!'" shouts Arianna, who has acquired so much substance that she is clothed, down to the last brass button, in her aeronautical costume. Her call is mistaken by the couple inside for a strong wind sliding around the outside corners of the cottage" (CH 254). This recurring device of storytelling parallels the Gothic element of the interrupted narrative as well.

Immediately following the climax of John's relation of the tale of Arianna, the two apparitions attain an epiphany and continue with their own personal evolutions.

The ghosts look long into one another's eyes. They clasp hands, embrace the energy of the completed story, touch reconciliation, become air, become wind, enter rock and ether, enter breeze and heather. Now they are shadows behind the glass, now they are clouds blown across the moon. They are engaged in the great gasp of leave-taking, the long relieved sigh of arrival. *Open the window, Nelly, I'm freezing.* On the other side of the window the ghosts are experiencing brilliance and fragmentation. Emily dissolves. Arianna evaporates (CH 258).

They have become the landscape as the heroine of Wuthering Heights does at her death. This identification with the landscape for the three main female characters, as well as for Catherine Linton, is crucial if Urquhart is to be understood as a Canadian Gothic writer, for it is through the landscape that the original Gothic characters and their emotions were first revealed to the reader. As J.M.S. Tompkins explains,

The characters and conflicts of Emily and Montoni and Vivaldi and Adeline are not the centre of interest; the

centre of interest is impersonal; it is the southern landscape, whose fullest effect is to be elicited by the happy musings of lovers or by their terror-stricken flight...The *raison d'etre* of her [Radcliffe's] books is not a story, nor a character, nor a moral truth, but a mood, the mood of a sensitive dreamer... (255).

If this statement is to be compared with the introduction to Changing Heaven, we may see the similarity between the two: "She wants to write a book about disturbance; about elements that change shape but never substance, about things that never disappear. About relentlessness. /About sky, weather, and wind" (CH 2).

Indeed, all of Urquhart's female characters may be classified as "sensitive dreamers" in their obsessions with their landscapes. The home of the Brontes, the site of Top Withins, reputed to be the original Wuthering Heights, and the English moors themselves all acquire significance for the characters during the course of their development in the novel. Ann, during her sojourn at Haworth, is attempting to write a critical analysis of the weather in Wuthering Heights. She also views herself in the context of the wind: "This is what Ann

wants, what she will get from him, what she will become in his presence./ A curtain responding to storm" (CH 91). Part of this focus on landscape naturally involves a concentration upon time and place, especially when one reflects upon the main characters who are either able to manipulate time and place or are attempting, as Ann is, to recapture an illusory and imagined location. This emphasis placed on landscape and weather, reflects the inner reflective worlds of the female characters. According to Coral Ann Howells, Gothic literature "...always looks away from the here and now, into past times or distant lands...into a fantasy world which was both timeless and placeless..." (8). This is certainly true of Changing Heaven during the events of which characters constantly strive to become fully attuned with their surroundings. Even Jeremy grows into his own personal landscape of the white Arctic as he balloons ever northwards in his somewhat desperate attempt to experience his love for Arianna as purity in absence. It would seem that he, too, experiences a ghostly existence since he unwittingly discovers his own skull frozen deep within the ice cap:

According to Urquhart, true inner knowledge results from a confrontation with one's own opposite. This can be accomplished by viewing one's reflection in either a mirror or in a reflecting

surface. She links landscape with mirrors as well as to define a relationship: "Still, it is the winter landscape, filling the mirror's absence, that she will remember most vividly. The flight of dark birds against grey sky, and one of the hunters, his back turned, walking towards the frozen pond, the ice-bound sea" (CH 116). In the supposed last room where they have their illicit liaison, Ann notices that "There is no mirror in the room. Until now Ann has believed that every space they entered contained a mirror" (CH 115). This omnipresent mirror can be uncomfortable after unpleasant revelations. Immediately after she and Arthur have their first physical encounter, Ann realizes the tawdriness of her actions and of her surroundings. In an effort to avoid being exposed to more anguish, Ann "...avoids her own eyes in mirrors" (CH 96).

