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Fatal Attraction: The Fetishized Image of the Fatal Woman as Gothic Double

Margaret Anne Young
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Dr. Steven Bruhm
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in English
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy
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FATAL ATTRACTION:
THE FETISHIZED IMAGE OF THE FATAL WOMAN AS GOTHIC DOUBLE

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

M. Anne Young

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

The Gothic heroine is often doubled by an image – a painting, statue, costume, drawing, projection, or mental image – that is preternaturally powerful and endowed with an antagonistic sexual presence. This image of the fatal woman, unlike portraits of the heroine, is a representation without a referent: a fetish object, both for fictional characters and critics.

I argue that the simulacrum of dangerous femininity is a shifting signifier rather than a one-dimensional representation of – as previous critics have argued – ‘male fears and desires’ or female empowerment. Following the work of sociologist Bruno Latour and narratologist Mieke Bal, I read this figure as a polyvalent fetish. Rather than a representation of an intrinsic, decodable significance, this image reveals her fetishists – including critics – instead of herself or a cultural, social, or biological truth lurking behind her. I also argue that criticism of this image is as productive of cultural values as the fiction it critiques.

The introduction lays out my methodology and theoretical direction, which is primarily Actor-Network-Theory, as outlined by Bruno Latour, and Narratology, particularly as it is employed by Mieke Bal. Chapter two surveys Romantic era Gothic (or the ‘golden age’ of Gothic), and compares visual culture and portraiture of the period with literary and dramatic representations of the fatal women, particularly as it pertains to the Gothic theme of ‘the unspeakable.’ In this chapter, I also compare Romantic and Gothic aesthetics. Chapter three considers Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s cult classic, *Carmilla*, as a serial published in the textual context of *The Dark Blue* journal and the eponymous vampire as a simulacral entity. The fourth chapter examines the discourse of late nineteenth-century degeneration theory in terms of artistic reproduction, with special attention to Oscar Wilde’s description of Dorian Gray’s maternal inheritance in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Looking at the ways that

Victorian visual and literary tropes continue into the Twentieth Century, chapter six offers a reading of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* as an ironic camp novel in which identity is a charade and the central figure, Rebecca, is in fact a fetish image.

Keywords

Actor-Network-Theory, "Amour Dure," Ann Radcliffe, Bram Stoker, Bruno Latour
Carmilla, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, counterfeit, Daphne du Maurier, E.T.A
Hoffmann, Fatal Woman, *Fantasmagoriana*, feminism, femme fatale, fetish, Fritz Leiber
Gothic, Horace Walpole, image, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Narratology, "Olalla," Oscar
Wilde, Percy Bysshe Shelley, portrait, *Rebecca*, Robert Louis Stevenson, simulacra,
Suspiria de Profundis, *Tales of the Dead*, *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Castle Spectre*, *The
Cenci*, *The Dark Blue*, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, *The Monk*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The
Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Rose and the Key*, "The Sandman," Thomas de Quincey,
uncanny, vamp, vampire, Vernon Lee, Walter Benjamin, women, *Wylde's Hand*

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¹ Woolf

² Fowler 699

³ No ‘body’ could be more soundly accused of “know[ing] the price of everything, and the value of nothing” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 42).

Finally, I would like to thank myself for my fortitude and perseverance. “I write all this you suppose with composure. But far from it; I cannot think of it without agitation. Nothing but your earnest desire so repeatedly expressed, could have induced me to sit down to a task that has unstrung my nerves for months to come, and reintroduced a shadow of the unspeakable horror which years after my deliverance continued to make my days and nights dreadful, and solitude insupportably terrific.”⁴ “After years of labour, after years of toiling and groping in the dark, after days and nights of disappointment and sometimes of despair, in which I used now and then to tremble and grow cold with the thought that perhaps there were others seeking for what I sought, at last, after so long, a pang of sudden joy thrilled my soul, and I knew the long journey was at an end.”⁵

⁴ Le Fanu, *Carmilla* 339

⁵ Machen 184

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Chapter 1

1 “Passages from the Diary of Spiridion Trepka”

1.1 PART I: Method and Madness

The critic . . . will look upon Art as a goddess whose mystery it is his province to intensify, and whose majesty his privilege to make more marvellous in the eyes of men.

--- Oscar Wilde, “*The Critic as Artist*” (245)

And what an experience it is to be embraced by a female vampire! – by a lady of utterly bewitching beauty – a lady of lovely countenance, full cheeks, straight nose, lush Italianate lips, and teeth of such sparkling whiteness and perfection as to make her seem as unreal as a portrait in an artist’s gallery –, to look at her large, luminous eyes shadowed with pensive sadness, to listen to the sudden rustle of silk and a tiny jingle of bracelets or pendant ear-rings, before swooning into oblivion!

---Devendra P. Varma, *Introduction to Varney the Vampire* (xxi)

The fatal woman, the *femme fatale*, the female vampire, the supernatural seductress: in all her guises, this fascinating, fetishized figure is frequently de-mystified, but – like the vampire – only to return again and again. This dissertation is concerned with Gothic texts in which the fatal female double appears as an image – as a painting, a statue, a photograph, or drawing. This image invariably takes on a life-like aura, and at times, even seems to supersede the power of the original – in fact, in most cases, it *is* the original. The image, at once the origin and copy, becomes a fetish, invested by characters, narrative devices, and readers, with preternatural agency. This archetype is

distinct from (although related to) the *femme fatale* and dangerous women of sensation fiction and film noir, in the sense that she appears in the gothic (not only a specific genre, but, as Robert Miles and Martin Myrone point out, a particular aesthetic⁶) and only as an image (not a ‘real’ character).

This dissertation considers the image of the fatal woman as double in Gothic literature of the ‘long’ nineteenth-century alongside another of its doubles: the invocation of the image of the fatal woman as a trope in critical and theoretical narratives. The compelling image of “a female vampire” quoted above is drawn, not from Gothic fiction, but Gothic criticism. The indistinct boundary between fictional and scholarly writing is a theme in both gothic fiction and criticism. In their influential essay “Gothic Criticism,” Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall attempt to re-assert a boundary line between fiction and criticism. Advocating “a return to careful historical specification” (227), Baldick and Mighall critique gothic criticism’s employment of gothic techniques as evidence that it is “compelled to reproduce what it fails to understand” (221). While this study is “careful,” and, to some degree, “historical,” I argue, contrary to Baldick and Mighall, that Gothic criticism might do well to take its cues from its objects of study, that criticism is – and should be – a mode of fiction and, correspondingly, the critic is necessarily a storyteller.

1.2 Critic as Fetishist⁷

William Pietz explains that “The discourse of the fetish has always been a critical discourse about the false objective values of a culture from which the speaker is

⁶ See part two.

⁷ Part of this section has been published in *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 24.4 (November 2013) as “Subversive Complicity: A *Story of O(r)*.”

personally distanced” (14). Commenting on critical practice in the social sciences, Bruno Latour notes that “many social scientists . . . associate criticism with antifetishism” (“Why” 163) – and so do many literary critics. According to Latour, anti-fetishist critique is predicated on the idea that others are enslaved by images and ideas to which they have attributed superstitions, while the critic, unfettered by such belief, is therefore able to see the fetish for what it is and what it conceals from the eyes of the naive believer. Evoking the anthropological origins of the term, Latour calls anti-fetishism “critical barbarity” (“Why” 165). According to Latour, the “critical barbarian” is part of a tribe who

debunk objects they don’t believe in by showing the productive and projective forces of people; then, . . . they use objects they do believe in to resort to the causalist or mechanist explanation and debunk conscious capacities of people whose behaviour they don’t approve of. (“Why” 165)

For Latour, this critical intention to reject beliefs results in a tendency to choose a “tribe” whose beliefs align with the critic’s, rather than to clarify points of connection.

Remarking on the tendencies of ideological criticism of the 1990s, Maggie Kilgour, turning to Gothic fiction as a guide, notes this tendency towards debunking mysteries and unmasking reality under fictional guises, pointing out that “The current analysis of ideological systems, seems however, even as it attacks our enlightenment inheritance, to reproduce at times a naive Godwinianism, for it implies that revelation is itself reformation and revolution, as if by exposing errors, ripping away idolatrous black veils, the truth will be seen” (221-2). Slavoj Žižek and Peter Melville Logan argue that anti-fetishist critics reveal their own fetishes in the process of critiquing the fetish of the other. In Logan’s description of the traditional anthropological concept of fetishism, the critic,

in order to recognize an object as a fetish, must fetishize it (i.e., construct it as a fetish); therefore, “the critique of fetishism produces a secondary fetishization of the critic’s values,” since their account necessarily indicates what is unusual in relation to those values (9). Logan explains this multiplication of fetishism as the product of “a dialogue . . . in which one’s claim of fetishism entails contamination by the thing it voices” (135). The study of fetishism is therefore a process of doubling in which “the critic and fetishist become structurally interchangeable” (Logan 9). In Žižek’s analysis, Marx fetishizes “transparent social relations” while Freud fetishizes “the ‘normal’ sexual relation” (125-6).

This displacement of one thing for another – a displacement that both Marx and Freud include in their respective definitions of fetishism – is evident in critical approaches to the image of the fatal woman. Her ghostly existence has been attributed to castration anxiety, the return of the repressed, abjection, and “male fears and desires,” while – yes, I run the risk of presenting an object of belief – her mysterious power remains mysterious. Since “the discourse of fetishism is never about the fetish itself; instead, its business lies in constructing the sequence of relationships that produce the notion of the fetish” (Logan 9), it is these “relationships” that I examine, rather than unveiling a single cause hiding behind the image of the fatal woman. These relationships, I will show, are diverse and variable, but they share a common point of similarity.⁸ In this case, “The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles” (Latour, “Why” 171).

⁸ Although Marx argues that a very particular relationship makes up the commodity fetish, the relationships I speak of are multiple, variable, not necessarily hidden or “secret,” and, most importantly, they are not substitutions.

The following is not an attempt to explain, dispel, or unmask the image of the fatal woman; rather, this dissertation overtly participates in her fetishization. My fetishism is not a barrier to producing critical analysis – quite the opposite. The figure of the fatal woman commands attention, and the responses that she elicits will form the basis of this study. I neither seek to dismantle this idol nor claim it for a specific purpose or social group. I argue for the polyvalence of the figure, and therefore I cannot offer a single theory explaining her existence as a reflection, mirror, or representation of anything or as emerging from a single cause. However, as I will show, the figure is invented by each study. By highlighting a particular archetype and trope, re-ordering the field of Gothic literature to this end, I have, in some way, created a new narrative – albeit in an argumentative, evidence-based genre.

The fetishist scholar appears frequently in Gothic fiction, including the unfortunate Spiridion Trepka, the scholar-protagonist whose search for the original of the portrait of a dead noble woman is the subject of Vernon Lee's "Amour Dure: Passages from the Diary of Spiridion Trepka" (1887-1890). Having received a government grant to study "the history of Urbania," Trepka, a restless young British scholar, neglects his official academic task in order to pursue his true historical obsession and what turns out to be a deadly research project. At first disappointed that his work as a historian does not provide access to history, Trepka, who "had longed . . . to come face to face with the past," gets his wish: in the process of unearthing the subject of his research, Trepka invokes her ghost (Lee 41).

This revivifying power of scholarship (i.e., its potential to revive the past) that Trepka stumbles upon is most notably demonstrated by one of his predecessors, that

scholar of ancient vampire lore whose research has led us to the lovely Carmilla and brought her to life again in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's cult classic of 1871-72.⁹ After narrating her first-hand experience with vampiric seduction, *Carmilla's* narrator asks her reader to

Let me add a word or two about that quaint Baron Vordenburg, to whose curious lore we were indebted for the discovery of the Countess Mircalla's grave . . . he devoted himself to the minute and laborious investigation of the marvellously authenticated tradition of vampirism. He had at his fingers' ends all the great and little works upon the subject. (2)

The scholar appears in the tale's conclusion as the vampire's double. The proliferation of scholarship doubles the reproduction of vampirism, and the immortal, matrilineal vampire is pursued *vampirically* by a patrilineal series of researchers. The Baron Vordenberg is doubled by his ancestor, whose name and title is identical, also a scholar of vampirism. The Baron Vordenberg and his ancestor, the Baron Vordenberg (Jr.), reverse one another's research questions: Vordenberg Sr. begins his work in an attempt to save the vampire he loves, while his ancestor seeks to destroy her. Vordenberg Sr., according to his ancestor, began to regret his work in favor of vampirism, leaving behind a retraction of his earlier efforts:

When age had stolen upon him, and from the vale of years he looked back on the scenes he was leaving, he considered, in a different spirit, what he

⁹ An earlier, preliminary version of this analysis of Vordenberg's work has appeared as a blog post for the International Gothic Association Student Blog in June 2012.

had done; and a horror took possession of him. He . . . drew up a confession of the deception that he had practiced. (Le Fanu 341).

In the end it is unclear whether the old Baron or the younger has revived or destroyed the vampire. Like the fascination of the vampire and its subsequent cravings, scholarship is also an antidote and poison¹⁰: it begins with the poisonous love of the “idol,” and ends with destruction of the idol. Because of their close proximity to the vampire – wherein lies the source of their knowledge – the Vordenbergs’ results are also suspect. Has the younger Baron in fact destroyed Carmilla, or has he aided her achievement of immortality? In this case, scholarship is apparently the means by which the vampire is both preserved and destroyed.

Although the Baron’s tireless efforts help to explain vampirism, his work does not explain Carmilla. The “ghostly law” of vampire reproduction and the identity of the original vampire also remain mysterious (7). The tale ends with an ominous suggestion of the persistence of vampirism post-Carmilla: Laura claims that Carmilla continues to haunt her and dies shortly thereafter; the question of whether she will then embark on a new life as a vampire, as Carmilla predicted, remains unanswered. This lingering doubt as to the fate of the vampire tradition is foreshadowed in the Baron’s statement that the vampire’s ability to travel to and from their tomb unnoticed “without displacing the clay or leaving any trace of disturbance in the state of the coffin or the cerements, has always been admitted to be utterly inexplicable” (Le Fanu 80-81). Their research, in other words, is not conclusive.

¹⁰ See Jacques Derrida’s explanation of “the *pharmakon*” (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 430).

The value of scholarship, as presented by the younger Baron, is its contrast to folklore. Jamieson Ridenhour points out that Le Fanu also lists several ‘real’ scholarly volumes as the basis of the Baron’s research – ‘real’ accounts of “the folkloric vampire” (xi, 80). Ridenhour posits that “Le Fanu’s debt to the eighteenth-century vampire treatises . . . highlights Carmilla’s identity as a primarily folkloric vampire”; however, “there are important differences” (xvii) – differences that Le Fanu’s fictional scholar explicates. Improving upon folk wisdom and describing the conditions of the vampire as accurately as possible are the tasks he highlights; these are the tasks of the scholar, just as seduction is the vampire’s. His work helps to re-adjust knowledge to be – if not complete – closer to the truth, whereas folklore and conventional wisdom “discolours and distorts a little” (3). Rather than fixing and defining its subject (given “the nature of vampires” [Le Fanu 82] this is impossible), the Vordenbergs’ scholarship realigns, adjusts, and clarifies (8) – just like good literary criticism.

The living Baron’s research is based not only on the books Le Fanu cites, but on “many journals and other papers” belonging to his ancestor (4). While it seems that the Baron’s object of study is far removed from that of literary criticism, it should be noted that his research, although it aims to understand vampire biology and physiology, is primarily historical and sociological. His research rests entirely on the authority of documents that recount personal experiences and observations from which he “extracted a system of principles” to differentiate the true characteristics of the vampire from “mere melodramatic fiction” (Le Fanu 80). In other words, the Baron’s work rests almost entirely – with some firsthand experience with a vampire – on the interpretation of narrative.

Like Sir Varma, the Baron Vordenberg, and Spiridion Trepka, I have followed the image of the fatal woman wherever she has led me and faithfully recorded my observations. Fortunately, these scholars have left valuable documentations of their findings, particularly in terms of their own personal attachment to the subject under consideration. However, I have made every attempt to avoid the unfortunate mistakes of my predecessors; the exact details of my method will be unfolded shortly.

1.3 Freud's Fetish, Theory as Fetish, and the Return of Hoffmann's Fatal Women

Following Freud and Marx, criticism of the fetish of the fatal woman invariably conjures up psychoanalytic and/or social explanations. The first, and most popular, of these theoretical paths explains the fatal woman as “phallic” and “castrating.” Despite the abstraction that psychoanalytic critics insist upon, the series of displacements that make up the phallic economy hinge on “a penis-substitute”¹¹ and ultimately returns, for Freud, to a fearsome spectacle that he estimates “[p]robably no male human being is spared”: “the terrifying shock of threatened castration at the sight of the female genitals” (“Fetishism,” 201). Unlike Richard von Krafft-Ebbing, who had claimed that the original source of any fetish is typically unknown and unknowable as well as diverse (12), Freud argues that the universal origin of fetishism lies in the wish to maintain a fantasy of – a prior belief in – the mother's penis (“Fetishism”). Rather than discuss his patients (to

¹¹ However, to be fair, it is a substitute “for a particular quite special penis that had been extremely important” (Freud, “Fetishism 199).

whom he alludes in his “Fetishism” essay), Freud first develops his theory of fetishism by analyzing E.T.A. Hoffmann’s short story, “The Sandman.”

Freud himself is thwarted by the fatal image of femininity he fetishizes. His dismissive explanation of her appeal is undercut when he describes his own inability to resist her in an auto-biographical inset tale in “The Uncanny” in which he is trapped in an urban labyrinth, unable to avoid “painted women” (631). In this essay, Freud references “The Sandman” to explain his theory of the uncanny, and, as Ritchie Robertson points out, “Subsequent commentary on *The Sandman* has also been a commentary on Freud’s interpretation” (xviii). “The Sandman” is the tale of a young student, Nathanael, who falls in love with an automaton in the shape of a beautiful woman. Upon discovering his mistake, Nathanael is driven to madness and suicide. Hélène Cixous argues that Freud represses Olympia¹² in his discussion of Hoffmann’s gothic tale, dismissing the automaton as insignificant, but allowing her to resurface in his text (Cixous 532; Royle 41-3). Indeed, Freud’s self-described compulsive attraction to “painted women” parallels Nathaniel’s attraction to Olympia. His description of the prostitutes only as “painted” implies that they are fetish objects like the eroticized automaton – a connection Cixous suggests in her comparison of the prostitutes to “dolls” (540). For both Freud and the luckless Nathanael, it is the women’s artifice that is so seductive.

Freud argues that the main source of fear in the story, however, is not the danger of mistaking an illusion for love, but the figure of “the Sandman”: a bird-like fairy-tale monster that picks out children’s eyes and that Nathanael associates with his father’s

¹² The spellings of characters’ names differ per translation; the spellings I have chosen are consistent with Robertson’s.

friend, Coppelius. This frightful adult became very angry at little Nathanael when he caught the boy peeping through a curtain at something he shouldn't see when he was supposed to be in bed. For Freud, this fear of having one's eyes represents an underlying fear of castration. Nathanael recalls his childhood fear of this strange adult when a travelling barometer seller who bears a striking resemblance to the Sandman appears and frightens him anew.

In response to Nathanael's revelation of his uncanny experience with the barometer seller, his fiancée, Clara, explains the uncanny with the anthropological discourse of fetishism. She claims that those "alien figures" that haunt us only appear to have "uncanny power" because "we ourselves give life to the spirit which our strange delusion persuades us is speaking from such figures" (95). In Clara's rationalization of the uncanny, the "dark powers and forces" are merely doubles of our own making: "the phantom of our own self" (95). According to Clara, Nathanael's belief in his own phantasmal creation – the object invested with his fantasies – is the source of his self-divi[sion]" (118) and the cause of his demise. A student himself, Nathanael

went so far as to assert that artists and scholars were under a delusion when they believed that their creative endeavors were governed by the autonomy of their will: 'for', said he, 'the inspired state which is indispensable for creation does not arise from inside ourselves; it is due to the influence of a higher principle that lies outside us.' (Hoffmann 101)

Attributing the uncanny to external forces and figures, Nathanael is unable to see his role in creating Olympia. Her eyes reflect his desires, since she always seems to be "gazing at him yearningly" (Hoffmann 108). Nathanael's views are confirmed by his own feminine

double¹³: while “her gaze grew ever more ardent and more animated. . . . [Nathanael] felt as though Olimpia had voiced his own thoughts . . . ; indeed, her voice seemed to come from within himself” (112). Thus, when Nathanael finds out that Olimpia does not have eyes of her own, and that their relationship was entirely imaginary, it is not a fear of castration he faces, but a fear that his identity is as fragile as the doll. His belief is shattered, and since he lacks a sense of self-awareness (i.e., is “self-divided” [118]), his ability to gain further self-awareness through others is weak; although, through Olimpia, he experiences an uncanny recognition, he cannot recognize this familiar element as *himself*.

Clara’s explanation is echoed in Ernst Jentsch’s 1906 essay, “On the Psychology of the Uncanny,” which overtly references anthropological discourse. With reference to Hoffmann’s tendency to use automatons and uncanny artworks in his stories, Jentsch describes the “uncertainty” of distinguishing between the animate and inanimate which constitutes the uncanny as produced in part by the process by which “that which man himself semi-consciously projected into things from his own being begins again to terrify him in those very things” (14). For Jentsch, the uncanny is connected to “primitive . . . intellectual development” and the process of fetishism: creating something and believing it is real (13, 14). He concludes his essay with a question of evolutionary struggle (15). Despite Jentsch’s insistence that “women, children, and dreamers” are especially prone to uncanny experiences, both he and Freud – ‘civilized,’ adult men – puzzle over it, and Jentsch ends his essay with an ominous paragraph concerning the danger of this

¹³ A doubling that Freud also notes (643; Cixous 538).

uncertainty, hypothesizing that “Intellectual certainty . . . signifies a defensive position against the assault of hostile forces” in “that never-ending war of the human and organic world” (15).

Freud sets up his theory in opposition to Jentsch, stating that “intellectual uncertainty” is not the cause of Nathanael’s madness (629). Freud’s attempt to supplant Jentsch’s argument, in effect, proves it. Freud’s autobiographical tale of his uncanny return to prostitutes illustrates the “lack of orientation” that Jentsch claims “is bound up with the impression of the uncanniness of a thing or incident” (8); and, just as Nathanael sees himself reflected in Olimpia’s eyes and hears himself in her speech, Freud projects his phallic obsession onto the figure of Olimpia, illustrating Jentsch’s notion of projection; his uncanny return to the “painted women” again and again seems to be something he desires, although he wavers in “intellectual uncertainty,” unable to admit it or to claim such a desire as his own (14).

Despite Clara’s propensity, in Nathanael’s estimation, to “draw such intellectual distinctions, worthy of a university graduate” (Hoffmann 96), her common-sense explanation also fails to dispel the uncanny. The story’s ending – in which the fictional audience begin to doubt their experience of reality – suggests that we cannot simply detach ourselves from our phantasmal creations since we are always acting in dialogue with them, continually defining ourselves against the artificial. Clara is no more capable of understanding the uncanny than is Nathanael or any of the other characters.

Perhaps this is because there is another actor in this narrative that only the omniscient narrator seems to be aware of: the spyglass that Nathanael purchases from the barometer seller. Freud makes the important observation that the uncanniness of the doll

is connected to Nathanael's viewing context. Nathanael's interest in Olympia is only piqued once he accidentally glimpses her through a slit in a curtain, repeating the illicit peeping he experienced as a child before the frightful Sandman discovered him. This repetition gives him an "uncanny feeling" (Hoffmann 97). Freud further elucidates this idea in "Fetishism," explaining that "when the fetish comes to life, so to speak, some process has been suddenly interrupted . . . what is possibly the last impression received before the uncanny traumatic one is preserved as a fetish" (201). However, it is only when Nathanael views Olympia through the spyglass that he becomes fascinated; only "then he perceived she was gazing at him yearningly" (108). The spyglass is seemingly a version of the voyeurism he experiences when peeping through the curtains, but it heightens this experience with something new – something mysterious that Hoffmann does not describe. Whatever makes the automaton appear life-like operates in reverse on the human woman: upon viewing his fiancé through the spyglass, Nathanael becomes convinced that she is an automaton (117).

If, as Cixous points out, Freud's essay is "a kind of fiction" (540), then Hoffmann's tale is a kind of essay on the uncanny. Nathanael attributes agency to the object, whereas Clara (and later, Jentsch) argue that the individual's perception is the source of meaning; one claims that meaning comes from without, the other from within. This problem is doubled by two professors: the professor of physics and the professor of poetry. The first, Olympia's creator, is charged with "fraud" for the cruel trick of letting his lifelike automaton fool partygoers, and is asked to leave the university (Hoffmann 115). The second, whom Hoffmann implicitly caricatures as an intellectual fraud, offers what he thinks is the last word, in a typically anti-fetishist explanation:

The professor of poetry and eloquence took a pinch of snuff, snapped his box shut, cleared his throat, and said in solemn tones: ‘My most esteemed ladies and gentlemen! Don’t you see what lies behind all this? The entire matter is an allegory – an extended metaphor! *Sapienti sat!*’¹⁴ (Hoffmann 115)

However, this explanation fails to convince his audience. The effect of the alluring automaton, Olympia, changes social behavior and physical deportment, as well as perceptions of these expressions:

the story of the automaton had made a deep impression on their minds, and a detestable distrust of human figures became prevalent. In order to make quite sure that they were not in love with wooden dolls, several lovers demanded that their beloved should fail to keep time in singing and dancing, and that, when being read aloud to, she should sew, knit, or play with her pug-dog; above all, the beloved was required not merely to listen, but also, from time, to speak in a manner that revealed genuine thought and feeling. . . . At tea parties there was an incredible amount of yawning, but no sneezing, in order to avert any suspicion. (Hoffmann 115).

This preoccupation with distinguishing the real from the fake by, paradoxically, affecting idiosyncratic mannerisms is inspired by the automaton, suggesting that not only are we constantly molded by culture, but that definitions of the natural are constantly defined by the artificial. Hoffmann’s conclusion – which Freud ignores – suggests, on the one hand,

¹⁴ “That is enough for a wise person” (Robertson 403) [clearly it isn’t, because it has to be foot-noted].

a dialectic in which neither one nor the other – the mechanical or the natural – has greater significance, but instead co-create each other. Freud does suggest this type of dialectical ambiguity in his explanation of “the double attitude of fetishists” (“Fetishism” 203). However, Hoffmann’s inset tales, as Hilda Meldrum Brown argues, offer a narrative ambiguity that is neither dualistic nor indeterminate. Brown argues that the tendency of poststructuralism to read Hoffmann’s tales as “indeterminate” fails to fully grasp Hoffman’s philosophical and critical techniques, advocating instead reading his fiction – in the terms of Hoffman’s musical compositions – as “polyphonic” (4). She argues that “An alternative response to the complexities of Hoffmann’s narratological strategies, however, might start from an assumption that a ‘polyphonic’ perspectivism does not in itself spell *disharmony*” (4). Much like Freud’s description of the fetishist’s mindset emphasizes the movement between two attitudes, so does Hoffmann’s tales rely on the play amongst a group of tales. The ambiguity in the story of fetishism is dualistic and relies on opposites, whereas Hoffmann’s ambiguous tales rely on a display of multiple perspectives that may not necessarily be in direct opposition to one another. In addition, Hoffmann’s merciless caricaturing of every one of his characters leaves a lingering sense of doubt as to the naturalness of the everyday; for example, the above passage critiques the image of the virtuous, ‘sensible’ femininity that characterizes the Gothic heroine – especially her apparent lack of ‘affectation’ (expressing a tension between concepts of artifice and nature that characterizes discourses of womanhood and femininity from the middle ages to today). But let us leave aside the insipid heroine and return to the subject at hand: “[t]his woman’s history and character” (Lee 45).

1.4 Critical Approaches to the Fatal Woman

The most significant difference between my study and previous analyses of this archetypal figure is my departure from psychoanalytic and historicist theories (and, implicitly, their methods). Psychoanalytic and historicist accounts of the fatal woman typically explain this figure as a product of “male fears and desires.”¹⁵ Both theoretical paths have a tendency to refer to oblique concepts such as “male fears and desires” and “male anxieties” (“My Duchess Medea turned into a bogey for naughty little boys!” [Lee 59]). This accusatory attribution not only makes an assumption about the lack of agency of female writers (as if male agency writes through women unaltered), but about the possibility that these fears exist independently.

For psychoanalytic critics, male fears and desires emerge from deep within the psyche. Although they privilege psychology, to varying degrees, they allow for cultural influence on the psyche. Drawing on Jungian psychoanalysis, Joseph Andriano makes the archetypal figure of the “demoness” an essentially male issue, although it often concerns heroines as well (3). Thus he is most concerned with the ways in which fiction represent what “men fear” (5), “the male ego” and “men’s attitudes” (8) as “the return of the repressed” (6). Re-vamping Freudian theory, Mary Ann Doane takes a historicist approach to Freud himself, positing that he reflects his culture in his work; for Doane, “his statements about female subjectivity are symptomatic of a larger cultural configuration” (8). Although recognizing that the archetype belongs to the realm of representation (rather than as a reflection of reality), Doane refuses to allow the figure

¹⁵ It is unnecessary to cite these quotes, since they appear so frequently – they are both direct quotes from a number of critics, and shared catchphrases.

any other meaning than a reflective, symptomatic one, claiming that the *femme fatale* is definitively “a symptom of male fears about feminism” (2-3). Barbara Creed applies Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection to preternaturally powerful and monstrous women in horror films. What remains so unsatisfying in Creed’s otherwise astute analysis is the continued focus on men as the origin of culture, and the neglect of female audiences and creators; predictably, “The presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity (Creed 7). Despite an androcentric bias, surely “the patriarchal unconscious” includes woman as participants (Creed 165-6).

Leaving behind what Žižek calls the fetishization of “the ‘normal’ sexual relation” (and perhaps the fetishization of a stereotyped male desire), a survey of materialist criticism demonstrates that the fetishization of “transparent social relations” is indeed a unifying characteristic (Žižek 125-6). However, a variety of Marxist-inflected historicist approaches – like Doane’s – have added important contextual dimensions to analyses of the fatal woman. Marx’s “commodity fetishism” also draws on the anthropological notion of the fetish, although he associates it with “the misty realm of religion” in general, rather than – as anthropologists commonly did – with non-European religion (Marx 165). Marx’s primary obsession is the disparity between the real and the fake; not only does he fetishize “transparent social relations,” but he also fetishizes the idea of reality or a real existing behind representations. However, his theory of commodity fetishism remains a useful investigation of both fetishism and capitalism.

In Marx’s explanation, the fetish is an object that has been granted autonomy because its value is determined by its relations with other commodities rather than its

relations with men. Because the use value of the object has been replaced with exchange value as the primary measure of valuation, this abstract value takes on an eternal, mystic quality, and the commodity appears to have a natural, intrinsic value “which transcends sensuousness” (163). Both use value and exchange value are attributes given to the object by men, but while use value can be determined by sizing up the commodity, exchange value acquires the illusion of objectivity beyond the ability of labourer or consumer to judge: these values “appear to result from the nature of the products” (167). These “appear[ances]” Marx compares to tricks of the eye, but he argues that, although sight may be deceptive, at least “[i]t is a physical relation between physical things,” whereas “the commodity form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [*dinglich*] relations arising out of this” (165). Once freed of the need to be useful, “sensuous” objects subservient to man’s immediate needs, the commodity fetish takes on a life of its own, and its relationships with other commodities forms the basis of social organization, replacing the human relation between producer and consumer. Only a physical relationship with a commodity can inform us of its use value, but only by exchanging it, do we know its value. This “social process” is passed off as an objective exchange of valuable objects rather than the social exchange Marx claims it really is. The “mystical” quality of the commodity fetish is its ability to appear independent and naturally occurring apart from its producer. Although it has in fact been produced by human labour, commodity fetishism maintains that the fetish is valuable for an intrinsic property separate from the quality and duration of the labour that produced it. The ‘cost’ of labour, time, health, and natural resources, in comparison to the usefulness of the

product, that Robinson Crusoe¹⁶ so carefully accounted for, all take a back seat to exchange value (170). For Marx, most simply, the commodity fetish hides the social relations that produce it, in contrast to the transparently unequal social relations of the feudalism that capitalism replaces. Moreover, this fetishism allows us to value objects for an abstract value, rather than their usefulness. He gives the examples of “gold and silver” “pearl[s]” and “diamond[s]” as commodities that are highly valued “only in exchange” (176-77). Thus “[n]owadays people know the price of everything, and the value of nothing” (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 42).

Despite Marx’s own blindness to the gendered division of labor, his work has been influential for feminist theory and criticism.¹⁷ Most famously, Luce Irigaray turns to Marx after rejecting psychoanalysis and its prescription of universality, critiquing Freud’s attention to “individual Histories” without considering the “state of society, of culture” in which the individual participates (Irigaray 70). Without directly referencing Marx’s stance on familial hierarchy, Irigaray significantly revises his theory of commodity fetishism, locating the centre of power in the familial institution that Marx calls “natural.” While Marx questions the organization of “patriarchy” in terms of the ordering of sons and the retention of wealth over generations, Irigaray argues that “The patriarchal order is indeed the one that functions as the *organization and monopolization of private property*

¹⁶ Of course, just as he naturalizes division of labour in the family, Marx forgets Friday’s role in the production of Crusoe’s “self-created wealth” (170). Theodore Adorno notes this oversight, remarking that Crusoe was “transported . . . out of the system of bourgeois society only to reproduce it again ‘through his own effort,’ as the children’s literature likes to put it” (54).

¹⁷ For Marx, “alienation” from one’s labor was only tragic if the laborer was male, since he claimed that patriarchal family structure was “natural,” referring to “the natural division of labor in the family” (*The German Ideology* 15, *Capital* 171), and, as Peter Stallybrass’s description of Marx’s life testifies, he lived according to this principle. Marx’s wife and an unpaid maid/mistress were primarily responsible for producing use value and exchange value in the Marx household (Stallybrass, in lecture and “Marx’s Coat”).

to the benefit of the head of the family,” and that the restriction of female sexuality is an economic imperative (83). Leaving Marx’s sexism unremarked, she references instead anthropological statements of the supposed naturalness of women’s commodification, arguing that “Marx’s analysis of commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth can thus be understood as an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called patriarchal societies” (172). In identifying “women’s role as fetish-objects,” Irigaray calls out men’s fetishism, while echoing Marx’s “phantom-like” rhetoric of unveiling and demystification (183, 175).

Although his blindness to (or complicity with) the relationship between gender and class has been corrected by subsequent feminist criticism, Marx’s inability to address the role of art beyond the service of power structures is a problem that materialist critics continue to grapple with. The binary division between the truth and the image – base and superstructure – remains an impediment for materialists and is especially ill-suited for recurring images, such as the fatal woman archetype. Nevertheless, materialism has broadened readings of the archetype, considering social, cultural, historical, and material factors, instead of universalizing human experience.

Two of the most influential materialist critics of the *femme fatale* are Julie Grossman and Jennifer Hedgecock. Grossman’s argument that the *femme fatale* in film noir – having evolved from Victorian Gothic – is a construction that defines in order to condemn, rather than merely repress, is convincing; however, she concludes that this construction reflects a reality. Hedgecock, on the other hand, reads the archetype as “empowering” (15). While Hedgecock’s study is historically sound, and she is careful to distinguish between the types of fatal women, she ultimately performs the allegorizing

that Elaine Freedgood critiques: Freedgood remarks that New Historicist criticism tends to read novels “as resolving, at the level of its plot, the plot of a historical conflict which that plot allegorizes” (163). For example, Hedgecock claims that “the erotic signifying power of the femme fatale . . . suggest[s] a reversal in economic and social power fuelled by radical economic cycles of inflation and depression, and threatens the tenuous social power of the old aristocracy as demonstrated by the American and French Revolutions” (6).

A recurring problem for both materialist and psychoanalytic critics, regardless of theoretical and political position, is the persistence of the reflection theory of art. Grossman, for examples, states that “We need to look more closely to see beyond superficial appearance and examine what the mirror casts back, in all its complexity” (15). Although she comes to very different conclusions about the archetype, Grossman’s account has something in common with earlier studies of this figure. If we return to those classic texts with which the scholar of the fatal woman must be familiar, we inevitably stumble upon the work of that renowned scholar of mystery: Mario Praz. His explanation of the prevalence of the fatal woman archetype in Romantic literature seems, by today’s standards, politically incorrect as well as theoretically unsound; and yet, it deserves to be reconsidered:

This chapter must begin, like an article in an encyclopedia, with an extremely obvious and bald statement. There have always existed Fatal Women both in mythology and in literature, since mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of the various aspects of real life, and

real life had always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters. (Praz 189)

Here, Praz explains that he subscribes to the reflection theory of art. His theoretical position on the relationship between art and life differs only from feminist subscribers in that he attributes the cause to another hypothetical source of reality; their theories may vary widely, but their methods are remarkably similar. As Nina Auerbach points out, in advance of the most influential studies of the fatal woman, “iconoclastic” critics – feminist or not – dismiss and disparage mere “images” despite the fact that our lives are made up of “‘myths’ and ‘images’” (2).¹⁸

Despite their calls to de-fetishize the image, iconoclastic critics implicitly fetishize it. So too Bram Djikstra, who writes in thrall to the idol he denounces. His gothic narrative features the seductive image he is both fascinated by and which he claims is a weapon deployed by that phantasmal tyrant, misogyny. While misogyny is undeniably a factor with which the image of “feminine evil” engages, Djikstra doesn’t let her leave her past behind her, insisting that she is in fact a dangerous vessel carrying a tainted ideology. For Djikstra, de-contextualizing the artwork allows it to deliver its hidden, parasitical meaning to other contexts, maintaining its “dangerous power of persuasion” (ix). Suggesting that the work of art is a vampire that infects viewers, Djikstra fetishizes the content of artwork under the assumption that art is a vehicle that transports content without transforming it. To protect audiences from art’s power to “disseminate” its ideological content, the proper distance and historical context act as

¹⁸ Or, as Nancy Armstrong has argued, more recently, “Counter to the argument that mass-produced images created an artificial barrier between observers and a reality that antedated and even now lingers behind those images, . . . *such images are and have told us what is real for more than a century now*” (3).

amulets, and with such protections, Djikstra claims that these artworks may still be enjoyed without negative consequences – thus justifying his own “reproduction” of these images in his book (x). These images are so powerful, Djikstra warns, that

The writers of contemporary Gothic novels, the makers of vampire movies, as well as the many men and women who are virtually addicted to these narratives, pronouncing them harmless fun or simply campy entertainment, are still unconsciously responding very directly to an anti-feminine sensibility established in its modern form and symbolic structure by the sexist ideologues among the nineteenth-century intelligentsia.

(Djikstra 340-1)

His constant warnings only intensify the aura of excitement and danger surrounding these images of “feminine evil,” and, moreover, he enacts – if only rhetorically – the very misogyny he ostensibly counters. For example, categorizing *Dracula* and *Carmilla* as “central documents of the late nineteenth-century war on women” (341), Djikstra inserts male dominance where men are notably absent, arguing that *Carmilla*, “like most of the late nineteenth-century’s crop of female vampires, is not permitted any direct vampire power over men” (341). This statement, implicitly referring to *Carmilla*’s seduction of women, underestimates her power and overestimates her interest in men. Despite his insistence on de-fetishizing the image, Djikstra, like a stereotypical Gothic scholar, indulges in the fatal image he claims to explain, rhetorically luxuriating in the “soft-breasted . . . steel-taloned destroyer” and “many chimeras of womanhood (333). He

resurrects her, ostensibly, to destroy her; but before driving a stake through her ideological heart, he describes (and recreates) the lore and allure of her fatal beauty.¹⁹

This interpenetration between critical and fictional rhetoric is noted by Jean Baudrillard, even as he participates in it himself. Like Freud's "painted women," the *femme fatale* is associated with artifice – so much so, that Baudrillard figures the abstract concepts of the artificial and the seductive object as a fatal female figure. Baudrillard imagines a world filled with deceitful, cruel women waiting to humiliate him, and suggests that the inequality of the sexes is necessary to keep women from overpowering men (*Fatal* 122-128). Baudrillard accuses *feministe fatales* of "the dirty trick" of reviving the archetype, "resuscitating the feminine as a dangerous, archaic, fusional power" (*Fatal* 141), yet he does exactly this several pages earlier, claiming that men are "haunted by the enigma of the opposite sex" but women, with their "Makeup, narcissism, seduction, attraction" and secret orgasms (a biological function that he depicts as complex, unknowable, and shrouded in mystery) "do not have this weakness and "can eternally seduce us" (*Fatal* 125-8). This characterization of women is not tangential, but central to his argument about the seductive object.

Linda A. Saladin addresses these overlooked analogies and metaphors of the feminine in theoretical texts, accusing poststructuralists of displacing traditional roles and images onto abstract "linguistic constructs" that can no longer be questioned (4). However, returning to the critical trope of portraying creativity as the purview of anxious men, she attempts to throw out the image – in effect, relegating the image of the

¹⁹ Regarding iconoclastic critique, Trepka writes: "I have for some time been hunting for portraits of the Duchess Medea. Most of them, I imagine, must have been destroyed, perhaps by Duke Robert II.'s fear lest even after her death this terrible beauty should play him a trick" (Lee 51).

archetype to the role of the *femme fatale* in her attempt to destroy it. Saladin seems to agree with Baudrillard about the feminist revival of the archetype though, criticizing feminist attempts to revive the ancient archetype as “rely[ing] on a female mythos in order to maintain an aura of power” (32), and explains the feminist interest in the figure as “trapped in a cognitive impossibility” (32). This refusal of acceptance is reminiscent of Vernon Lee’s “Bavarian professor” who angers Trepka with his assertion that “such a woman . . . was psychologically and physiologically impossible” (Lee 60).

I want to analyze this figure as one that is depicted by a variety of individuals (including “Anonymous”), and in doing so, I reject the battle of the sexes waged by traditional Gothic criticism. Correspondingly, I do not divide the gothic into ‘male’ and ‘female’ plots. I am most certainly not ignoring gender inequality in doing so; rather, my approach allows for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the effects of social inequality. I want to leave behind a feminist stance that looks to “the fundamentally male writing populace” as a cause of gender inequality (Saladin 22). This particular view of gender relations divests women of creative agency, leaving the best for men – even more than the society they critique – by presenting men as creators and women as either subjects or critics, but never participants.

Although the arguments have tended to be for or against her image, recent critics have begun to question the empowerment/disempowerment, subversion/complicity approach to the fatal female archetype, noting its variation and ability to change in context. Countering the assumption that the archetype of the *femme fatale* or the fatal

woman²⁰ can be attributed solely to men, Adriana Craciun focuses on her appearance in Romantic literature by women. Craciun argues against the assumption “that these figures originate in the imaginations of men” (1); rather, she claims that in the Romantic era “the femme fatale was an ideologically charged figure that both male and female writers invested with a range of contemporary political, sexual, and poetic significations” (16). Craciun diverts criticism of the fatal woman of Romantic literature from the male origin myth, noting that Mario Praz’s *The Romantic Agony* “establishes a continuous, canonical, and exclusively male history of this figure to which most studies limit themselves” (16). Craciun cites the central problem with this dominant theoretical path as being “ahistorical” (16). In addition to being ahistorical, this approach also ignores other contextual factors, including individual, affective ones. Following Craciun’s groundbreaking study, I open up the discussion further to include all writers (and artists) of the period as participating in an exchange of available motifs.

Of the two approaches, psychoanalytic and historicist, this study is most influenced by the later, but departs from it in significant ways. New Historicism has changed the way literary critics historicize texts, but its originating principles – despite accusations of vagueness – have been forgotten in the theoretical stew that sometimes melds together so many watered-down ingredients that the distinct flavors cannot be distinguished. Freedgood warns against allegorizing and instead advocates a less rigid approach to historical context. However, while she refers to what it “tends to” do, the theoretical underpinnings of new historicism suggest the beginnings of what Freedgood

²⁰ Craciun uses the terms interchangeably.

proposes – with subtle, but significant differences. Stephen Greenblatt emphasizes that the kind of interpenetration between reality and fiction he is interested in is *not* “allusion, symbolization, allegorization, representation” or “mimesis” (11). However, understanding that “the work of art is the product of negotiation between a creator . . . and the institutions and practices of society” implies a dialectic between two unified, opposing forces – or, at least, that’s often how it’s interpreted in critical practice (12). Such a polarization gives rise to the subversion/complicity binary that Louis A. Montrose challenges, stating that “we should resist the inevitably reductive tendency to constitute such terms as binary oppositions,” because “so many cultural codes converge and intersect that ideological coherence and stability are scarcely possible” (21-22). Montrose argues that “as opposition between ‘containment’ and ‘subversion’” is “so reductive, polarized, and undynamic as to be of little or no conceptual value” (22). However, while he points toward alternatives, for example, countering post-structuralist reversion to “indeterminacy” in favor of “the historical specificity of discursive practices – acts of speaking, writing, and interpreting” – that *can* be pinned down, Montrose is ultimately unable to find a way out, returning instead to “the dialectic between the text and the world” (24). It is the absence of a symmetrical dialectic that differentiates Freedgood’s approach from her New Historicist predecessors. Freedgood’s work might be classified as part of a new, evolving New Historicism. What Freedgood proposes instead is something akin to a three-dimensional map, rather than a scale on which positions are differentiated by degrees: “connect[ing] the extra-textual dots” with textual objects (like Benjamin’s “constellation,” but without the dialectic of aggression and submission) (17, 163).

Periodization is important to this project because studies of the fatal woman tend to focus on the Romantic period, the late nineteenth century (‘Victorian’ for British focused studies), or the twentieth century, typically as distinct and separate blocks of time in which a particular archetype is contained. These “logics of totality” engendered by the reification of periods, Eric Hayot observes, “rely on a narrative of origins . . . , development . . . , declines . . . , supersessions . . . , and ghostly returns” (745). This Gothic narrative structure tends toward the ‘rise’ and ‘fall’ of the archetype, and the illusion of her enclosure within an institutionalized period. I wish to demonstrate that this is a continuing archetype, and my choice of period (a very long nineteenth century) is merely a segment of this continuity. While this study converges at the end of the nineteenth century, it is a historical moment firmly attached to what came before and after it. I read late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century narratives as drawing upon Romantic texts, but I do not claim that the image originates in Romanticism, nor do I claim that it disappears at the moment when ‘Victorian’ supposedly collides with ‘Modernism.’ Certainly, she transforms over time, but perhaps in less sudden, distinctly demarcated historical moments. In this sense, I am following Walter Benjamin’s historical materialist approach: instead of seeing time as linear, the historical materialist “grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one” (255).

However, at the same time, my contention with Benjamin lies in the aspect of his theory that relies on the fatal woman as rhetorical trope. For Benjamin, the historical materialist is a virile critic whose machismo is intimately connected to his political values. “This historical materialist,” Benjamin writes, “leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called ‘once upon a time’ in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of

his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (396). In this passage, Benjamin figures the historical materialist as a hero vanquishing the vamp of historical tradition, and – in keeping with literary tradition – feminizes the past, and masculinizes the scholar. Benjamin’s analogy suggests that the traditional historian is a passive medium for whom history is a fantasy that stays in place, while the historical materialist engages with history and recognizes its relation to the present as part of a continuum. Whether one sees only the active/passive dichotomy, the male/female dichotomy, or both at once, this dialectic is problematic. This analogy posits that either the historian or history is the agent, the victor, the dominant force. In the metaphor of prostitute and client, the work of the historian is a violent “blasting open” (Benjamin 396); instead, I’d like to suggest a less combative model of scholarship – one that simultaneously rejects the traditional literary paradigm of human sexual behavior that Benjamin draws upon. (Such a perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of narrative and sexuality, rather than dichotomizing sexual narratives as strictly either true or false representations.)

The problem of how to historicize is a critical problem that Gothic fiction participates in (often, as it mocks scholarly efforts to compose history and to historicize literature). A recurring theme in both Gothic and critical literature is a nostalgia for a more credulous past: a past in which belief was blinding, in contrast with a skeptical, unbelieving present. But, as Vernon Lee’s Trepka asks rhetorically, “why should the present be right and the past wrong?” (Lee 71). After all, “[w]e smile at what we choose to call the superstition of the past, forgetting that all our vaunted science of to-day may seem just such another superstition to the men of the future” (Lee 71). Trepka is not alone in his suspicion: this narrative of historical progress is called into question by the first

Gothic novelist. In his first preface to *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Horace Walpole affects the attitude of a literary scholar and translator of the novel, which his scholarly persona claims is a medieval document. In adopting this voice, and performing this narrative genre, Walpole, among other things, mocks the practice of characterizing the past as credulous and detached from the present. Presenting his work as a product of 1529, Walpole, under pseudonym, states that “The principle incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of christianity” [sic], and that – contrary to Walpole’s present – “Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages” (5, 6).

Two centuries later, this type of depiction of the past has remained – despite some notable rebuttals – a standard plot device in critical accounts of cultural and textual evolution. For example, in his 1977 monograph on the magic picture motif in European and American literature, *Disenchanted Images: A Literary Chronology*, Theodore Ziolkowski argues that this motif evolves through a cultural process of “disenchantment.” Thus, early magic picture narratives express belief, while later depictions express a loss of belief tinged with lingering doubt. Terry Castle continues Ziolkowski’s argument in *The Female Thermometer*, answering his query about the persistence of the supernatural in literature, arguing that as enlightenment reason rose in popularity, superstition was stuffed into artistic representations (239). Terry Castle’s evolutionary model has only recently been challenged by David J. Jones, who argues that religious beliefs have persisted, rather than dissolving in the nineteenth century. He notes that although “Terry Castle has stated that the tendency of Robertson’s phantasmagoria is to relocate the supernatural away from the external world of inexplicable phenomena to the inner realm of the mind . . . Robertson seeks to undermine confidence in perceived sense data

associated with the mind” (70). To this I would add that Castle’s argument also presumes, as well as a sudden disbelief, the presence of a previous belief – a historical model of ‘primitive’ belief to which Walpole refers in his first preface to *The Castle of Otranto*. It might be more accurate to see belief and unbelief as constantly in motion – at least, this is the position that Gothic fiction most often takes up. Like Walpole, the anonymous French translator of *Fantasmagoriana* suggests this in his preface; according to Ziolkowski’s historical cycle, *Fantasmagoriana* ranks somewhere in the middle, between belief and skepticism, yet the prefacer claims that “It is generally believed that at this time of day no one puts any faith in ghosts and apparitions,” but follows this by questioning this certainty, concluding that “so long as human nature exists, there will [not] [sic] be wanting those who will attach faith to histories of ghosts and spectres” (iii, v).²¹ *Fantasmagoriana* and *The Castle of Otranto* are but two examples of the Gothic trope of conjuring the credulity of the past. This sham historicism parallels the counterfeiting of historical presence through portraitive images.

1.5 Beyond Duality

“Ah, that was . . . the past! – And This is the present!” (Lee, “Amour Dure” 42-3). The internal versus external question that Nathanael and Clara debate bears an uncanny resemblance to contemporary text versus context debates. Steven Mailloux argues that theorizing about texts leads critics to attempt to discover a single, correct reading of a text

²¹ These passages clearly show that “Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Brown Utterson[’s]” (Day 145) translation of *Fantasmagoriana* (*Tales from the Dead*) was an amateur one, and that any subsequent editing or proofing was also spotty. The problem of reading pulp fiction and its attendant errors will be discussed in chapter three.

by focusing on an innate quality of either the text or the audience. Mailloux calls these two factions “textual realism and readerly idealism” (“Rhetorical” 622). The “realists” argue that “meanings are discovered, not created” while “idealists” claim that “meaning is made, not found” (“Rhetorical” 622). The first group privileges ‘the text’ and seeks the true story held within it. The second group privileges ‘context’ and typically emphasize audience response to the text. Žižek explains that “In the false alternative between ‘naive historicist realism’ and ‘discursive idealism’, both sides accuse each other of ‘fetishism’” (123). Instead of a compromise – merely “combining realism and idealism” – Mailloux proposes a third option: an alternative theory (or, more importantly, a method) which he calls “rhetorical hermeneutics” (“Rhetorical” 627). Mailloux argues that meaning is determined not so much by ‘context’ as by “rhetorical exchanges.” Rather than abandon “theorizing,” Mailloux suggests that criticism should not be left un-theorized, and like fiction, must be subject to scrutiny – not in terms of the correctness of its interpretation about any given text (as if anyone can directly interact with a text) so much as its participation in producing meaning through “rhetorical exchange.”

“Rhetorical exchanges” may seem to be another way of saying “context” (although it includes texts) or the merging of text and context, but is, rather, a third space between the two.²² The text/context binary proposes stability in one of two categories. Neither text nor context exists independently, and therefore, meaning can only be isolated in particular rhetorical situations (i.e., the space of rhetorical movement between text and context, which, unlike context, is something we can pin down and subject to analysis).

²² Or, as Mailloux explains, “Rhetoric is both inside and outside the text” (“Disciplinary Identities” 21).

Rhetorical hermeneutics differs from other theoretical approaches because it does not aim “to describe and prescribe interpretation in general” (“Revisited” 243). Instead, it considers “rhetorical situations” (“Revisited” 243); unlike contexts – which are whole and include the material and ephemeral – they are, simply, rhetorical (i.e., not direct representations of material or social context). Following this method, comparing “The Sandman” with twenty-first century critical theory is a dubious practice, since each participates in entirely different rhetorical situations. It might be more appropriate, for example, to discuss Hoffmann’s work in relation to Romanticism, Hegelian philosophy, or early nineteenth-century anthropological discourse. This is not so much a question of *historical* accuracy, but rather recognizing the “rhetorical situations” with which they engage – situations which may or may not be particular to a time or place. The value of “The Sandman” or “The Uncanny” does not lie in their ideological proximity to my time and place; as Quentin Skinner remarks, “sometimes . . . the writers of the past are simply praised or blamed according to how far they may seem to have aspired to the condition of being ourselves” (11). (Indeed, “why should the present be right and the past wrong?” [Lee, “Amour Dure” 71].) That is not to say that they cannot be compared with current theory if one maps them on a three-dimensional network of connections rather than a two-dimensional binary (which remains two-dimensional regardless of whether or there is a ‘spectrum’ or a ‘continuum’ between them).

A rhetorical exchange is composed of many actors, and placing these actors on a binary scale misrepresents the nature of both exchange and discourse. Rhetorical exchanges are recorded, fixed statements, and they can occur in and around any text. It is neither wholly textual nor wholly an audience response: it is a representation produced

between actors, which itself becomes an actor. In terms of understanding the complexity of individual works of art, Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) allows us to understand text and context, not as locked in dialectic, acting on one another in isolation, but rather as actors in motion, circulating rather than acting on or being acted on by omnipotent forces ("Pragmatogonies" 805). Artworks are not merely products of context, but actors circulating in an ever-changing network. From the perspective of an ANT researcher, artworks no longer seem to come from "male fears and desires," since, even in a patriarchal, androcentric context, it is impossible that men exist in a vacuum or that they are psychologically identical. In Latour's social theory of network circulation, dominant powers are determined by their greater movement. Therefore, a patriarchal society can be characterized by the frequent circulation of androcentric ideas compared to less mobile alternatives. This approach does not ignore inequalities, but rather allows us to observe them more closely, and to account for variation.

Traditional criticism arranges previous criticism around the primary text under observation, arguing that some are closer or further from the text itself in an attempt to determine what it means. On the other hand, criticism that is more open to ambiguity, as Mailloux and others complain, often concludes that all interpretations are legitimate in their subjectivity. Performing narratological and rhetorical analysis of these texts (primary and secondary), I do not seek to establish correct readings of literary texts, but instead compare different narratives and rhetoric, and explore the implications of those differences. What Latour calls a "good text" demonstrates a consciousness of its own lack of objectivity (*Reassembling* 124). Analytical writing is a form of participation, not unmediated objectivity, since texts – including analytic descriptions – participate in the

creation of meaning (Latour, *Reassembling* 124-130). Writers cannot help but implicate themselves in their accounts, since they too are actors, not simply mediators. Instead of embarking on a vain attempt to cure oneself of fetishism, to separate illusion from reality, or “to see things as they are” (as Arnold asks, in *Culture and Anarchy* [33]), scholars necessarily bring their ‘biases’ not only as impediments, but as forms of knowledge. (Perhaps this is why, like Trepka, “it seems to me that I understand her so well; so much better than my facts warrant” [Lee 55-6]). For Latour, stories – and sociologists and literary analysts are storytellers – are not different ways of seeing a unified reality, but part of the formation and perception of reality. For this reason, he proposes dissolving “the divide between one reality and many interpretations” (117). (And it is this divide that the Gothic calls into question with its incessant inset tales, parodies, and discursive shifts.)

More specifically, Latour defines a “good text” as one that identifies lots of actors, whereas “[i]n a bad text only a handful of actors will be designated as the causes of all the others” (*Reassembling* 130). A bad text will “jump straight ahead to connect vast arrays of life and history, to mobilize gigantic forces, to detect dramatic patterns emerging out of confusing interactions, to see everywhere at hand yet more examples of well-known types, to reveal behind the scenes some dark powers pulling the strings” (Latour, *Reassembling* 22). Like Mailloux, Latour also maintains that when it comes to “defining and ordering the social . . . the best solution is to trace connections *between* the controversies themselves rather than try to settle any given controversy” (*Reassembling* 23). Latour’s method relies on “description” and avoids “explanation.” This means that instead of attributing any given phenomenon to opaque bundles of connections – such as

“the words ‘society,’ ‘power,’ ‘structure,’ and ‘context,’” – the connections must be made visible (*Reassembling* 22).

Like Latour, Mieke Bal advocates a methodology based on “description” and which considers a wider range of actors in any given text. For Bal, description and interpretation are inseparable, and she argues that “most studies of narrative texts are weak precisely in that their authors fail to use adequate descriptive tools. Thus they fail to account for the subjectivity of their interpretations and to open these up for interpretation” (Bal 13). Therefore, a good narratological analysis, like a good ANT text, accounts for itself and does not hide behind blanket explanations.²³ Narratology “is an instrument for making descriptions, and hence interpretations, discussable” and “*That*, not objectivity or certainty, ‘being right’ or ‘proving wrong,’” she claims, “is the point” (12). The cliché that there is no unmediated interaction with the text need not be a cop-out or a justification for refusing to assign meaning. Accuracy in literary criticism may be relative, but not unachievable. The question is not so much a matter of objective accuracy or inaccuracy, but rather, how is accuracy determined?

²³ This is somewhat similar to John Stuart Mill’s description of Jeremy Bentham’s critical methods. In his essay on “Bentham,” Mill discusses the difference between the “creative” and the “negative” critic. Bentham’s legacy as a thinker, according to Mill, is not so much his conclusions as his method: “Bentham’s method may be shortly described as the method of detail; of treating wholes by separating them into their parts, abstractions by resolving them into Things, classes and generalities by distinguishing them into the individuals of which they are made up; and breaking every question into pieces before attempting to solve it” (5). This detail-oriented approach to critique is like Latour’s in its need to unpack the contents of a problem --- “the parts of which the whole is made up” – and its view that “errors lurk in generalities” (Mill 6), particularly opaque, authoritative phraseology: “ordinary modes of moral and political reasoning,” that, “when hunted to their source” – “terminated in phrases” such as “politics, liberty, social order, constitution, law of nature, social compact, etc.,” (6).

1.6 Ambiguous Ambiguity

While Spiridion Trepka resents the “old pedant” for his superstitious contempt of the fatal woman (“he would have enjoyed having had her burnt as a witch”), and “the Bavarian professor” who dismisses the object of his scholarly obsession with a simplistic explanation (“the mythopoeic . . . tendency of the Renaissance”), my response to the image of the fatal woman is not a disinterested one, since, like young Trepka, I too have fallen under her spell (Lee 58, 60). Despite my resentment of her mistreatment by previous critics – “romance (as usual) has been overlooked by our Dryasdusts” (Lee 45) – I realize that this is in part the result of my own subjective response to art. “Am I turning novelist instead of historian?” (Lee 55).

No. Giving oneself over to fetishism and acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in criticism does not imply that ‘anything goes’ or that all subjective impressions fall under the leaking umbrella of ‘critique.’ Rather, the critic who maintains awareness of subjectivity does not do so only to describe an ‘impression’ or to extinguish and remove subjectivity, but is capable of describing the formal and contextual factors which contribute to their subjective response. Like Latour, Mailloux counters poststructuralist helplessness in the face of biases, arguing that “an interpreter’s assumptions are not prejudices that distort understanding but the enabling ground of the process” (*Reception* 7). Avoiding explanations that point to a single, definitive cause, post-structuralism allows texts to maintain their ambiguity and polyvalence, but too often post-structuralist analyses dissipate into the nebulous regions of ‘ambiguity’ and ‘indeterminacy.’ Meaning may not be fixed or static, but in what sense? Texts are ambiguous in particular ways. Ambiguity in narrative does not mean that everything is possible, but rather that a

particular set of possibilities are put into conversation with one another. In the Gothic especially, ambiguity is neither a space of infinite possibilities nor a mystery that can be accurately decoded by the astute critic. Uncertainty, hesitation and permeable boundaries between opposites (i.e., characters, narrators, and readers may be unsure who is sane or insane, good or evil, alive or dead, and struggle to determine what is real and what is not) is one of the most defining features of the Gothic, which often presents two or more possibilities between which the text wavers. These possibilities arise but are suspended in mid-air, never settling. For examples, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu ends his famous vampire tale,²⁴ *Carmilla*, with the concept of ambiguity in the heroine's final confession:

to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with *ambiguous* alternations – sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door. (La Fanu 83 [italics mine])

These “ambiguous alterations” are distinct, but not singular or stable – that is what makes them “ambiguous” (not complete indeterminacy). In these ambiguous textual moments, several possibilities are invoked, and their intermingling *is* the meaning, not merely a cover for meaning. This attention to appearances – to taking “the surfaces of Gothic novels, with the superficialities of ‘claptrap,’ ‘*décor*,’ and ‘stageset’” at face value, rather than looking for something behind or beneath them (11-12) – is what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick advises in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. For Sedgwick, images and

²⁴ *Carmilla* was originally published as an illustrated serial, and later as an inset tale connected to others with a frame narrative (*In a Glass Darkly*) and independently as a novella. I will discuss these publication details in a chapter three.

conventions *are* the content, not something hidden by them. Although the Gothic is particularly notable for its attention, often through parody, to hidden depths that turn out to be shallow, Sedgwick later suggests that this mode of reading – of taking surfaces at face value – may be productive of meaning in literature generally.

Vernon Lee's description of the supernatural is similar to 'the ambiguous' since both are intangible and always in motion. Lee explains that ghosts can't be captured in art. Today, however, searching for ghosts has become the hallmark of the "paranoid reading" that followed in the wake of post-structuralism. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies an alternative: "reparative reading" which is akin to the process of creating a tangible image that Lee describes by which artists and writers express the experience of the spectral (Lee 304). Lee explains that "the supernatural is necessarily essentially vague, and art is necessarily distinct: give shape to the vague and it ceases to exist" (295). Reparation is "additive" in opposition to "the x-ray gaze of the paranoid impulse" that aims to reduce the work to a core meaning (Sedgwick 27). The problem with the latter, Sedgwick explains, is that "The paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends . . . on an infinite reservoir of naïvité in those who make up the audience for those unveilings" (19). In other words, this approach relies on a belief in the typical reader's inability to see what is dangerously repressed and repressive, which in turn allows the critic to accuse those imaginary readers of their naïve fetishism.

In either case, whether they are operating in the paranoid or the reparative mode, the critic can only describe what they have created in the process of reading. Although it is necessarily a process of filling in gaps in the narrative, Roger Luckhurst argues that a concrete presence cannot be found in the absences, as so many 'haunted' critics claim. In

response to the popularization and de-politicization of Jacques Derrida's hauntology, Luckhurst asks, "Surely we have to risk the violence of *reading* the ghost, of cracking it open its absent presence" (542). This opening of textual material is what Latour advocates in his call to make the social "flat" (*Reassembling* 171).²⁵ The ANT researcher, Latour repeatedly reminds us, is like the tiny ant who gets close enough to see that the surface is rich in detail, and through her tireless work, knows that the anthill is not a cover for the underground lair, but a series of connections she easily traverses.

1.7 Enchantment and Paranoia

This intense scrutiny, of course, reminds us of the paranoid caution against paranoia that has confused contemporary criticism. Sedgwick has argued for a positive, constructive mode of criticism: "reparative" rather than "paranoid" reading. These two positions are two sides on the same coin, and therefore "it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices" (Sedgwick, "Paranoid" 28) (Poor Trepka, for instance, who realizes only too late that "all is explained by the fact that the first time I read of this woman's career, the first time I saw her portrait, I loved her, though I hid my love to myself in the garb of historical interest" [Lee 72]). The difference, in other words, between the "paranoid" and the "reparative" is that that the former seeks to find – with its "x-ray gaze" – while the

²⁵ Sharon Marcus, Stephen Best, and Heather Love have explored what this might mean for literary criticism – that is, what it means see the text as flat, rather than a series of ever-receding layers – and their solutions will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

latter draws attention to its own additions, admitting that perception is imaginative (“Historical interest indeed!” [Lee 72]).²⁶

But how does all of this accounting for subjectivity differ from impressionist criticism? How does this accounting differ from Oscar Wilde’s claim that good criticism is a “form of autobiography” – that we are all, in so many ways, Trepkas writing ourselves into history? (*The Critic* 237). First of all, it should be noted that although Sedgwick suggests a positive, in the sense of “additive” style of criticism, this need not always be – as Rita Felski’s enthusiasm might suggest – happy, ‘celebratory,’ or “enchanted”²⁷ – it simply requires critics to be more receptive, both to the text and to their own feelings. This affective turn considers ‘feelings’ without leaning on the universalism of psychoanalysis or the determinism of materialism. Acknowledging the role of socio-economic inequality in one’s supposedly personal feelings, affect studies calls for more detailed, nuanced, and particular examinations of ‘feeling’ with all of the complexities that elude Marxism; in other words, a consideration of affect beyond identifying false consciousness or ideological blindness from which the critic has miraculously extricated herself.

Denis Donoghue suggests possible differences between impressionist criticism and possible new directions in critical considerations of affect by paralleling nineteenth-

²⁶ Heather Love, too, notes that “Sedgwick acknowledges throughout the essay the benefits of paranoid reading” (“Truth and Consequences” 238).

²⁷ For example, Sianne Ngai’s analysis of *Ugly Feelings* – responses that are not only negative, but lacking the dramatic flair and social currency of shock, dread, or anger. Heather Love, with regard to Sedgwick’s reparation, remarks on “the negativity and the aggression at the heart of psychic life” and without which “thinking is impossible” (238). Such complex and affective possibilities will also be discussed in the following chapters.

century and twenty-first-century criticism, characterizing Matthew Arnold's approach to interpretation as text-centered and Walter Pater's response as reader-centered. While Pater states his agreement with Arnold that "the aim of all true criticism" is "To see the object as in itself it really is," his method of interpreting the object is completely the opposite: "the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly" (Pater viii). Donoghue comments that "that 'first step' was the only one Pater proposed to take" (40). While Arnold claims that good criticism attempts "To see the object as in itself it really is," Pater suggests that it is more important "to know one's own impression as it really is" (Pater viii). Oscar Wilde proposes a third way: that the critic must go further than simply understanding their own impressions; they must create a new object, with no pretense to understanding the "object as in itself it really is" ("The Critic as Artist" 238). For Wilde, "the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is *not* . . . To the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticizes" (240-1[italics added]). Although he agrees that "the first step in aesthetic criticism is to realize one's own impressions," Wilde notes – with the serious tone of an essayist in "Pen, Pencil, Poison," and the flippancy of the comedic dramatist in "The Critic as Artist" – that Pater takes a second step: 'Mr. Pater has put into the portrait of Monna Lisa something that Lionardo never dreamed of . . . And so the picture becomes more wonderful to us than it really is, and reveals to us a secret of which, in truth, it knows nothing' ("Pen, Pencil , Poison" 198, 200; "The Critic as Artist" 238-39). In Wilde's theory, the only difference between criticism and art is that art takes as its materials "the visible world of form and colour, or

the unseen world of thought,” whereas criticism takes “the work of art” as its inspiration (“The Critic” 236).

In the twenty-first century, however, criticism as merely a kind of art about art is no longer satisfactory. Donoghue argues that – although Arnoldian and Paterian methods are still going strong – today’s critics typically “do not feel any piety towards the object as in itself it really is, or to the impression the work has made on them, or to the alternative impressions they have formed in relation to the work” (50). These critics, as Donoghue and Sedgwick argue, are so concerned with ‘reading against the grain,’ ‘resisting,’ ‘subverting,’ and avoiding ‘complicity,’ that they ‘resist’ the object, their feelings, and the loss of control that creativity requires. Wilde suggests a three-step method (although he only emphasizes the last two): to try to understand the object; to understand one’s own impressions; and to take responsibility for one’s imaginative and creative impulses. The third step, as Mailloux, Latour, Bal, and Felksi all suggest in one way or another, is to interpret the relationships, responses, and reactions a work produces. It is the tendency to get stuck on repetitive hauntings while avoiding the apparition they attempt to address that Luckhurst queries, advocating attention to “specificity” instead (542). I am not seeking what is hidden or absent, but what is present – or hidden in plain sight. In this sense, I am pursuing what Sharon Marcus calls “just reading.” Drawing on Sedgwick’s answer to the “hermeneutics of suspicion” (reparation), Marcus proposes “striv[ing] to be adequate to a text conceived as complex and ample rather than as diminished by, or reduced to, what it has had to repress” (280, 75).

Post-reparation, Rita Felksi has broached the possibility of re-invigorating criticism with pleasure and “enchantment” while simultaneously critiquing it. Instead of

the unreflective story-telling of impressionist criticism or the detachment of post-structuralism, Felski calls for “accountability” (*Uses* 19). This parallax mode of criticism – both accepting and critiquing – is not an ‘interrogation’ that seeks to expose the text but an exchange that allows the reader to be vulnerable to texts without fear of ‘complicity.’ Felski pushes the notion of “reparative reading” further, suggesting that “enchantment” might be a legitimate mode of reading. Felski re-tells *Kiss of the Spider Woman* as a critique of the feminization of this mode of reading featuring a debate between Molina, the seductive critic, and Valentin, “the quintessential exponent of ideology critique, eager to demonstrate his fluency with theoretical codes, to translate aesthetic surfaces into hermeneutical depths, to diagnose the pathologies” and valiantly protect the weak from the power of ideology (68). Although Valentin attempts to save Molina from the spell of enchantment, he doesn’t seem to notice that her retellings of Gothic cinema are not mimetic descriptions, but inventions to entrap him, and, as ‘even paranoid people have enemies,’ Valentin’s skepticism proves to be his undoing (but neither Molina nor Valentin emerge victorious). Likewise, Latour advises circumventing the binary model of mastery and submission to participate instead in textual exchange. The extent of the artwork’s possibilities cannot be captured by a single critic, but therein lies the self-perpetuating nature of scholarship: each exchange provokes still more exchanges.

What Felski and others are calling “after critique”²⁸ is a useful mode of analysis for Gothic scholars since, not only is the issue of personal involvement with historical objects a central theme in the Gothic, but because this mode of fiction, as Sedgwick’s

²⁸ See *English Language Notes* 51.2 (Fall 2013).

early work reminds us, demands that we notice its surfaces. It does so not as a fiction that must be read with a particular theoretical framework, but rather as a self-consciously critical mode. The ANT mode of inquiry outlined by Latour allows us to read clichés as openly referential rather than symbolic or merely ‘ambiguous’ and ‘indeterminant.’ ANT encourages not only acknowledging, but accepting our investments in cultural products, and the Gothic invites us to fully immerse ourselves in its world by scaring us, making fun of us, and embedding narratives in an overt attempt to convince us it is embedded in our reality. Given that the affective tone of the Gothic is an ambivalent mixture of – as so many have noted – ‘fear and desire,’ it is reasonable for the critic of the Gothic to confront their own fears and desires in the process of study. As I have argued elsewhere,²⁹ contra Baldick and Mighall’s request that we “step outside the ‘circles of fear and desire’” (228)³⁰ we might consider delving into these regions.

While describing haunted representational female doubles, this dissertation is also doubled; I write in two critical modes, two voices: the narratological reader who describes first-hand impressions of fiction, and the critic who interrogates the rhetoric of previous criticism. Thus, each fictional female double is interpreted twice. At the same time, my purported “first-hand impressions” cannot be innocent since I often focus on passages that have either been frequently critiqued or conspicuously ignored (rhetorical exchanges have a role to play in how we receive any given work of art), and therefore I

²⁹ International Gothic Association conference, 7 August 2013, Guildford, UK.

³⁰ An implicit reference to William Patrick Day’s *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy*.

am also responding to previous criticism indirectly while directly challenging critical narrative conventions and rhetorical strategies.

1.8 PART II: Spectral Images and Uncanny Portraits

A Curious, at first rather conventional, artificial-looking sort of beauty, voluptuous yet cold, which, the more it is contemplated, the more it troubles and haunts the mind.

--- *Vernon Lee, "Amour Dure" (52)*

I wonder what I Shall do with myself now? – haunted and brain-ridden as I am by this woman and her picture?

--- *Marie Corelli, Ziska (85)*

A good text is never an unmediated portrait of what it describes – nor for that matter is a portrait

--- *Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social, (136)*

1.9 The Fetish as Image/Image as Fetish

In Logan's explanation of the production of fetishism, the "anti-representational" nature of the fetish is paradoxical in that the fetish is both a representation and the thing it represents (Logan 10-11). The apparent independence of the fetish image detaches it from questions of its relationship to anything it purports to represent, and instead highlights the nature of its interactions with other actors. Specifically, this dissertation deals with a recurring, fetishized image that appears in multiple media and contexts, and is not bound to a particular object.

Walter Benjamin addresses this detachment of image from object in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” Describing the loss of the “aura,” Benjamin states that “In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place” (253). The “unique existence” of the traditional artwork “bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject” (253). The fetishized image, however, does not bear anything for long: it carries associations temporarily, solidifying the illusion of aura, but always exchanging its old associations for new ones. Benjamin differentiates the auratic quality of the artwork from the context of its reception with the example of “An ancient statue of Venus” moving from “a traditional context for the Greeks” to the middle ages (256). Despite gathering new associations in these disparate contexts, the statue maintains “its uniqueness – that is, its aura” (256). Therefore, the process of changing the meanings associated with it is much slower than for that of the simulacrum. While reproduction “devalues” the artwork, the simulacrum requires reproduction to gain the illusion of aura (254). Mobility replaces historical testimony and the authority of tradition as the image’s source of power: “it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence” (254). Benjamin notes a shift from an original and copy dialectic to “the reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility,” and therefore, “For the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual” (256). However, released from its parasitic relationship with tradition, reproduced artwork seeks new hosts “[a]nd in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced” (254). Because “the

distracted masses absorb the work of art into themselves,” simulacra are easily divested of their associations (or, temporary aura).³¹

The aura-less image is a simulacrum. Jean Baudrillard argues that we are now living in an era of simulation, surrounded by simulacra. He characterizes the Renaissance as an era of counterfeits (symbols separated from their substance). Giving the examples of the automaton and the robot, Baudrillard distinguishes between first and second order simulation: the automaton is representational (i.e., a counterfeit), but industrial production effaces the connection between original and copy, replacing rather than resembling. Third order simulation – the simulacrum – is produced in order to be mechanically reproduced. Rather than counterfeiting an original, the simulacrum is its

³¹ For Terry Castle, technological reproduction is a contributing factor in “the spectralization of the other.” This process of spectralization, which she claims began in the eighteenth century, resulted in a sense that “The corporeality of the other – his or her actual life in the world – became strangely insubstantial and indistinct: what mattered was the mental picture, the ghost, the haunting image” (125). Castle defines spectralization as a displacement of others, but for Jacques Derrida, the spectralizing power of media is also transformative. While Castle follows Freud’s theory of repression, Derrida hypothesizes spectralization as something that arises not simply from repression, but from negation; rather than the return of something that previously existed, something new is created. The spectral is not merely something repressed which returns, but a phenomenon “beyond the economy of repression” (Derrida *Specters*, 26). In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida focuses on Marx’s paradoxical depiction of the supernatural, explaining that “to conjure means also to exorcise” (59). In *Capital*, for example, Marx explains capitalism as a magic trick and capital as a vampire, but to conjure them away, he must first conjure them into existence. *Capital* proves that money is, like vampires, phantasmal, and yet, at the same time, it proves the existence of a vampire: capital. Derrida notes Marx’s anxiety in this regard, ridiculing his attempts to dispel the phantasmatic from the social and his desire to re-instate the ‘real’ in place of the magical. Reflecting on Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Derrida argues that Marx’s distinction between the spirit and specter of revolution is inaccurate; rather, there is no pure essence or spirit which can be separated from its husk, shell, dead form, “The apparition form, the phenomenal body of the spirit” (169), but that the two are separated only by temporality (138-141). In arguing for this interpenetrative relationship, Derrida suggests that Marx’s essay, in making this distinction, in fact points to “the essential contamination of spirit (*Geist*) by specter (*Gespenst*)” (141). Derrida explains that since we can only speculate upon anything through representation, to denounce something we must first create it (183), whereas Freud’s concept of repression relies on the notion that representations make visible something that really exists. But since, according to Derrida, there is nothing that already exists before representation, the repressed cannot return as itself – instead, it must be invented (conjured into being). Derrida’s logic of haunting allows for the nonhuman to haunt or contaminate the human (rather than simply act as mirrors).

own sign (unified with its simulacra with what Baudrillard calls “the signifier of reference” [*Symbolic* 56]).