The mirror recurs in Venice where she has travelled frenetically in order to meet Arthur. This particular emphasis on the image of the mirror originates from Arthur's own profession as an art historian. In order to observe the painted ceiling at the Scuola San Rocco, viewers must utilize a mirror distributed by Carlo. Ann is able to scrutinize the dark miracles and the angels of Tinterotto--the Renaissance painter with whom Arthur is particularly fascinated. This particular

painting consists of putti and of angels: "dark miracles". As Ann makes her daily pilgrimage to the Scuola, she becomes intimately aware of the painting's composition.

The angels, about whom she has completed a study, provide the bridge which ultimately leads to Ann's acceptance of the impossibility of any relationship with Arthur. By drawing an analogy between herself and another heroine, Ann reaches a pinnacle in the attainment of self-knowledge. It is interesting that Catherine knows that she will not belong to the domain of the angels and conversely, will be cast down from heaven so that she may dwell on her beloved moors as a ghost. Ann, too, will be forbidden to enter the world of art and of love because of Arthur: "He does not want to be known--at least by her--does not want to submit to her scrutiny. Short allotments of communion. Dark acts in hidden places" (CH 104). She will be restricted to the wildness of the moors. As usual, Ann defines her sense of reality and her personal world in the context of the domain of Wuthering Heights by associating herself with Catherine. It is Ann who is harming Arthur the most for she has stripped away his power. She retains the intensity of passion that Arthur will never know and thus, we see a character who is desperately inflicting harm on another solely to satiate her own needs.

These passionate injuries mirror Catherine's impulsive acts and could potentially bar Ann from heaven.

Ann thinks of how Catherine described her adolescent dream in Wuthering Heights; how she knew that heaven was not her home. Ann can practically see this dream, in which angry angels toss a young girl out of the clouds and down onto the unreclaimed moor, as if her body were weather itself. Catherine asleep, her mind falling through air, the angels receding. And then the crash, the awakening. The real, the painful joy. All through the night Ann falls, falls to earth, just as if certain angels had taken it upon themselves to toss her out an inappropriate heaven (CH 238).

This expulsion from heaven is very appropriate for Catherine as well as for Ann. Ann too is a creature driven by weather and by passion. Unlike Bronte's Gothic heroine, she is able to flee from the desperation of an impossible liaison with Arthur in order to pursue her real happiness. The alternate version of a happier Wuthering Heights begins to be written. Even though Ann

falls and must leave Arthur, their parting is a travesty of the usual Gothic endings. It is Ann who takes the initiative to leave, not Arthur. He is unable to indulge as completely as Ann in the necessary intensity of an emotional affair. It is impossible for Arthur to play the role of the villain/hero for Ann despite the chivalric connotations of his name. Instead Ann finds romance with a storyteller, which is an equally valid role for the Gothic genre. Without Nelly Dean, there would be no Wuthering Heights. It is an ironic reversal for the adventurous Ann. She is not destined to play the heroine's role but is to be confined to the position of the listener to Gothic tales.

Interestingly, both Joan and Ann are forced by their inner voices to abandon an Arthur. As they are both writers searching for a unique form of expression, if one plays with words and assumes "author" for Arthur, it is possible that the Gothic villains in these pieces are the conventional male writers. As already noted, language appropriates a Bakhtinian significance in Gothic parameters which cannot be underestimated. By undergoing a ritualized death or by an imagined expulsion from celestial realms, these female characters have successfully evaded the pervasive influence of a male authorial voice which would have dominated their words. Yet in spite of their Gothic ideals, Joan

and Ann have to return to a forced reality--to a world where villains are only imagined and are in fact, created by descriptions used to label men as heroes or as villains.