Following Baudrillard’s theory of the evolution of counterfeiting to simulation, Jerrold E. Hogle argues that the Gothic expresses nostalgia for counterfeits in the age of simulation, and is therefore haunted by “the ghost of the counterfeit” (*The Undergrounds* 107-13). The Gothic image of the fatal woman is a simulacrum with no definite origin that continually reappears in new forms, participating in this nostalgia for real fakes (false images covering truths). Once in circulation, however, this image – like Marx’s vampire – carries out a half-life as an undead mechanical entity. In this way, it becomes real – or “hyperreal.” Once in circulation, freed of her chequered past, the fatal woman is continually reproduced, enabling her to seduce a wider audience – like Benjamin’s technologically reproduced artwork – promiscuously. However, the image gathers a new kind of aura in circulation. Instead of belonging to an object with a ritual function, the fetishized image or “signifier of referent” is imbued with a kind of “authority” by virtue of its associations. This virtual aura – or what Graeme Gilloch calls, provisionally, “artificial aura” – differs from that of the original work of art, because, as Benjamin explains, it must be constantly renewed by audience investment in order to survive.

In this sense, Benjamin is right to suggest that there is potential for the audience to gain power in the era of technological reproduction that Baudrillard will later term the era of simulation because they are no longer subservient to the object handed down by tradition. The auratic vapour of the image is fleeting, but also more mysterious than the aura of tradition because it changes so quickly; for this reason, it becomes increasingly important to trace its associations (rather than search for a referent).

But “[w]hat is aura, actually?” and how is an authentic aura different from a virtual or artificial one (Benjamin, “Little History” 518)? In his “Little History of Photography,” Benjamin offers another definition of aura: “the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be” (518). It is not only the auratic object’s “singular[ity]” and “uniqueness” that differentiates it from the reproducible copy, but “duration” (519). An experience of the object is implicit in this description of aura as a “strange weave of space and time” (518). His example of the branch suggests what he does not state: motion. The transformation into an image of the experience of “rest[ing] on a summer noon . . . trac[ing] a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance” means divesting the scene of its experience – of the time that is inseparable from the production of the image before you. Once captured, the motion of the sun, air, and all life in the scene, is no longer required to continue reproducing this image. The reproduction then, becomes the model for viewing reality: scenes encountered in nature are measured against all the reproduced images one has consumed (519). The consequences of this “peeling away of the object’s shell, the destruction of the aura” (519) will be explored further in chapters three and four.

1.10 The Fatal Woman as Uncanny Portrait

Gothic literature focuses on the visual, although, as Kamilla Elliott points out, the visual is often privileged in verbal media: the Gothic tendency to “undermine the representational capacities of words” occurs “paradoxically *through* words, using words to declare the superiority of images and ekphrastic words to undermine symbolic words” (207). Elliott is primarily concerned with “Gothic fiction’s rhetoric of portraiture” rather

than “its ekphrastic representations of actual portraits” (210). Elizabeth A. Fay outlines a “cultural history” of what she calls “the portraitive mode” (6). This “mode” crosses media and expresses the ways in which portraiture interacts with social and literary life (Fay 6). Like Elliott’s and Fay’s, this study is interested in rhetorical depictions of responses to portraiture in the Gothic, although it also addresses the relationship between characters’ responses and ekphrastic descriptions. Gothic fiction typically foregrounds viewers’ responses and the purported meaning or spirit held in an image, rather than the aesthetic properties of the portrait; in other words, the Gothic is concerned with describing the portrait’s affective qualities rather than what it looks like. This “rhetoric of portraiture” may refer to an image that exists only in a character’s imagination or which is suggested for the reader to imagine, but ekphrastic descriptions are not always provided.

The aesthetic context in which the portrait appears (i.e., the Gothic setting) is what ultimately imbues the image with its uncanny aura. Martin Myrone argues that the Gothic transcends genre and that – like Castle’s claim for an uncanny underside to reason – “gothic spectacle” was the shadow of eighteenth-century aesthetic ideals and ‘taste’ (289). Referencing Robert Miles’s argument that Lord Kames theory of ‘ideal presence’³² is essential to understanding the Gothic, Myrone argues that the gothic spectacle, regardless of the media in which it is rendered, exhibits a particular temporality, aside from shared visual motifs: the temporality of reverie. For Myrone the Gothic is defined by “a particular sense of temporality” (i.e., that of spectacle), rather

³² Miles explains that “ideal presence is ultimately a scene of moral instruction . . . surrendering to pleasurable reverie, we rehearse moral scenes: impressions are re-iterated, warmth infused, and the lesson imprinted” (15).

than the replication of visual motifs (295). He argues that this “gothic spectacle” visualizes an instability attributed to Gothic fiction (i.e., its hesitant, surreal, oneiric quality), or “an insistent sense of instantaneity” that “reduce[s] the exercise of aesthetic judgment to a kind of dream-state” (308, 310).

The fatal woman in the gothic mode therefore differs from the fallen women of Victorian realism and the *femme fatale* of *noir* cinema since her context offers a particular mode of viewing: one of fixation and entrancement of a supernatural order. In *film noir*, the *femme fatale* is a criminal or motivates others to commit crimes, and her evil is defined by specific actions and sex appeal; in the gothic, the fatal woman exerts supernatural (or seemingly supernatural) power that entrances her victim. In other words, the gothic fatal woman captures her victims through the reveries of what Myrone calls the “gothic aesthetic”: dreams, telepathy, haunted images, hypnosis, etc. She may do this momentarily, particularly in the gothic interludes in sensation fiction, or before the supernatural is explained in Radcliffe’s novels, but she is never explained away completely or divested of power when she appears in the gothic mode (rather than in what Carol Margaret Davison calls the “gothic closets”³³ of realist fiction). The fatal woman appears in many forms, but I have limited my analysis to the image when it appears as a double with supernatural or seemingly supernatural qualities. I have therefore excluded works such as *Lady Audley’s Secret*, in which the portrait acts as fatal double because, although it evokes the gothic, it is more properly a sensation novel, and the portrait plays a primarily symbolic, rather than supernatural or psychological role.

³³ In “The Ghosts of Genres Past,” Davison differentiates Gothic novels from realist, bildungsroman novels with “Gothic closets” (i.e., Gothic passages or references contained within a realist novel).

While my argument necessarily draws on the history and theory of portraiture and imaging technologies, I am primarily interested in the images themselves, in each of their transformations. Textual depictions of images and characters' relationships with images are foregrounded, rather than the history of portraiture and image production. This approach acknowledges the persistence of stock images beyond the media by which they are first introduced to us. Many Gothic images, including those of fatal women, cycle through folklore, magic lantern shows, literature, music, visual art, film, and digital media. David J. Jones calls this recycling process (the process by which these images are kept alive) the "Gothic machine." Neither defined solely by their vehicles or by an essential meaning inherent in a particular image, Jones argues that "the 'machine' actually supplants the assemblage which helped form it" (14). In other words, their very status as clichés – a status they have acquired through constant repetition – is what, for Jones, lends significance and power to these images. Although their translation into new media inevitably alters the images to some degree, their longevity and continuity deserves attention. The Gothic offers a particular convention of depicting the role of art that is connected to, but not merely determined by, social practices of viewing.

Notably, the Gothic portrait is not an image to be passively consumed, but an object with agency that threatens to consume its consumer. Elliott argues that in the Gothic, the portrait is not merely an object to be looked at, but is capable of overpowering its audience, observing that "Theories of Foucaultian surveillance and psychoanalytic gazing emphasize the power of the looker over the looked-at" whereas

“picture identification”³⁴ reverses such power relations, championing the power of the image over those who look on it” (242). The fatal woman, for example, exerts power through art. Instead of being contained or captured by art, she threatens to escape its bounds.

A key feature of the uncanny artwork is its returned gaze. Derrida calls this “the visor effect” in reference to old Hamlet’s ghost whose “apparition makes him appear still invisible beneath his armor” (6). The mask of representation prevents us from truly seeing the specter because there is nothing behind it. It is this returned gaze or apparent subjectivity of the specter that “distinguish[es] the specter not only from the icon or the idol but also from the image of the image, from the Platonic *phantasma*, as well as from the simple *simulacrum*” (Derrida 6). We cannot engage with the gaze of the spectre; instead, we are under its surveillance, we self-censor to conform to its gaze, but our efforts are not affirmed. We “feel ourselves seen by a look which it will always be impossible to cross” (Derrida 7). The gaze of the portrait is the key to its uncanny power, but this gaze is a missed, imagined gaze. We respond to its threat of surveillance, but the returned gaze of the inanimate is, of course, an illusion, and the uncanny sensation may trigger the viewer’s paranoia (“The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects” [Derrida 125]).

In her discussion of the *femme fatale* of noir cinema, Gaylyn Studlar notes the phenomenon of the returned gaze of the image and the passivity of the spectator when “Dietrich looks back or initiates the look” (48). The film ‘close-up’ – aesthetically similar

³⁴ Elliott defines “picture identification” as “the mimetic matching of an embodied, presented face to a named, represented face to establish social identity” (Elliott 20).

to portraiture – is comparable to moments of portraitive description in fiction, since the action stops in favor of becoming familiar with a character in a way that simulates personal interaction. Instead of merely observing the actions of the characters, we are invited to participate in the story. For example, in the 1929 film *Pandora's Box*, Louise Brooks, as Lulu, has a lengthy close up near the end of the film in which her seductive gaze is directed at the audience (*fig. 1*). This scene places the audience in the position of her latest victim. It is a similar invitation to engage with the portrait that characters respond to in Gothic narratives, in which pictures become actors.



Figure 1: Louise Brooks as Lulu

For example, “The Family Portraits,” the first story in Sarah Elizabeth Utterson’s translation of Jean Baptiste Benoit Eyrès’s *Fantasmagoriana* (1812), *Tales of the Dead* (1813), “features a “fatal” portrait of a melancholy woman followed by a frame narrative explaining the portrait’s effect on its viewers and the story’s audience:

‘That is the reason,’ replied the young person who had related the history, ‘that I prefer those portraits where the individual is represented occupied in some employment, as then the figure is entirely independent of those who look at it; whereas in a simple portrait the eyes are inanimately fixed on every thing [sic] that passes. Such portraits appear to me as contrary to the laws of illusion as painted statues.’ (Anonymous 13-4)

In other words, if the portrait appears to be engaged in another context, it is less likely to seem as if it were present in the context in which it is shown. While the appearance of the portrait returning its viewers’ gaze is uncanny, humans who too closely resemble artworks also cause discomfort. Moreover, representations provide a constant comparison of the living. Thus marriageable women in “The Sandman” “sew, knit, or play” in order to differentiate themselves from the automaton who appears solely engaged with you.

Representing the gaze is especially significant when the subject of the portrait is female. The difference between female figures in high art versus low art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – and, arguably, still today – lies not in the modesty of dress, but the modesty of the gaze; portraits in which the female subject seems to look out at their viewer are typically perceived as more sexually charged than those whose gaze is directed elsewhere. Alison Conway highlights the importance of the returned gaze in categorizing portraits of women as erotic, and that this feature is typical of erotic portraits, including those used to advertise prostitution; she notes that “the direct gaze of Nell Gwyn and Louise de Keroualle . . . seems to confront the beholder, demanding that the painting be viewed from a position defined by the portrait subject” (62). While portraits of women reading (seemingly unaware that they are being observed, much less

looking back at the observer) were considered morally sound, the direct gaze of the female subject was suspect (Conway 43). One eighteenth-century critic remarks of a portrait of a courtesan that “the *Eyes* are too characteristic of her vocation” (qtd. in Conway 40). Descriptions of portraits considered erotic in the period cite the “peeping” and “leer”ing of its female subjects as evidence that they are suitable for “the bed-chamber of a bagnio,” suggesting that nudity is less a mark of vulgarity than the gaze of its subject (Conway 21). The largely unspoken rule that a direct gaze is improper for a lady is intimated by the Duke in Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess” who, lamenting his late wife’s behavior and attempting to explain the origin of the portrait’s “glance,” complains that “her looks went everywhere” (8, 12, 24). Vernon Lee’s Trepka imagines that his idol must have suffered similar problems, wondering what if “her husband has taken it into his head that she has looked too hard at this man or that”? (Lee 56).

The uncanny image of the fatal woman is both frightening and alluring; it is this combination that defines her type. Her assertive gaze is the source of her appeal, but may also be the ‘fatal’ quality that leads her viewers astray. Medusa-like, she arrests her audience, holding them in a space of reverie that is both frightening and seductive. Thus Trepka finds the portrait he has been seeking of “the real Medea,” the essence of whom he perceives as “a thousand times more real, individual, and powerful than in the other portraits” although “[t]he face is the same as in the other portraits” because, in this one, “[s]he looks out of the frame with a cold, level glance; yet the lips smile” (Lee 62). Trepka confesses that he “often examine[s] these tragic portraits” seeking to find in them the look of her face “when Medea del Carpi fascinated her victims into love unto death” (52). He sees her in many portraits, regardless of the model: “Cleopatra seems to me, for

all her Oriental dress, and although she wears a black wig, to be meant for Medea” (Lee 51). It is this searching for something he already seems to know that seems to lend the portrait an uncanny quality.

In making the claim that art has a life of its own, separate from its original context, I might sound like Nathanael, the delusional student who rejects his fiancé’s common-sense explanation in favor of philosophical abstractions and mechanical objects. Yet I do not share Nathanael’s claim that external forces act through “artists and scholars,” but rather the independence of the image, like that of the automaton, is gained through its interaction with humans; like the automaton, it takes on a life-like appearance, but we give it life, and it returns the favor. What makes the uncanny portrait of the fatal woman so interesting, in terms of literary analysis, is the ways in which her observers respond to the appearance of engagement.

In this dissertation, I analyze the archetypal image of the fatal woman in several unique literary contexts in an attempt to demonstrate her versatility, adaptability and longevity. In chapter two, I explore her relationship to the Romantic theme of ‘the unspeakable’ as well as addressing the different treatment of the image in Gothic versus Romantic literature. Chapter three considers Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* as a story of simulacral reproduction that is linked to its trajectory from serial to cult fiction. Chapter four reorients the standard view of the Victorian discourse of miscegenation and inheritance, reading Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in light of his critical work. Chapter five is all about “Rebecca, Rebecca, Rebecca”: her simulacral reproduction, her role as a masquerader and masquerade costume, and the fetishism of femininity. I conclude with some suggestions for reading the transformation of the

archetype of the fatal woman from the mid-twentieth-century until today. In the process, I hope to re-orient the discussion of this figure to include her as an actor with a life history, rather than as a representation mediating between characters, or as a symbolic representation of something else.

Chapter 2

2 (Unspeakable)



Figure 2 Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers (Photo ©Tate London)

Their Scylla and the Portress of Hell, their daemons and our spectres, the shade of Patroclus and the ghost of Hamlet, their naiads, nymphs, and oreads, and our sylphs, gnomes, and fairies, their furies and our witches, differ less in essence than in local, temporary, social modifications. (Henry Fuseli, On the Ancients, Lectures on Painting, 410)

Henry Fuseli's *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* (1812) features the titular character swooping into center stage and confronting the bloody daggers with her finger on her lips, implying coolness in the face of violence. Extending a heavily impastoed sleeve toward the viewer, Lady Macbeth seems to rise out of the darkness in the style of the phantasmagoria show. In this work Fuseli mixes three genres: phantasmagoria, theatre, and history painting (low, middle, and high culture, respectively), and depicts three obsessions of the period: Shakespeare, the 'unspeakable,' and the fatal woman. This theatrical portrait, inspired by Mrs. Siddons's enactment of Lady Macbeth (its alternate title is *Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth* [Fowle]), documents a multiplicity of representations: Shakespeare's, the theatre's, the actress', the magic lantern slide painter's, and the academy painter's. While typically Gothic in its blending of media and genres, Fuseli's work is atypical of academy painting. Martin Myrone explains that as a self-taught member of the academy, a popular commercial illustrator and a successful exhibitor, Fuseli's reputation – like that of many Gothic writers – was mixed: he was considered a “great painter and charlatan, genius and fool” (Myrone 290).

Fuseli rendered this scene and others featuring Lady Macbeth multiple times, and his borrowings from theatre and phantasmagoria remind us that stock images of fatal women are repeated across media. Acknowledging the eighteenth-century Gothic's debt to early modern print imagery, David J. Jones calls this process of inter-media repetition – the constant motion of motifs as they cycle and recycle through a variety of media – the “Gothic machine” (11). For example, images of Medusa and Lewis's Bleeding Nun appeared frequently in phantasmagoria shows (Thomas 96; Jones 40) (*fig. 3*). Most of these images, whether they – like Lady Macbeth – are revived from the early modern

period, or – like Medusa – from classical sources, are not new, but they play a particular role during this loosely configured period.



Figure 3: lantern slide depicting the Bleeding Nun

Lady Macbeth’s silencing gesture and the look of horror on her husband’s face brings us to a particularly Gothic theme: the ‘unspeakable.’ In *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that Gothic themes appear in two ways, either depicted or named: “‘Unspeakable,’ for instance, is a favorite Gothic word The word appears regularly enough, in enough contexts, that it could be called a theme in itself, but it also works as a name for moments when it is not used: moments when, for instance, a character drops dead trying to utter a particular name” (4). Kamilla Elliott also notes the Gothic preoccupation with “the unspeakable” – both the word itself, and the depiction of characters’ inability to communicate – summarizing the convention as typically resulting in the paradoxical “priority of the image over the word” that “is declared in words” (202). Although the trope of invisibility may occur alongside the ‘unspeakable,’ “some Gothic fiction develops a rhetoric of portraiture” that “mounts an

attack by the image *against* language from *within* language” (202). Thus facial expression, movement, and art (including parallel inset tales in other genres) express the inexpressible (or so we are often told by continually deferring narrators).

This chapter will focus on those instances where the ‘unspeakable’ and the image of the fatal woman intersect; in these instances, the fatal image speaks for, or acts in place of, female characters (both heroines and villainesses). Although the fatal woman archetype appears in many forms in Romantic literature, I focus on instances where her image – clearly marked as a representation divided from the more realistic aspects of the narrative – acts as a double (a double which, in some cases, such as Matilda in *The Monk*, have no original). I argue that instead of representing someone or something, this image is significant because of the ways it reveals the other characters. The relationship between the fictional image and the fictional characters typically tells us more about the characters than the image. In the Gothic, responses to portraits and reproductions of portraitive images are more important than any inherent meaning in the portrait itself. That significance is relevant to all portraitive images, but the feminized portrait plays a particular role – one that coincides with a context in which, as Conway and Fay have shown, anonymous portraits are more often of women, while, as Castle argues, modernity is marked by a simultaneous spectralization of women and a feminization of technology and inanimate objects.

2.1 Representation as Theme in Romantic Literature

The Romantic-era Gothic is preoccupied with the problem of representation. In this Gothic mode, representations – words and images as well as ‘body language’ – are depicted as failing to accurately transmit information, while simultaneously threatening

to take on a power all their own. More broadly, Romanticism, as an artistic and literary movement, is concerned with disparities between representations and represented. Images are no longer merely true or false, but are often depicted as participating in a dialectic with formless content.

This obsession with duality and the conflict between representation and experience is evident in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetry, particularly in his 1819 drama, *The Cenci*. This conflict is a theme not only in Shelley's poetry, but in his later "Defense of Poetry" (1821). For Shelley, poets – creators – depict "truth" to the best of their abilities. However, unlike Schiller's naïve poet, the "language" of Shelley's poet "is vitally metaphorical" (1132).³⁵ Representation is always removed from what it represents, and thus, for Shelley, truth is not singular, but rather comprises duality. The poet's task, then, "is to apprehend . . . the good which exists in the relation subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression" (1132). Thus his statement that the poet "beholds intensely the present as it is" implies that this "truth" is not singular, but rather comprises a collection of dualities (1133). The poet, in Shelley's theory, is charged with the task of depicting the invisible and inaudible, since, as the Demogorgon claims in *Prometheus Unbound*, "the deep truth is imageless" (*PU* 2.4.116). At the same time, since this depth is perceived and expressed at removals, in order to depict "deep truth," the poet must necessarily portray the challenge of doing so.

³⁵ For Schiller, the naïve poet is able to communicate directly with simple, straightforward language. Shelley, however, argues that "language itself is poetry" and that, as I explain, the poet's role is not to deliver a singular truth but to employ form as something removed from what it represents and which can never be direct ("A Defense of Poetry" 1132).

The disjunction between experience and language is taken up by William Wordsworth, who, in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, refers to “the real language of men” as the proper language of the poet, disparaging the ostentatious “poetic diction” of Augustan poetry (171, 178). For Wordsworth, as Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter explain, “artificial constructions of language” are barriers to the perception of the reality they depict (23). This mode of communication – one that supposedly gets closer to reality – is not actually realistic at all, if, as Shelley later claims, reality is not singular or definable. Coleridge takes Wordsworth to task – belatedly, having found the words so difficult – arguing that there is no such thing as what Wordsworth “unfortunately . . . called the language of *real* life” (*BL* 7). Wordsworth’s diction is more affected than he claimed, since, Coleridge claims, all artistic representation – and even “colloquial” speech – necessitates “studied selection and artificial arrangement” (*BL* 11). Coleridge “object[s]” to “the use of the word ‘real’” because the poems Wordsworth prefaces are, no matter how realistic, “representation[s]” (*BL* 41, 30). It is Shelley’s recognition of the transformative power of representation and the role of perception – the “transfer between reception and response” – that Jerold E. Hogle addresses in his outline of the theory expounded in “A Defense of Poetry” (“Language and Form” 145). Contrary to Wordsworth, for Shelley, good poetry (and art) does not take us closer to “the real,” but rather provides a distance from which to view perceptions; the artificiality of poetry allows us to reflect upon our constructed perceptions. Like Wordsworth, however, Shelley opposes the ossification of poetic language through repetition. Shelley also qualifies Wordsworth’s optimism in his preface to *The Cenci*, explaining that, in writing this drama, he has attempted a style which accords with “those modern critics who assert

that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men” (xii). Following this reference to Wordsworth’s preface, he adds an amendment: “But it must be the real language of men in general and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong” (xii). Shelley’s commentary on Wordsworth suggests that the latter had not considered the limitations of his manifesto, but at the same time, Shelley does not depart from the idea that there is indeed a category of language freely available to everyone. In the drama that follows Shelley’s preface, however, the possibility of direct communication is either absent or continually thwarted.

The Cenci emphasizes the impossibility of communicating sensory experience in words alone. This theme is established in the preface to the 1819 publication, in which Shelley presents an engraving of a portrait thought to represent Beatrice Cenci (*fig. 4*). He juxtaposes this illustration with a description of the portrait upon which the painting is based, detailing the significance of the portrait’s expression:

There is a fixed and pale composure upon the features: she seems sad and stricken down in spirit, yet the despair thus expressed is lightened by the patience of gentleness. . . . the lips have that permanent meaning of imagination and sensibility which suffering has not repressed and which it seems death scarcely could extinguish. . . . her eyes, which we are told were remarkable for their vivacity, are swollen with weeping and lusterless, but beautifully tender and serene. In the whole mien, there is a simplicity and dignity which united with her exquisite loveliness and deep sorrow are inexpressibly pathetic. (Shelley, *The Cenci* xiii)

Shelley imagines she has been crying, and in his description, subtly suggests that Beatrice's eyes were even more striking in life. Although the portrait features a direct gaze, he claims that this is only a pale version of the powerful gaze he emphasizes in his drama.



Figure 4: William Bell Scott, engraving after Elizabetta Sirani

In “Speaking for Pictures: The Rhetoric of Art Criticism,” James A.W. Heffernan makes a similar argument about art history as that being made by critics of critique in other humanities and social science disciplines, stating that the history and criticism of art “is always interpretive” (43), “its language is always rhetorical,” and “its ostensibly descriptive moves are always interpretive” (44). Paralleling Steven Mailloux’s argument about literary criticism, Heffernan argues that “the art of speaking for pictures is above

all a rhetorical performance” (44). In doing so Heffernan questions the notion that current art history – and its newest incarnations in ‘visual studies’ and ‘visual culture’ – has shed the rhetorical and narrative creativity of its past, and that ultimately, images – just as much as literature – cannot escape being mediated by verbal representation because “The task of speaking for pictures – of turning their silent images into stories of how they were made, how they affect us, what they say to us – remains essentially and enduringly rhetorical” (68).³⁶

Romantic era Gothic literary portraits demonstrate this disjunction, whether self-consciously or not. For example, Shelley’s description of Beatrice Cenci’s portrait represents the image as conveying so much information about the emotional and intellectual life of its subject –that what he describes cannot possibly be obvious to someone observing it without verbal instructions. This description is only partly ekphrastic and incorporates much speculation on the possible emotions exhibited in her countenance. In turn, Shelley’s description of the portrait is informed by “A manuscript . . . copied from the archives of the Cenci Palace at Rome” (*The Cenci* vii).

The intertextual relationship between words and images is one of the themes of the play, as well as its preface. In both *The Cenci* and its preface, words and images rely on one another because, independently, they fail to communicate the full story. Shelley, in other words, demonstrates the Gothic convention of drawing on multiple media to tell

³⁶ Although Heffernan’s argument may seem to counter that put forth by W.J.T. Mitchell in *Picture Theory*, these two perspectives are not entirely incompatible. According to Mitchell, the recent “pictorial turn . . . is the realization that *spectatorship* . . . may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* . . . and that visual experience or ‘visual literacy’ might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality” (16). While Mitchell argues that images cannot be reduced to words, so too does Heffernan; verbal descriptions of images are always implicated in language, and therefore, can never be direct translations of the visual.

a story, while simultaneously drawing attention to their respective failure, as mere representations, to convey meaning. *The Cenci* depicts the body as something that can be read, and that can communicate what words cannot, despite the unreliability of its communicative potential and the possibility that it can be as deceptive as language (e.g., “false smiles” [1.2.34]). The notion that a portrait speaks to its viewers in a way that words cannot – the way that Beatrice conveys meaning in her glare – is a Gothic narrative device that at times seems to triumph over words, and at other times, fails. For example, Shelley insists in his preface that Beatrice Cenci’s portrait tells us who she was, but his words suggest that it cannot speak for itself.

What Shelley suggests, then, is a mode of writing that continually references its limits in its dialogue with experience. Shelley’s lengthy speculation on what Beatrice’s face expresses about her inner state does not mention her gaze, which is directed outward at the viewer. However, it is Beatrice’s powerful gaze that becomes the dominant mode of communication in the play. In this preface, as well as the play, Shelley depicts bodies as readable and able to communicate what words cannot; for example, the servant, Andrea, says of Beatrice that it was not so much what she said, but “’twas what she looked” (4.1.111). Perhaps it is “Because her wrongs could not be told, not thought” that her eyes must do the talking (5.2.177-78). It is Beatrice’s gaze that directs her father’s murder: “a look / Which told before she spoke it, he must die...” (3.1.425-26).

Particularly, Beatrice’s gaze has the potential to overpower those who gaze on her. Orsino, her admirer, is especially attuned to Beatrice’s physical communication, often remarking that her gaze acts as a mirror reflecting what he is ashamed to see in himself; he claims that “Beatrice unveiled me to myself” (2.2.123) with

her awe-inspiring gaze

Whose beams anatomize me nerve by nerve

And lay me bare, and make me blush to see

My hidden thoughts. (1.2.91-94).

While her “look” and her “gaze” are referred to frequently throughout the *The Cenci*, there is a distinction between the two: how she looks means her physical expression, separate from the privileged expression of her eyes. Not only her gaze, but her image – just as Elliott characterizes the Gothic image as consuming its consumers – is one that “Follows” Orsino and “infects and poisons” her father (1.2.15, 4.1.138). In both the play and its preface, Shelley evokes “the visor effect”³⁷: although the reader cannot meet Beatrice Cenci in person, and the audience cannot directly interact with the actress, each is invited to consider what it would be like if they could, through the depiction of this gaze.

In refusing to turn his play into a ‘spectacle,’ and thus to sensationalize the subject of incest, Shelley turns the gaze back on his audience/readers. Aiming to “diminish the actual horror of the events” and to avoid moralizing (ix-x), Shelley foregrounds self-reflection in the face of tyranny, rather than moral judgment, vicarious pleasure, or schadenfreude. Beatrice challenges her audience (explicitly, the characters onstage, but implicitly, the play’s audience), asking rhetorically, “Dare not one look on me? / None answer? Can one tyrant overbear / The sense of many best and wisest men?” (1.3.152-53). By directly engaging with her observers, Beatrice refuses to allow the

³⁷ See chapter one.

audience to remain passive, challenging them to participate through self-reflection. This strategy reflects Shelley's view that "In a drama of the highest order there is little food for censure or hatred; it teaches rather self-knowledge and self-respect" ("A Defense of Poetry" 1137).

Conversely, demonstrating the conflict between the Gothic and Romantic modes (despite their similarities), Matthew Lewis includes a justification of spectacle in his published version of his play, *The Castle Spectre* (1797). While it shares much of the same rhetoric of portraiture with *The Cenci*, *The Castle Spectre* offers a slightly different presentation of the fatal woman as image. In his 1798 annotations and afterword to the published version, Lewis responds to criticism of its production and performance. *The Castle Spectre* was very successful, but this popularity came with accusations of sensationalism. Lewis's note "To The Reader" lists complaints of "licentious" language, excessive displays of unruly passion, the inclusion of the eponymous spectre, and the "anachronism" of enslaved black characters (100-1). Lewis does sensationalize the subject of incest, allowing many dramatic scenes of near-rape, and has his characters dwell on the possibility and its horror. This emphasis on the horror of rape and the taboo of incest prepares the audience to enjoy Osmond's death in the play's climax: with the help of her mother's ghost, Angela stabs Osmond in a spectacular moment of pure revenge. That this moment was a defining image of the play is indicated not only in the stage direction, but in the verse epilogue spoken after the curtain by the actress who played Angela:

Bid Osmond live again, again to die;

Nightly with plaudits loud his breath recall,

Nightly beneath my dagger see him fall,

Give him a thousand lives! – and let *me* take them all. (Lewis vi)

These last words allude to the iconic status the image achieves in repetition and reinforces the play's final moments in which Angela "*springs suddenly forwards, and plunges her dagger in Osmond's bosom, who falls with a loud groan, and faints*" (98).

This verse summary also performs the Gothic techniques of extending the narrative beyond the frame, and, while drawing attention to its status as fiction (in this case, a performance re-enacted "[n]ightly"), paradoxically lends it a quality of verisimilitude by breaking the fourth wall. This attention to the audience, however, unlike Beatrice Cenci's call to self-reflection, suggests dwelling on sensational images that may arouse fear, desire for revenge, and prurience. Lewis's rape-revenge drama relies on spectacle, while Shelley's later version of a similar plot avoids any direct representation of incestuous rape. However, Lewis's spectacle relies on words ("Force? Oh! No!" [27]) as much as Shelley's poetry relies on tableau-vivant-like scenes and silent actions such as "(BEATRICE *advances towards him; he covers his face, and shrinks back.*)" (84).

Beatrice's gaze is more often described than seen, but Angela's most significant scene has her utter only one word: "die!" Her aid, the ghost of her mother, Evelina, does not speak at all. In addition, Lewis includes Evelina's portrait as a key prop. Despite its anti-spectacle stance, *The Cenci* emphasizes the power of vision, and although *The Castle Spectre* dwells on spectacle, it also alludes to the dangers of privileging appearances. Osmond's desire for Angela rests on her resemblance to her mother, Evelina, and so Osmond's villainy is demonstrated in his attachment to forms without substance. His torment derives from this same weakness: the image of Evelina that he is so attached to

reminds him of the horrid image of her death. Both plays rely on the silent or unspeakable to tell their tale: Evelina's silent ghost advances the action and unravels the plot; Beatrice's father's crime is the wrong that cannot be named.

Whether as an impossible ideal, or an ideal to strive for, in summation, Romanticism is marked by a seeking after what is hidden, experience that has not been articulated, and emotions that cannot be expressed, and thus a binary model of formless truth versus representation – “deep truth” and image – is a distinctly Romantic theme. However, as Michael Gamer and Steven Bruhm have argued, the two literary styles – Romantic and Gothic – are not distinctly separate. For Gamer, the distinction between ‘Gothic’ and ‘Romantic’ is an evaluative one, and one that is applied externally rather than an inherent structural component of texts labeled as such (*Romanticism* 26). With reference to Robert Hume's claim that the Romantic “offers escape through transcendence” while the Gothic “is bound by fixity and limitation,” Bruhm suggests that the difference between the idealism of Romanticism and the paranoia of the Gothic is a matter of treatment of the same problem, observing that “Such a division . . . while it may emphasize what Romantic authors *tried* to do, it does not account for what often they *succeeded* in doing” (Bruhm xvi). While both categories are unified by their recognition of the disparity between truth and its representation, the Gothic questions the very existence of truth (and its unity), while the Romantic – no more successful at overcoming the problem (of depicting “deep truth”) – celebrates the possibility of, and the striving after, accurate and true representations. Both modes self-reflexively consider clichés, either openly critiquing them (Romanticism) or employing them in such a way as to draw attention to their artificiality (Gothicism). Sedgwick also argues that the Gothic belies the

Romantic notion of “deep truth,” arguing that Gothic fiction – in contradiction to Shelley’s use of the metaphor of unveiling – presents a series of covers or veils which only reveal more surfaces.³⁸

2.2 Romanticism and Portraiture

As I’ve mentioned, these images are intertextual across a variety of media, and the Gothic is an aesthetic that is not limited to literature, just as Romanticism is also a cross-disciplinary movement. For painters as well as writers, the supposed mimetic realism of the early eighteenth century has become flat and stale, and new ways of representing are called for. Elizabeth A. Fay’s “cultural history” of what she calls “the portraitive mode” (i.e., a mode that transcends genres and crosses between the realms of society and art) takes into account Romanticism’s struggle to represent (most evident in the Gothic), attributing the changing fashion in portraiture – from likenesses to representations of character – to a growing concern with the disparity between surface and content (2, 47).³⁹

While the definition of poetry is changing in this period, what constitutes a good portrait also changes. Coleridge explains that a “good portrait” shows the essence of its subject since “it is not the likeness for actual comparison, but for recollection”; in other words, the particular physical attributes are less important than illusion of the motion and expression of the person depicted that provides verisimilitude, and that, he claims, “explains why the likeness of a very good portrait is not always recognized” (“Poesy”

³⁸ While I’ve described Shelley’s theory of poetry outlined in “A Defense of Poetry” as suggesting that “truth” is multiple, his metaphors do indicate a series of layers beneath which there is an origin.

³⁹ See chapter one.

259). According to Nadia Tscherny, British portrait painters in the Romantic period faced “intensified demands that likeness be both mimetic and synthetic” (193). What becomes more important than “resemblance” is “‘life-likeness,’ or its ability to enchant the viewer and evoke the presence of the sitter” (Tscherny 198). Part of achieving life-likeness is creating the illusion of movement. During the eighteenth century, as Erik Rothstein explains, the “non finito” – what must be completed by the eye – was recognized and used by painters to increase the realism of their work, as this gives the illusion of movement, and thus life-likeness and “ideal presence.” As artists faced increasing pressure to depict the “spirit” and “mind” of their subjects, a certain degree of vagueness – leaving something to the viewer’s imagination – was thought to increase the perfection of an image” (Rothstein 315, 316, 328). What, exactly, constitutes “life-likeness” apart from a mere “likeness,” as well as the dual problems of “life-likeness” and the loss of likeness in the anonymity of mechanical reproduction, are subjects that Gothic writers explore in detail.

In addition to the portrait’s status as a ‘counterfeit’ of an original, reproduction of the portrait in the eighteenth century means not only a copy of an original, but the proliferation of copies of copies: in other words, a move from counterfeits to simulacra.⁴⁰ The phenomenon of the anonymous portrait with a life of its own, dramatized most famously by Matthew Lewis in *The Monk* (1796), occurs in two ways: firstly, the loss of likeness resulting from copying an original portrait (copying copies), and secondly, the production of anonymous or archetypal portraits. Historical scenes, for example, use

⁴⁰ See Chapter one.

models to represent someone other than themselves, but they are representations held within a context. For example, Fuseli's *Lady Macbeth* is a representation of both a literary character enacting a narrative, and a celebrity actress. Depictions of human beings without a narrative connection, however, can only represent beauty or other personal interest. The portrait as a genre differs from other representations of the human form, Conway explains, because "it was viewed as incapable of instructing the viewer in high moral principles, as promoting only sensual appetite as a universal experience" ("Private" 1). Illustrating this view, Fuseli disparaged the genre in his *Lectures on Painting*, remarking that if the portrait is "Ennobled by character, it rises to dramatic dignity; destitute of that, it sinks to mere mechanic dexterity, or floats, a bubble of fashion" (427).