Ann, in her irrepressible stream of words to Arthur at Venice, is eventually effectively silenced by him in his refusal to participate in the dialogue. Ann is not threatened by John's storytelling. Unlike Arthur who is overwhelmed by the extreme demands of Ann and is "terrified that [his] life will collapse around [him]" (CH 237), John is not intimidated by "the fused beast", the intense spiritual joining that Ann requires as love.

Emily, during a discussion of relationships, creates the analogy between the loved one and being an actual dungeon: "The loved one starts to acquire architectural properties; so much so that the bars the prisoner looks through could easily be the loved one's ribcage and the lover knocking like a heart trying to get free" (CH 136). Unlike the usual imagery of an villain who is imprisoning or torturing a young maiden, Emily is suggesting that we impose our prisons upon ourselves in an effort to obtain and maintain love. The boundaries are therefore blurred between the persecutor and the persecuted; each partner takes on attributes of both roles. The mutability of these established boundaries is precisely the origin of confusion, flight and

terror. As we know, the maiden in flight is a crucial aspect of dark romance. In the case of Changing Heaven, Urquhart continues her deliberate ambiguity in that it is Ann who so desperately seeks Arthur despite the potential destruction of her fledgling relationship with John. Even though we initially perceive Arthur to be a somewhat evil character since he is conducting an illicit relationship which will eventually damage Ann, sympathy for his unenviable position escalates when we, too, are exposed to the pathetic barrage of words that Ann ceaselessly hurls at him during their sojourn at Venice. In order for the conventional prison to be destroyed, the female must tear it apart. In theory, this will create more equitable relationships than to the unbalance of the virile male pursuing a weak maiden typical of Gothic literature.

We can see Arthur as a potentially ominous and grotesque character at the novel's beginning. At their original meeting, Ann describes him in Shelleyan terms:

As Arthur walks towards her, across the grass, his face is illuminated by sheet lightning. She will always remember this: the white mask, startling and disembodied, the dark suit he is wearing blending with the night. He kisses her

once, roughly; then, standing back he holds both her hands and looks through the dark directly into her face. And she sees him, even without the lightning, and all her indifference evaporates. It changes, in a second, into something as huge and monstrous as the swaying night maples (CH 80).

This scene echoes the creation of Frankenstein's monster--intimidating, monstrous and alien. Ann's feelings for Arthur would seem to be unnatural. Immediately following this section, Ann, as Victor Frankenstein did, begins to create the man whom she wants to exist and superimposes his image over her own personal landscape. This is a means of creating the dungeon to surround the loved one, and quite conversely, to build a safe haven for herself (albeit one that becomes a prison).

Arthur is unable to feel with his palms due to burns experienced during an attempt to extinguish a fire. This neatly parallels his innate inability to comprehend the tumultuous emotions which Ann experiences so intensely. If, once again, we perceive him as being the nasty villain, then we would expect him to have some physical disfigurement which would reflect appropriately some personality defect. This problem with his

hands falls into that Gothic category. However, we realize that Arthur is not a scheming scoundrel but is prey to his own personal follies and selfishness. In fact, upon her return to Haworth when Ann notices that he is growing old, he loses even more of his former powerful stature.

Ann is not the only character who attempts to mould another. Jeremy goes so far as to confine Arianna to a white room to appease his unrealistic desire that she would never change or be exposed to any outside influences: "Soon, however, I saw that there was never going to be any past; that he had locked it out, had locked out even a past that was connected to us because, in that sea, in that white room, there were never going to be any details" (CH 50) and, "It was always he who operated the door that closed us in together, always he who turned the key..." (CH 53). Jeremy was causing Arianna to feel that he was "making [her] so much a part of him [she] was swallowed" (CH 53). He is also the person who gives her her new name--Arianna M. Ether (The M. represents Milkweed): "He was her teacher, as he reminded her over and over, almost her creator" (CH 9).

Their difficulty of negotiating space is not unique; it aligns itself with Ann's and Arthur's trouble--the imprisoning of the lover. As Eugenia DeLamotte has argued, there are two main

Gothic fears: the fear of separateness and the fear of being engulfed by the Other (22). It is only when Jeremy conceives of his plan to murder Arianna that he is truly able to experience love: "'I'm free of you," he said excitedly, "I love you again. I am separate. I am other. I adore you. I'm free'" (CH 15). Jeremy finally has the experience of love and of freedom when he travels to the vast expanse of the Arctic. This is the first time since Polly has violated the sanctity of the white room by introducing alternate realities that Jeremy has felt this type of release. He is able to confront his love in these netherlands in a Shelleyan context. This is precisely the location to which Frankenstein has been led in his relentless pursuit of his monster. Immediately following the shipboard encounter where the monster laments over the body of Frankenstein, the monster flees to his inevitable demise on the ice. Jeremy too has to brave the ghosts of his past. He is the truest malingerer in the novel as revealed by his evil plot created selfishly to ensure his own personal happiness. He attempts to communicate with Arianna by sending up brief messages into the atmosphere. It is in these notes that the reader understands that his ends have indeed been accomplished and that he dies in a state of euphoria connected with love and absence from the loved one. Once again, this

corresponds to the conflicting ideals of separateness and togetherness explored by Ann and Arthur. In its purest state, love must be an absolute of one of these two extremes. This attraction and repulsion is the basis for stereotypical Gothic love where the female is uncertain about the "true" nature of the man to whom she is attracted and of whom she is afraid. Urquhart is proclaiming the dangers which correspond to this type of relationship. Although it is not as exciting or romantic, Ann eventually concedes that a more sedate brand of love may be more permanent and equitable. In her turn, Arianna must also admit to Jeremy's wickedness.

Therefore, Arianna achieves ultimate happiness by merging with the landscape and Ann manages to locate a contented relationship by a revision of Wuthering Heights. The Gothic perils have been vanquished and the roles have been recast.

Chapter Six

AWAY: A GOTHIC LOVE STORY

Urquhart has used the following Gothic elements in Away: demonic possession, haunting and redemption, secrets, emotional absence in true love, ghosts, family curses, and stories. All of these motifs combine to present pictures of strong and self-reliant women who are willing to undergo personal deprivation in order to experience a fulfilling relationship, if only for a limited period. Consistently, the women are the focal point of the novel even when the story is being narrated by Liam. This focus is conventionally Gothic but it reverses the normal trend of the females experiencing confusion concerning male thoughts and motivation. In this novel, Brian and Liam never completely comprehend either Mary or Eileen, who are elusive creatures, not quite as trustworthy as conventionally reliable heroines. As in Urquhart's other two novels, Away's female characters take their happiness into their own hands and do not allow others to control it. Eileen is the unknowing prime mover in the assassination of

Darcy McGee and as a result, politics becomes intertwined with her own personal life.

The Gothic genre, so frequently relegated to the realm of the naive, unsophisticated reader, reclaims vitality in Urquhart's skilful reuse of its elements and assists her in exploring feminist social claims. In Urquhart's Gothic, men and women realize that their firm convictions about virtue and vice are fallible. No longer is the maiden in flight from a predatory male. These traditional prototypes are no longer a feasible concept in our society. Instead, the situation may be reversed, or even eventually negated in the power politics of male/female relations. Urquhart makes contact with us by introducing the stereotypes with which they are familiar but then offers alternate paradigms with which to structure our reality.

Away is perhaps the least Gothic of Urquhart's three novels, although it contains frequent references to supernatural events. Over the years, these have attained the stature of myth for the narrator, Esther. However, in the retelling of the horrors of the Irish potato famine, Urquhart manages successfully to weave Gothic strains into the lives of Irish immigrants. The title of the text itself is indicative of the manner in which she incorporates the theme of eeriness. The original main character,

Mary (Moirira) has been bewitched by a young dead sailor who has, she believes, renamed her. She is from then on considered to be "away" from the everyday concerns of human beings. Her soul is now the domain of the otherworldly creatures, the Others (fairies), even though she still performs mechanical daily tasks. For the locals, this phenomenon takes on the semblance of possession, albeit a quasi-positive one. All of her thoughts and her emotions are irretrievably centred on this young man. Mary even takes on the name which he speaks upon her claiming him from the sea, Moira. He continues to haunt her upon her family's relocation to Canada and she, for the sake of her own happiness, abandons her family in order to commune fully with her secret lover until her eventual death by the side of Lake Moira.