The anonymous portrait – typically religious or pornographic (the similarity between the two types is explicated in *The Monk*) – does not refer to a specific person, and is, as the narrator of "The Family Portraits" notes, separated from a context of their own, and therefore seemly threatening to engage with their extra-diagetic context.⁴¹ Once again, while portraits of women were more common, so too were portraits of women more frequently reproduced, as they were popular subjects for anonymous, decorative, iconic, and erotic portraits, and, according to Conway, portraits of women were more often the target of criticism for their potentially erotic content ("Private" 5). Fay notes that the practice of copying from miniatures and engravings can lead to both a

⁴¹ See Chapter one.

loss of resemblance and a wider circulation of private portraits (71, 76).⁴² The first type of reproduction – copying from an original – is illustrated in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). When Emily St. Aubert fails to recognize her ancestral likeness in the miniature, the servant who first remarks on the resemblance states that “There is another picture of her” that “is much more like you than the miniature” (529); although Emily still does not recognize herself in it, she notes that the portrait is significantly different (533). Of course, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is set in the Renaissance, but its depiction of portraiture is particular to the eighteenth century and its preoccupation with ‘likeness.’ Unlike Romantic portraits, Renaissance portraits are not typified by expressiveness – Charles Le Brun’s treatise of painting the passions and an interest in portraying emotion, whether stereotypical or individual, will come later – and, according to Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, Renaissance portraits were rarely good ‘likenesses’, but rather, in Renaissance portraiture, “the costume, not the face, is privileged” (35).

Although early Gothic fiction typically depicts traditional painted portraits, wide-ranging audience recognition of these luxury objects would also be made possible through the availability of mechanically reproduced images. On the one hand, the previously aristocratic practice of collecting portraits was now available to the new middle classes, as Fuseli disdainfully remarks: “Since liberty and commerce have more levelled the ranks of society, and more equally diffused opulence, private importance has been increased, family connexions [sic] and attachments have been more numerous

⁴² Miniatures were typically copied from full scale portraits that had been painted from life. Copying from a miniature therefore could result in even further loss of resemblance to the original subject.

formed, and hence portrait-painting, which formerly was the exclusive property of princes, or a tribute to beauty, prowess, genius, talent, and distinguished character, is now become a family calendar, engrossed by the mutual charities of parents, children, brothers, nephews, cousins, and relatives of all colours” (449). More importantly however, as Elliott and Fay explain, the familiarity of readers of Gothic fiction with portrait conventions was also enabled by mechanical reproduction (i.e., prints).

According to Elliott, “print-media portrait galleries flourished between 1764 and 1835. Portraits that had previously only been available in private collections or occasional public exhibitions were now engraved, mass-produced, and circulated” (47). The portrait gallery was now available to a wider audience through public tours and books of engraved reproductions, “the portrait gallery volume” (Fay 45). This in part explains why the trope of the ancestral, aristocratic portrait becomes a recognizable convention in a literary mode with a diverse audience.

The publication of previously private portraits also contributes to the production of simulacra. With respect to the repetition of portraits in a variety of media (ceramics, prints, objects, etc.) and the popularization of the portrait genre, Fay argues that “The iterability of the image, with its cycle of self-referencing and self-sequencing embodiments, fetishizes the object, making it desirable through its morphing forms” (133). In other words, through repetition, the image takes on another dimension and a virtual life of its own. The three classic Gothic texts I now examine here share a body of stock images that, although continually reframed, appear again and again, and their origin is nearly impossible to trace. Comparing Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*, and Utterson’s short story collection *Tales of the Dead*, it is

possible to observe a pattern of identification and seduction in the circulation of the image of the fatal woman. For heroes and villains, the fatal image seduces; for heroines, the image is (unsurprisingly) a point of identification, but also a kind of seduction. Unlike the seduction of the heroes and villains, the heroine is seduced into death through a kind of attraction that is figured as a friendship or maternal bond. In other words, the portrait of the fatal woman is not always one with which the heroine identifies, but rather one that attracts her with a promise of community and family. ‘Attraction,’ in the case of the heroine’s response to the fatal woman’s portrait once again alludes to the picture’s appearance of returning the viewer’s gaze. In addition, in all cases, unlike portraits of heroes, heroines, and villains, the fatal woman’s portrait always emits an aura of sexual danger.

2.3 Mistress of Udolpho

Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* offers a fairly standard eighteenth-century Romance plot: innocent heroine has adventures and eventually gets married. Terry Castle suggests that *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is best understood as an experience, rather than a sequential narrative with a lot of plot development (it takes three substantial volumes to take us back to Emily’s family estate, where she marries the man she’s always day-dreamed of), proposing that to the reader who lets down their (perhaps incredulous) guard, the novel is “hypnotic” and “Like a long and complex dream” (xxvi). The predominance of cliché and convention over realism is illustrated in Montoni’s statement that “You speak like a heroine” (381) and descriptions that seem modelled on art, not life; for example, the interior of the chateau is compared to “old pictures . . . much resembling those, exhibited on the faded tapestry, with which the chamber was hung” (Radcliffe

474). Thus the room is metonymically represented by its objects, such as a tapestry that reflects it in a *mise-en-abyme*. In other words, Radcliffe, despite rhetorically privileging ‘nature,’ continually references art to describe the experiences of her characters.

As in most Gothic fiction, the plot is less important than the moments of ‘reverie.’ Castle advocates an approach to reading that is not only the antithesis of what Sedgwick will later call “paranoid,” but one which puts the reader in a position very much like that of the protagonist: “an open, relaxed, even labile attitude – with some of that curious ‘pensiveness’ of approach Radcliffe elsewhere praises in her heroine” (xxv-i). This attitude also implies a certain loss of identity on the part of the reader, since Emily is both a poorly defined character and the novel’s focalizer. More to the point, we are invited to see through her eyes, but we rarely see *her*. The omniscient narrator has us identify with the focalizing protagonist but we don’t *see* Emily until the second volume, oddly in a reference to a stereotypical portrait of the Madonna: “Hers was the *contour* of a Madona [sic], with the sensibility of a Magdalen; and the pensive uplifted eye, with the tear that glittered on her cheek, confirmed the expression of the character” (Radcliffe 184). Emily’s appearance is not discussed again until volume four, when her servant shows her a portrait of the Marchioness de Villeroi, and claims that they resemble one another (533). As Sedgwick has observed, “identity . . . is social and relational rather than original or private; it is established only *ex post facto*, by recognition” and that it “is at no moment inherent in one but is applicable – is applied – only from the outside, *après-coup*, and by a process of visual assimilation or ‘seeing as’” (*The Coherence* 142, 157). When we do finally see our heroine, it seems to be her first time seeing herself. At this point, Emily is confronted with the Marchioness’s clothing and accessories, and the

servant insists on putting the dead woman's veil on Emily, "who shuddered to find it wrapped round her" (Radcliffe 533-4). It is only in the final volume of the novel that Emily begins to have a sense of an outward appearance, or a concept of how others perceive her physically. This is an experience the reader is invited to partake in, but even then, a detailed physical description of Emily is never provided. Instead, identity, as Sedgwick explains, relies on resemblances to images – images which, in this case, are also scantily described.

Maggie Kilgour therefore states quite rightly that "The text dwells on a series of portraits of women – of Emily, the Marchioness, Laurentini – which further emphasises the stasis of female identity" (123). However, as Elliott has pointed out, resemblances imply variance in the sense that they are not identical copies: "resemblance is not the binary opposite, the antagonist of difference, for it incorporates difference" (26-32). For one thing, the subject's identity does change: Laurentini lives a second life as a nun, and although "Emily continued to gaze alternately upon the picture and the dying nun, endeavoring to trace a resemblance between them, which no longer existed," Laurentini's appearance has changed so much that the nun's miniature copy of the portrait at Udolpho is a more convincing proof of identity – the pictures resemble each other and thus prove her former identity, since the 'original' has decayed (646). The characters in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are compared to their resemblances as similar but not exact copies, and Emily differs from those whom she resembles.

The Gothic theme of female doubles, particularly the fatal woman/heroine dyad featured in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Monk*, has been passed over in criticism in favor of tyrant/heroine and hero/heroine relationships. Sarah Utterson's addition to *Tales*

of the Dead⁴³, “The Storm,” reconfigures a Radcliffian plot to focus on the connection between the fatal woman and the heroine. The tale begins as an abridged version of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, featuring once again, that popular heroine, “Emily.” Instead of the romance plot, Utterson emphasizes Radcliffe’s friendship theme (Emily’s adventures in *Mysteries* involve many female friendships, and little interaction with her beloved Valancourt). In Utterson’s almost plagiarized version of the story, Emily meets a glamorous Spanish widow, aptly named “Madame de Nunez,” at the occasion of her cousin’s wedding. Like Laurentini, Nunez’s face, although attractive, bears the “evidence of the stronger passions of human nature . . . pride . . . distress” and “the effects of some concealed crime” (180-81). The wedding party at which the two women meet is interrupted by a summer storm. Nunez is the only woman at the party unperturbed. Since the storm prevents anyone from going home, Nunez and Emily share a room and “the horrors of this night”: her past crime returns to haunt her and horrify Emily (185). These “horrors” appear in much the same way as the images that haunt Emily in *Mysteries*: a horrid but mysterious “spectacle” connected to a beautiful, sophisticated woman appears to terrorize the heroine (187). However, contrary to Radcliffe, there is no happy ending. The spectacle Utterson’s Emily witnesses causes “brain-fever” and soon thereafter, death (192). What she saw is never disclosed, since she promised the mysterious Madame de

⁴³ As a typically Gothic Ur-text, it lacks solidity: it continued to influence and be influenced through its multiple translations. The original German text and the subsequent French and English versions are three separate works. I’ve therefore chosen to discuss the English ‘translation,’ *Tales of the Dead*, as a text unto itself (rather than a translation in our contemporary sense of the word). The “translator,” Sara Utterson, in fact abridged, edited, and partially wrote *Tales of the Dead*, and what she did translate, was already a translation (*Fantasmagoriana*). Furthermore, as a collection of derivative, folkloric tales, it invites re-working as well as further derivation.

Nunez she would never reveal the secret (192). The ‘unspeakable horrors’ that Emily witnesses can easily be written off as a cheap trick, but the relationship between her and the mysterious lady re-works an important Radcliffean theme: the bad friend. Before meeting the equally bland Blanche, Radcliffe’s Emily attempts to befriend a courtesan in Montoni’s company by drawing a portrait of the young lady (188). For all heroines, having a good female friend is essential to her ability to follow a virtuous life and to marry well. When this is not the case, female influence can be destructive to the young woman’s virtue, health and happiness. This is most dramatically depicted in Coleridge’s “Christabel,” and the sensational possibilities that may result from bad friends is explored in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s fiction (of which some examples will be discussed in the next chapter).

According to Carol Margaret Davison, the portraits of women Emily encounters in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are “the ghosts of foremothers past” and “These numerous foremothers function, in effect, as memento mori figures, dreadful reminders that transgressing the laws of patriarchy is often fatal to oneself and others” (*Gothic* 104, 102). The danger that Emily may become like any of these women is not only one of mortal danger – as Bruhm remarks, the identification of the heroine with the portrait has to stop because “All these women die horribly, and so Emily must disassociate from them in order to protect herself from sharing their fate” (42) – but also moral danger. Davison remarks that “propriety . . . self-possession” and “sexual restraint” are “Key to Emily’s ultimate marital success” (*Gothic* 100). However, at the same time, what often goes unremarked in analyses of this novel is that the key to Emily’s financial success is inherited from a woman who is her exact opposite, as Elliott observes that “Laurentini

leaves her fortune to Emily as penance for murdering the woman with whom she picture-identifies Emily” (179). Emily’s search for mother figures culminates in an inheritance from a woman of ill repute (the former mistress of Udolpho) – one who has done everything in opposition to the feminine values that Emily exemplifies. Emily momentarily suspects that this woman is her real mother, but later discovers she is her aunt’s rival. Emily is twice doubled by two tragic figures: her aunt, the Marchioness, and Laurentini, her aunt’s rival. Her aunt is most obviously Emily’s double in the form of her portraitive likeness. Laurentini, however, is also a kind of double; she haunts Emily with her music and mirrors her situation, but with tragic results: like Emily, she waited patiently for love, but was scorned. Laurentini, in turn, is haunted by Emily whom she at first believes is the ghost of the Marchioness: “gazing wildly upon Emily,” Laurentini “exclaimed, ‘It is her very self! Oh! There is all that fascination in her look, which proved my destruction!’” (Radcliffe 644).

What separates Emily from the portraits of her “foremothers” is in part demonstrated by the character that these images purportedly reveal. It is not only Emily who escapes detailed physical description, but most of Radcliffe’s descriptions of characters tell us the affective value of their appearance, rather than specific physical details. For example, Montoni’s criminal associates are described not by how they appear, so much as what their appearance conveys: they “had all an expression, more or less, of wild fierceness, of subtle design, or of licentious passions” (Radcliffe 312). Of Laurentini’s portrait, the only hint of her physical appearance is that she was “handsome,” but more importantly “It was a countenance, which spoke the language of passion, rather than that of sentiment; a haughty impatience of misfortune – not the placid

melancholy of a spirit injured, yet resigned” (278). On the other hand, the portraits of the Marchioness are described as expressing “pensive melancholy” and, in contrast to the countenance of the young Laurentini, she appears “meek . . . and resigned” (533, 497). Although this form of physical communication proves faulty in several instances, it continues to be relied upon as a descriptive device throughout the novel. This “countenance” is described in entirely in affective terms: instead of information about what the portrait looks like, we are told how Emily feels about it. Her feelings suggest that she more closely resembles the Marchioness, since that portrait, according to Emily, displays “*pensive melancholy*” while she dislikes the portrait of Laurentini because it lacks “captivating sweetness” and “the *pensive mildness* she loves” (278 [emphasis added]). Indeed, the Marchioness is Emily’s aunt, and others notice her resemblance to the favored portrait.

2.4 The Bleeding Nun

Lewis repeats the story of Lady Laurentini in the subplot to *The Monk*, but in his rendition, the heroine she doubles is not so lucky; indeed, she even becomes the image she fears and in part creates. Agnes de Medina seems to express her resentment at being placed in a convent through her drawing and storytelling of the legend of “the bleeding nun,” whose fate she will follow. When Raymond (alias Alphonso) meets Agnes to tell her of her aunt’s plan of “vengeance,” he finds her engaged in drawing (Lewis 139). He describes one of her finished drawings, a picture of the bleeding nun and several horrified observers (140). At Alphonso’s behest, Agnes relates the legend. Beatrice’s story is remarkably like Agnes’s. Like Agnes, the living Beatrice was powerless, unknown and unheard: “till after her death she was never known to have existed” and only “Then first

did she think it necessary to make some noise in the world” (141). However, like Agnes, Beatrice is not a paragon of virtue. Both women fall from grace after being forced to enter a convent. Beatrice became a mistress, and Agnes gives birth to an illegitimate child. Although Agnes’s situation is represented sympathetically – and closely, since Lewis allows her to tell her own tale – Beatrice’s tale as told by the wanderer suggests another (and more public) narrative for Agnes’s mistakes: “no sooner did her warm and voluptuous character begin to be developed, than she abandoned herself freely to the impulse of her passions, and seized the first opportunity to procure their gratification” (Lewis 165-6). In contrast, while the events are similar, Agnes’s story is presented in a sympathetic light and rather than her impetuous nature, the cruelty and hypocrisy of social and religious values are highlighted. Although Agnes is innocent and caring, while Beatrice is purportedly as “voluptuous” as Ambrosio, their punishments are not equal, and suffering and cruelty await Agnes despite her comparative virtue. Unlike Radcliffe, Lewis does not reward virtue, nor does he, like de Sade, punish virtue and reward vice. Instead, Lewis rejects the eighteenth-century convention of poetic justice, rendering all the characters’ trials arbitrary, and their suffering a needless and unproductive religious fetish. After telling Beatrice’s story over her drawing table, Agnes gives Raymond a portrait of herself (143). At this moment, as soon as he kisses her portrait, “she uttered a loud shriek” as the young couple is interrupted by Agnes’s vengeful aunt, a figure I will return to shortly (143).

2.5 “A Picture of the Virgin”

In her survey of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Gothic, Maggie Kilgour mentions that “Schiller’s *Ghost-Seer* includes a picture of a Madonna, clearly the

model for Lewis's, which is realized in a living woman" (156). In Schiller's tale, the Prince becomes enamoured with a woman who reminds him of a painting of "the Madonna" (Schiller 69). The prince announces that "She was here personified, even to those few deviations from the studied costume, which so powerfully, so irresistibly attracted me in the picture" (69). At this point, the prince's friend interjects in the narrative to tell the story of how they had met a painter who showed them three paintings, "a Madonna, a Heloise, and a Venus, very lightly appalled" (69). All are beautiful, but the prince shows a strong preference for one: "the Madonna absorbed his whole attention; in the two others, he admired the painter's genius – but in this, he forgot the artist and his art, his whole soul being absorbed in the contemplation of the work" (69). The verisimilitude of the portrait fascinates the prince, but paradoxically, it is her similarity to the painting (and especially the "costume") that attracts the prince to the woman, and this enchantment leads him to experience a sense of devotion attributed to religious connotations of the icon, "confess[ing]" that upon seeing her he "believed firmly in him, whose image was clasped in her beautiful hand" (69). Later his friend notes that the resemblance has affected the Prince's perception of the mysterious woman, causing him to seek those aspects which synchronize with the enchanting portrait, stating that "The passionate interest with which he had regarded her had hindered him from observing her minutely . . . from his description, one would have sooner expected to find her prototype in the works of Ariosto or Tasso than on a Venetian island" (Schiller 73). The device of the inset tale provided by the Prince's close friend reinforces the impression that the Prince has been enchanted and is not entirely aware of what has affected him so deeply.

His friend, an outside observer, coolly explains the charm of an image, which to him is merely a psychological trick, but one which has a powerful influence on the Prince.

Schiller's depiction of the enchanting portrait is humorous, with relatively harmless results, but Lewis takes the idea further, having, not a Prince, but an ambitious founding monk seduced by a religious icon. While the hapless Prince desires to purchase the portrait and marry the woman (desires which are thwarted, but honorable in their intent), Lewis' monk, Ambrosio, becomes dependant on the portrait as an object he sees as unconnected to living women, refuses to acknowledge its sensual influence, and believes himself to be impervious to temptation. Yet in both cases, the image is so life-like, it seems to emerge from its frame and join in the life of its viewers. The Prince "forgot the artist and his art" but Ambrosio tried to convince himself, in a speech that parallels the Prince's, that "It is not the woman's beauty that fills me with such enthusiasm; it is the painter's skill that I admire; it is the divinity that I adore" (Lewis 66). Here, Ambrosio insists that he is capable of seeing "the divinity" that Socrates claims, in Book Ten of Plato's *Republic*, is three times removed in any mimetic representation. However, Socrates' disparagement of art as useless because it is removed from the objects it represents is ironic, in the sense that his dialogue implies that since everything we perceive in our world is already a representation – and hence twice removed from "the divinity" – then art is necessary to create a further distance from which we can see objects as mere representations, and to more clearly understand our relationships with those representations. Despite Ambrosio's claim to admire "the divinity," it is the painting he admires more, since, as he predicts, the living embodiment fails to inspire the same admiration. Ambrosio's statement also appears doubtful when followed by a

description of his lustful dreams, in which the portrait comes to life: “the eyes of the figure seemed to beam on him with inexpressible sweetness; he pressed his lips to hers, and found them warm; the animated form started from the canvas, embraced him affectionately, and his senses were unable to support delight so exquisite” (86). Ambrosio lacks the ironic distance that Socrates alludes to and is unable to differentiate the representations around him, seeking to find in the portrait a truth that it cannot yield unless he confronts his own attachment to its beauty. Like Hoffmann’s Nathaneal, Ambrosio is captivated by the gaze of the hollow image.

In *The Monk*, Lewis’s omniscient narrator takes on the role of the Prince’s friend and part-time narrator, extending the critique of the role of portraits in mediating human relationships that Schiller begins. Lewis’s critique is aimed at the reader as much as at Ambrosio (whose idolatry leads him to immoral deeds) and the fictional citizens of Madrid (who make Ambrosio their “idol”). Like De Sade’s facetious explanation in the preface to *Justine* justifying the depiction of vice in order to expound virtue,⁴⁴ Lewis ostensibly critiques the eroticization of images with statements of condemnation for Ambrosio’s responses as well as his deeds, while simultaneously reproducing pornographic (or ‘obscene’) images in his text. For example, when Matilda’s enchanted mirror shows Ambrosio a vision of Antonia bathing, the narration is focalized by the monk and depicts what he sees:

⁴⁴ “Such are the sentiments which are going to direct our labors, and it is in consideration of these intentions that we ask the reader’s indulgence for the erroneous doctrines which are to be placed in the mouths of our characters, and for the sometimes rather painful situations which, out of love for truth, we have been obliged to dress before his eyes” (de Sade 458).

She was undressing to bath herself. The long tresses of her hair were already bound up. The amorous monk had full opportunity to observe the voluptuous contours and admirable symmetry of her person. She threw off her last garment Though unconscious of being observed, an inbred sense of modesty induced her to veil her charms; and she stood hesitating on the brink, in the attitude of the Venus de Medicis. At this moment a tame linnet flew towards her, nestled its head between her breasts, and nibbled them in wanton play. The smiling Antonia strove in vain to shake off the bird, and at length raised her hands to drive it from its delightful harbour. (Lewis 239-40)

The enchanted mirror shows Antonia as if she were depicted in art, as a “Venus.” Robert Miles notes that “The ‘Venus’ was a notorious image in eighteenth-century aesthetics, one highlighting the problematic boundary between pornography and art” and therefore “one might say that the magic mirror signifies the veil of textuality that mediates Ambrosio's lust” (11). In response to Miles’ assertion, David J. Jones adds that it suggests a particular form of mediation: that “Lewis’ mirror – with its smoke and mantic occult characters – is an obvious trope of the magic lantern, and, in particular, the phantasmagoria” (41). This connection perhaps adds another level of pornographic association, since Jones also notes that in addition to horror shows, projections of pornographic engravings were some of the magic lantern’s earliest uses (27). Ambrosio uses the same enchanted mirror to induce deep sleep in Antonia, permitting him to rape her. During this scene, Ambrosio is once again the focal character, and the reader is invited to see Antonia through his eyes:

He now ventured to cast a glance upon the sleeping beauty. A single lamp, burning before the statue of St. Rosalia, shed a faint light through the room, and permitted him to examine all the charms of the lovely object before him. The heat of the weather had obliged her to throw off part of the bed-clothes. Those which still covered her Ambrosio's insolent hand hastened to remove. She lay with her cheek reclining upon one ivory arm: the other rested on the side of the bed with graceful indolence. A few tresses of her hair had escaped from beneath the muslin which confined the rest, and fell carelessly over her bosom, as it heaved with slow and regular suspiration. The warm air had spread her cheek with higher colour than usual. A smile inexpressibly sweet played round her ripe and coral lips, from which every now and then escaped a gentle sigh, or a half-pronounced sentence. An air of enchanting candour pervaded her whole form; and there was a sort of modesty in her very nakedness, which added fresh stings to the desire of the lustful monk. (Lewis 262)

This focalization is 'obscene' in the sense that Lewis provides an eroticized portrait of Antonia, but the added statements of judgment proceeding and following the portraitive description highlights the horror of the monk's intentions and subsequent deeds, and, in case readers find this description appealing, they are invited to share Ambrosio's guilt.

However, although Lewis depicts Ambrosio's behavior, specifically as it is encouraged by his relationship with images, as immoral (or rather, unethical), the 'objectification' of human beings that is a running theme in the novel is not as iconoclastic as it might appear. On the one hand, as Hogle points out, "all passionate

desire in the book is really aroused, intensified, and answered by images more than objects or bodies” (1 “The Ghost”); however, there are differences between Ambrosio’s objectification of others, and that of the other characters. In short, Ambrosio values the object over the human. On the other hand, Lorenzo’s objectification of Antonia, and later her carbon copy, Virginia, differs from the monk’s. When Lorenzo first sees Antonia, the omniscient narrator compares her to a statue (“the Medicean Venus”): “Her features were hidden by a thick veil; but struggling through the crowd had deranged it sufficiently to discover a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus” (Lewis 40-1; Macdonald and Scherf 41). This introduction is paralleled much later when Lorenzo first sees Antonia’s replacement, Virginia: “he never beheld more perfect beauty; and had not his heart been Antonia’s, it must have fallen a sacrifice to this enchanting girl. As it was, he considered her only as a fine statue: she obtained from him no tribute save cold admiration; and when she had passed him, he thought of her no more” (296). What seems to be implied here is that Lorenzo appreciates Virginia as one *should* appreciate a work of art, as opposed to the way that Ambrosio views both art and women, which is distorted, not because he sees women as objects to be used, but objects to be abused. As part of an ongoing commentary about the modern disavowal and denigration of the material, Peter Stallybrass comments that “if it is wrong to treat people like objects, what does that say about what we’ve done to objects?” (seminar on “Marx’s Coat,” 2013, Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, University of Western Ontario). At the same time, in his initial view of Virginia, the omniscient narrator intimates that Lorenzo prefers that which is *not* like a statue (i.e., at this moment he still prefers Antonia). Although both women appear to him initially as objects, they gradually

become more real to him. Conversely – perversely – Ambrosio prefers the object to the human. For Lorenzo, as for Schiller’s prince, art leads him to reciprocal love, but for the monk who lacks understanding of both art and human relationships, it leads to harmful acts, and, eventually, the devil – after all, Ambrosio’s iconoclastic destruction of the portrait and the mirror does nothing to stop his own sinful progress.

2.6 “Venus” or “Virgin,” “Everything in Quotation Marks”

Despite the apparent focus of the narrative on the spectacle of femininity, the bodies we are shown are rarely specifically female (Agnes produces an infant, but ‘offstage’ – the reader witnesses no part of the process). Gender is itself represented as a fetishized image, as Lewis highlights artifice instead of physiology. Early in the narrative, Antonia’s aunt, Leonella, tells us what Antonia has in common with Ambrosio: “he is reported to be so strict an observer of chastity, that he knows not in what consists the difference of man and woman” (Lewis 47). Antonia too is ignorant of this difference, and the buzzing of the crowd prevents her from hearing her aunt’s attempt to inform her that “a man has no breasts, and no hips, and no.....” (Lewis 47). We hear no more about “.....” or anything else below the waist, for that matter. Aside from the depiction of “breasts” above, and the possibility of motherhood, despite his licentious descriptions, femininity is a series of faces, attitudes, poses, and fetishized artifice. The difference – as in the hermaphroditic Rosario/Mathilda – seems to always be reducible to “images more than objects or bodies” (Hogle, “The Ghost” 1). In the above description of Antonia sleeping, ‘he’ could easily replace ‘she’, since Lewis cites only those parts which every young person has (i.e., “arms,” “hair”).

Arguing for a camp reading of eighteenth-century Gothic, Max Fincher points out that “One of the most important ways that *The Monk* is queer-camp is how the ‘truth’ of gender, desire and identity is always precarious and their constructions are put on show for the reader” (103). Representations of gender in *The Monk* accord with Susan Sontag’s assertion that “Camp sees everything in quotation marks” (56). Throughout the novel, “man” and “woman” appear to be parodies of fictional archetypes, framed in defamiliarized clichés. Most obviously, the figure of Matilda/Rosario is a shapeshifting demon, exhibiting a series of gender roles before Lucifer reveals ‘her’ true identity. Initially attracted to her because she resembles his beloved portrait of the Madonna, Ambrosio’s feelings about Matilda are inconclusive (does he want her to be a boy, a girl, or something else?), and the omniscient narrator seems to parody gender stereotypes, explaining that in disguise as Rosario, “she appeared the mildest and softest of her sex, devoted to his will, and looking up to him as to a superior being” but that since revealing herself to Ambrosio, “she assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse” (Lewis 210). Strangely, Ambrosio “regretted Rosario, the fond, the gentle, and submissive; he grieved that Matilda preferred the virtues of his sex to those of her own” (210). It is not clear whether Ambrosio wishes Matilda to be more feminine, or more like a boy, since the feminine qualities he purportedly prefers, he found in the boy, Rosario. This suggestion that the qualities he finds attractive in Matilda and the portrait are not actually ‘feminine’ at all is reinforced by the ‘real’ (i.e., not demonic) female characters, all of whom fail to conform to the image of chaste, modest womanhood. Lewis’s novel, in other words, seems to question what it means to be a “man” or a “woman,” and this querying suggests that these categories might not be as simple as “male” or “female,” and

the relationship of these categories to art exemplifies Sontag's definition of camp's "epicene style": "The convertability of 'man' and 'woman', 'person' and 'thing'" (56).

The fourth story of *Tales of the Dead* also offers a darkly humorous depiction of this "convertability." In "The Death-Bride," a jilted lover, per the specifications of a blood-drinking pact made with her betrothed, returns after death, modeling her appearance on a portrait. Her betrayer is first drawn to her because he claims to have seen her walking in a portrait gallery, but this woman turns out to be the image of her dead twin sister inhabited by the ghost of his abandoned lover. This spirit can only appear in the form of someone who has died, and so she models her appearance on portraits: as the narrator explains, "she always chose among the dead those who the most strongly resembled them. It was for this reason she voluntarily frequented the galleries in which were hung family portraits" (174). The death-Bride is a shape-shifting spectre that "wanders on earth in every possible shape" but, according to the narrator, it *typically* takes on the appearance "of lovely females" (174). This narrator plays a role reminiscent of the Prince's friend in *The Ghost-Seer*, teasing the young man who is the unfortunate dupe of the whole narrative: remarking on his sudden visit to the young lady whose ghost has seduced him, the narrator asks, rhetorically, "or was it a portrait, or what else, which caused you to think of looking for . . . the charming Ida?" (133). This mysterious male narrator, in a final twist, magically disappears in the same manner as the trickster spirit he has described in his tale.

As much as sexual appeal in *The Monk* is enhanced by artifice, chastity is also depicted as fraudulent. None of Lewis's characters is truly chaste, but the particularities of the emotions they attach to sexual attraction and the ways in which they express their

attractions are what seems to differentiate them. Ultimately, none of the characters meets the standards of sexual purity that Lewis presents as possible only as a hypocritical fiction. The erotically charged images presented in the novel do not have an intrinsic value that all can appraise; instead each individual reacts in accordance with their character. Upon encountering his own lust, Ambrosio typically responds with thoughts of abusing his power and hiding his feelings and deeds.

Antonia and Virginia are doubled not only by each other, but by older female relatives – aunts – who are depicted as sexually voracious and thereby challenge the virginal archetype that Antonia and Virginia initially seem to match. This doubling also suggests the possibility that the young virgins may not be – or remain – as chaste and modest as they strive to appear, particularly since Agnes – like Beatrice before her – succumbs to temptation. In fact, as Fincher notes, all the female characters exhibit overt sexual desire, although they invariably attempt to hide it (often ‘veiling’ it, literally or metaphorically). Regarding the caricaturing of the older women, Fincher, echoing critical consensus, argues that in these instances especially, Lewis’s depictions of women are misogynist. However, I argue that he depicts the denial of sexuality, and the role of socio-economic status in determining sexual expression, as a problem that affects both men and women (although it should be noted, not equally), and his caricatures of the old women are no more misogynistic than his depiction of a monk is a negative depiction of men. Lewis is ultimately sympathetic to the rebellious Agnes, and because he depicts chastity and religious devotion as ideas that improve one’s public image rather than one’s morals, he is equally critical of men and women. In his caricatures, however, Lewis does expose the limitations women face: subordination to male religious leaders, severe punishments

for sexual transgressions, and his most powerful female characters (Agnes's aunt and the nun who imprisons her) must use manipulation and artifice to keep their positions. In fact, Lewis critiques misogyny in his depiction of Ambrosio's attitude towards women: his disdain for women and his fetishistic attachment to the portrait of the Madonna. More broadly, Lewis seems to caricature gender stereotypes, more than men or women. For example, following Ambrosio's wish that Matilda might return to her more feminine appearance as a boy, the narrator states that "Consciousness of the guilty business on which he was employed appalled his heart, and rendered it more timid than a woman's. Yet he still proceeded" (Lewis 261). Despite violent acts, he is womanly, and this stereotypically feminine quality does nothing to stop him – does it stop women? Is his cowardly heart really "as timid as a woman's"? Are women's hearts "timid"? These are the questions implicit in such ironically contradictory commentary, because they re-orient clichés in such a way that they are rendered absurd.

In addition to highlighting the sexuality of women (or, rather, acknowledging its existence), Lewis shifts the focus of the narrative from images of women to images of men, most notably in Matilda's conjuring of a demon out of a phantasmagoric cloud: "he beheld a figure more beautiful than fancy's pencil ever drew. It was a youth scarce eighteen, the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled. He was perfectly naked . . . and his silken locks were confined by a band of many-coloured fires, which played round his head" (Lewis 246). This beautiful illusion is matched later in the hideous appearance of Satan as a Medusa-like figure ("his hair was supplied by living snakes") (Lewis 356).

The visual allusion to Medusa suggests the danger of forbidden sight, and throughout the novel, although Lewis emphasizes the attempts (and the necessity of the attempts) of women to protect themselves from the eyes of men, the female gaze features prominently in the narrative. The returned gaze of the portrait that attracts Ambrosio is paralleled in Theodore's fabricated story of the powers of the virgin. Wearing an eye patch as part of his disguise, Theodore tells the nuns (who have admitted him, it seems, on the basis of his attractiveness) that he lost his sight as punishment for looking at an unclothed statue of the Virgin: "At the moment that the monks were changing her shift, I ventured to open my left eye, and gave a little peep towards the statue . . . I hastily shut my sacrilegious eye, and never have been able to unclose it since!" (Lewis 251). Fincher remarks that, in this novel, "Sometimes men who look at the female body, or feminized bodies, such as the angel/demon's suggests they are not always dominant. Ambrosio is almost blinded by the 'dazzling' epicene spirit, while Theodore fantasizes that he is blinded by the Madonna" (105). Theodore has narrated himself as one who has lost the prerogative of the gazer, and assumes instead the place of an object of the nuns' barely 'veiled' lust: "the nuns admired the delicacy of his features, the beauty of his hair, and the sweetness and grace which accompanied all his actions" (Lewis 249). However, for the most part, they avoid recognizing their feelings as such; instead, "They lamented to each other in whispers, that so charming a youth should be exposed to the seductions of the world" and "sister Helena enquired whether he had not a sister like him, because she should like such a companion," but, more strangely for a nun, "sister Rachael was fully persuaded that the brother would be the pleasanter companion of the two" (249, 250).

The freezing stare is the Bleedings Nun's trademark, as Raymond claims that his "eyes were fascinated, and [he] had not the power of withdrawing them from the spectre's" (156). Comparing Lewis's retelling to his source materials, Andrea Rummel observes that "there is something Medusa-like in the Bleeding Nun's gaze in Lewis' version of the plot" (37). The power of the female gaze, as Adriana Craciun has argued,⁴⁵ is a Romantic motif, whether it occurs with or without a portrait. However, this powerful and unusual gaze becomes supernatural in the Gothic portrait, and what this returned gaze means in Gothic fiction differs depending on the gender of the viewer.

In *Tales of the Dead*, the seductive portraits appear in a more conventional and comedic role than in Lewis's controversial novel. The introductory tale in Utterson's compilation ("The Family Portraits"), as I've discussed in chapter one, is typical of the appearance of uncanny portraits of women in Gothic fiction. Journeying to meet the woman he is to marry, a young man stops at a cottage where a group of women have gathered to tell ghost stories. This first story begins with a quotation from the end of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, taken from the final scene in which Leontes is presented with a statue of his late wife: "No longer shall you gaze on't; lest your fancy / May think anon, it moves. ——— / The fixture of her eye has motion in't / WINTER'S TALE" (Anon. 3). Before the tale even begins, the epigraph alludes to the dangers of art, but also its pleasures, since both *The Winter's Tale* and "The Family Portraits" end happily. In addition, the allusion, which focuses on the final moment of the play in which it is suggested that Leontes will remarry, foreshadows the explication of sexual attraction

⁴⁵ Particularly in her discussion of Anne Bannerman's poetry.

in “The Family Portraits.” The frame narrative featuring the mysterious woman’s portrait turns out to be directly connected to the fates of the young people gathered together to tell stories. The teller of the uncanny tale reminds the hero of his childhood sweetheart, Emily. When he later visits Emily, “he discovered” in her home, “among the portraits with which it was decorated, that of the young lady whose features had the over-night charmed him anew” (that is, the woman who *reminded* him of Emily) (34). At that moment, Emily appears: “it was not the charming person with flaxen hair; it was not a figure corresponding with his imagination, which at this moment presented itself to his view. But it was Emily” (34-5). The hero’s attraction to Emily depends upon a series of resemblances, rather than her uniqueness. The memory of the younger Emily, a portrait of a relative, and another woman all serve as frames and contexts for his meeting with Emily. Since he has already decided that he loves her, each resemblance serves only to increase his attraction. While Lewis suggests the danger of artifice, *Tales of the Dead* (like *The Winter’s Tale*) highlights its essential role in constructing relationships.

However, the “fatal” portrait’s attraction has a different effect on its female audience in *Tales of the Dead*. For example, the “fatal portrait” in “The Family Portraits” kills women by falling on them, and “The Fatal Hour” concerns the fate of two sisters who are the last of their “house”: Seraphina, who is able to divide her image in order to have the appearance of being in two places at once, and Florentina, who ultimately follows her sister to a spectral life after death. This union, which is figured as a substitute for Florentina’s wedding, is observed by her friends, Amelia and Maria. This event is foretold by the spirit of her mother and her own double which “came out of the wardrobe” as if it were “a looking-glass” (81). Once again, the curse is related to

marriage, but this time, the heroine must stay single in order to escape tragedy. True to the warning, three days before Florentina's wedding is to take place, the phantom of Seraphina appears to take her away (92). In this tale, the image is anti-sexual, or anti-marital. While the fatal woman's portrait in "The Family Portraits" leads the hero to the woman he will marry through a series of doubles, the resemblances Seraphina encounters lead her only to death. This story, as well as the theme of the bad friend explored in Utterson's "The Storm," is echoed in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, the subject of the next chapter.

In these Romantic era Gothic tales, portraits of fatal women are apprehended differently by male and female characters: these portraits typically seduce men, while female characters, although these portraits may also forge friendships (such as in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*), tend to identify with these images. Regardless of their affective relationship with the portrait, however, both men and women may be victims of its "fatal" power. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, portraits play a role in the heroine's self definition; in *The Monk*, portraits seduce and avenge; and in *Tales of the Dead*, portraits both document family lines and determine their future course.