The Gothic strain becomes obvious immediately upon the opening of the novel. In a sense, Moira becomes possessed by the spirit of this young man and has almost constant communication with him. Yet although it is his haunting of her that creates a division between Moira and the other members of Rathlin Island, it is Moira herself who has to assume the burden of suspicion by the townspeople, not the ghost. This situation is very similar to Lucy's in Bram Stoker's Dracula who, although thought to be ill, was virtually concealing Dracula's frequent nightly forays

to her at great risk to her own health. Lucy dies from her extreme loss of blood and, after her death as a vampire, begins to perpetuate the same forms of attack as she had previously experienced in life. It is Moira too who keeps her constant communication with the drowned sailor as a secret.

Like Lucy's doctor who attempts various medical remedies, Moira has Father Quinn who tries to redeem her by marrying her to Brian O'Malley. The priestly element recurs frequently within the Gothic tradition and normally the priest advises the afflicted family about the correct procedure to obtain a return to order out of the bewildering chaos:

She felt the holy water fill her hair, but it was tepid and useless and ran in futile tracings to her throat. She brought the memory of her hand to the place beneath her jaw to get rid herself of it and then saw the moisture glistening on her fingers. The water when she placed it in her mouth was not the moisture she desired (A 48).

In this holy effort, he fails to reclaim the girl, but Father Quinn manages to achieve his goal by the introduction of Mary to Brian: "'I am here but I am not here,' she said. 'I will be your

wife but I will not be your wife'...And then she fell weeping onto the schoolmaster's shoulder. Unbuckling. Beginning to enter the world again" (A 57). However, she does not remain part of the real, everyday world forever:

As she moved through the grass, bent under her load that smelled of the sea, the word "Moira" moved within her, its two syllables becoming clearer as she lifted her face to the lake. She saw that he who called her swayed like the reeds and shimmered in the early-morning sun, and she slid the straps from her shoulders and walked towards him with her spine straight and her throat open to the air. In her arms he was as cool and as smooth as beach stones, and behind him the water trembled and shone (A 84).

This part of her life seems to remain a secret, concealed even from Brian. To all, it appeared that her life had resumed its more normal overtones once she had married and had had Liam, her first child. This secret has ominous overtones because of the eventual adverse effects which her children have to endure as a direct result of it.

Once again in Urquhart's fiction, we are reminded of Gothic overtones in the secret existence of Mary's inner life with respect to her uncompromising dedication to northern climes and also to her drowned sailor. Although she does not voluntarily create her demon lover as Victor Frankenstein creates his monster, he pursues her to her new life in Canada to the shores of the significantly named Moira Lake. They cannot be separated and therefore, in order to engage in her romance with her ghostly lover, Mary is forced to forsake her children. This continues Urquhart's theme that true love is possible only when one of the lovers is absent, developed in both The Whirlpool and in Changing Heaven. Her story is eventually told by Exodus Crow as Frankenstein's tragic tale is narrated to the reader by the captain of the exploring northern ship. Like Victor Frankenstein, Mary is driven into exile by her sailor and must confront both the strengths and the frailties of her nature. She returns to her family as a frozen corpse and it is through hearing her story that Liam attains adulthood, according to Exodus Crow.

Upon her departure, Liam imagines that he sees the ghost of his mother:

It was then that he saw his mother--or what he would later in his dreams call his mother--slipping in and out among the pines on the opposite side of the stream as she had sometimes done in playful moments during their happy summer, making a game of it. Her form appeared and disappeared, multiplied, and then reduced itself (A 158).