The Gothic texts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – the golden era of the Gothic, during which it alternately competes and mingles with the Romantic – have a definite engagement with the changing style of portraiture and Romantic theories of art. While magic lantern shows and mechanically produced prints are important reference points for the early Gothic and a part of its engagement with the contentious rise of 'spectacle,' the portrait trope appears in this generation as a portrait. As the nineteenth century progresses, however, the portrait imitates other visual media. While

the early nineteenth-century Gothic harkens back to old portraits, the Victorian Gothic remembers the phantasmagoria shows of the early century.

Chapter 3

3 Serial Vampirism

. . . *the glow of life spread itself gently over the face and limbs of the girl, and dyed her lips with the brightest crimson, the fixed glance gave place to the soft fire of animation, and I beheld before me the breathing archetype of the portrait whose beauty had so enchanted me.*

--- "*Spalatro, from the notes of Fra Giacomo,*" Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, 1843

Borrowing his title character's name from Radcliffe's *The Italian*, and repeating the appearance of the three portraits from Schiller's *Ghost-Seer* under the typical Gothic device of distant authorship (here labeled "the translator" ["yours faithfully, though far away"] (13), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu published "Spalatro, from the Notes of Fra Giacomo" in *Dublin University Magazine* in 1843. In that tale, three portraits must be uncovered, much like in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by removing "a black velvet pall" (5). The first portrait is of an old man, identical to the mysterious host; the second is a beautiful woman; and the third remains uncovered, presumably because the second portrait "entrance[s]" Spalatro: "Like one lost in a sad and beautiful dream," he "stood rapt and moveless" (5). First fascinated by her portrait, the young bravo is drawn to the "archetype of the portrait whose beauty had so enchanted [him]" (7). However, as David J. Jones observes, this "original" appears to rise from the mist, moving like an "automaton" and disappearing in the manner of a phantasmagoria figure (Jones 93, Le Fanu 7, 11). The phantom woman appears after the hero is tricked into drinking blood by the elderly host, who claims to be the girl's father, and this vision eventually leads him to

his death (7, 11-12). Le Fanu later developed the character of the vampire woman who entrances Spalatro (and enabling parent) in his longer magazine story, *Carmilla*, which has enjoyed a lasting popularity.

In *Carmilla*, Le Fanu replaces Spalatro with a lonely aristocratic girl in the role of deceased narrator, and his vampire transforms from a mysterious image to a fully developed character. Although this tale is often described as unique by Gothic scholars, it is, despite its singularity, as derivative as any Gothic tale. Most obviously, the centrality of the uncanny ancestral portrait is already a cliché. Its treatment of the female double is often compared to Coleridge's "Christabel." As for the mysterious female narrator, the depiction of vampirism, and the notion of immortality held in an anagram, Alexandre Dumas' *One Thousand and One Ghosts* (1849) seems to be the most likely source. However, as I've suggested in the previous chapter, the publication most closely resembling *Carmilla* is Utterson's revision of *Fantasmagoriana* (*Tales of the Dead*), particularly in terms of the theme of the female double as destructive influence. While *Fantasmagoriana* derives its title from Robertson's popular magic lantern shows, the tales within it (although at least one directly references the lantern show) are more preoccupied with turn-of-the-century portrait conventions than with phantasmagoria. *Carmilla*, on the other hand, like *Spalatro*, references the portrait trope while mimicking the phantasmagoria show. As well as using the portrait trope in a way that reflects popular visual media much more than the conventions of aristocratic family portraits, *Carmilla* continues the bad friend theme of Romantic era Gothic tales in a way that sexualizes the friendship beyond simply impeding marriage.

Carmilla (as an illustrated serial, novella, short story, inset tale, or inspiration for numerous films) is remarkably hearty and persistent. *Carmilla* has survived many re-contextualizations; and, not only does she survive, but she only seems to get stronger, as Nancy M. West remarks, in her essay on film adaptations of the story: “*Carmilla* gestures constantly toward its own adaptability, for what else is Le Fanu’s work but a series of interpretations, recounting, and narrative gaps waiting to be filled in?” (138). West’s reappraisal of the film adaptations in light of “Umberto Eco’s observation” about “the cult object” and its propensity for disassembly⁴⁶ speaks to Rita Felski’s call to consider texts as belonging to “cross-temporal networks” rather than single moments that freeze its meaning in ‘historical context,’ and as potentially engaged in an “afterlife” that carries its history forward only to be recontextualized (West 148; Felski 577, 580). *Carmilla*’s “busy afterlife” (Felski 580), I argue, is in part a product of her reproducibility, both in the context of the story, and in the context of her serial presentation.

The search for a textual or contextual origin for *Carmilla* is mirrored in the story’s central mystery: the search for the origin of *Carmilla* and of vampirism in general. According to Le Fanu’s fictional scholar of folkloric vampirology, “It is the nature of vampires to increase and multiply.” Particularly,

The vampire is, apparently, subject, in certain situations, to special conditions. In the particular instance of which I have given you a relation, Mircalla seemed to be limited to a name which, if not her real one, should at least reproduce, without the omission or addition of a single letter,

⁴⁶ Eco claims that “in order to transform a work into a cult object one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole” (Eco 198; West 148).

those, as we say, anagrammatically, which compose it. *Carmilla* did this; so did *Millarca*. (Le Fanu 77, 76)

Carmilla the text and Carmilla the vampire are remarkably similar in their methods of reproduction. Just as Carmilla “reproduce[s] . . . anagrammatically,” so too does *Carmilla* self-perpetuate through its multi-media re-configurations. And, like West, I am convinced that this quality of reproducibility is particular to the story itself, evidenced not only by her subsequent adaptations, but by her ‘original’ appearance (which, as I’ve already suggested, is not so original after all). Within the narrative, Carmilla (who doubles the narrator) is doubled by aristocratic Renaissance portraits, while in her original serialization in *The Dark Blue* journal she is represented by mass-produced erotic illustrations. Her image dispersed among poems in *The Dark Blue*, Carmilla is in fact not unique, but rather a replication that continues to reproduce: diegetically, through portraits and anagrams, and extradiegetically through mechanical reproduction and repetition. The story depicts the ancestral portrait, the funeral monument, and the name as what Jerrold Hogle calls “the ghost of the counterfeit”: antique counterfeits that behave like simulacra. Carmilla’s vampiric reproduction through third-order simulation⁴⁷ suggests photography or mechanically reproduced engravings (in which she appears in *The Dark Blue*), rather than painting (the media depicted in the story). Commenting on a character’s claim that Carmilla is the “original” of the uncanny ancestral portrait, Victor Sage counters that “there is no original” (198). In *Tales of the Dead*, images aid or hinder reproduction as

⁴⁷ In the sense that she is without origin and the reproduction of her supernatural power seems to be a repetition of a “signifier of referent” rather than a model.

well as proving lineage, but in *Carmilla* art itself reproduces, and the portrait embodies lineage, rather than merely representing it.

This chapter extends the idea of artificial or virtual aura discussed in chapter one: an “aura” that is a collection of associations that provide an illusion of aura, and hence lend authority to the simulated image. Because the virtual aura of simulacra are so mutable (as opposed to the “authentic” aura of the object of tradition) their history is more elusive. Tracing *Carmilla*’s associations, then, allows us to understand the authoritative, auratic quality of the simulated archetypal figure.

In his later essay, “Literary History and the Study of Literature,” Benjamin more clearly suggests the possible gathering of new aura (or a replacement for lost aura), arguing that the “life” of the text is as important as its birth (i.e., its original context) (464). According to Benjamin, the “life” of the work “should have the right to stand along-side the history of their contemporaries, their translations, their fame” because “with this the work is transformed inwardly into a microcosm, or indeed a microeon” (464). In reference to Benjamin’s claim for what Rita Felski calls the “afterlife” of texts, Marjorie Garber explains that “intertextual references” and literary influence can be just as important as material historical context, thereby implicitly questioning the very concept of ‘context’ (Felski 580; Garber 57).

With Benjamin’s suggestion to leave aside the notion that the truth of a work can be found only within an original historical context in mind, and considering Felski’s questioning “of what counts as context” (580), I argue that many of the texts co-published with *Carmilla* in *The Dark Blue* are both contexts for Le Fanu’s narrative and hosts for his vampire to feed upon and strengthen her gathering “aura.” Although

ostensibly part of an ‘original’ context, these intertexts and paratexts demonstrate the continuity and fluidity of textual artifacts, and, in drawing attention to the serial publication, I am countering the notion that *Carmilla* is either entirely unique or distinctly ‘Victorian.’ Even in its ‘original’ context, this story appears derivative. Without arguing that it is the key to understanding the text, I will be reading *Carmilla* in serial form, and all citations refer to this edition.

3.1 *The Dark Blue’s Intertextuality as Context for Carmilla*

Carmilla has been read and studied predominantly in its re-publication as a framed short story in a collection of mock case studies, but recent scholarship has begun to consider Le Fanu’s infamous vampire in her original appearance in serial form. Recent scholarly editions of the serial version include its illustrations and illuminate *Carmilla’s* journey from serial to collection, particularly the differences between the two versions of the text: the unframed serial version, and the later republication as a framed short story in the anthology *In a Glass Darkly*.⁴⁸ Criticism to date has examined the differences in the two versions of the story published in Le Fanu’s lifetime in terms of both internal narrative structure and external historical context, but none has broached the relevance of the textual context of the serial publication: the context of the journal it originally appeared in, and the variety of texts comprising this context. In what follows, I explore the possible relationship between *Carmilla* and the illustrations, poetry, fiction, and essays published alongside it. In addition to the story’s self-conscious intertextuality with visual media, its publication format and the textual context of *The Dark Blue* reorient interpretative

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis of the specificities of this *version* of the *text*, see Costello-Sullivan.

possibilities because this allows us to see *Carmilla* as composed of, and in conversation with, stock images, characters, and phrases.

Carmilla first appeared in the short-lived but extravagant *The Dark Blue*, as a four-part serial, beginning in 1871 and concluding in 1872. According to the *Rossetti Archive*, “No purpose or perspective seems to unify *The Dark Blue*, other than [John Christian] Freund's desire to make a splash with a literary journal that would endear itself to a large readership,” and *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* claims that “As one tries to find the clue to Dark Blue, to say what was its main character or predominant attitude, one is baffled.” However, despite its apparent eclecticism, the journal does have a distinct flavour, publishing feminist, socialist, and anti-imperialist articles alongside aesthetic poetry and neo-gothic sensation fiction. The journal combines decadent style and art criticism with political and social commentary. As for the style of the fiction, poetry, and illustrations, and numerous articles championing women’s rights, the image that unifies *The Dark Blue* is a proto New Woman, fashioned in the style of the Pre-Raphaelite ‘stunner,’ moping about darkly. In this first publication, *Carmilla* is not only illustrated (a contextual factor largely ignored by critics), but juxtaposed with poetry that extends her “aura” (as well as the suspense of reading the serial in order), and which is perhaps an important part of the reputation she has achieved. In particular, the serialized *Carmilla* is interspersed with poems featuring female doubles, paralleling the central relationship between the two girls in Le Fanu’s narrative.

The first installment, in December 1871, is prefaced by a poem by F. Scarlet Potter entitled “The Burden of the Willows.” This allegorical poem personifies two willow trees as “Unhappy sisters”: one who betrayed the church that once stood beside

her, and her sister, who feels ashamed for her and who, although virtuous, shares her guilt by association. As a result of this misdeed, the sisters are ‘weeping’ willows. Like the stubborn willow sister who commits the crime of “blasphemy” (Potter 84), Carmilla also rejects Christianity, and, at several points in the narrative, explicitly denies the Christian faith.

A few pages later, two “Sonnets” concerning unearthly love by Millicent O’Hara appear just before the first three chapters of *Carmilla*. These two sonnets concern a melancholy lover who dreams of a mysterious beloved. This tone matches that of the first installment of *Carmilla* in which the subject of love-sickness and romantic yearning is invoked by an intertextual reference to *The Merchant of Venice*: “‘In truth I know not why I am so sad: It wearies me; you say it wearies you; But how I got it – came by it.’ I forget the rest” (Le Fanu 440). In this first installment, the narrator introduces herself and the eponymous vampire. In doing so, she also introduces an important visual intertext: the phantasmagoria show. The narrator, Laura, describes memories of her early life, calling them “scenes” that “stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness” (Le Fanu 437) and, indeed, the narrative that follows is presented as a series of ‘dissolving views.’ According to David J. Jones, “By the time Le Fanu was eight, Jacques Charles, incorporating the discovery of dissolving views (gradual superimposition of images) and moving slides opened the Dublin ‘Lectures on Apparitions and Ghosts’” (97). The dissolving view was accomplished by “two identical lanterns projecting an image on the same spot. . . . by slowly cutting off the illumination from the first lantern and simultaneously revealing the scene projected by the second, the first scene could be made to fade imperceptibly into the second” (Plunkett 21-23). This

technique of transitioning from one slide – one isolated image “surrounded by darkness” – to another is mimicked by Le Fanu, who displays scenes dissolving into one another, rather than describing action in the typical imitation of ‘real time’ pacing of realist fiction. For example, the first major event after Laura’s description of a childhood dream – Carmilla’s arrival – is sudden and surreal: a carriage crashes when a large cross spooks the horses, and Carmilla’s mother leaves her daughter with the narrator’s family to recover from the shock and, it is later revealed, a mysterious illness. In addition to such sudden transitions, the narrative is broken into short chapters. These divisions create a particular cycle: as one chapter ends, a time draws to a close; as a new chapter begins, the narrative once again situates the reader and the action in the present, which Le Fanu establishes with the continual intrusion of present tense (despite the narrator’s claim that it has happened in the past). To the usual techniques of repeating dialogue and announcing her position as storyteller in the present (e.g., “I am now going to tell you something” [437]), are added descriptions of scenes from the past presented as if they are presently visible or frozen in time. For example, in chapter one, Laura hesitates between the past, present and imperfect tenses in the following description:

The glade through which we had just walked lay before us. At our left the narrow road wound away under clumps of lordly trees, and was lost to sight amid the thickening forest. At the right the same road crosses the steep and picturesque bridge, near which stands a ruined tower which once guarded the pass; and beyond the bridge an abrupt eminence rises, covered with trees, and showing in the shadows some grey ivy-clustered rocks. (Le Fanu 437)

Laura also claims that she knows only the present, as she says “I forget all my life preceding that event, and for some time after it is all obscure also; but the scenes I have just described stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness” (Le Fanu 437). In this chapter, Laura also remarks that “the moon was shining” and the “mist was stealing” rather than stating that the moon *shone* or the mist *stole*. These types of descriptions create a series of still images. Each chapter is a tale unto itself, as well as a single image or scene. Revisiting and repeating scenes, and using the present or imperfect tense, Le Fanu presents a series of images rather than a continuous, progressive narrative. The analogy of the phantasmagoria then, gives a clue as to how the novella might be interpreted: as a visual fantasy rather than a logical narrative or an analogy.

After the phantasmagoric arrival of Carmilla – first in a dream, then in a carriage – the scene shifts to the castle interior. The guest stays in a room in the castle with “a sombre piece of tapestry opposite the foot of the bed, representing Cleopatra with the asps to her bosom” (Le Fanu 446): another set piece that implies Carmilla’s role as a fatal woman and foreshadows her later identification with a shared ancestral portrait. Strangely, Laura does not see Carmilla during the accident, but only after she visits her in this room. When Laura enters this room, she notices the portrait first. Following the description of the representation of a popular Victorian archetypal image, Laura describes experiencing an uncanny meeting that “struck [her] dumb in a moment, and made [her] recoil a step or two from her”; she explains that upon seeing Carmilla for the first time, “I saw the very face which had visited me in my childhood at night, which remained so fixed in my memory, and on which I had for so many years so often ruminated with

horror, when no one suspected of what I was thinking” (446). At this point, no description of the mysterious face is given, but the significance of the apparitional “face” is emphasized by the repetition of the word, which Laura uses a total of eight times in this introductory chapter. Carmilla claims to have had a similar dream, and extends their bond with her fascinating gaze and attractive looks: “She pressed my hand, she laid hers upon it, and her eyes glowed, as, looking hastily into mine, she smiled again, and blushed” (446). At this moment, however, we are told only of Laura’s recognition, but we are not given any indication of Carmilla’s physical appearance; instead, Laura reports Carmilla’s description of Laura in the second person: “while her fine dark eyes gazed passionately on me” and “her eyes followed me with a fond and melancholy gaze,” Carmilla reports that in her dreams, she has seen Laura “as I see you now; a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes” (447-8). Laura claims to feel both attracted and afraid, but the former prevails. Carmilla, too, claims to have a similar shock and “faint antipathy” upon recognizing Laura (448). This first installment ends with the girls “laugh[ing] over [their] momentary horrors” and “[*To be continued*]” (448).

This promise of continuation is directly followed by a poem by H. Curwen purportedly “(From Charles Baudelaire),” entitled “Midnight Confession.” This poem not only references Baudelaire’s well-known fatal women, but extends the mildly sinister conversation between Laura and Carmilla in its chorus of witches who have “Stoop’d to carnal base delight” and are apparently doomed to an eternity of prostitution (Curwen 30). In her anthology of lesbian fiction, *Chloe Plus Olivia*, Lillian Faderman pairs *Carmilla* with Baudelaire’s “Femmes Damnées,” explaining that “In his depiction of the lesbian as a fascinating monster who drains the lifeblood of her victim, Baudelaire creates

one of the earliest images of lesbian as vampire, which continued to be emulated well into the twentieth century” (295). Faderman links the two authors because of their contemporaneity, but their juxtaposition in this issue of *The Dark Blue* further supports the possibility of Baudelaire’s influence upon either Le Fanu or reception of his work.

The second instalment, in January, is prefaced by a poem about a “flirt[atious]” young woman reminiscent of *Venus in Furs* whom the author compares to “Queen Camilla” (Ashby-Sterry 3,6). There is seemingly little similarity between the poem and Le Fanu’s story, except the attractiveness, flirtatiousness, name of the subject, and a class difference between the speaker and the object of affection.



Figure 5 “Carmilla,” Michael Fitzgerald

Chapter four of *Carmilla* begins with the narrator’s description (finally) of Carmilla’s physical appearance. Their relationship progresses quickly, with “foolish

embraces” (Le Fanu 593) and grand declarations of love.⁴⁹ Stylistically, these moments seem to repeat the characters’ shared childhood dream. Throughout, Carmilla’s eyes hypnotize our heroine/narrator. At this point, an illustration by M. Fitzgerald depicts the two girls as Laura watches a funeral procession, while Carmilla looks away from it, facing us, and thereby emphasizing her powerful gaze (*fig.5*). Laura’s recounting of this funeral scene, to which I will return, abruptly turns to a visit from a travelling entertainer and salesman with a “magic-lantern” and other curiosities (596). This travelling salesman reminds us of the popular culture influences of this tale. In particular, the fact that he is carrying a magic lantern emphasizes the importance of this medium to the aesthetic of the story.

The following chapter, “A Wonderful Likeness,” repeats the uncanny recognition of the first installment, this time in the form of an ancestral portrait. This seventeenth-century portrait is described as if it were a moving lantern slide: at first “so blackened with age” that its subject is obscured, and upon being cleaned, “It was quite beautiful; it was startling; it seemed to live. It was the effigy of Carmilla! ‘Carmilla . . . living, smiling, ready to speak, in this picture” (600). Although the portrait is not described, it is presented as a product of 1698, providing something to help the reader envision it. The only identifying mark mentioned is “the little mole on her throat” (600).⁵⁰ The revelation of the portrait includes the anagrammatic name, “Mircalla” and the discovery that the two

⁴⁹ Laura wonders if Carmilla is “a boyish lover . . . in masquerade” (594), but quickly discounts this theory. This speculation suggests that Laura is not as innocent as she claims (since she apparently knows what Carmilla’s gestures mean). This remark also echoes that famous critical response to “Christabel”: “Is *Lady Geraldine* a sorceress? Or a vampire? Or a man? Or what is she, or he, or it?” (*Champion* qtd. in Lapp 35).

⁵⁰ A similar birthmark differentiates the living from the dead twin in “The Death-Bride” (see chapter two).

girls are related through their maternal ancestry, the Karnsteins. Once the portrait is visible, it has a marked effect on Laura, who reports that “I was more and more lost in wonder the more I looked at the picture” (601). The portrait’s appearance marks the point at which Laura admits that Carmilla has a hold on her; Laura requests that the portrait be hung in her room, and Carmilla gloats over this triumph during a moonlit walk following the uncovering of the painting: “‘And so you were thinking of the night I came here?’ she almost whispered. ‘Are you glad I came?’ . . . ‘And you asked for the picture you think like me, to hang in your room,’ she murmured with a sigh, as she drew her arm closer about my waist, and let her pretty head sink upon my shoulder” (Le Fanu 601). Not only is the portrait a reflection of Carmilla, it tells us something about Laura (her last name and her relation to Carmilla), and hints at her eventual transformation into one more like her mysterious friend and relative.

This second installment ends with a large black cat with glowing eyes (Carmilla in disguise) attacking Laura, and is followed by a sonnet, “The language of the Eyes” by C.H. Waring, which celebrates “silence” and “the golden silent language of the eyes” (1,2, 14), extending not only the image of the eyes Laura fears, but the stillness in which she nurses this fear: “I sprang into my bed and covered my head up in the bed-clothes, and lay there more dead than alive till morning” (Le Fanu 606). The subsequent installment, in February 1872, begins with Laura’s recap of this dream, and Carmilla reporting that she had an identical one, thereby repeating the original story once again. Laura reports that “Carmilla became more devoted to me than ever, and her strange paroxysms of languid adoration more frequent” (Le Fanu 703), while at the same time, both girls become increasingly ill (at this point, Laura too falls prey to “languor” [704]).

After more descriptions of “strange paroxysms of languid adoration” comes Carmilla’s appearance in the night covered in blood (Le Fanu 703, 704).

This event is accompanied by an illustration by D.H. Friston, who is responsible for the erotic drawings in the serial version.⁵¹ Instead of depicting the bloody vampire, Friston chooses to show Laura’s reaction, and her nipples visible beneath her nightgown, while Carmilla has her back to us (*fig. 6*). In Le Fanu’s story, this scene is described from Laura’s perspective. Friston’s illustration reverses this focalization to show Laura from Carmilla’s direction and Carmilla from behind. He shows us Laura’s fear instead of Carmilla’s fearsomeness. The composition of this illustration is organized by motion and contrast: the two girls lean in opposite directions, and keeping with their consistent color-coding throughout the narrative, Laura is highlighted and Carmilla’s figure is dark. Friston or Jenkins (the engraver) takes care to detail the transparency of the girls’ nightgowns. Although difficult to discern in reproductions, the original clearly shows Laura’s areolas.⁵²

After this, Carmilla mysteriously disappears and reappears in separate locations, and upon hearing her story, the doctor inspects Laura’s neck and upper chest to find what appear to be hickeys (709). They then meet General Spielsdorf, the father of the deceased girl who was to be a visitor at the castle, and, we later discover, one of Carmilla’s victims. The General, Laura, and her father begin a journey to Karnstein, the abandoned

⁵¹ While several editions of *Carmilla* have reprinted the original illustrations, only Costello-Sullivan’s correctly attributes the images to their respective illustrators. They worked independently on separate drawings, which were then engraved by C.M. Jenkin. The process of their commission and production remains, at least to me, somewhat of a mystery, but according to Simon Cooke, Le Fanu was not involved with it.

⁵² This is only clear when viewing the original, although James D. Jenkins uses color tinting to replace this lost detail for the cover of Ridenhour’s edition.

village and ruined estate of the “extinct” Karnstein family (of which, coincidentally, all three girls are maternal descendants). The contrasting, doubling, and contagious vampirism is mimicked in the poem that appears after this installment.



Figure 6 “Carmilla,” David Henry Friston

Following this episode, amongst other unrelated articles, is a poem called “Two Pictures” by John C. Collins. It appears in two parallel columns facing one another on two pages, labeled “I” and “II”, with its title prefacing both pages. This diptych poem presents two portraits: one of a “pale,” pious woman, and one of a dark, sexual woman (1.18). The first is “A frail fair angel” and is compared to the figure of Christ she kneels before (Collins 1.1, 1.18).⁵³ Her double, another anonymous archetypal woman, is a form threatening to erupt with sexual passion: her

.....red luscious lips too tremblingly close

To hide the agonies that slumber where

Hot love too real mocks that proud cold smile

.....

.....her shuddering frame

Struggles and pants for ruinous repose. (Collins 2.20, 2.25)

Like *Carmilla*, she is “languorous,” paralleling Le Fanu’s frequent use of the word to denote not merely lassitude, but weakness resulting from love-sickness (Collins 2.17).⁵⁴

Both poems end with parallel emotional states: the pious woman and Christ (to whom she is now united) are “trembling into speechless joy” while her erotically charged double “Struggles and pants for ruinous repose” (Collins 1.25, 2.25). Collins depicts religious and sexual ecstasy as similar, personified as female, and stereotypically feminine, but at the same time, he depicts femininity as comprised of two potentialities (both

⁵³ Which evokes Coleridge’s “Christabel.”

⁵⁴ The OED suggests this possible reading of “languor,” as does Le Fanu’s quotation of Shakespeare in the first chapter.

stereotypical). This unified double ending parallels Laura's ultimate unification with Carmilla, just as the latter forewarns ("I live in your warm life, and you shall die – die, sweetly die – into mine" [Le Fanu 594]). Although it is not possible to speculate on the way readers approached this journal – whether they read it in order, skipped straight to the sections that interested them, or flipped through it – this two-part poem (to which I will return) potentially acts as an illustration or extension of Le Fanu's story.

Indeed, pictures are a kind of glue holding *Carmilla* together, and this imagistic quality of the text is reinforced by its serial presentation. The structure of *Carmilla* continues to mimic that of the phantasmagoria, with dream-like scenes joined only by brief and unrealistic premises (the carriage crash and the sudden trip to the village of Karnstein for a picnic, for example). The final installment begins with the general's story, which takes place at a masquerade party; thus, in keeping with the phantasmagoric narrative structure, the realist meeting and conversation between Laura and the bereaved father is brief, and serves only to facilitate "The Story" (Le Fanu 59). This chapter is yet another scene of uncanny recognition. Carmilla disappears and reappears without physical movement, much like Seraphina in "The Fatal Hour."⁵⁵ Hearing this story on the way to Karnstein – a miniature version of her narration for the past three installments – Laura recognizes her own recent experiences, remarking that "You may guess how strangely I felt as I heard my own symptoms so exactly described You may suppose, also, how I felt as I heard him detail habits and mysterious peculiarities which were, in fact, those of our beautiful guest, Carmilla!" (66-7). This story is also repeated in

⁵⁵ See chapter two.

Friston's second drawing, which illustrates the General's tale (*fig. 7*). Once again, he depicts Carmilla as a dark figure looming over Bertha's exposed breasts.



Figure 7: "Carmilla," David Henry Friston

Although, as Tammis Elise Thomas observes, “Le Fanu uses euphemism to simultaneously mask and dramatize the profound sexual attraction between the two lovers” (44), Laura’s expressions of innocence are supplemented by Friston’s depictions of not-so-innocent encounters. While the narrative maintains the intimacy of an epistolary exchange and conversation (i.e., second person narration), Friston’s (and Fitzgerald’s) illustrations interrupt this intimacy with a voyeuristic third person perspective – a narrative perspective typically attributed to the later frame narrative of *In a Glass Darkly*. Regarding this illustration (*fig. 7*), Simon Cooke suggests that Friston “displace[s]”

Laura's narration, retelling her story but "projecting it onto a minor character" in order to corroborate Laura's self-presentation as innocent ("Haunted"). Moreover, one cannot rule out prurient interest and imagination on the part of the artist. Cooke's argument assumes narrative intention on the part of the illustrator, but Friston's motivation for reproducing this scene may have been its erotic potential: this moment of catching Carmilla in action does not happen during any of Laura's encounters with her. Friston's narrative is not an exact reproduction of Le Fanu's, but yet contributes to the narrative doubling effect of the inset tales. In Friston's version of the story, the erotic potential that Le Fanu hints at is made visible.

While the General tells his story, Laura's reflections act as a bridge between the spectacular masquerade party and the carriage's arrival at Karnstein: "A vista opened in the forest; we were on a sudden under the chimneys and gables of the ruined village, and the towers and battlements of the dismantled castle, round which gigantic trees are grouped, overhung us from a slight eminence" (Le Fanu 67). Once again, the scene appears as if in a series of dissolving views, and hence Laura exits the carriage "In a frightened dream" and is, just as strangely, "soon . . . among the spacious chambers, winding stairs, and dark corridors of the castle" (67). Carmilla appears and disappears, and, all of a sudden, an unusual character – a scholar – appears to neatly tie up the case, uncover Carmilla's tomb, lead in her violent destruction, and to explain the anagrammatic nature of the vampire (76). The final chapter concludes with his explanation of vampirism. However, as I have discussed in chapter one, this explanation is not entirely satisfactory. The Baron's lack of efficacy (whether purposely or accidentally) in vanquishing vampirism is suggested in his final words: "[o]ne sign of the vampire is the

power of the hand. . . . its power is not confined to its grasp; it leaves a numbness in the limb it seizes, which is slowly, if ever, recovered from” (78). The Baron’s expertise in the subject of local epidemics of vampirism derives predominantly from his ancestor who “had been a passionate and favoured lover of the beautiful Mircalla, Countess Karnstein” (77). In order to preserve his beloved, this love-sick man researched her illness and “pretended” to destroy her body and tomb (77). His descendant, the Baron, claims that this time, the destruction of Carmilla is genuine and final. Should we believe him? If he in fact has not fallen prey to the vampire’s charms as his ancestor has, his scholarship fails to prevent the continuation of vampirism, since it is clear that Laura has contracted the illness.

Despite the Baron’s reassurances, this story does not end with Carmilla’s “true death.” The contagious nature of vampirism, Laura’s failing health, and particularly the shared ancestry emblemized in the portrait, all suggest that Laura becomes a vampire, and, in a way, becomes Carmilla. This becoming is hinted at throughout the story in the moments of sudden appearance or revelation: the dream, the first meeting, the portrait cleaning, and the final vision of Carmilla before her death. In each appearance, Laura recognizes herself, and this recognition is given to the reader in the form of self-revelation (i.e., at the moment the portrait appears, Laura’s reveals her relation to the cursed family). Each of these moments shows us a little more of Laura as the image of Carmilla is mobilized. Carmilla’s persistence beyond the story is suggested in the tale’s last words, in which she threatens to “step” out of the world of fiction: Laura reports that “to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory . . . and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door” (78).

3.2 How to Read an Anagram

Carmilla has very little narrative progression: the narrative seems to serve only to connect a series of images. In particular, the uncanny portrait trope is one of the most easily “disassembled” items, and a significant aspect of its cult of re-assembly. As I’ve shown in my description of the story, a single plotline is repeated with variations in four installments. While its images are rich and vivid, mimicking the structure of the phantasmagoria show, La Fanu’s prose is clichéd and repetitive. This aspect, common to pulp fiction, suggests a need to read differently – to read for images rather than abstractions or tightly woven plots. This tendency of pulp fiction, as Ken Gelder has argued, discombobulates the favorite method of literary criticism, close reading (*Popular* 38).⁵⁶ Part of what makes *Carmilla* an imagistic narrative is Le Fanu’s use of genre conventions and a limited vocabulary resulting in a tale that, at the level of the text, is difficult to analyze. In other words, *Carmilla* resists attempts to attribute weight to a single word or phrase. For example, the word “pretty” and variants (i.e., “prettily” and “prettier”) is a favorite word throughout the story, and appears six times in chapter three, and, over the course of the six pages that make up this chapter, the word “beautiful” also appears six times (Le Fanu 443-48). In chapter one, as I’ve mentioned, *Carmilla* is introduced as merely a “face” and the word re-appears when the two girls compare dreams. Ultimately, *Carmilla* is responsive to broader forms of reading that recognize her fragmentary, artificial nature (much like her predecessor, “Christabel”). Since, as Heather Love observes, finding “richness” beneath the surface of a text is part of what enables

⁵⁶ On this point, see also Peter Rabinowitz and Robyn R. Warhol.

critics to determine that certain texts are worth studying, “Depth is also a dimension that critics attempt to produce in their readings” (388). Thus William Veeder defends Le Fanu the “popular entertainer” with the assertion that “‘Carmilla’ will reward close formal analysis as other gothic masterpieces do” (197). Victor Sage addresses Le Fanu’s reputation as a popular, rather than a literary author, noting that “There are two major prejudices about these books, both of which began among his Victorian reviewers: one, that they are a form of weak, failed realism. . . . The second lingering prejudice is that, because Le Fanu was a prolific writer, a newspaper editor, and a journalist, he wrote too hastily and was simply careless” (2).

It is not only generic clichés and repetition that confound close reading, but errors. Richard Haslam reminds us of pulp fiction’s tendency toward hack writing, sloppy editing, and typographical errors. When faced with such failures of intention, Gelder argues, the mechanisms of close reading are jammed. The critical confusion that the possible plot holes and other errors of the *In a Glass Darkly* republication cause is addressed (although not unproblematically) by Richard Haslam in an article which deals with “misreading” Le Fanu with reference to Steven Mailloux’s “rehermeneutics.” While Haslam does not eschew close reading, he critiques a “literary critical providentialism in which no element of a work is permitted to be accidental” (342). However, this critical desire to find that every word counts and belongs to a coherent and deep structure is particular to the practice of close reading as developed by New Criticism – a practice that Haslam does not reject.

Criticism of *Carmilla* has typically relied on the version published as a framed narrative in a series of medical cases, linked by brief horror-host style introductions by a

doctor of dubious authority. This frame narrative has been a source of much critical debate, and it is into this debate that Haslam intervenes. The problem Haslam addresses is the disjunction between the frame narrator's claim that the epistolary narrative that follows is the product of Doctor Hesselius's "correspondence" with its narrator, Laura (Haslam1, *Le Fanu* in Costello-Sullivan 3). This disjunction between the prologue and the tale itself is typically read as a site of conflict between competing male and female voices. For many critics, this is a deliberate narrative conflict which the author intended to be meaningful.

In Haslam's view, this is an attempt to prove a point in advance – a move he believes is easily avoided by following an empirical approach. Haslam's call to "empiricize instead of theorize," at least for anyone attempting Mailloux's method, is not possible, since reading is itself an interpretative process, and therefore must be – overtly or covertly – theoretical. What Mailloux advocates is not an abandonment of theory, but rather a resistance to theorizing in advance of empirical engagement. Both Haslam and Mailloux gesture towards Latour's advice to avoid any 'application' of theory whatsoever – it is not the theory that is rejected, but rather the method of 'application.' Rather than theorize, Mailloux and Latour advocate direct engagement at the ground level with the interpretive act as a process. Haslam has himself slightly misinterpreted Mailloux, and in the process of explaining his own reading of *Le Fanu* as unfettered by theory and ideology, unwittingly reveals his theoretical and ideological biases. In arguing that the misalignment between the prefacer and the narrator is simply a mistake on the part of the author, he decides that the prefacer trumps the narrator – the mistake, in other words, for Haslam, lies in making too much of Laura's address to "a lady" (it should be noted, more

than once), rather than seeing the later preface or its misinformation as the site of error. While his argument is largely plausible (that Le Fanu did not have clear intentions and perhaps did not carefully check his plot details), he then concludes that an empirical reading easily dismisses the reading of this epistolary narrative as having any lesbian (or other) sexual connotation.

Instead of reading the relationship between the frame narrator and Laura as antagonistic, with regard to the re-publication of *Carmilla* as an inset tale in a short story collection (*In a Glass Darkly*), Ardel Haefele-Thomas reflects on the role of the framing device in establishing reader expectations. Thomas argues that “in serial form in *The Dark Blue*, *Carmilla* was a ‘stand alone’ novella,” whereas “Le Fanu’s inclusion of the previously independent vampire tale in a book of case studies situates the vampire as an oddity . . . in need of further scrutiny” (100-101). She claims that “Readers of the first publication would have entered the text ‘innocently’, without pre-judgment, whereas readers of the later version would have begun with a pre-existing notion that the case was abnormal since, clearly, it had ended up in a German metaphysician’s case study” (101). This holds true, in the sense that in its original serial publication, the correspondence between the narrator, Laura, and an unnamed female “you” presents the tale in the form of eighteenth-century epistolary fiction, while the frame story of *In a Glass Darkly* sets it up as a medical mystery and a second-hand, twice mediated correspondence. However, readers of the serial version would also be encountering the text in a particular textual context, framed by feminist essays, decadent poetry featuring fatal women, and other sensation tales that broached a number of sexual taboos. Thus, the precise nature of the reader’s ‘innocence’ cannot be guaranteed. Each publication context sets up slightly

different expectations, but it is not likely that the reader of the serial version would be “innocent” or expecting the ordinary. Costello-Sullivan also makes such a claim for singularity, stating that her edition “presents it as it was originally encountered rather than as one story among others” (xxiii-xxiv); yet, in *The Dark Blue*, it *was* a story among others. What those “other” stories activate, I’ve been suggesting, is a stock image that is already a fetish, and that the reader might very well be expecting.

For many readers today, this image is still a fetish, but it is not the only one. As I have mentioned, the genre of literary criticism brings its own fetishes. For one thing, critics often want frame narratives to do something very specific.⁵⁷ Haslam favors the prefaced version, Haefele-Thomas the unprefaced version. In my reading, the presence of the preface does little to alter the persistent image of Carmilla and the text’s ability – as West remarks – to be “dissect[ed]” and reproduced, just as Carmilla reproduces anagrammatically. The debate about *Carmilla*’s frame narrative is still going strong (and perhaps not quite exhausted), but the role of the serial as an aesthetic context still requires further investigation. Historicism – situating the text in ‘Victorian society’ – and close reading have so far proved to be inadequate to address the “mysterious subject,” as it is called by the *In a Glass Darkly* frame narrator (Le Fanu in Costello-Sullivan 3), of Le Fanu’s most famous creation. Several critics have noted the disjunction between the voice of masculine reason and Laura’s narration, such as Jarlath Killeen, who remarks on “the blundering male fools that populate this story” (382). Yet there is a strong critical imperative to choose a side: to confirm that one story is the right one, the others – the

⁵⁷ Regarding this issue, particularly as it pertains to E.T.A. Hoffmann’s framing techniques, see Hilda Meldrum Brown.

prefacer? Vordenberg? The General? – are mistaken. And to that end, the impotence of anti-fetishist critique is foreshadowed by the Baron’s detached, scholarly explanations. For example, his explanation that “[t]he vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons” and that “[i]n these cases it seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent” does nothing to cure Laura of her attachment (76). In a typically Gothic trope of genre-switching (i.e., repeating the same material in different genres, often for verisimilitude), the cool, professorial explanation that follows Laura’s detailed description of fascination and seduction, seems to be, although not entirely inaccurate, lacking in the experiential knowledge that may very well be the key to understanding the problem – a problem that remains unsolved. Since Latour claims that the way a story is told is not merely a different way of saying the same thing, but rather, part of the story’s creation, these two accounts – the scholarly account and Laura’s personal account – are not necessarily translations of each other.