Later he realizes that his vision was caused by white birches moving in the wind--a rational explanation for his experience. In a similar manner, Brian too abruptly realizes that his wife has gone when he returns home: "As he approached the cabin he saw his wife's apron shuddering, like a ghost, a memory, on the string between the trees" (A 162). Mary has vanished from her family's story.

On a more positive side, Mary's elusive otherworldly qualities inspire emotion in her landlord, and her poetic nature provides impetus for her family to receive the coveted passage to Canada from the relocation initiated by Osbert Sedgewick: "There's this light in her, you see," he said, "and it must not be put out...It's just this subtle light." (A 122). It is this encounter at the tidepool that inspires Osbert to undertake the arduous journey to Canada after a great number of years. He

provides the link between the Old and the New World for Liam and for Eileen.

In an old school text of his father's, Liam has discovered the futility of farming on the Canadian Shield and so decides to sell the family farm to their former landlord. This relocation causes the O'Malleys to be cursed through the generations by the mines: "When she had entered the green world of the tree, later in the day, the crow confided to Eileen that the only problem was that from now on her family would be visited by the curse of the mines" (A 225).

This is reminiscent of the threats of retribution and punishment of those families in Gothic fiction who had transgressed appropriate moralities. Madame Cheron dies in The Mysteries of Udolpho as a direct result of her cavalier treatment of Emily and in The Castle of Otranto, Manfred's family is punished for the crimes of his ancestor who illegally confiscated a castle. Once again, it is repeated in Clara Reeve's The Baron. The curse placed on the O'Malleys does indeed come to pass in that their newly acquired property is gradually invaded by the technology of mining. Esther, the novel's storyteller, is constantly brought back to the present by the horrific noises of machinery which is violating the land: "Unthinkably bright

floodlights are switched on causing the lines in the men's dusty faces to look exaggerated and exposing the torn rock, the scars, the fractures" (A 356). These machines are a modern recreation of Gothic monsters.

These stories which have been related to succeeding generations by Eileen have an integral role in the understanding of this work as Gothic. The stories have touched her as a child when she listened to her father in the isolation of their Canadian homestead; they have affected her in a manner that Liam has not been able to appreciate:

His father's stories, which had entertained him as a child while wolverines yodelled beyond the cabin walls on sharp winter nights, had left his centre untouched. But his sister, he knew, had ingested the stories, their darkness--the twist in the voice of the song, the sadness of the broken country--and had therefore carried, in her body and her brain, some of that country's clay (A 207).

Brian's stories, from which he draws material in order to teach the school children, lead to his firing. The transmission

of knowledge that is, from the perspective of English Protestant settlers, forbidden is sufficient to have Brian removed. There is even a tinge of the pursuit of secret knowledge in the use of his Irish hedgerow school, which originated in the desire to evade the English authorities. This fascination for what is restricted is associated with the tantalizing quest for the unknown which recurs so frequently in dark romances such as Frankenstein and Goethe's Dr. Faustus. The image of Brian as the repository for potentially dangerous secrets is emphasized in Liam's descriptions of his father's homecomings: "...pulling night behind him like a cloak" (A 194) where he assumes a somewhat ominous aura.

These stories which have gained an unearthly control over Eileen are able to shape the generations which follow. Eileen, who demonstrates psychic abilities as a young girl during her conversations with the crow who lived in the willow tree, repeats the patterns of her mother by abandoning her family abruptly for the sake of a young man. This love affair is doomed as well. In her zeal to contribute to what she calls the "cause," Eileen inadvertently causes the murder of Thomas Darcy McGee. Aidan, her lover, is his ardent supporter. He is devastated by the event and Eileen senses that he will never be able to be with her

ever again. She must return home pregnant with her unborn child, Deirdre. Once again, hints of Wuthering Heights filter through the novel. The nature of an unfulfilled and doomed love echoes throughout the generations of the female O'Malleys.