Revisiting the serialization of the work is one way to broaden our readings, and to develop a more nuanced sense of what it means to contextualize literature. The intertextual context of *Carmilla*’s serial publication challenges readings that rely on historical (extra-textual) context alone. This original context is not definitive, but one of a series of re-contextualizations that continue to extend its aura. In other words, I view *Carmilla* as a type circulating in the realm of the aesthetic and discursive rather than a

unique character representing social reality. Focusing on images allows for flatter and wider readings (in the sense of Latour's flat social landscape).⁵⁸

Carmilla reads like a picture show, and because Le Fanu shows so much, the flatness of the narrative does not translate easily into depth hermeneutics. The tendency to seek deep, rather than wide meaning, is one possible reason (or excuse) for the general dismissal of its sexual content; critics, Steven Bruhm remarks, "are as interested in how [*Carmilla*] *doesn't* signify as lesbian as they are in how she does" ("The Gothic Novel" 16). Anna Maria Jones also notes this fashion for explaining that "x 'is really about' y" (the 'x', in this case, is typically the erotically charged romance between *Carmilla* and Laura) (27). Ultimately, critical readings put *Carmilla* under pressure to exemplify a 'Victorian' or Irish consciousness, or Le Fanu's individual consciousness. However, *Carmilla* is not alone, among either Le Fanu's other works or Victorian fiction more broadly, in depicting sexual attraction between women; however, the lack of subtlety of this particular depiction makes it impossible to ignore. Instead, it must be explained – and often, explained *away*. For these critics, (ostensibly) lesbian content must represent something, preferably something beyond the realms of the sexual or aesthetic. Joseph Andriano argues that "Le Fanu followed Coleridge's exception to the rule [that female demons haunt men], not because he was fascinated by lesbianism, but because he was concerned about his own death" (105). For Robert Tracy, Le Fanu most obviously includes the sexual relationship "in order to emphasize the unnatural in his supernatural tale," but ultimately, the attraction/repulsion dynamic "at once suggest[s] and mask[s] Le

⁵⁸ Heather Love argues that Latour's sociological method can help literary studies to "develop modes of reading that are close but not deep" (375). If, as Latour asks, we "make the social flat," then, I would suggest we are looking at a larger surface, if not a deeper one.

Fanu's deeper anxieties" which "are neither supernatural nor primarily sexual . . . They are primarily social and political, aroused as the Catholic Irish begin to assert themselves" (Tracy xix). For Adrienne Antrim Major, Laura and Carmilla represent the sharing of knowledge and writing between women and "Le Fanu encodes as lesbianism the dangers of feminine intellectual discourse" (164). Carol Senf asserts that "Although a great deal of critical energy has been devoted to this lesbian relationship and also to Le Fanu's supposed homosexuality, it is equally likely that he uses the relationship between vampire and victim to represent the relationship between mother and child" before moving on to discuss what she considers serious topics (54). Certainly, the story, as an epistolary narrative, comments on writing and genre; it includes a strange mother-daughter dynamic *in addition to* the lesbian relationship; and any text is potentially political (and Tracy provides convincing evidence for this connection elsewhere); yet the need to posit that these are not only the text's central concerns over and above the ostensible romance theme, but that this theme can only be understood as an awkward analogy in need of explanation, is a narrative problem in and of itself. In early criticism, this squeamishness is clearly homophobic. For example, Nelson Browne writes in 1951 that "Not the least horrible thing about Carmilla is the strain of lesbian perversity in her passionate declarations of affection for Laura" (84). Devendra P. Varma introduces *In a Glass Darkly* in 1977 with the biting remark (enticement?) that to the "traditional elements of the vampire legend" Le Fanu "adds the *even more sinister* element of lesbian perversity" ([italics added] vi). A year later, Glen St John Barclay takes a comparatively progressive stance, arguing that it was necessary for Le Fanu to use vampirism as an analogy for lesbianism in the Victorian era but in modern times, "Now that the theme can

be discussed, we presumably have no further need of the symbol” (38). However, “Now that [lesbianism] can be discussed,” Barclay suggests it is an unworthy topic of discussion, remarking that Le Fanu’s talents are spoiled because “One rapidly becomes dissatisfied with a novelist who seems to be concerned with eroticism in any sense only in terms of lesbians, transvestites and child molesters” (3). Barclay’s use of the term “transvestites” is a follow up to his complaints about Le Fanu’s supposedly feminine heroes (“virtually incapable of conceiving any kind of erotic or even emotional relationship in anything other than lesbian terms. . . . Le Fanu . . . carries this approach to the point of making his heroes sound like transvestites; in fact he has no heroes in the conventional sense” [33]), and his “child molesters” are presumably Laura and Carmilla’s mysterious nightmare visitors. The criticism of the 1970s – the heyday of the ‘lesbian vampire’ film – is not only homophobic to a contemporary eye, but reveals an implicit erotophobia; for example, Michael Begnal’s comment that “Le Fanu’s purpose is not to attack . . . homosexuality, but rather to comment on the self-destruction of a total submission to sexuality. Just as Carmilla will drain the life’s blood from her prey, so too will lust destroy the moral and physical lives of its victims” (qtd. in Senf 172). However, Begnal’s comment does seem to be, aside from the implied judgment, defining an important theme in this text, and the Gothic in general. Rather than a pro or anti position, the Gothic often mixes attraction and repulsion as well as – as Begnal gestures toward – what Bruhm calls “Gothic sexualities”: the Gothic’s concern with potential loss of identity (or the impossibility of ever achieving one), particularly “the determined, the stable, the legible self of Western modernity” (“The Gothic Novel” 2, 21). “Gothic

sexualities” threaten to overtake and change or destroy the individual, just as Laura loses herself (and is possibly transformed into a vampire).

At the same time, criticism’s tendency to posit that “x ‘is really about’ y” relies as much on theoretical positions that seek displacements, and so, for example, while Jamieson Ridenhour agrees with Tracy that Carmilla represents Ireland, he also states that “No matter what other symbology is implied by individual vampire stories, the vampire’s bite is always a metaphor for sex” (xxiii). Although they self-consciously move away from a homophobic past, in more recent attempts to excuse the un-lady-like behaviour depicted in *Carmilla*, it is apparent that homophobia depends on a more generalized erotophobia in order to survive. Whether because she seems to be a lesbian,⁵⁹ because she is presumably a male fantasy, or because she belongs to a series of sexualized negative stereotypes of women, many critics cast a disproving eye on *Carmilla*, and by extension, its author.

On the other hand, another strain of criticism sees Carmilla and *Carmilla* as ‘subversive,’ ‘transgressive,’ and ‘celebratory,’ and therefore, as Bruhm explains, “for feminist and anti-homophobic readers, an agent of sexual liberation” (15). This group is split between those who first de-sexualize her before lauding her heroism, and those who wish to ‘celebrate’ her sexuality as sexual. The first group aim to depict Carmilla as fitting a feminist paradigm of positive relationships, both sexual and non-sexual. Despite her cruelty and predation, Carmilla is also refitted with a normative late twentieth-century lesbian identity and evaluated for how well she models a utopian, ethical sexuality (if

⁵⁹ My deferment of using this term decisively will be explained shortly.

any). This paradigm is shared between both sides, although a minority read her as evil *and* appealing (Palmer, for example). For Helen Stoddard, “the physical nature of the relationship between the narrator and the vampire is a far cry from mutual lesbian desire and can more clearly be seen in this light as a masculine fantasy of and about lesbianism” (32). Because “it becomes the violent Gothic invasion by one figure . . . with power over another,” it cannot be, in her estimation, possible unless heterosexual, and she implies that female sexuality has no business with “cruelty” or “possession” (32). However, Elizabeth Signorotti, reading *Carmilla* as a victim herself, posits that the relationship between the two girls is “liberating” and egalitarian (611, 628). This stance requires ignoring the loss of control in Laura’s enthrallment. In the process of re-telling this story, Signorotti calls upon “the homosocial continuum” to de-sexualize the text and to replace vampirism with co-operative female community. In both cases, whether critics read *Carmilla* as misogynistic and homophobic, or as liberating and feminist, opposing misogynistic and homophobic connotations typically means choosing the angel of the house over the vamp, pointing out the vamp as a false image hiding only more angels, but in effect, recycling these tropes, as if choosing between Collins’s “Two Pictures.”

The question of Le Fanu’s depiction of what would now be called lesbianism as either positive or negative is perhaps better understood in relation to his other works. Le Fanu’s earlier novel, *Wylder’s Hand* (1864), centers on the romance between two cousins, Dorcas and Rachel (although it is and was packaged as a murder mystery). The girls start the novel with the declaration that “we shall be old maids, you and I, and live together like the ladies of Llangollen, careless and happy recluses” (138). They maintain this dream through the course of the novel, despite Dorcas’ marriage to Rachael’s abusive

brother (who in turn tries to force his sister to marry someone else). True to Barclay's lament, all of the male characters fail spectacularly and conveniently die, allowing the two girls to hoard the family money and spend the rest of their days living together in Venice. Although they are more affectionate than even the typically effusive Victorian heroine, Le Fanu leaves sex out of this tale; instead, he reassures his reader that although young, pretty, and well-connected, the girls have no interest in marriage. Dorcas, reassuring Rachel that she intends to honor their plan, suggests that marriage is a kind of death, at least for the women of their family: "Death comes to other women in the accustomed way; but we have a double death. There is not one beautiful portrait in Brandon that has not a sad and true story. Early death . . . but a still earlier death of happiness" (198). The afterword to the Atlantic Books Classic Crime series republication states only that "*Wylder's Hand* is regarded as the most uncomplicated of Le Fanu's mysteries, and is sometimes referred to as his masterpiece" and that "In the character of Mark Wylder, he establishes a fully realized psychological portrait" (496). Strangely though, the titular character makes very little appearance in the novel. Instead, the majority of the story follows Dorcas and Rachael with omniscient narration. Victor Sage notes, rather cryptically, that "There is irony throughout the text in Rachael's relationship to her beautiful dark-haired cousin, Dorcas" (92), but the only critic to point out the obvious, St. John Barclay, states that *Wylder's Hand* "is quite literally a story of lesbian love" (33). Barclay, in contrast to Varma, believes that the subject should no longer inspire fear, but follows this declaration of enlightened sexual mores with his complaint about what he perceives as an excess of "lesbians" in Le Fanu's work (38). Aside from Barclay's apparent preference for stories about manly men, another way of characterizing

Le Fanu's themes might be to say that he was interested in exploring alternative relationship models in contrast to traditional marriage. For example, in *The Rose and the Key*, the happiest characters are a bachelor and a spinster who live next door to one another, and, proclaiming their choice to remain happily unmarried, visit each other and go for walks every day, enjoying a romance free of legal complications or children (problems which plague all of the other characters, sometimes fatally). In both novels, marriage is economically driven and causes more problems than it solves.

Portraits of fatal women appear in *The Rose and the Key* as ominous warnings signifying forced marriage, tragic love, and thwarted passion. Most often, these portraits are used to characterize Lady Vernon, the novel's *femme fatale*. In *Wylder's Hand*, Dorcas is compared to portraits and statues in a similar way. Although both of these novels are easily characterized as sensation fiction rather than Gothic, these portraits and rhetoric of portraiture tend to coincide with those moments (or "Gothic Closets") that make reference to Gothic conventions. The characterization of these women as cold and more like "pictures and statues" (La Fanu *Wylder's Hand* 161) than human beings accords with the stock image of the fatal woman, and ultimately, signifies their secret passions (for the widowed Lady Vernon, an illegitimate son and a wish to remarry, for Dorcas, her preference for Rachel over her numerous suitors). When she learns that Dorcas is to marry, Rachel imagines her cousin as "something ghastly, wan, glittering, and terrible, like a priestess at a solitary sacrifice" (91). Dorcas herself tells Rachel, "I wish I knew more about these proud beauties whose portraits are fading on the walls. Their spirit, I am sure, is in us, Rachel; and their pictures and traditions have always supported me" (432). Unlike Carmilla, who is the embodiment of her ancestral portrait

because she is the ancestor, Dorcas and Rachel are clearly differentiated from their predecessors. Lady Vernon is compared, in a dream sequence, to the image of the of the bleeding nun and the dagger wielding ghost of Lewis' *The Monk* and *The Castle Spectre*: “a rather remarkable portrait . . . of a handsome, but forbidding woman, in a nun’s dress” that “expressed resolution, contempt, and cruelty” (*The Rose and the Key* 193). In a dream, the portrait comes to life and appears to be Lady Vernon wielding a knife. However, this fantasy is dispelled upon waking, and is couched in a novel that tends towards realism rather than Gothicism. In other words, these brief moments recall the reveries of the Gothic, but do not maintain this aesthetic over the course the novel. On the other hand, *Carmilla* dwells in the mode of reverie and does not clearly differentiate between reality and dream. What remains the same is the reference to a type, and this type – the languorous, heavy-lidded, and mysterious woman with an air of tragedy – carries not one, but many meanings. While the portrait remains an important metaphor, the image circulates through a variety of media. In the case of sensation fiction, it appears only in descriptive realms that are clearly separated from the realist narrative; only in the unreal world of Gothic fiction does the image move from its frame and play a role beyond the descriptive.

3.3 The “fact”s of “fiction”

While it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to see Le Fanu or his text as making a clear argument for or against lesbianism or feminism – group identities which are created later – a more interesting project is tracing some of *Carmilla*'s associations. These associations, it should be noted, are not the same thing as historical context and its attendant implications of depth or ‘background.’ One particular textual association is the

emerging field of sexology. Ardel Heafele-Thomas notes that, although they are eerily similar, “Le Fanu’s story . . . predates the explosion of sexological writings such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s 1886 *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Havelock Ellis’ 1897 English edition of *Sexual Inversion*” (97). Yet this is not so strange, if we allow for the role of fiction in establishing ideas that come to be understood as factual (“Bovarisism,” “Narcissism,” etc.). In his now iconic work, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Richard von Krafft-Ebing states – following an admission that he has little in the way of scientific evidence – that “[i]t is a remarkable *fact* that in *fiction*, lesbian love is frequently used as a leading theme” (428, italics mine). From there, Krafft-Ebing describes existing relationships in the terms of fictional ones (while his patients tell their stories using his vocabulary and narrative structure). On the other hand, historicist and new historicist criticism aims to situate *Carmilla* in a social context which presumably precedes the text. For example, Senf seeks to “probe the real social reasons for this fear and awe” (56). For Senf and others, Le Fanu’s villainesses represent the threat of up-and-coming feminist power. While this is certainly a plausible factor, it is not enough to name this as the sole cause of the archetype’s transmission in this period (and beyond). As an association though, it must certainly have a role to play.

One of the most productive feminist new historicist readings of *Carmilla* is Tamar Heller’s comparison of the novella with the vampiric figure circulating in contemporaneous medical texts. Although she suggests several important leads, the ways in which Heller employs her evidence means that none of these leads are followed very far. However, her analysis offers a useful entry point into the intertextuality of *Carmilla*, comparing the increasing medicalization of women’s bodies in the late nineteenth century

with Le Fanu's depiction of the illness which plagues Carmilla and her victims, observing that "the language used by nineteenth-century medicine to diagnose the female patient echoes throughout 'Carmilla'" (80). Like Haefele-Thomas, Heller tends to argue that it "echoes" in advance, which may be part of new historicist tendency to privilege non-fiction text as context, as having a closer relationship with social reality, while the fictional text is a pale, shadowy analogy for that context. Perhaps, as Oscar Wilde argues, describing the influence of Pre-Raphaelite painting on women's fashion, "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" ("The Decay of Lying" 179). Nevertheless, Heller provides a window into the contemporary classification of Carmilla's sexuality, noting that the girls (Carmilla and Laura) "display classic symptoms of the masturbator according to nineteenth-century medicine" (83). More specifically though, in 1870 – one year before Le Fanu published *Carmilla* – American doctor Nicholas Francis Cooke published *Satan in Society*, a treatise on the dangers of excessive sexual pleasure (i.e., anything not directly leading to the production of legitimate offspring), masturbation, birth control, and the ever-present danger of contagious immorality. Cooke's description of the effects of masturbation perfectly matches Carmilla's and, later, Laura's symptoms; according to Cooke, "The symptoms which enable us to recognize or suspect this crime are the following: A general condition of languor, weakness, and a loss of flesh; the absence of freshness and beauty . . . a sad expression" and "sadness and melancholy" ([“languor” is especially significant for *Carmilla*] 105-106). For Le Fanu, this eventually leads to vampirism, for Cooke, “nymphomania” (106).⁶⁰ Cooke insists that this vice is

⁶⁰ A term in use since at least 1775 (Groneman 6).

contagious, and that no young girl can think of it all by herself. He cites governesses, nurses, and teachers as possible seducer instructors,⁶¹ although where this knowledge originates if it must always come from elsewhere (unless the answer be in his title) is a mystery he leaves unexplained. Despite his seemingly voyeuristic interest in seeking, finding, and exposing sexual deviance, Cooke warns (entices?) his readers that “Those who shall seek in our pages the gratification of a libidinous curiosity, will be disappointed, but, better still, they will be *scared!*” (36). The fear Cooke aims to instill in this document is that of the ill health, deformed offspring, sterility, and even death that he claims masturbation will inevitably cause “– consequences which none may escape” (36). This discourse, not particular to Cooke,⁶² nor limited only to the condemnation of female masturbation (he devotes an entire chapter to the evils of male masturbation), sheds some light on what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick means when she claims that “the dropping out of sight in this century of the masturbatory identity has only, it seems, given more the authority and self-evidence to the scientific, therapeutic, institutional, and narrative relations originally organized around it” (“Jane Austen” 318). Cooke’s treatise is one of many dating from the eighteenth century treating masturbation as a dangerous and contagious illness. In the mid-eighteenth century, English translations of Samuel Auguste David Tissot’s *Onanism* were available. In his brief chapter on the subject of

⁶¹ This type of governess features in Le Fanu’s *Uncle Silas*. The sexual preference of this governess is never specific, but she fits the type of French, evil, hyper-sexual, and a corrupting influence. Carmilla’s mysterious nurse leers out of the carriage after the crash, and Laura has two governesses (one French) in addition to a nurse.

⁶² Haefele-Thomas also observes that *Carmilla* “takes on both a lesbian and an autoerotic aspect which foreshadows some of Krafft-Ebing’s connections between homosexuality and masturbation” (104).

female masturbation, Tissot lists the exact symptoms described by Cooke, including “languor,” and relates a brief narrative very much like *Carmilla*:

Not long since a young woman, about eighteen years old, who had enjoyed a good state of health, was seized with an astonishing weakness: her powers daily diminished, in the day-time she was constantly overcome with drowsiness, and was at night unable to sleep; she lost her appetite, and a dropsical swelling spread all over her body: she consulted a skillful surgeon, who after he found that her courses were regular, suspected masturbation. (Tissot 45)

Most significantly, Tissot closely categorizes lesbian sex as a type of masturbation.

Claiming it was much more common among the ancient Romans, and including several Latin passages and references to Sappho, he warns that “The danger of this kind of pollution is not, however, less than that of the other sorts of masturbation: the effects are equally shocking, all these paths lead to emaciation, languor, pain and death” (Tissot 46). He concludes his warning by remarking that “Women have been known to love girls with as much fondness as ever did the most passionate of men” (47). In Tissot’s explanation, this love is a symptom rather than a cause of sexual activity. Diane Mason calls for greater attention to Victorian discourse on masturbation beyond its apparent ridiculousness for contemporary readers. She states that the contemporary dismissal of Victorian anti-masturbation discourse “reflects the mocking disregard of the views of one society by another which deems itself to be more sophisticated and liberal in its outlook”

and “diminishes the ‘serious’ nature of masturbation as a facet of sexuality,” and more particularly, Victorian views of sexuality (1).⁶³

An important connection for *Carmilla* is the understanding of lesbian sex as masturbation. Indeed, although Heller recognizes the discourse surrounding masturbation, she projects sexual categories of the 1990s onto the 1870s. With reference to Shuttleworth’s quotation of an 1851 medical article which calls “masturbation in girls ‘lesbian pleasures,’” Heller remarks that this statement “conflated the homo- and autoerotic” (Heller 83, Shuttleworth 67), but such a conflation was not unique to this author. This is not per se a mistaken identification that we have since discovered and corrected with the help of a “repressive hypothesis,” but part of a larger trend in Victorian medical writing that identified masturbation as the origin of all other deviations from the normative model of sexuality. By the time Nethercot asks for a “true” “case” of lesbianism (Nethercot 38; Bruhm 16), “lesbian” is no longer merely an adjective, but has developed an identity of its own, and is therefore difficult to retrospectively match with the types presented in Le Fanu’s fiction.

To re-orient our perspectives on the matter, it is useful to recall Benjamin’s cryptic advice to the literary historian: “What is at stake is not to portray literary works in the context of their age, but to represent the age that perceives them – our age – in the age during which they arose” (464). Thomas De Quincey provides a more detailed explanation of how to achieve this: to see “The past viewed not *as* the past, but by a spectator who steps back ten years deeper into the rear, in order that he may regard it as

⁶³ Mason’s study clearly follows Michel Foucault’s critique of “the repressive hypothesis” outlined in *The History of Sexuality, vol. I*.

the future” (174). Imaging ourselves for a moment in the figure of the curious Victorian schoolgirl, the learned medical man, the concerned parent, the guilty patient, the “masturbator” – whoever he or she might be – and look out at the expanse of time before us, arising like a phantasmagoria show, we can never know what they would have seen, or how it would have been perceived, but in this empathic gesture, we may be afforded an altered perception. This point of view flattens the plane of history, shortening the distance between us and them. At the same time as getting closer to the late nineteenth century, we may also imaginatively detach from our present, and defamiliarize the contemporary. If we can reverse our position in this way, we can remember that in the future – after *Carmilla* – masturbation would begin to be thought of as separate from gender preference and would eventually drop out of sight as an identity altogether.

But how do these ideas contribute to the recurring image of the fatal woman? The identity of the masturbator, contrary to contemporary classifications, is directly linked, for the Victorians, with sterility, birth control, and lesbianism (which, at the time, was not clearly differentiated from what would now be thought of as bisexuality, leaving what is for some critics a bothersome question about the Moravian nobleman in *Carmilla*’s past a moot point). The images of the masturbator, the prostitute, and the consumptive, Mason makes clear, are remarkably similar. She remarks that the stereotype of the fatal woman, or the female vampire, was pale and sickly, comprising an eroticization of illness connected to both the glamour of consumption and prurient interest in the purportedly unhealthy masturbatory habits of women (40-43). Thus the second “picture” in Collins’ diptych is clearly sexualized because she is debilitated by a sexual excess represented by “drooping white lids” and a “languorous” and “indolent” manner (2.10, 17, 18). The

portrait of Cleopatra that precedes our introduction to Carmilla, then, suggests more than suicide, but the sensual self-destruction that erotophobic discourse predicts. While previous historicist critics have pointed out the image's links to each of these aspects – lesbianism, birth control, consumption, abortion, green sickness, etc. – any and all of these associations might co-exist in ways that a twenty-first century audience may not be accustomed to. For example, masturbation, although conflated with lesbianism, was supposed to cause infertility (Mason 8, Mighall). This potentially shifting or combining of associations is one reason that, like Robert Mighall, I do not want to argue that Carmilla or the image of the fatal woman in general represents masturbation. Mighall emphasizes that he is “not suggesting that vampirism ‘really is’ masturbation in this or any other tale from the period” but that we might instead look for “material correspondences, rather than symbolic ‘equivalents’, conscious modellings, rather than unconscious ‘substitutions’ (121). What these previous accounts of the connection between vampire fiction and anti-masturbation texts neglect is the contagion of a stock image, one that, as Mason points out, was glamorized as much as it was demonized (Mason 43). A recognizable type emerges and outlasts her original associations. This type has fallen out of favor because of its homophobic and misogynistic connotations, but this glamorous image has continued to re-emerge with shifting associations. What I want to emphasize, is the image's status as an actor rather than a mediator: an agent rather than a representation of *something else*.

Another aspect of the fatal image in this tale is Carmilla's status as an aristocrat and her image as a delicate, yet vicious lady, whose origin is found in a portrait of a countess. Like *Dracula*, *Carmilla* is strangely preoccupied with practical monetary

concerns as well as the more abstract notion of class. Laura begins her narrative by establishing her position in the economic landscape as well as the natural environment. She also identifies Carmilla's attitude towards underlings as one of the traits that detracts from her appeal. Critics have been tempted to align Carmilla's aristocratic status with existing social positions in nineteenth-century Ireland. In addition, Laura is typically read as clearly middle-class, in contrast to Carmilla. Instead, I read the luxurious and exotic setting as part of the fairy-tale quality of the story. *Carmilla* is a surreal fantasy that takes place in a card-board cut-out world (or rather, a phantasmagoric one); and, as Sage reminds us, it is not a work of historical fiction, and attempts to locate a distinct moral or political agenda typically overlook the playful spirit of the Gothic (Sage 3). Perhaps more than an antagonistic relationship between clearly defined classes, the novella depicts the instability of class, class mobility, and the potential disjunctions between class and wealth. In addition, the pastiche quality of the narrative gives the aristocratic touches a sense of unreality or make-believe, and this representation of a leisurely lifestyle as a faraway place like Styria, rather than, say, Eliot's realist portrait of Dorothea Brooke or Austen's descriptions of Mr. Darcy's estate, is emphasized in the surreal, phantasmagoric quality of the ancestral portrait (a cartoonish quality that film adaptations of *Carmilla* pick up on, consciously or unconsciously). In other words, what seems more evident in this depiction of class boundaries is less a direct commentary on class conflict, but a fantasy of aristocratic life and an attempt to create a distancing effect.

Perhaps the most significant issue is not Carmilla's 'real' political and economic position, but rather, the way she reproduces her power. Diegetically, her immortality is contained in an aristocratic portrait. Extra-diegetically, she is reproduced in a serialized

sensation story replete with sexually suggestive illustrations designed to be printed for mass consumption. To this day, she continues to proliferate in popular media, particularly ‘low-brow’ and camp genres. Indeed, the General remarks on Carmilla’s fraudulence when he claims that she is “the original” of the portrait – as Victor Sage notes, “there is no original” (198).

In addition to complicating her contexts, I want to make clear the text’s importance *as* a context in forming subsequent Gothic productions. Each citation, as Gelder points out, positions itself with regard to the work it cites, and, regardless of quality or audience, is in some way a critical commentary on its citation.⁶⁴ The many associations connected with this text, from the Victorian era to the present, are both changing and connected. Whether we see *Carmilla* as the product of a negative or positive attitude about sex, women, or lesbians, such conclusions do not answer the question of why she is still with us – why she has continued to “make friends” and enemies. Why, for example, was the arguably most homophobic and misogynistic lesbian vampire film, *Lesbian Vampire Killers* made as late as 2009 (plot summary: the heroes must kill lesbians, because they are vampires led by a queen named Carmilla)? Why does ‘lesbian vampire’ continue to be a common-place phrase, and why is the vamp an image we still recognize? Why is *Carmilla* both so intriguing and so unwieldy to contemporary critics? What is a ‘lesbian vampire,’ and why do we love and/or love to hate her? In the words of “Spalatro”’s scholarly frame narrator, “What are these things that we call spectral illusions, dreams, madness?” (13).

⁶⁴ “It is almost impossible for one vampire film not to cite or invoke another vampire film or vampire novel . . . recognizing the vampire . . . is also a process that these films often literally thematize” (Gelder, *New Vampire Cinema* 30).

Chapter 4

4 Curse of the Mummy's Womb (Starring: Lady Hamilton in Antique Poses)

She is unlike her mother; but in both feature and colour she is a marvellous resemblance to the pictures of Queen Tera. --- Bram Stoker, The Jewel of Seven Stars, 1903

. . . one had ancestors in literature, as well as one's own race, nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them . . . --- Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, 1891

Carmilla features an ancestral portrait that is not merely evidence of ancestry, but *is* the ancestor. The woman who introduces herself as Carmilla's mother repeatedly abandons her daughter, and Laura and Bertha, Carmilla's victims and relations, have also lost their mothers. These girls all seem to come from one mysterious mother Karnstein, exemplified in the ancestral portrait, who replicates her likeness endlessly. As I've discussed in the previous two chapters, the ancestral portrait as simulacrum in *Carmilla* differs from the portrait as resemblance in *Tales of the Dead*. In the latter, portraits serve as documentation of lineage, but in the former, a portrait embodies the lineage as well as representing it.

A great deal has been written about the racial and gender implications of this maternal legacy, as well as the Victorian interest in evolution and miscegenation as it appears in fiction more generally. The mother's role in passing on degenerative traits is highlighted in these stories (such as *Carmilla*). Max Nordau's theory of degeneration and Nicholas Francis Cooke's anti-masturbation warnings were influential in late nineteenth-century Britain. This interest however, did not merely appear as a symptom of 'anxiety'

or belief; the words of Nordau and Cooke were in circulation, but, much as circulating discourses today do not achieve full belief or acquiescence from all, writers in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century re-circulated these ideas in very different ways. Despite sharing a contemporaneous discourse of heredity and an archetypal image, Victorian writers present this combination of degeneration narrative and fatal women in diverse ways. This chapter examines a particular variation of the trope of the ancestral portrait in Gothic fiction: the portrait that replaces or supplants biological reproduction instead of representing it.

In *Carmilla*, vampirism spreads like a disease that the Karnsteins are destined to inherit. Robert Louis Stevenson's "Olalla" presents a similar tale of degeneration leading to vampirism, and, as in *Carmilla*, the ancestral portrait documents the destiny of a type rather than the evolution of a family line. The hero of the tale journeys to a remote location in rural Spain on the advice of his doctor. He stays in a crumbling mansion with the last descendants of an aristocratic family. According to his doctor, who recommends this estate turned bed-and-breakfast, "The mother was the last representative of a princely stock, degenerate in both parts and fortune" (Stevenson 184). Inheriting only the family madness, this woman then produced two children, one son and one daughter. Locals speculate as to whether she married their father (purportedly a criminal) or whether the children are "bastards" (184). A family portrait hangs in the guest's room at "the residencia" of "a woman, still young" (188). The protagonist and narrator reports that, although it appears to be very old, "to judge by the vivacity of the attitude, the eyes and the features, I might have been beholding in a mirror the image of life" (188). The portrait's "vivacity" is produced in part by the illusion of the returned gaze, which creates

a sense of the sinister and the seductive: “her eyes, of a very golden brown, held mine with a look; and her face, which was perfectly shaped, was yet marred by a cruel, sullen, and sensual expression” (188). At this point, he has only met the son, and is struck by the resemblance between the boy and the picture: “I stood a while, unpleasantly attracted and wondering at the oddity of the resemblance” (188). Next, he meets the boy’s mother, who also resembles the portrait. Both mother and son are “imbecile[s]” (192). Only the last family member he meets, Olalla (who also resembles the ancestral portrait) has not been affected by the mental degeneration that runs in her family. He falls in love with her, but she resists him because she fears passing on her family’s degeneracy.

To a degree, “Olalla” follows Romantic depictions of portraiture as evidencing the inner aspects of the subject. At the same time, Stevenson highlights the possibility that a portrait, and the body it depicts, may be misleading. Comparing the portrait with its living descendants, Stevenson’s protagonist remarks that “the faces of today were struck as sharply from the mint as the face of two centuries ago But the intelligence (that more precious heirloom) was degenerate” (194). Although the portrait of a beautiful ancestor entices the hero and increases his attraction to the living girl, its “difference” is a sign of her eventual degeneration (202). The portrait’s resemblance to Olalla and her mentally degenerate, blood-drinking mother seems eerily deceptive as “it followed [him] with eyes of paint”: “I knew it to be like, and marvelled at the tenacity of type in that declining race; but the likeness was swallowed up in difference” (202). Here he notes two differences and two resemblances: Olalla and her mother. Her mother resembles the ancestral portrait, but her eyes convey her mental decline. Olalla also resembles the portrait, but differs because she lacks the cruelty evidenced in the portrait’s expression

(“the ill-significance that offended and attracted me in the painting” [Stevenson 193]). In her discussion of the uncanny resemblance trope in Gothic fiction, Kamilla Elliott argues that “resemblance is not the binary opposite, the antagonist of difference, for it incorporates difference” (31-32). Although the portrait of Olalla’s ancestor stamps the “type,” the protagonist identifies each family member by comparing differences between the likeness and that which is like.

“Olalla” depicts a popularized version of evolutionary theory that emphasizes biological determinism over adaptation. Olalla warns the protagonist that they cannot marry because degeneration is inevitable; by remaining single, she is acting for the greater good. Her inheritance is clearly feminized and exoticized: the narrator tells us that the mother’s promiscuity and sexual voracity are responsible for the continuation of this rural (and hence ‘uncivilized’) Spanish line. The feminine, the exotic, and the primitive are, as many critics have noted, defining features of the monstrous figure in degeneration narratives. However, as Piya Pal-Lipinski argues in her challenge to Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, “nineteenth-century aesthetic constructions of exoticism” were not universally Orientalist, and the image of “the exotic woman” could be more than “a product of a totalizing gaze” (xx). In other words, these exotic, feminized figures were not necessarily depicted in the same way, nor do they necessarily mean the same thing in all Victorian texts. “Olalla” appears to meet the orientalist model, and to express an un-ironic fear of hereditary taint. It offers a stereotypical Gothic portrait of Spain as a

suitable location for the primitive, the sensual, and the cruel. This is not equally true for all Gothic fiction, however.⁶⁵

Like the portraits that seduce the heroes and villains of *The Ghost-Seer*, *The Monk*, and *Tales of the Dead*, the portrait that fascinates Stevenson's hero has a pornographic quality. While Carmilla's portrait reproduces, the fatal portrait of "The Family Portrait" (*Tales of the Dead*) leads the hero to his ideal match, and the portrait of the Virgin Mary in *The Monk* is an illusion that leads Ambrosio to Satan, the portrait in "Ollala" both increases the hero's attraction to Olalla, and warns him of the potential danger of marrying her. In this case, resemblance heightens the attraction – as it does for the hero of "The Family Portraits" – and repulses. Paradoxically, the portrait indicates Olalla's unsuitableness for healthy reproduction, not only because of its resemblance to her mad relatives, but because it is too sexy; in particular, it exhibits a "sensual expression" (188). This again alludes to the notion, as discussed in the previous chapter, that an excessive sexual appetite was linked to degeneracy and infertility, and, as Diane Mason notes, this medicalization of sexuality contributed to a parallel sexualization of illness. Hence Olalla and her family are sexy because they are sick and sick because they are sexy. In this tale, portraits may encourage reproduction, and therefore contribute to degeneration, or they may warn against reproduction by documenting degeneration. Either way, the portrait plays a role in reproduction, but does not reproduce itself.

⁶⁵ For example, *Carmilla*'s Styrian setting need not be a direct political commentary about Eastern Europe or about Styrian or Hungarian culture, as much as it is a remote, forested location that the English reader would probably not have visited. For Pal-Lipinski, the exotic woman sometimes represents a more appealing way of life or a type of enlightened progress rather than regression. For example, Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* depicts foreign influence as contributing to evolution, rather than devolution. Pal-Lipinski argues that Stoker depicts ancient Egypt as more modern than twentieth-century Britain, and therefore recovering the past is essential to moving forward (xx, 105-106).

Like Carmilla, Bram Stoker's female lead in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* seems to be produced as much by art as biology. The living female character, Margaret Trelawny, is doubled by an ancient Egyptian Queen whose mummy has been removed from its tomb and brought to England in the hopes of reviving her according to the Queen's specifications. Queen Tera, following a belief in the multiplicity of the human subject, developed a plan to return, not only her soul, but her body after death. Margaret's father and another Egyptologist interpret the inscriptions on the tomb as explaining that the Queen's "body could become astral at command, and so move, particle by particle, and becomes whole again when and where required" (Stoker 130). The goal of the Egyptologists, led by Margaret's father, is to bring Tera to life according to her instructions. However, the revival of Tera's image, Stoker suggests, has already occurred. Margaret's mother died in labour and Margaret was born after her death, and, at the moment of her birth, her father was "in a trance in the tomb" (206). Margaret's father remarks that "She is unlike her mother; but in both feature and colour she is a marvellous resemblance to the *pictures* of Queen Tera" (136 [italics mine]). Margaret also has a strange birthmark on her wrist which resembles the wound on Tera's (160, 207). This mysterious image transference is, according to Kate Hebblethwaite, connected to Stoker's interest in the concept of maternal impressions⁶⁶: "Stoker was much taken with the notion that birthmarks were either a direct result of 'maternal impression,' the representation of an event experienced by a mother during pregnancy, or a physical manifestation of a

⁶⁶ Although this idea does not originate in the Victorian period. See Ross Hagen's "A Warning to England: Monstrous births, teratology and feminine power in Elizabethan broadside ballads" in *Horror Studies* 4.1 (April 2013): 21-41.

past-life memory” (Hebblethwaite 268).⁶⁷ This popular notion also appears in Arthur Machen’s short story, “The Great God Pan,” in which a drawing proves that the shape-shifting, name-changing Helen Vaughn is the offspring of a woman who has seen the goat-footed God. This vision, artificially induced by a doctor by performing brain surgery on the mother, results in her production of this woman whose Satanic influence kills. The mother’s impressions form her child, and the portrait proves the lineage: Helen resembles her mother, but the eyes of the portrait reveal her Satanic origin. In Machen’s and Stoker’s tales, images reproduce with the help of biological conception and through imitation on contact.

However, this apparently scientific explanation is discounted in Stoker’s tale: “It could not be any birthmark reproducing what had been in the mother’s mind; for Mrs. Trelawny had never seen the pictures” (207). The inevitable conclusion is that Queen Tera has already partially resurrected herself via astral projection (206-7). At least, framed by Tera’s objects, she appears uncannily like the ancient Queen. Her admirer and the novel’s narrator, Malcolm, wonders whether he has been in love with an Egyptologist’s daughter or an ancient Egyptian Queen: “How could I believe that there was no Margaret at all; but just an animated image . . . !” (206). At first, it appears that Tera has projected her physical self into the future, but is inhabited by another spirit that in combination creates Margaret as he knows her. According to the ancient inscriptions,

⁶⁷ Stoker provides some clues to the state of scientific knowledge at the time of writing. His protagonist tells us that “As of yet we know nothing of what goes to create or evoke the active spark of life. We have no knowledge of the methods of conception; of the laws which govern molecular or foetal growth, of the final influences which attend birth. Year by year, day by day, hour by hour, we are learning; but the end is far, far off” (186-7). Stevenson, too, professes a collective ignorance of the mysteries of human reproduction: “That a child should be born of its mother, that it should grow and clothe itself (we know not how) with humanity, and put on inherited looks, and turn its head with the manner of one ascendant, and offer its hand with the gesture of another, are wonders dulled for us by repetition” (198).

Tera demands to be released through an elaborate occult ritual, but this may merely be a stage in the process already set in motion by the Queen.

Throughout the novel, the question of whether Margaret is, or will become, Tera is ever-present; as Pal-Lapinski observes, “The insidious and almost imperceptible hybridization of Margaret’s body is at the center of the text’s anxieties” (104). The original 1903 ending suggests that Tera has temporarily possessed Margaret (her likeness) in order to bring about the process of her complete resurrection. Hebblethwaite summarizes: “Neither reincarnated nor resurrected, Tera has quite literally become a ‘new woman’ through transmutation” (xxx). In the second ending, added in 1912,⁶⁸ it is uncertain whether Margaret has become Tera, or whether Tera has simply left an impression on the young couple. In this version, Margaret wears Tera’s robes and jewels to marry Malcolm, and her double, although she has corporeally vanished, remains with them, as Malcolm remarks that “We often think of the great Queen, and we talk of her freely” (250). Clearly, even if she has not been revived, she has, or at least her objects have, influenced the creation of Margaret, Malcolm’s perception of Margaret, and their relationship. Margaret Trelawny has been Tera in one way or another all along, both in image and anagrammatically in name, but when Margaret is reunited with Tera’s Jewels, clothing, and artifacts, the dead Queen is fully realized in the modern woman. This is suggested in Malcolm’s perception of her surrounded by ancient Egyptian artifacts. Recalling their first meeting, Malcolm describes his beloved as

⁶⁸ There is some doubt as to whether or not Stoker wrote the 1912 ending, but it is the most commonly circulated version of the text to date (Hebblethwaite xli, 245).

A Princess! . . . A queenly figure! Tall and slim, bending, swaying, undulating as the lily or the lotus. . . For ornament in her hair she wore an old Egyptian jewel, a tiny crystal disc, set between rising plumes carved in lapis lazuli. On her wrist was a broad bangle or bracelet of antique work, in the shape of a pair of spreading wings wrought in gold with the feathers made of coloured gems. (Stoker 64)

Although Malcolm's perception dominates the text, the influence of the artifacts in shaping Margaret is noted not only by Malcolm, but by Margaret herself. She claims that she has "always taken them for granted" and tells Malcolm: "I have noticed the same thing now and again with family pictures, and the way they are taken for granted by the family" (90-91). Her father's collection takes the place of portraits and traditional heirlooms, leaving Margaret poised to inherit Tera's legacy. Meilee D. Bridges notes the active role of the inanimate in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, arguing that it depicts "The danger of ancient artifacts acquiring the sinister power to objectify and possess their owners" (146). Indeed, according to Bridges, "[t]his inversion of subject-object relations" noted above "occurs to a greater degree as Margaret comes more and more under the spell of her father's collection and especially the mummy of Queen Tera" (144). Karen E. Macfarlane also argues that in this and other turn-of-the-century mummy fiction, "reanimated mummies move easily out of their stable positions as artifacts or relics and enter the Western symbolic order as acting subjects" (5). It is not only the Queen's mummy that reanimates, however. Tera's portraits and her personal adornments hold a strange power over those who come into contact with them, and particularly those who live with them. The Sargeant investigating the mysterious incident of Margaret's father's

sudden coma insists that “we generally find that when crime is done, or attempted, it’s people, not things, that are at the bottom of it” (Stoker 66). This proves to be wishful thinking, because “things” are crucial for Tera’s revival.

Stevenson’s tale of miscegenation averted, “Ollala,” depicts art as dangerously seductive, but also potentially able to warn against reproduction, while in Machen’s “The Great God Pan” and Stokers’ *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, art influences, or generates in place of, biological reproduction. Machen and Stevenson speak to an earnest fear of degeneration. Stoker, like Machen, suggests that life in the womb is subject to influences beyond the biological, but for Stoker, these interventions are potentially positive. All three tales share the rhetoric of evolutionary progress and regress that characterizes degeneration narratives.

Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, parodies the stereotypical degeneration narrative. For Wilde, art plays a central role in creating the individual – or rather, in the individual’s self creation. Despite Patrick Bratlinger’s claim that Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* “traces an atavistic descent into criminal self-indulgence” (233), Wilde suggests that the individual’s development through art is more important than genetic inheritance. Like Stoker’s Egyptomania-inspired *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, Wilde’s novel is preoccupied with cultural, rather than biological inheritance, but goes even farther by dismissing biological motherhood altogether. Wilde, the product of an Egyptomaniac and a writer, parodically evokes the discourse of degeneration in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

4.1 Lady Hamilton's Legacy

Joris-Karl Huysmans' novel, *À Rebours*, which Wilde references to the point of plagiarism, opens with a description of its protagonist's ancestral portraits, emphasizing their progressive degeneration. He traces this degeneration to a single portrait:

It was a strange, sly face, with pale, drawn features; the cheekbones were punctuated with cosmetic commas of rouge, the hair was plastered down and bound with a string of pearls, and the thin, painted neck emerged from the starched pleats of a ruff. . . . In this picture . . . the defects of an impoverished stock and the excess of lymph in the blood were already apparent. Since then, the degeneration of this ancient house had clearly followed a regular course, with the men becoming less manly . . .

(Huysmans17)

Wilde repeats this scene in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but with a difference. Near the end of the novel, when Dorian wanders through his family's portrait gallery, reflecting on his life of vice, he stops to contemplate one portrait closely:

his mother with her Lady Hamilton face, and her moist wine-dashed lips – he knew what he had got from her. He had got from her his beauty, and his passion for the beauty of others. She laughed at him in her loose Bacchante dress. There were wine leaves in her hair. The purple spilled from the cup she was holding. The carnations of the painting had withered,

but the eyes were still wonderful in their depth and brilliancy of colour.

They seemed to follow him wherever he went. (Wilde 122)⁶⁹

This reference to Lady Hamilton is quite detailed. Since Emma Hamilton was painted numerous times by several artists “as a Bacchante,” Wilde might be referring to a specific painting, but he could also be referring to the series as a whole, since there are several that meet his description. Like the oft-painted actresses who played Lady Macbeth (see chapter two), Emma Hamilton was a celebrity. She was painted as “a Bacchante” by Joshua Reynolds, Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, and George Romney (see *fig. 8, 9, 10 and 11*). Wilde’s description of Dorian’s mother’s portrait very closely matches several portraits of Lady Hamilton, although he seems to have invented this one by amalgamating several. The portrait that most closely resembles Wilde’s description is Vigée-Lebrun’s portrait of *Emma Hart, the Future Lady Hamilton, as Ariadne* (*fig. 11*), which features a drooping goblet. However, none of the portraits appear to include carnations; given his personal propensity for this flower, it is likely Wilde invented this detail, adding his own authorial stamp to yet another copy of Emma as a Bacchante.

⁶⁹ This passage was added to Dorian’s family gallery in the 1891 novel, but is absent from the original serial publication.



Figure 8 (left): Engraving after Reynolds' *Emma Hart as a Bacchante*, 1784

Figure 9 (center): Engraving after one of Romney's *Emma as a Bacchante*, 1785

Figure 10 (right): Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Emma Hamilton as a Bacchante*, 1791



Figure 11 Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Emma Hart, the Future Lady Hamilton, as Ariadne*, 1790 (Baillio 88)

Huysmans depicts the portrait gallery as evidence of moral and physical degeneration and a partial explanation for the eccentricities of his decadent protagonist. Wilde's reenactment of the portrait gallery scene in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* questions the value of genetic inheritance against cultural inheritance. In this comparison of Dorian to Lady Hamilton, Wilde, although participating in a discourse about degeneration, moves away from the issue of biological inheritance to focus instead on the influence of art in the creation of the individual. Following the description of his mother as Lady Hamilton, Dorian concludes a perusal of his family portraits with the reflection that "one had ancestors in literature, as well as in one's own race, nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them, and certainly with an influence of which one was more absolutely conscious" (122). A few years earlier, in "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," Wilde's narrator remarks that "It is Art, and Art only that reveals us to ourselves" (91). He explains that encounters with art can make us "aware that we have passions we never dreamed" because actors, artist, musicians, and writers "have given form and substance to what was within us" and therefore "they have enabled us to realize our personality" (91). Such is the experience Wilde's omniscient narrator describes as Dorian contemplates his mother's "Lady Hamilton face." Like "his mother," Dorian parasitically feeds on the adoration of others, and his good name hides a series of moral transgressions and broken taboos. The implication of Dorian's reflections, particularly because he names and describes a famous portrait, seems to be that Lady Hamilton is (metaphorically) his mother. He takes after his mother only as a type, and perhaps more importantly, he suggests that he has something in common with a celebrity. Lady Hamilton, the last in his list of adulterous relatives of dubious origins, was not an

aristocrat by birth, but a blacksmith's daughter. She made her fortune (or at least a living) by becoming a mistress and later a wife. She was also mother to several illegitimate children. This tour of Dorian's family portrait gallery suggests that Dorian's status as an aristocrat is (and perhaps all such positions are) counterfeit. Lady Hamilton, who changed her name several times before her marriage to Sir William Hamilton, exemplifies Wilde's ideal of individualism: the force of her personality and her self-creation through art made people take notice of her and made her a "Lady." Not only has Wilde suggested a likeness between Lady Hamilton and Dorian, but a likeness worth emulating, since Hamilton herself was made in part by her portraits. With more success than Sibyl Vane, Emma Hamilton was also self-made through her art. Like Dorian's fatal portrait, Lady Hamilton's "face" had a life of its own. Unlike Dorian, who seemingly gains immortality while his painting ages, her portraits retained the immortal power of the fatal women she poses as, while her own life was actually somewhat precarious (conversely, Dorian's portrait suffers while he remains youthful and free).

Emma Hamilton was also created by the artists she inspired and the men she charmed. Her first advancement in the world, the first step in the metamorphosis from an uneducated servant into a Lady, was becoming a mistress. She became the mistress of a series of gentlemen, but her celebrity status began while she was the mistress of an Earl. It was during this time that she was first painted by George Romney, and Flora Fraser suggests that the less-than-wealthy Earl intended to profit from Emma's modeling career (22). The Earl's uncle, Sir William Hamilton, was "so struck by her 'exquisite beauty' that he . . . commissioned Reynolds to paint her portrait" (Fraser 38) (*fig. 8*). Sir William became a collector of paintings of Emma as a Bacchante, took her on as a mistress, and

eventually married her. Because of their ‘long engagement,’ many portraits of Lady Hamilton, such as Vigée-Lebrun’s, are pictures of “the *future* Lady Hamilton” (see *fig. 11*, italics mine).⁷⁰ Emma’s career as an actress/model takes off when she begins her life with Sir William, a collector of antiquities. Emma’s ‘attitudes,’ immortalized in paintings and prints, were influential, according to Lynda Nead, in beginning the nineteenth-century fashion for *tableaux vivants* (Nead 70). According to Goethe, a guest in their home, Sir William “has had a Greek costume made for her” and that Emma

Dressed in this, . . . lets down her hair and, with a few shawls, gives so much variety to her poses, gestures, expressions, etc., that the spectator can hardly believe his eyes. He sees what thousands of artists would have liked to express realized before him in movements and surprising transformations – standing, kneeling, sitting, reclining, serious, sad, playful, ecstatic, contrite, alluring, threatening, anxious, one pose follows another without a break. . . . The old knight idolizes her and is quite enthusiastic about everything she does. In her he has found all the antiquities, all the profiles of Sicilian coins, even the Appollo Belvedere. This much is certain: as a performance it’s like nothing you ever saw before in your life. (Goethe, qtd. in Fraser 121)

Goethe clearly admires Emma’s abilities, but at the same time, he finds delight in the image of the old man adoring the charming young woman who brings his collection to life, noting Sir William’s role in the creation of Emma, the entertainer. Goethe is not

⁷⁰ Interestingly, Vigée-Lebrun herself, most famous for her portraits of Marie Antoinette, was also from humble origins, was also “self-taught,” and, as a woman working in a professional sphere, was managed by her husband (Baillio 7).

alone in this observation; another fan of Emma's performances, the Comte d'Espinchal, writes in 1791 that "It is apparently to please her benefactor, a great amateur of the arts and of Antiquity that Mrs. Hart learned to execute these different *attitudes*" (d'Espinchal qtd. in Baillio 88). Sir William is reported to have "said he had married Emma because 'she alone of the sex exhibited the beautiful lines he found on his Etruscan vases'" (qtd. in Faxon 270). Sir Horace Walpole, author of the Gothic classic *The Castle of Otranto*, remarked that "Sir William has actually married his gallery of status!" (qtd. in Faxon 270). Sir William replaces Charles Greville (the unscrupulous Earl) as a sort of Lord Henry Wotton to Emma. George Romney, her most devoted portraitist, takes the role of Basil Hallward. Romney, like Greville, saw potential in Emma, using a portrait of her for advertisement purposes (Fraser 26). Romney's numerous portraits of Emma as a Bacchante and other classical figures seem to have set a trend followed by subsequent painters.

If there is something of Sir William and something of the artists who painted her in "the future Lady Hamilton[']s" portraits, the tendency to depict her as a fatal woman – Circe, Medea, Bacchantes – suggests something about public perception of her "obscure origins" combined with her beauty and talents (Compte d'Espinchal qtd. in Baillio 88). It is this "beauty" that Dorian "has got from her" through his apparently counterfeit aristocratic lineage. It is her work as an actress, hostess, mistress, and model that elevates the girl born Emily Lyons from a life of obscurity among the labouring portion of society and allows her to assume a title. Sibyl Vane might have shared this fate, Dorian tells her when she disappoints him (although Hamilton's achievement of the title "Lady" ultimately only served to save her "face," since she dies in poverty as a corpulent

alcoholic [Fraser]). It is no accident then that Wilde uses this image of Lady Hamilton to comment on class, art, “influence,” and sexual relationships.

We know what Dorian has inherited from his mother – “what *he* had got from *her*” – but yet another implication of this resemblance is that Dorian’s portrait belongs to a lineage of feminine portraits. Although I’ve eschewed the categorization of Gothic fiction into male and female modes, the representation of portraits of men and women in Gothic fiction differs. Dorian’s portrait has less in common with the ancestral portrait of John Melmoth in Wilde’s great-uncle’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* than it has with those encountered by Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Ambrosio in *The Monk*. The feminine portrait represents beauty, charm, and, if good, marriagibility, if bad, seduction. Although Wilde’s novel focuses on relationships between men, this focus is enabled by images of fatal women, often as points of reference to articulate these connections: Sibyl Vane, her mother, Lady Hamilton’s portrait, the women Dorian supposedly ruins, and the widows, divorcées, and adulteresses that hover in the background of Dorian’s escapades with Sir Henry and Basil. Although the type is so prevalent, and even, as Wilde suggests in “The Decay of Lying,” as an image that women model themselves after, in his work, these figures change from the fatal Medeas, Circes, witches, Bacchantes, and dangerous seductresses to jokes, jokesters, hostesses, and sphinxes without secrets.

In focusing on Wilde’s reference to Lady Hamilton, I may very well be guilty of painting a very different picture of his fatal women in the style of Walter Pater, who, according to Wilde, “has put into the portrait of Monna Lisa [sic] something that Lionardo [sic] never dreamed of” (“The Critic” 238). It may be true that I have “reveal[ed] . . . a secret, of which, in truth” a portrait of Lady Hamilton “knows nothing”

(“The Critic” 239). However, “when the work is finished it has, as it were, an independent life of its own, and may deliver a message far other than that which was put into its lips” (Wilde, “The Critic” 240). Unlike Dorian’s portrait, Lady Hamilton’s is not a significant narratological actor, although it is a minor element of character description. However, as I’ve suggested, it is a potentially significant actor in ANT analysis. I have argued that Lady Hamilton is a significant reference, and in the process, I have also suggested that Dorian Gray is modeled as much on the fatal woman archetype as the Gothic villain.

On the one hand, Wilde’s novel suggests that the artwork reveals the artist, not the subject. In painting Dorian, Basil finds that “at the same time that it obliterates the object (the ‘sitter’), it telegraphs its desire *for* the object” (Bruhm, *Reflecting* 73). Basil Hallward is at first afraid to exhibit his depiction of Dorian because, as he says, “every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter” (8). Basil’s fear of self revelation – of showing his “soul” to “the world” – prevents him from showing his work (13). His artistic goal is to efface himself and create beauty without showing himself. Explaining his reluctance to reveal his portrait of Dorian, Basil tells Sir Henry that “Someday I will show the world what it is; and it for that reason the world shall never see my portrait of Dorian Gray” (13). In the paradigm of Wilde’s theory Basil can never “show the world as it is” because any artist can only show the world as *they* see it; or, as the narrator of “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” explains, “Art . . . can never really show us the external world. All that it shows us is our own soul, the one world of which we have any real cognizance” (91). And yet, Wilde states in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that “To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim,” corroborating Lord

Henry's comment that "The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame," summarizing a theme of perception (183). Lord Henry's notion of showing the world itself differs from Basil's. In Lord Henry's view, the world would only really see itself as itself if it were to confront its own perceptions.

On the other hand, Lord Henry seems to contradict the idea that art reveals the artist, because it apparently reveals its audience (but only to those perceiving that audience). In this scheme, the only thing not revealed by art is the subject chosen by the artist. Dorian's claims that portraits are "fatal" and that a portrait "has a life of its own" is true, in the sense that, like a person, it may accrue a reputation and social context (100). The image, once created, separated from its subject and creator, like Lady Hamilton's, becomes upon wider circulation increasingly independent – to the point that a "Lady Hamilton face" means more than "Lady Hamilton" herself (it "had a life of its own"). Wilde's aphorisms seem at first contradictory, but are in fact mutually reinforcing. In addition, Daniel A. Novak suggests that the story of Dorian's portrait comments on the very impossibility of originality, since "reproducing what Lord Henry had produced, Basil Hallward's portrait might be thought of as a reproduction at two removes – or perhaps three" considering that "Lord Henry's influence is borrowed from" Huysmans's novel (87). However, Lord Henry and his influence is only introduced to Dorian after Basil reveals an infatuation with his model; as Norman Page explains, Dorian "is first 'created' by the artist as an ideal and then 'recreated' by Lord Henry" (21). In this model, creation is never linear, but always mutable, and degeneration is something entirely separate from biology. Once he has been created in the form of a portrait, however, Dorian is able to reflect on this image and use it to further define himself. This

moment of self-discovery (or, discovering the view others have of him) occurs when he sees the finished painting and laments its eternity, cursing the portrait with his wish that “the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now!” (26). Dorian is acutely aware that the portrait represents only a momentary view held by others, and that he will change, beginning at the very moment of seeing this image, predicting that “[i]t will mock me someday – mock me horribly!” (26). Dorian gets his wish, and keeps up the appearance of innocence, enjoying the benefits of the young Dorian, while acquiring the knowledge of what to do with such advantages – a learning process that might very well be compared to Lady Hamilton’s rise to fame and prosperity.

While it may seem that Lady Hamilton’s portraits belong to an earlier, auratic mode of art, in contrast to the 1890s, when painting competes and collaborates with photography, Dorian’s remarks on Lady Hamilton as a “face” remind us of the late eighteenth-century relationship between painted portraits, celebrity actors, and mechanical reproduction. Although Hamilton was famous for her private performances and modeling for original paintings, her ‘attitudes’ were reproduced in engravings. Even in the multiple ‘original’ paintings of Hamilton, we see repetition, and hence the phrase “Lady Hamilton face” means more than looking like Lady Hamilton: it means a reproducible image, separate from the auratic artwork or the model as a personality. Lady Hamilton’s celebrity is perpetuated by simulation (portraits and prints), but how does this differ from photographic simulation? In his “Little History of Photography,” Walter Benjamin remarks on the phenomenon of looking for evidence in photographs. This process, as I’ve described in the previous chapters, has been underway for some time. However, since photographs can be produced more quickly than paintings, and their

likeness more exact, they are expected to yield more evidence of the subject's character. The photograph demystifies what Romantic artists attempted to depict in their portraits: the essence of those barely perceptible, continually shifting movements of the subject. Of that seemingly indefinable essence that Romantic portrait painters tried to re-create, "Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret" (Benjamin, "Little History" 510). While the portraitist attempts to re-create this illusion, the camera dissects it: in his comparison of filmmaking to surgery, Benjamin argues that "The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, whereas the cinematographer penetrates deeply into its tissue" ("The Work of Art" 263). Although Wilde's depiction of the relationship between model, artist, and portrait is applicable to any media, the portrait's role as evidence of Dorian's crimes reflects the growing interest in photography as a forensic tool – and the attendant expectation that photography can provide proof that is elusive even in the reality it depicts.

Contrary to this increased pressure for pictures to accurately report the subject's interiority and intentions, Gothic writers often portray a reversal of the supposed sequence of representation and represented. Instead of documenting the biological destiny of their subjects, images – whether paintings or photographs – set the precedent for the subject's behavior and appearance. This is the phenomenon that Wilde remarks on in "The Decay of Lying": "a certain curious and fascinating type of beauty, invented and emphasized by two imaginative painters, has so influenced life that whenever one goes to a private view or to an artistic salon one sees . . . the mystic eyes of Rossetti's dream" because "A great artist invents a type, and Life tries to copy it" (179). Instead of merely documenting reproduction, images reproduce. Instead of taking after his mother, Dorian

Gray takes after a woman's portrait. Dorian's soul is held in a portrait – a portrait spawned by other portraits.

In “Olalla,” portraits document degeneration, while in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, pictures reproduce in place of people. In Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, the subject of our next chapter, this cliché returns, once again featuring a famous Romantic painter. The counterfeit of Caroline de Winter and the simulacra of Rebecca haunt du Maurier's heroine, shaping this character's development rather than documenting it.

Chapter 5

5 “Rebecca, Rebecca, Rebecca”

Like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* centres on a portrait, but this time it is neither supernatural nor entirely visible. More precisely, there are two portraits doubling one another: the ekphrastic counterfeit portrait of Caroline de Winter, and the shifting simulacral image of Rebecca that is described in the terms of portraiture. Rebecca, although she is the subject of the novel, is a haunting image. Nina Auerbach perceptively notes that Rebecca “is less a coherent character than a series of discordant images” (121). While the literal portrait at the centre of Manderley and the narrative reminds us of Gothic portrait conventions because of its style and period, it remains fixed in place. It is the representation of Rebecca as a metaphorical portrait that “took shape” and “stepp[ed] from her shadow world like a living figure from a picture frame” (272). At the same time that her image is constantly evoked, we are never permitted a clear, static view of Rebecca. The novel pivots around this phantom of paradoxically ideal yet monstrous femininity that is always absent, but yet always a haunting presence. Rebecca, like her literary predecessors, is a still image against which the other characters are compared and defined. The ‘real’ Rebecca remains a mystery, while her phantom reveals the remaining characters. This image doubles the narrator (who is also the heroine) and serves as a point of comparison for all the novel’s female characters. As in Peter Melville Logan’s description of the triangular relationship between fetish, fetishist, and critic, in which the fetishist and not the fetish is the object of study (8), Rebecca’s image – as an

actor, rather than a mediator – tells us more about the other characters than about Rebecca.

The first appearance of the image of sinister femininity that characterizes Rebecca occurs in chapter one, in which the narrator introduces Manderley by way of a dream. In this dream, the trees and shrubs outside of the estate have become overgrown and appear monstrous, and “Nature” is personified as a fatal woman. The miscegenation in the garden is reminiscent of the degeneration threat associated with late Victorian vampire women: “No hand had checked their progress, and they had gone native now, rearing to monster height without a bloom, black and ugly as the nameless parasites that grew beside them” (du Maurier 2). The nineteenth-century degeneration narrative is echoed in images of “unnatural growth,” particularly the description of “[t]he rhododendrons” which “had entered into alien marriage with a host of nameless shrubs, poor bastard things that clung about their roots as though conscious of their spurious origin” (2). Annamarie Jagose notes that this passage contains “histrionically mixed metaphors of miscegenation, masturbation, monstrousness, and primitivism, with their tropological insinuation of homosexuality” (363). As I have shown in chapter three, masturbation and homosexuality were linked together and associated with infertility. This suggestion of miscegenation, combined with the “ugly form” of a strange, “forgotten” plant and its “unnatural growth” is proleptic of Rebecca’s deformed uterus and the cancerous “growth [which] was deep-rooted” in her (unspecified) reproductive organs (3, 367). Casting nature in this role is a trope in nineteenth-century literature, both fiction and nonfiction. For example, Richard von Kraft-Ebing describes unchecked “Nature” as one who “rises in her power, and leads the helpless, unprotected innocent into dangerous by-paths”

(295). More famous is Tennyson's characterization of "Nature" as a *femme fatale* at war with God ("In Memoriam A.H.H.").⁷¹ As well as these overtly sexualized images, including the personification of the trees "intermingled in a strange embrace" (1), this description contains a number of other, less evident, sexual connotations. Particularly, "Menace" and "halfbreed" are terms du Maurier used to describe sexual attraction and herself as half male, respectively (du Maurier 1, 3; Forster 221-22; Horner and Zlosnik 10). Du Maurier's definition of herself as composed of "half" of each gender is tied to her dissatisfaction with available models of sexuality. Although these words are du Maurier's, they are related to contemporaneous discourses of sexuality which are reinforced later in the novel. Today, du Maurier might be called 'bisexual,' but that is not to say it would be a more accurate description of her. Amongst the many sexualized plants in the overgrown garden, "[t]here was another plant too, some halfbreed from the woods, whose seed had been scattered long ago beneath the trees and then forgotten, and now, marching in unison with the ivy, thrust its ugly form like a giant rhubarb towards the soft grass where the daffodils had blown" (du Maurier 3). Du Maurier's description of a "halfbreed" plant in this opening chapter signals the novel's theme of gender performance, and particularly, failure to adequately perform one's gender role.

⁷¹ Throughout the poem, but particularly in cantos 54 and 55:

Are God and Nature then at strife
 That Nature lends such evil dreams?
 . . .
 Who trusted God was love indeed
 And love Creation's final law ---
 Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
 With ravine, shriek'd against his creed ---
 (55. 5-6; 56.13-16)

After describing her dream of Manderley overrun by nature, the narrator represents her younger self as having significant problems becoming a woman. Like Pinocchio, the narrator wants very badly to become ‘real’ and her personal project seems to be growing up; or rather, affecting the persona of a grown up, since she is already biologically, chronologically, and experientially an adult at the outset of her adventures. Her desire to be perceived as an adult is expressed in her fetishism of Rebecca as a sophisticated lady. This image of ideal, alluring womanhood is invoked by the narrator when her younger self exclaims, “I wish I was a woman of about thirty-six dressed in black satin with a string of pearls” (du Maurier 37). The image that the narrator holds of ideal, sophisticated womanhood, which appears before Rebecca is properly introduced, implies maturity, femininity, and wealth all at once. This conflation recurs throughout the novel, and in such a way that it raises potential problems with these categories. This definition of adulthood is bound up with patriarchy and capitalism (although I promised not to name them as *causes*). Her marriage to Maxim de Winter seems to provide the ideal situation for the heroine to achieve this metamorphosis from poor to rich, single to married, child to adult; yet this role continues to elude her, even after the honeymoon.

This focus on identity as artifice culminates in the novel’s pivotal event: the masquerade party. The newly-wed de Winters host a fancy dress ball, and the narrator, feeling underestimated by her new husband, proposes to surprise him with her costume. Mrs. Danvers suggests, privately, to the narrator that she model her costume after one of the portraits in the family gallery. The uncanny portrait in this case is not of Rebecca, but of someone whom Rebecca masqueraded as; at Mrs. Danvers’ suggestion, the heroine dons the same costume. Significantly, like Agnes in *The Monk*, the narrator/heroine of

Rebecca sketches a copy of the painting in order to have her costume made, and becomes what she has created (or re-created, and co-created). The portrait is described, as is the narrator's appearance when she wears the costume, but both Rebecca and the narrator are less visible than the late eighteenth-century portrait they copy – it is a link between them, more solid and real than either of them (du Maurier 203, 234). Unfortunately for the narrator, Mrs. Danvers has played a trick on her. This was the same portrait that Rebecca copied for her costume at the last Manderley masquerade party, before she died.

Although the physical appearance of Rebecca and the narrator remains somewhat indistinct throughout the novel, the portrait of Caroline de Winter (Maxim's ancestor) "in white, with a hat in her hand" that they masquerade as is very clearly described: "It was a Raeburn" and Caroline de Winter had dark, curly hair and wore a "white dress" with "puffed sleeves," a "flounce," and a "little bodice" (de Maurier 203). The naming of the artist suggests a stock image: du Maurier's ekphrastic description matches several of Raeburn's portraits of women. In addition to the distinctiveness of Raeburn's style, this evocation simultaneously indicates the indistinctness of the subject (Caroline de Winter). Duncan Thomson remarks that Raeburn's commissioned private portraits (to which group the portrait of Maxim's ancestor would belong) are remarkably similar, bearing the style of the artist more clearly than the style of his subjects. For example, Thomson notes that the ostensibly personal portraits of Ann Pattison, Mrs. William Urquhart (c. 1812) and Margaret McDonald, Mrs. Robert Scott Moncrieff (c. 1814) are posed in the same attitude, with the same expression, style of dress, and coloring (Thomson 164-67). Moreover, nearly all of his female sitters appear in a "white dress." Although portraiture is always marked by convention to a degree, this is especially evident in Raeburn's work.

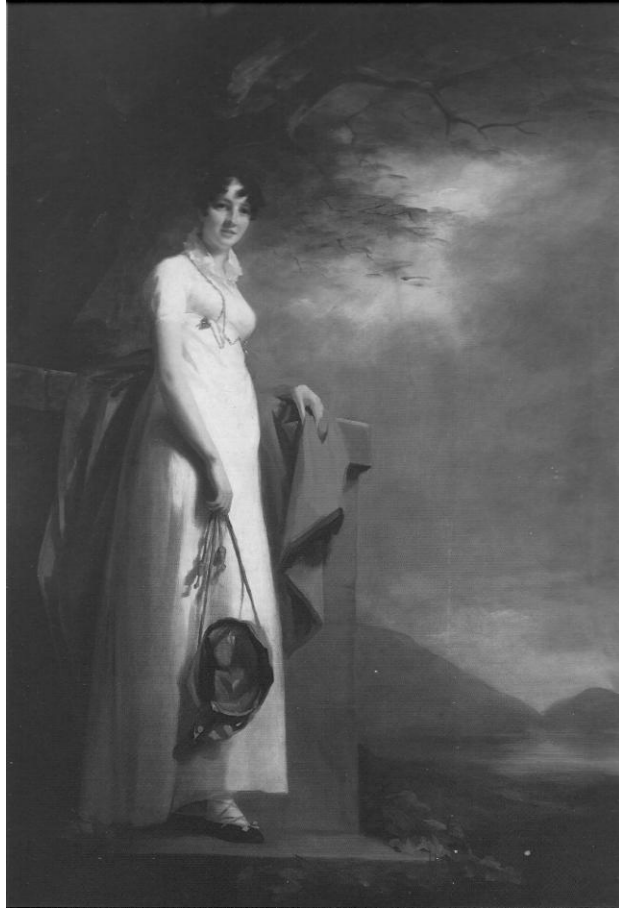


Figure 12 One of Raeburn’s many women in white, *Helen Graham, Lady Montgomery*, c. 1816 (Thomson 179)

The narrator claims that when she dons the costume designed after the portrait, she becomes “more vivid and alive” (205). Once in disguise, “no longer hampered by [her] appearance,” she feels different and begins to act differently, claiming that “My own dull personality was submerged at last” (211). When she watches her maid’s delight (and possibly envy) at this “transformation” the experience is heightened once again, almost as if the narrator were transferring “[her] own dull personality” to her maid, and leaving it behind: “Clarice stood behind my shoulder, I saw her round face beyond mine in the reflection of the looking glass, her eyes shining, her mouth a little open” (211). It is

only once she has made the change and left her “appearance” and “dull personality” behind that she snaps at the young woman in a way that is inconsistent with their relationship in the rest of the novel: “‘Give me the wig,’ I said excitedly, careful, don’t crush it, the curls mustn’t be flat” (211). Up until this point, the heroine has had difficulty speaking to the other servants in her own home with confidence, let alone ordering them to do anything.

After her transformation into Caroline de Winter, the heroine experiences the complete opposite of the appreciation she seeks from the other party-goers, discovering too late that it was this portrait that Rebecca imitated at the last masquerade ball before her death; the portrait remains the same, but it adds another aspect to the image of Rebecca. Thinking of Rebecca in that costume, the narrator explains that “From where I stood I could see the picture of Caroline de Winter facing me in the gallery. I could see the curls framing her face, and I could see the smile on her lips. I remembered the Bishop’s wife who had said to me that day I called, ‘I shall never forget her, dressed all in white, with that cloud of dark hair’” (222). This description of Rebecca only portrays the costume the narrator also wears, not Rebecca. The only difference between the two women in disguise is that Rebecca’s performance was successful.



Figure 13: film stills from the 1940 film version (© ABC/Disney/Buena Vista)



Figure 14: triumph



Figure 15: failure

Rebecca is both an ideal woman and a fatal woman because – unlike the other women in the novel – she is a successful masquer. The other female characters – the narrator, Mrs. Danvers, Beatrice – are each depicted as in some way failures in the art of performing femininity. The narrator is a child, not a woman; Beatrice is mannish and uncouth; and although her title implies she is married, Mrs. Danvers’s husband is never mentioned, her nickname is “Danny,” and, according to Giles, “she’s no oil painting” (96). Mrs. Van Hopper seems to be the only other woman who is properly a woman, although that too is attributed to her artificiality, and she accuses the narrator of being deceptive as well, with the assumption that Mr. de Winter has been seduced by the narrator’s schemes (58).

At the masquerade party, the characters’ relationship to their costumes is also significant, particularly the narrator (tragically) and Beatrice (comically). Nicola J. Watson explains that the narrator’s masquerade costume is an attempt to replicate her

image of ideal female identity: “a living simulacrum of Rebecca” who is “a figment of the narrator’s imagination” (23). Beatrice, on the other hand, is not even concerned with her failure to properly carry a costume, and, it’s suggested, her inability to ‘act’ like a woman. Maxim recounts Beatrice’s costume at a previous party which involved a wig that “came adrift”: “‘I can’t stand this damned thing,’ she said, in that blunt voice of hers, and chucked it on a chair and went through the rest of the evening with her own cropped hair” (205). At the fateful ball at which the heroine re-enacts Rebecca’s costume of Caroline de Winter, Beatrice is “a strange rather ludicrous figure in her eastern drapery” with a “veil slipping continually from her over-heated forehead” (216, 224). Beatrice is the comic double of the narrator’s failed costume, paralleling her inability to perform femininity, which Maxim implies in his criticism of his sister’s inability to masquerade (205-206).

Rebecca’s artificiality allows her to appear ideal: not only is she physically absent, but she is eventually revealed to have been fake when living. Rebecca, as it turns out, also failed to be a ‘real’ woman: Maxim claims that “she was not even normal” (du Maurier 271); her doctor reveals that although “Outwardly . . . she was a perfectly healthy woman” her reproductive organs were cancerous and that she also had “a certain malformation of the uterus” (367); and, according to Mrs. Danvers “she ought to have been a boy” (243).

In life, Rebecca was a counterfeit woman, but her ghost is a simulacrum. Like *Carmilla* and *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, *Rebecca* presents a female character whose identity depends on the image of another; like Laura and Margaret, respectively, the unnamed narrator gradually becomes Rebecca, seemingly contaminated with her image.

Initially, the narrator is identified as “very different from Rebecca,” but, as Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik observe, there is a “gradual identification between the narrator and Rebecca” (du Maurier 105; Horner and Zlosnik “Daphne” 216). One of the ways this is depicted is in the presentation of Rebecca’s posthumous presence in contrast to the narrator’s indistinctiveness. Mrs. Danvers confronts the narrator to admonish her for not being her beloved Rebecca and tells her that “It’s you that’s the shadow and the ghost,” suggesting that the narrator, not Rebecca, should be dead (246). Prior to this exchange, the new Mrs. de Winter, having previously heard Mrs. Danvers claim that Rebecca is always present in the house, wonders if the dead woman is watching her, if “I haunted her as she haunted me” (234).

In this encounter, before she encourages the narrator to commit suicide, Mrs. Danvers claims to speak for Maxim, stating that he was still jealous of Rebecca. In fact it is only Mrs. Danvers who is jealous, and in reviving the image of Rebecca as she saw her, tells us about her own obsession. Explaining Maxim’s supposed jealousy, Mrs. Danvers tells the narrator,

Of course he was jealous. So was I. So was everyone who knew her. She didn’t care. She only laughed. . . . A man had only to look at her once and be mad about her. . . . They made love to her of course, who would not? She laughed, she would come back and tell me what they had said, and what they’d done. She did not mind, it was like a game to her. Like a game. Who wouldn’t be jealous? They were all jealous, all mad for her. Mr. de Winter, Mr. Jack, Mr. Crawley, everyone who knew her, everyone who came to Manderley. (du Maurier 245)

The narrator later discovers that Mr. Crawley did not in fact like Rebecca at all, and Mr. de Winter hated her. When Mrs. Danvers discovers this too, she is also surprised and shocked.