Thus, Away falls into the category of Gothic literature and as in Atwood's Bluebeard's Egg, Urquhart combines elements of folk belief with the unsettling images of Gothic literature. When Changing Heaven and Away are considered in terms of their Gothic elements, it becomes obvious that Urquhart has undertaken the task of transferring the Gothic canon to the New World and, with a unique flair, has developed Canadian literature in this context. By making use of the conventions as outlined above, Urquhart successfully manages to place Canadian literature in an English context but simultaneously, by the reversal and by the innovations to the mode, she also powerfully argues for the feminine perspective.

CONCLUSION

REDEFINING THE GOTHIC

Both Urquhart and Atwood have produced novels which are focused on Gothic heroines and the means that they use in their relationships to escape from restrictive roles. Despite their need for personal reassurance and stability, their relationships remain uncertain because they justifiably mistrust their sometimes seemingly villainous mates. Though they are frequently uneasy, this fear is not primarily of the men involved. Instead, the fear is of being ultimately alone. Sometimes the heroines are content to continue to dream of their Byronic hero of the Gothic mode while forming a relationship they regard as less important. This Gothic pattern has both been imposed upon these women as well as being personally created by them.

The Gothic works out of the context of an patriarchal social setting but as noted on numerous occasions, the novels are subversive. The characters of the heroines appropriate the approved social behaviours of the Gothic format in order to attempt to regain some autonomy. They invariably seek the well

worn comfort of easily classifiable character types and shrink from confronting the various merging of good and evil typical of everyday existence. They sometimes achieve an epiphany. However, most often, the heroine is too overtly involved in her own myth-making to be able to reflect upon internal revelations.

Both Urquhart and Atwood use Gothic techniques to state and to argue the case for the average woman who is caught in a negative social construction. By defining the role of the anti-Gothic heroine, who is the primary focus in both authors instead of relegating their heroines to stereotypical patterns, they are increasing the number of possibilities open to her and subsequently, to their readers: "Dialogism, Bakhtin's theory about encountering otherness through the potential of dialogue, is central to feminist practice because it invites new possibilities for activism and change" (Bauer and McKinstry 2). By using Bakhtin's theory as a framework for feminist criticism, neo-Gothic novels may be considered to be advocating political change. Although the individual female characters may possess strong personal attributes, the society in which they live is a sometimes constricting one. As Josephine Donovan argues: "...he [Bakhtin]...recognized that literature exists in a political context and therefore literary devices reflect and

refract the power differentials of the author's society" (85). These power differentials are clearly demonstrated in the feminist writings of Jane Urquhart and Margaret Atwood. The inequalities become especially apparent when social boundaries are ignored or transgressed by the Gothic heroines.

The emotional privacy of the Canadian Gothic heroine is consistently being breached by their husbands, their lovers and sometimes their mothers. The quest of the Gothic heroine is to uncover her own language and to become one with her own personal world, as Fleda and Arianna do. Throughout the works examined in this study, the heroine searches for her own source of wisdom. In these instances, without exception, that secret contains an understanding of the self and a restructuring of previously diffuse boundaries. While Urquhart's fiction the heroines generally succeed in their quest, Atwood's characters generally fluctuate between the desire for self-actualization and fear of the unknown.

In the preceding chapters, many conventional Gothic techniques were observed and discussed. These include exotic settings, ghosts, disguises, the grotesque, mirrors and mazes, the pursuit of an innocent maiden by a villain, the *doppelganger* and the natural perils of unidimensional thinking. Atwood and

Urquhart make use of these conventions in order to remove the power associated with magic and transformation. In their Gothic innovations, they present these elements only to cause them to vanish, leaving the heroines to rely on their own resourcefulness and ability. In Canadian Gothic, the true secret is not what is hidden behind a black veil in a mysterious castle but what mysteries lurk within the strictly controlled mind of the heroine. It is only when these Joan Fosters are able to remove the disguising cloak of fear and social repression that the true heroine will miraculously appear.

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