Mrs. Danvers's speech in the West Wing is repeated after the discovery of Rebecca's body, but this time her audience includes Mr. Favell and Mr. de Winter as well as the narrator. The scene is narrated as if it is a moment of revelation, and yet, it tells us almost nothing new about Rebecca or the mystery of the body. This passage solidifies Rebecca's image, and, in the process, reveals a little more about the other characters. Colonel Julyan asks Mrs. Danvers to corroborate Favell's claim that Rebecca was romantically involved with him, and Favell asks her to corroborate his belief that Rebecca loved him. This request leads Mrs. Danvers to respond with "passion" that

She was not in love with you, or with Mr. De Winter. She was not in love with anyone. She despised all men. She was above all that . . .

Lovemaking was a game with her, only a game. She told me so. She did it because it made her laugh. It made her laugh, I tell you. She laughed at you like she did at the rest. I've known her to come back and sit on her bed and rock with laughter at the lot of you. (340)

This speech is framed by the characters' shocked reactions and Mrs. Danvers – the otherwise marginal, shadowy figure – stands in the middle of the room, surrounded by her audience. Mrs. Danvers's claims reveal as much about herself as Rebecca. She seems to prefer Rebecca's indifference, ridicule, and hatred of men to the idea that her deceased mistress was in love with any of them. Mrs. Danvers prefers the idea that Rebecca preferred her, her trusted friend and servant, to any man.

This might be a declaration of what everyone already knew: that Mrs. Danvers was infatuated with Rebecca. But the only obvious thing this speech reveals, whether it was Rebecca's 'truth' or not, is that Rebecca's romances were merely expressions of her manipulative personality. But didn't we already know this? Isn't this the gist of what Maxim has already explained to his young bride in the boathouse, and what Mrs. Danvers told the new Mrs. de Winter in Rebecca's bedroom? Doesn't everyone present already know this, in one way or another? Yet Mrs. Danvers manages to shock her audience. Despite his knowledge of Rebecca, why is it that "Maxim had gone very white" (340)? Didn't he already know that Rebecca had never loved him? In their brief reference to this scene, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik state that "both reader and narrator perceive Rebecca as a character who rejects cultural definitions of femininity . . . whose sexual identity is complex and multifaceted" (122). However, the reader and the narrator have already learned this from Mrs. Danvers and Maxim before this scene; and, as Maxim already knew this about his wife, it is not quite true that "Mrs. Danvers' version of Rebecca thus radically destabilizes Maxim's one-dimensional portrait of his first wife" (122). Nothing new about Rebecca is displayed here, only additional information about Mrs. Danvers and the narrator.

Perhaps the most significant revelation is one that only the reader is privy to: the unexpressed internal reaction of the first-person narrator. The unspoken reaction of the focal character, the narrator's younger self, is described by the narrator in the past tense: "There was something horrible in the sudden torrent of words, something horrible and unexpected. It revolted me, even though I knew . . . I wanted to run out of the room and scream and scream" (340). What did she "know"? That Rebecca was a *femme fatale* who

used men? Why would that be so revolting? That alone is nothing new or horrible or threatening. Mrs. Danvers's "words" and display of emotion have triggered something in our heroine – but have they revealed anything? Mrs. Danvers does not state anything but by negation, and our heroine is only made very uncomfortable by something unspoken and undefined. Only one thing is clear: the problem that silences the room in this instance is one of female sexuality, or, more specifically, a sexual female (the ghost of Rebecca). This moment of "know"ing seems to parallel Maxim's earlier speech in which he tells the narrator that "she [Rebecca] was not even normal," and which seems to trigger a sudden realization in the narrator. She retrospectively comments that at this moment, "The jig-saw pieces came together piece by piece, and the real Rebecca took shape and form before me, stepping from her shadow world like a living figure from a picture frame. . . . leaning down from the minstrels' gallery with a smile on her lips" (271, 272). The narrator's image of Rebecca then, has been with her all along (in the rhododendrons, in the "woman of thirty-six," and in "Rebecca's sloping hand"), but becomes all the more vivid when she learns that Rebecca "was not even normal," and confirmed by Mrs. Danvers's emotional "torrent of words." She does not, however, specify what she "already knew," leaving the reader to contend with the "jig-saw pieces."

This is only one of many instances in which Rebecca is described in the terms of portraiture. Mrs. Danvers claims that Rebecca was "Lovely as a picture" (243), and the narrator, who sees her everywhere, sees her looking down from the gallery. However, despite the continual evocation of Rebecca's portrait, or Rebecca as a portrait, we are never given an ekphrastic description of any actual picture. While the portrait of Caroline de Winter that Rebecca and the narrator masquerade as is clearly described and remains a

static, ekphrastic presence, portraits of Rebecca are discussed, but not shown. The only literal portrait of Rebecca is described by Mrs. Danvers (“she was painted on horseback”), “but Mr. de Winter did not care for it, and would not have it at Manderley” (169). Caroline de Winter’s portrait is “a Raeburn,” but the banished portrait of Rebecca is the product of an unnamed “famous artist” and is not available for the narrator to provide a more detailed description (169). Perhaps because she does not see any actual pictures of Rebecca, such as that of Caroline de Winter, she creates her own picture in her mind, and these multiple introductions of portraits and metaphorical portraits invite the reader to create their own picture of Rebecca. The narrator eventually realizes that “I had built up false pictures in my mind” (276).

In their attempts to describe Rebecca, critics easily fall into the trap set for them. Just as the narrator claims that she “knew her figure now” and “the cloud of dark hair” (which is in fact the result of a wig much like the one the narrator wore), there is a tendency to want to attribute meaning to the color and cut of Rebecca’s hair, or to her figure. Yet Rebecca is a shifting image, depending on who is talking, and, besides the wig, she changed her hair quite often. This indistinctness is something Rebecca shares with the unnamed, unassuming narrator. The question of who was the real Rebecca is one that preoccupies both the narrator and critics. Mrs. Danvers’s speech, in which she tells Jack Favell and Maxim de Winter that Rebecca did not love them, depicts a moment of revelation for the narrator. She claims to now know the truth of Rebecca, but she does not share her knowledge – perhaps because what she knows is that she recognizes herself in Rebecca’s fraudulence.

Alison Light states that “the exploration of Rebecca’s sexuality is imaginatively recast in the novel as a crime story” (“Returning” 10), suggesting that Rebecca’s sexuality, not murder or missing bodies, is the real mystery; or rather, this is the mystery that criticism of *Rebecca* attempts to solve. Critics are more often tempted to *explain* this and other ambiguous passages, and correspondingly, to cite previous critics’ guesses as to what ‘really’ happens here. This passage is one that is frequently glossed by unqualified explanatory statements, as if this lengthy scene is merely a descriptive veil ornamenting the story; as if, on other words, the text covers the story and fabula, conveying them without forming them. However, as I have made clear in my description, nothing new about Rebecca’s sexuality is revealed in Mrs. Danvers’s speech. What *is* revealed is the reaction of each character to the version of Rebecca that momentarily possesses the housekeeper.

Critical responses to the novel, with the exception of Horner and Zlosnik’s, and perhaps Mary Wings’, have tended to categorize *Rebecca* as either a heterosexual romance with women’s socio-economic doom written all over it, or a lesbian romance filled with hidden meaning (mostly about the author); both accounts insist that the novel conveys or hides meaning rather than complicates meaning – conducting, with alterations, conventions and meanings that circulated in 1938 Britain and its literature. This is not exactly the same as the reflection of the social that cultural materialists and new historicists attribute to literature, but rather, as Elaine Freedgood and Bruno Latour propose, the social and the literary mingle freely rather than merely reflecting one another.

Traditional feminist readings tend to run into two problems: firstly, flattening the novel's triangulations and converting them into a binary model, and secondly, attributing the fetishization of Rebecca to a universal male psychology. Although I agree with her claim that the horror genre is an "outlet for examination of fears and desires," I take issue with Gina Wisker's characterization of the fears and desires explored in *Rebecca* as distinctly male. Wisker notes that the narrator and Mrs. Danvers fetishize particular aspects of Rebecca, and yet, she posits that the fetishized image of Rebecca is "a product of male fantasy" (30). Although it is true that the narrator and Mrs. Danvers make reference to Rebecca's power over men, there are particular qualities that they seem to admire beyond appealing to men; for the narrator, it is the self-assured confidence and competence that she aspires to, and for Mrs. Danvers, who seems to have been very attached to Rebecca, it is her willful, selfish disposition that she found so attractive. For both women, Rebecca's socio-economic status is something they can never truly attain. Wisker positions du Maurier as responding directly to a masculine realm of thought, but the novel (and du Maurier) is not so easily categorized; instead, Wisker's claim that du Maurier's work "interrogat[es] gender representations and assumptions" seems most accurate (Wisker 19). In Wisker's analysis, the image of the fatal woman is a male construction that may appear in texts that challenge patriarchal social norms. While Wisker's approach does not accord with my own, ultimately I agree with her conclusion: that du Maurier's fatal woman holds "a compulsive attraction which goes deeper and beyond narrative closure" and that "Our fascination with Rebecca lasts as it does for the second wife, way beyond the grave, and it tells us more about ourselves perhaps than we would like to recognize" (Wisker 32).

Given du Maurier's tendency to describe herself as half male (a "halfbreed"), and that she associated her male half with her writing self, she may have had very different thoughts about her position as a woman writer than we do – she might have taken it as a compliment that she wrote like a man. In terms of *Rebecca*'s identity conflicts, Alison Light perceptively notes that "The desire to be differently female is central to du Maurier's best-known novels" (166). However, although she notes the important, yet often overlooked, element of class in the formation of sexuality and sexual identity,⁷² Light seems to understand readerly and authorial positionality as capable only of sympathizing with female characters, never desiring (or fearing) them (181).

Recent criticism has considered du Maurier's work in terms of a more nuanced understanding of sexuality and gender. Margaret Forster has compared du Maurier's fiction and her letters, and, as Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik contend, Forster uses this evidence to launch a search for the 'real' lesbian in du Maurier's writing. The sexual orientation of Rebecca and *Rebecca* is of interest to several other critics as well, including Nina Auerbach. Attempts to orient *Rebecca* in this way often involve defining the novel by its lesbian content, or negating the possibility of lesbian content (sometimes simultaneously). This investigation began with biographies of du Maurier, but the difference between the techniques of the biographer and the literary critic are less than distinctive in his regard. Du Maurier's written accounts of sexual identity in personal correspondences, non-fiction, and *Rebecca* complicate sexual categories – as they existed

⁷² Although I have not addressed it at length here, this may in fact be one of the most significant and overlooked themes in the novel. On this point I am in agreement with Janet Harbord, who claims that "what remains the most poignant feature of the text is the notion of economic security as a necessity for any form of sexual freedom" (106).

then, and as they exist now. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick remarks on the modern assumption that we can and should define and understand sex completely, and the attendant compulsion to define the sexuality of individuals; she calls these fallacies “deadening pretended knowingness” (*Epistemology* 12). Without positing that du Maurier or I have the last word on the sexual content of *Rebecca*, I analyze a selection of du Maurier’s texts and their criticism in order to unpack the identities they reference or refract. It is now taken for granted – at least theoretically – that categories of sexuality are not derived from and representative of innate truths within an individual, and rhetorical variations can mean significant differences in personal identification. There are particular identities that are depicted in *Rebecca*. My concern is what makes up those constructions in this text and how they circulate amongst the fatal female and her fetishists.

Many critics intuit and remark upon an aura of homo-eroticism in the novel, but they do not seem to be able to directly identify or articulate it. It seems that critics pick up a suggestion of lesbianism from *Rebecca*, but are unable to articulate exactly what creates that impression, and the introduction of the lesbian as a ‘transgressive’ thing in criticism echoes its appearance as negation in fiction. Madeleine K. Davies states that “connotations of lesbianism . . . enshroud” Mrs. Danvers, but does not state what those connotations are (184).⁷³ Janet Harbord ends her otherwise cogent deconstruction with the vaporous concepts of “fluidity” and “ambivalence” (106), and, along with Horner and Zlosnik, identifies sexuality in the novel as “transgressive” (102). Sally Beaman assumes that the heroine and Mr. De Winter have a sexless marriage, but doesn’t explain

⁷³ Horner and Zlosnik attach a footnote about a reader’s report for *Rebecca* which mentions similarities with Le Fanu’s *Uncle Silas*. In footnote 53 to chapter three, I discuss the character of the governess in *Uncle Silas* and servants more generally in his work.

why (52), nor does she explain why Rebecca is “possibly bisexual” (53) other than that it is “strongly hinted at in the novel” (59). Auerbach’s vagueness concerning Rebecca’s sexuality is revealing in its opacity; she does not explain her assertion that “The perverse Rebecca-worship of sinister Mrs. Danvers, and the obscene growths and swollen sea that threaten to devour Manderley throughout the book, might define Rebecca as a lesbian, but nothing in the plot supports this: her great trespass is not loving women but laughing at men” (111). Auerbach does not describe what she calls “obscene growths” and why these “growths and swollen sea” imply lesbianism. Finally, however, Auerbach concludes that these suggestions lead nowhere and that the plot is strictly heterosexual; in Auerbach’s text, the vague suspicion of homo-eroticism disappears as mysteriously as it appears. At first calling forth ‘transgressive’ possibilities with the adjectives “perverse” and “obscene” and the Freudian-inflected verb “devour,” Auerbach then dispels this phantasmagoria of sexological phraseology with the solidity of “the plot.” D.A. Miller argues that when relegated to the ‘ambiguous’ realm of connotation, homosexuality is spectralized, but when labeled denotatively, is deceptively matter-of-fact (i.e., the name makes it true, while not naming it makes it disappear). Miller suggests that the opacity of denotation discourages analysis; thus, while connotations of homosexuality in *Rebecca* simultaneously raise its spectre and allow its dismissal, denoting it as ‘lesbian’ or ‘bisexual’ typically works to detract from attempts to follow the connotative leads.

It is difficult not to read *Rebecca* biographically; its boyish heroine with an “unusual name” and “Joan-of-Arc” haircut is easily comparable to du Maurier herself, who, like Rebecca, had many affairs. The biographies and publication of du Maurier’s personal writing have subsequently led to a different approach to her fiction, and the

critical treatment of homosexual possibilities in the novel is echoed in du Maurier's biographies. Horner and Zlosnik's poststructuralist approach compares du Maurier's texts – personal and public – rather than comparing texts with more ephemeral biographical information. Responding to biographical criticism of du Maurier's fiction, particularly Margaret Forster's, Horner and Zlosnik caution against attempting to determine “du Maurier's ‘real’ sexual identity” (*Daphne* 2, 124). While they warn against reading du Maurier's fiction biographically, their caution also suggests that assumption of an author's heterosexuality can also skew critical response – as evidenced in a number of earlier criticisms of *Rebecca*. They eschew the tactic of determining a distinct sexual identity, allowing for the possibility of bisexuality. They note the discourse surrounding sexuality in du Maurier's period, as well as our own, and in the process, pointing out that neither era has a greater hold on the truth of sex, but rather that du Maurier's prose participates in a discourse of sexuality particular to her era, and criticism of her work participates in the discourse of ours – neither is more ‘real’ or accurate than the other. According to Horner and Zlosnik, the “tendency to define her as *either* heterosexual, *or* bisexual, *or* lesbian, reveal more about our century's need to categorize gendered behaviour through a sexed body than it does about du Maurier's protean sense of ‘self’” (*Daphne* 20). Instead, they argue, du Maurier uses the figure of the double to express the instability of gender identity (*Daphne* 21).

However, in their poststructuralist openness, Horner and Zlosnik avoid addressing the critical contention, instead fading into the vagueness of ‘ambiguity.’ In a later article that takes up the question of Rebecca's sexuality, Horner and Zlosnik note that “her sexuality is ambiguous” but, in the same sentence, assert that as well as confirming

heterosexual affairs, “the text . . . also hints that she and Mrs. Danvers have been lesbian lovers” (“Daphne” 210). By explaining Rebecca’s sexuality as “ambiguous” and remarking that “the text . . . hints” without further description of what comprises either the ambiguity or the “hints” other than that it is “transgressive” and “polymorphous” (*Daphne* 112 “Daphne” 210, 214), Horner and Zlosnik deconstruct but do not reconstruct the text’s gaps and contradictions. Sexuality, in these instances, is represented by adjectives and nouns, not verbs. While they refer to the associations of images or representations, they do not name them as such, instead of citing characters’ actions or even “things” Rebecca did that Maxim “shall never repeat to a living soul” (272). While they are not, unlike previous critics, insistent upon definitively labeling the sexualities depicted in the novel, they avoid the significance of sexuality (as if to do so would require defining it). Ironically, of all the characters in this novel, Rebecca is the least sexually ambiguous since we know more about her and her attitudes than the other characters; on the other hand, none of the other characters seems to be comfortably or clearly fixed in a definable sexuality. It seems that the less is known about a character’s sexuality, the more likely it is to be assumed to be unambiguous. When a character exhibits a great deal of information about her sexuality, it may be more likely to be interpreted as increasingly unpredictable (like the “unnatural growth” of those monstrous wild plants that foreshadow the destructive force of Rebecca’s sexuality).

Despite an apparent willingness to eschew limited categorizations of sexuality, Horner and Sloznic perform a more sophisticated evasion of homoeroticism; although they claim to focus “on questions of identity” (11), they shy away from directly addressing questions of sexual orientation unless it is to dismiss them (18), despite the

fact that ‘lesbian’ and not-‘lesbian’ are crucial to the identities that are played out in this novel. Most troubling, is that while they allow for the suggestion of bisexuality, Horner and Zlosnik prefer to relegate this category to the wastelands of “ambiguous”; thus Virginia Woolf becomes “a modernist of ambiguous sexual identity” (16). While it is difficult to categorize human beings, texts are fixed and limited in their range of possibilities; ultimately, a reliance on “ambiguity” as an adjectival solution to sexuality depicted in a text seems to be, at least from an ANT (Actor-Network-Theory) or strictly narratological perspective, a cop-out. If, as Horner and Zlosnik argue, *Rebecca* “explores subjectivity as a spectrum” (100), ANT researchers and narratologists alike ask: what is on that spectrum? More specifically, what actors are circulating, where, and how? While Horner and Zlosnik open important questions of Gothic identity for discussion, the specific, sexualized identities that appear in this novel have yet to be examined (although they have been suggested). In other words, sexuality need not be definable to make sexual connections meaningful.

Rebecca’s abnormality and deformed reproductive organs are suggestive of certain categorizations of women at the time, for example, in Krafft-Ebbing’s theory of inversion.⁷⁴ The seemingly vague word “normal” and more especially, “not normal” has sexual connotations in the period. “Normal” was as popular a description of sex as “safe” and “healthy” are today. Erin Connell and Alan Hunt remark that “[i]n the history of

⁷⁴ His theory is that homosexual women must have some masculine traits, although occasionally a woman may look entirely ‘normal’ and thereby be difficult to spot.

sexual discourses the preoccupation with ‘the normal’ has governed like a tyrant” (28).⁷⁵ Such a connection is not definitely stated, but they are suggested in passages that are typically labeled ‘ambiguous.’

The critical conjuring acts which invoke the suggestion of lesbianism only to negate it re-enacts the “lesbian panic” that appears in *Rebecca* (for example, as I’ve described its appearance in Mrs. Danvers’s speech and its effect on the narrator). To examine this phenomenon, I refer to the work of Juliana Smith, namely, her description of “lesbian panic” as a “trope” in twentieth-century British literature and her examination of “the function of . . . a socially and culturally ingrained *fear* of lesbianism and the stigma pertaining thereunto – in specific narrative *texts*” (2, xii). Smith performs a Latour-style unpacking of these moments of textual panic: rather than focusing on whether or not a character is a lesbian (as these moments often ask of us), she examines these discursive moments in each text to find out what they are made of. Instead of discussing lesbians in literature, she attempts to locate the fear driving these moments of “panic.” Smith argues that in twentieth-century fiction lesbians are made visible and invisible by negation, since the increased visibility of lesbianism has led to more open condemnation. She states that “while lesbianism has become both narratable and representable in twentieth-century fictional discourse, the ongoing pathologizing and marginalization of lesbianism virtually necessitate lesbian panic as a narrative adjunct” (11). Counter to Terry Castle’s argument about the value of the word, Smith argues that

⁷⁵ Connell and Hunt survey sex advice literature, and note that the word “normal” was popular during this period; particularly, they argue that during the inter-war period, the definition of “normal” sex was undergoing change (moving away from overt religious significance). Kraft-Ebing seems to lead this re-routing of “normal” from religion to medicine with phrases such as “normal hetero-sexual love,” “normal sexual intercourse,” and “abnormal inclinations” (240, 263).

“the epistemological terror inherent in the very lack of fixed meaning attached to the word ‘lesbian’ is at the root of much of the lesbian panic in the novels I discuss” (14). Emphasizing that “lesbian panic” is easier to identify than “lesbianism,” Smith shifts the focus from – as Horner and Zlosnik advise against – speculative arguments about a character’s (let alone an author’s) “‘real’ sexuality” to examining the discourse of negation surrounding the conjured spectre of lesbianism; similarly, Castle remarks: “The spectral figure is a perfect vehicle for conveying . . . that ‘recognition through negation’ which has taken place with regard to female homosexuality in Western culture since the Enlightenment” (60). The question then, is what, in *Rebecca*, the spectral is made of – what negations produce her?

Du Maurier herself had eccentric and what would now be considered unpolitically correct notions of sexuality. What is clear is that she felt that contemporary sexual identifications were inadequate to explain her personal experiences and desires. In letters to Ellen Doubleday, du Maurier, according to Forster, insisted that she was not a lesbian; du Maurier stated that “if anyone should call that sort of love by that unattractive word that begins with ‘L’, I’d tear their guts out” and, according to Forster, “she refused ‘to be classed with that gang’” (222, 231). While we tend to think of our own time (as they probably did in the 1930s⁷⁶) as having solved the mysteries of sex, and that we now have a clear, enlightened view of it, our contemporary categories may be just as flawed and tied to problematic identity politics – as Horner and Zlosnik point out. Du Maurier’s problems with the ‘L’ word seem to be related to the identity, not the practice.

⁷⁶ According to Beatrice, “There’s nothing to be embarrassed about in the facts of nature” (du Maurier 177).

Ultimately, Forster seems to agree with Terry Castle that the word ‘lesbian’ is preferable because it’s more “meaningful” – even if it might be slightly disingenuous (Castle 15).⁷⁷ From etymological and experiential standpoints, the three available terms to describe sexuality – at least for women – are not always meaningful or useful, and are loaded with ideological baggage. Du Maurier clearly felt uncomfortable with being identified with a coherent group, and current attempts to identify her with a coherent group (an entirely different imaginary group), seems limiting. Regardless of terminology, the importance placed on gender preference in the categorization of sexuality allows for broad generalizations, and disregard of specificity. *Rebecca* depicts sexuality not only in terms of homo/hetero eroticism, but Gothicizes it.

Du Maurier’s personal writing about love and sex casts sexuality in a sinister, fearful light (whether homo or hetero erotic). She had a tendency to describe all sexual attraction as “menacing” on a regular basis in correspondence, and retrospectively called her lesbian affairs “obsessions” (Forster 229). The sinister connotations she attaches, with an attitude of whimsy, to sexuality doesn’t accord with our contemporary discourse of ‘health & safety,’ although it also falls outside of her contemporary society’s discourse of health and normalcy. The dearth of ‘healthy’ relationships in *Rebecca* makes it a difficult and uncomfortable read for some critics. No one rises triumphant (except maybe Rebecca, in her own twisted, comically deformed way). Du Maurier’s “menaces” do compliment a reading of fear and desire in *Rebecca* as closely connected.

⁷⁷ Despite her complaint that the lesbian “has been ghosted – or made to seem invisible – by culture itself,” Castle participates in the “ghosting” of bisexuality. Castle decides that Greta Garbo, despite her affairs with men, should be called a lesbian, not bisexual, because it would be “more meaningful to refer to her as a lesbian” (15). In the process of advising her readers to “call *the* lesbian back from that ‘world of vapours’ to which she has been consigned” [emphasis mine], she rhetorically vaporizes bisexuals (19).

Once again, Steven Bruhm's term, "Gothic Sexualities," is the most appropriate one to sum up representations of relationships in this novel. Critics, like the characters in du Maurier's novel, focus their gaze on Rebecca, but she is an unsolvable mystery. Her role in the novel is to reveal its living characters, and each story about her tells us about these characters. Just as the unnamed narrator depicts herself as innocent, incompetent, and unattractive in contrast to the image of Rebecca she has created, critics focus their attention on trying to figure out who or what Rebecca really was, rather than examining the way the other characters depict her in relation to themselves. Horner and Zlosnik advise that, instead of searching for a reality lurking behind the text, "A more fruitful approach is to contemplate the values negotiated over Rebecca's (dead) body" (*Daphne* 124). This is essentially what I've attempted here in my examination of ambiguous signification. There's a little bit of Rebecca in every one of the novel's characters – she is the contagious representation that seems to both reproduce herself in others and reproduces the reflections of others in the form of an image of fatal femininity. Mrs. Danvers remarks that Rebecca "had all the courage and spirit of a boy, . . . She ought to have been a boy" (243). It could just as easily be said that "mannish" Beatrice is the one who "ought to have been a boy," or, perhaps the narrator who continually fails in the performance of femininity "ought to have been a boy," or maybe "Danny" also "ought to have been a boy." Rebecca is never human in this text, never alive; instead, she is posthumously mystified and acts as a (paradoxically, invisible) fetish against which the novel's characters are defined.

This emphasis on boyishness throughout the novel is significant to du Maurier's representation of adult sexuality as a role and an image. Dennis Denisoff remarks that "In

du Maurier's terms, Rebecca would not be best defined as either a man or a woman, because her strongest trait, even as an adult, was her boyishness" (143). Mrs. Danvers's speech in praise of Rebecca's boyishness is parodied in Colonel Julyan's dinner-table conversation with Maxim and the narrator. At this point, the narrator has begun to feel more grown-up, more confident in her role. Part of this realization is the knowledge that adult life is just like a masquerade. Discussing the party, Frank Crawley remarks that "It's a universal instinct of the human species, isn't it, that desire to dress up in some sort of disguise" (294). Colonel Julyan replies that "It's natural . . . for all of us to want to wish to look different" because "We are all children in some ways" (294). The theme of growing up properly is camped in this conversation. Colonel Julyan tells them his daughter plays golf and that "She ought to have been the boy . . . My lad is different altogether. No earthly use at games. Always writing poetry. I suppose he'll grow out of it" (294). Frank and Max seem to ridicule the Colonel, replying, respectively, "I used to write poetry myself when I was his age. Awful nonsense, too. I never write any now. . . Good heavens, I should hope not" (294). The narrator is perfectly comfortable during this conversation, having progressed from wishing she were a grown woman and comparing herself to a boy, to wondering if Maxim really would prefer her to be "a sort of boy" (265), to finally realizing that growing up is all about wearing the right costume and playing a role – something Rebecca did so well.

Having killed Rebecca a second time in supporting her husband's claim of innocence,⁷⁸ the narrator begins to take on Rebecca's personality, explaining that "My

⁷⁸ "I had listened to his story and part of me went with him like a shadow in his tracks. I too had killed Rebecca" (du Maurier 284).

old fears, my diffidence, my shyness, my sense of inferiority, must be conquered now and thrust aside” (264) and that “I had not thought it would be so easy to be severe. I wondered why it had seemed so hard for me before.” (289). In the concluding dream of the last chapter, paralleling the dream of the first chapter, the narrator dreams that she writes in Rebecca’s handwriting, and surprised by this, sees herself as Rebecca in a mirror:

I was writing letters in the morning-room. I was sending out invitations. I wrote them all myself with a thick black pen. But when I had looked down to see what I had written it was not my small square handwriting at all, it was long, and slanting, with curious pointed strokes. I pushed the cards away from the blotter and hid them. I got up and went to the looking glass. A face stared back at me that was not my own. . . . The face in the glass stared back at me and laughed. And I saw then that she was sitting on a chair before the dressing-table in her bedroom, and Maxim was brushing her hair. . . . and as he brushed it he wound it slowly into a thick long rope. It twisted like a snake, and he took hold of it with both hands and smiled at Rebecca and put it round his neck. (du Maurier 379)

The narrator’s maturing process culminates in a dream of becoming Rebecca. Rebecca’s hideously deformed, cancerous reproductive organs parallel the narrator’s failure to conceive. Like Rebecca, the narrator never has children, but she learns to ‘act’ like an adult woman. Becoming that sophisticated “woman of about thirty-six” means faking it. Adulthood and femininity, like class, as it turns out, are merely roles. Jagose, noting the novel’s relationship with psychoanalytic notions of progress (towards maturity, and,

implicitly, heterosexuality), argues that *Rebecca* depicts a journey that never ends; instead, “The sexual perversity, which – while most obviously coagulating at Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca – equally casts its lines around the novel’s narrator, never gives way to that heterosexuality that claims to succeed it” (361). In the terms of early twentieth-century psychology, homosexuality is a stepping stone on the way to adult sexuality. For late twentieth-century critics, monosexuality replaces heterosexuality as the desired location at which the subject must eventually arrive in order to be considered fully grown.

Despite discovering that the image of Rebecca was “false” and that Rebecca was a clever masquer, not the ideal woman she appeared to be, this image persists for the narrator. The narrator’s vivid first-person depiction of her sense of persecution under the gaze of the fetish places the reader in the position of the fetishist. Like Carmilla, Rebecca lives beyond the confines of the text, becoming a fetish image for the reader, as well as the characters of the novel. The narrator has constructed a glamorous image of Rebecca, and that is the image that dominates the text. Rebecca not only contaminates the narrator, but the text itself. Horner and Zlosnik describe Rebecca as resembling the classic female vampire – like Carmilla – in her contagious reproducibility and liminal existence: “Like the vampire, Rebecca seems able to reconstitute herself endlessly and, like the vampire, her corporeal status is unstable: she is neither visibly a body nor visibly a corpse” (“Daphne” 213). Strangely, the only ideal woman in the text is Caroline de Winter – or rather, her portrait. How well the other female characters enact the image of womanhood, and their relationship to creating the image, determines their identity as feminine or not

(Rebecca enacted it, Mrs. Danvers helped to produce it in others, and Beatrice and the narrator, quite simply, fail).

In du Maurier's *Rebecca*, the fetish reveals the artifice of female identity and the instability of identity in general. Nothing specific is lurking *beneath* it, but rather the surface itself refracts specific contextual factors instead of reflecting an essential interiority or reality that transcends contexts. The question of 'true' sexuality is depicted in *Rebecca*, not so much as an orientation located on a homo/hetero binary, but as something achieved rather than found. There is no single, specific sexual transgression or identity that must be uncovered in this novel (or in the author), but rather it suggests something that is either excessive (Rebecca) or lacking (Rebecca's marriage) compared to twentieth-century notions of 'normal' sexuality. The exact transgression is less significant than its possibilities; although, as I've suggested, what those possibilities are, are significant and not limitless. Too, the novel does more than re-hash contemporaneous ideology; it is also unique and particular to itself.

Chapter 6

6 Conclusion: “Here Ends the Diary of the Late Spiridion Trepka”

The fatal woman has overpowered poor Spiridion Trepka, Schiller’s Prince, Lewis’s Monk, and many heroines. Yet her critics, like “the Bavarian Professor,” have argued “that research would disprove the greater part” of the legends of the fatal woman, or, like Duke Robert, they would like to have her done away with altogether. In my analysis, I have tried to describe her role in fiction as a fetish, the meaning of which can be found next to, rather than beneath her.

In arguing for the polyvalence of the image of the fatal woman, I have emphasized her role as a double, and, by extension, the Gothic’s tendency to depict art as generative through the trope of the uncanny portrait. In the early Gothic novel, the portrait documents and encourages bonds between characters, but also the potential for portraiture to replace those bonds – the way that Olimpia temporarily fulfills Nathanael’s romantic yearnings. Later Victorian texts dramatize the potential for the simulacral image of popular visual media to have “a life of its own,” evidenced suggestively in the three-dimensional illusions of the phantasmagoria. I hesitate to suggest a linear progression from the eighteenth-century to the modern Gothic. Instead, my research has led me to consider the possibility that technological changes – although significant – may not be significant in the way that I had assumed at the outset. What if, for example, our hero Nathanael had fallen in love with an online profile, a stock model comprised of multiple photo-shopped images, or the image of a heavily made-up pornographic actress

portraying an archetype? Would his story be so very different, beyond the dressing and props of the period?

An ANT perspective allows us to see the images and objects themselves as actors, rather than only mediators between actors. In other words, I want to read this archetypal image as something more (or less) than a representation of something other than itself. This perspective allows us to re-conceptualize the role of media in organizing human relationships. Here it useful to differentiate between the actor of ANT and the actor of Narratology. While I have in some instances leaned more towards a narratological reading (for example, in my analysis of *The Monk* in chapter two), at other times (such as in Chapter three and four) I have drawn upon ANT methodology. For ANT, observing segments of a situation at close-range, many more items, including objects, can be observed to be active and circulating. The limitation of this approach, of course, is that although Narratology can observe the narrative structure as a whole, ANT necessarily zeroes in on one aspect of a narrative in detail. It also focuses on the minute actions of the circulation of associations, such as portrait conventions, rather than the large-scale actions of the plot. Lady Hamilton's portrait, for example, is not an actor in the narratological sense, although it is a minor element of character description. However, as I've suggested in chapter four, it is a potentially significant actor in an ANT analysis.

I am not suggesting that the technological mode of transmission is unimportant, but what I am suggesting is that it is not as powerful as some critical theory has claimed. What I have focused on in this dissertation are fictional relationships formed with *images* that may be consumed in a variety of forms. For example, in Jules Verne's *Castle of the Carpathians*, the ostensible theme is the trickery of emerging audio-visual technologies.

A man is seduced by the projection of his beloved's image and the recording of her voice. Yet his love is not for the woman, but for her image and voice: separate components that can be reproduced. The technology targets his obsession, but it cannot be fully responsible for creating the obsession. Could it be the spectacle of the stage on which he first saw this woman? Or the magic of fashion? Or perhaps lithographed posters? Just as Trepka "[e]ven before coming" to Urbania "felt attracted by the strange figure of a woman" (Lee 45), the origin of Verne's ill-fated lover's obsession is also difficult to locate.⁷⁹ While the history of technology is clearly important, our relationships with images also involve something of the image as it transcends its media.

Gothic fiction often challenges iconoclasm, even as it expresses suspicions about visual technology. For example, Fritz Leiber's 1949 short story, "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes," introduces the character of a hardboiled commercial photographer with reservations about his line of work. Despite his suspicions, he differentiates himself from stereotypical anti-capitalist sentiment. Before letting the reader in on his views, the photographer assures us of his political neutrality: "No, I haven't suddenly developed any long-haired indignation at the evils of advertising and the national glamour-girl complex. That'd be a laugh in my line of work, wouldn't it?" (Leiber 19). Positioning himself as an insider, as opposed to a "long-hair" outsider – implicitly rejecting a Marxist influenced iconoclasm – he draws attention to the strangeness of the anonymous seductive image which has existed for some time now, but which is increasingly a phenomenon particular to photography. The strange subject he brings to our attention – the natural phenomenon

⁷⁹ This stance suggests Krafft-Ebing's theory of the fetish: that it is located so early in the individual's history, that it is variable and untraceable; or, more recently, Elaine Freedgood's theory of the fetish.

depicted as supernatural in this story – is the often overlooked quality of photography’s apparent realism: it does not mimic reality, but renders most people either ‘photogenic’ or ‘unphotogenic.’ In particular, he lights on that weird quality of the highly photogenic, yet unattractive person. Although, noting the advertising practices of the time, he admits that drawings of her appear, they are all made from photographs, not from life; in other words, the photograph – the simulacrum – is the original to which these copies aspire to represent.

But is this something new particular to photography? In chapter four, I discussed Dorian Gray’s portrait in comparison to photographic evidence. Walter Benjamin claims that photography’s verisimilitude leads us to expect it to provide information about the subject. However, as I’ve discussed in chapter three, this is something that viewers have been expecting for a long time, as Thomas de Quincey reminds us, in *Suspiria de Profundis*, when he asks us to put ourselves in the position of viewing the present as the past’s future. De Quincey uses Queen Victoria’s iconic portrait as an example of this imaginative technique. In De Quincey’s *Confessions* and its sequel, female figures seem to morph from one to the other, progressively darkening as his Gothic auto-biography unfolds, culminating in a montage of portraits that begins with the Queen’s: “the portrait that on the day of her Majesty’s coronation would have been admired by you with a pure disinterested admiration, but which if seen to-day would draw forth an involuntary groan” (174-175). In this pictorial review of history, the later period demarcations of “Romantic” and “Victorian” collide in De Quincey’s palimpsest historicism, in which he asks the reader to envision the past “not *as* the past” but as a time-traveller who sees it as the future (174). In this example, De Quincey does not suggest that the image contains

any clues, so much as it *seems* to once we know more about its subject; like Shelley's explanation of the emotions revealed in Beatrice's Cenci's portrait, words give pictures something they cannot express alone. However, our desire to glean information from pictures prevails. What appears life-like seems to change over time, but our collective response to perceived life-likeness remains remarkably similar to those of our ancestors. The Gothic asks us to reflect on our attachments, not only to technology, but to the images that these devices deliver.

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Curriculum Vitae

- Name:** M. Anne Young
- Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** Mount Allison University
Sackville, N.B., Canada
1999-2003 B.F.A.
- University of New Brunswick
Fredericton, N.B., Canada
2007-2009 B.A.
- University of Windsor
Windsor, Ontario, Canada
2009-2010 M.A.
- University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2010-2014 Ph.D
- Honours and Awards:** Marshall D'avray Prize in Literature, 2008 (UNB)
Bliss Carman Memorial Scholarship, 2008-2009 (UNB)
- Related Work Experience**
- Teaching Assistant
University of Western Ontario
2010-2014
- Instructor
University of Windsor
2009
- Artist in Residence
Gallery Connexion/City of Fredericton
2004, 2009
- Publications:**
- Young, Anne. "Subversive Complicity: A Story of O(r)." *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*; Special Issue: *Pornography and Literature* 24.4 (October 2013): 318-41.
- Young, Anne. Review of Kamilla Elliott's *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). *Horror Studies* 4.2 (October 2013): 259-261.