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I

Along with Isaac Crookenden (fl. 1777-1820), Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson (1779-1831) was one of the most prolific writers of gothic chapbooks, one of the few people who actually appears listed as the author of her own works, some twenty-nine volumes of fiction and more than 100 short works, at least half of which are gothic. Working at times as a writer (and perhaps editor) for Ann Lemoine's *Tell-Tale Magazine*, or independently trying to support her mother and (possibly illegitimate) daughter Amelia, Wilkinson scratched along as a "scribbler" and owner of a circulating library until she was forced on more than one occasion to apply for financial assistance to the Royal Literary Fund, a form of welfare for indigent and worthy authors. Regina Maria Roche and Isabella Kelly, both prolific gothic novelists themselves, also applied for RLF aid at various points in their long writing careers. But the focus of this essay will be on using a few of Wilkinson's best-known works, *Albert of Werdendorff; or The Midnight Embrace* (based on Lewis's ballad "Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine"); *The Spectres* (an amalgamation of Reeve's *Old English Baron*, Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance*, and Parsons's *Castle of Wolfenbach*); and *The Castle Spectre, An Ancient Baronial Romance* (based on Lewis's drama), as the basis for querying Wilkinson's status as a practitioner of female gothic "victim feminism." As I discussed in *Gothic Feminism*, there seemed to me to be a clear pattern in a number of female gothic writers of "pretended or staged weakness" in order to "tame the ravages of a lustful, raving patriarch gone berserk" (7). But more recent critical approaches to the field challenge this position and move toward a decidedly more postfeminist destabilization of the categories of "female" and "gothic" altogether, arguing that "the tension between 'victim' and 'power' feminisms" is at the bottom of so many of the texts that we have routinely labeled "female gothic" (Munford 61). One way of examining this claim is to consider Wilkinson's works as composite blends of Radcliffean terror and Lewisite horror. Doing so will allow us to interrogate the inherent contradictions within postfeminism and the limitations of our own entrenched critical approaches to Female Gothic texts. That is, Wilkinson's works present us with a case study that challenges the generally agreed upon Female Gothic mould and, by extension, its association with Second Wave feminism.

Genz and Brabon (2007:7) have recently noted that "Gothic and feminist categories now demand a self-criticism with respect to their own totalizing gestures and assumptions, . . . we might also have crossed a barrier and reached a new critical space beyond the Female Gothic (and its ghosts of essentialism and universality)." I would agree and elaborate by saying that if we continue to dissect the works by the same canonical authors endlessly, in some compulsively limited gothic loop, we will merely come to the same conclusions we have always

reached because all of us are working from the same (self-confirming) assumptions and with the same limited "control group" (so to speak). Examining the works of a non-canonical author like Wilkinson allows us to query both the categories of "female" and the "gothic." It also allows us to query the "essentialist" and "universalist" assumptions behind our selection of authors and texts. Put another way we might ask, did Wilkinson's supposed identity as a "female gothic" author dictate her aesthetic practice (as we have continually claimed that Radcliffe was distinctively "female" in opposition to Monk Lewis's "male gothic" practice)? In fact, it would appear that Wilkinson made authorial decisions based on a purely market-driven aesthetic, writing works that crossed over the gender divide and attempted to appeal to the largest possible readership with no regard to her own gender as the author. She also eschewed the practice of literary privilege that characterized so much of Radcliffe's novels, with their frequent recourse to (desperate to impress) quotations from Shakespeare, Collins, or Gray. Wilkinson wrote gothic novels and chapbooks for a living and she quite accurately calculated that the market share was large enough to support her own voluminous productions (in contrast to Radcliffe, the highest paid novelist of her day, Wilkinson was distinctly "down market" and her income was derived only from her sales, not the sort of large advances that Radcliffe received.)

Wilkinson has certainly gained critical attention recently, largely because of attempts to recover "lost" female writers and to place the chapbook tradition itself into its larger cultural and literary context.¹ As one of the only female "hack" writers that we know by name, Wilkinson's works and career can be fruitfully examined as a case study of what I would call a female gothic entrepreneur, a writer whose works are not aligned with or controlled by any gendered aesthetic, but are motivated by a canny assessment of market demands and the literary interests of middling to lower-class readers during the early nineteenth century. In fact, her very prolific publishing

¹ Potter has excavated Wilkinson's oeuvre (2005) and republished a number of her chapbooks and novels (2009). One of the earliest scholarly attempts to discuss the chapbook genre can be found in Watt, who argues that "shilling shockers" are the transitional link between the late eighteenth-century gothic novels and the short tales of terror as developed by Poe, Maupassant, and LeFanu. Varma deplored the development of the genre, seeing it "as an index of the sensation-craze into which the Gothic vogue degenerated in its declining years," also observing that the gothic bluebook "catered to the perverted taste for excitement among degenerate readers" (189). May has argued that the romantic short tale was an attempt to demythologize folktales, to divest them of their external values, and to remythologize them by internalizing those values and self-consciously projecting them onto the external world. They wished to preserve the old religious values of the romance and the folktale without their religious dogma and supernatural trappings" (5).

profile recalls Bradford Mudge's observation that the development of mass culture during this period was linked to the dominance of women as the authors as well as readers of circulating library materials. But this female-inflected mass culture was increasingly figured, at least by the Regency and the early-Victorian periods, as a diseased and metastatic type of female reproduction because it challenged the hegemonic model of the realistic novel (1992: 92). For instance, it was typical of Wilkinson to "flood the market" and exploit whatever popular political or social controversy was current at the moment. She was ever at the ready to publish under her own name dozens of updated adaptations of dramatic works that had been popular on the stage years earlier, a strategy she used continuously throughout her writing career and without regard to the ideologies present in the original work. In 1805, on the heels of the acquisition of new territories in the West Indies, notably Trinidad, Berbice, and Demerara, a Bill providing for the abolition of the slave trade to conquered territories triumphantly passed both Houses of Parliament. The following year this was followed by an even stronger measure that outlawed the British Atlantic slave trade altogether. In the midst of this controversy and widespread debate and with her eye shrewdly trained on the popular market, Wilkinson decides to retell for lower-class readers the famous tale of Inkle and Yarico wherein a white trader in the Indies betrays and then sells his "Negro virgin" lover as a slave (retold in Richard Steele's *Spectator* 11 [1711]). The story had been turned into an improbable comic opera by George Colman (Haymarket 1787), concluding his version of this mixed race romance with a happy ending and a marriage between the two. Like Colman, Wilkinson concludes her version happily, but her idealized adaptation [see Figures One and Two] was starkly unlike the original tale or the much more pessimistic and realistic poetic versions of the same narrative by her near-

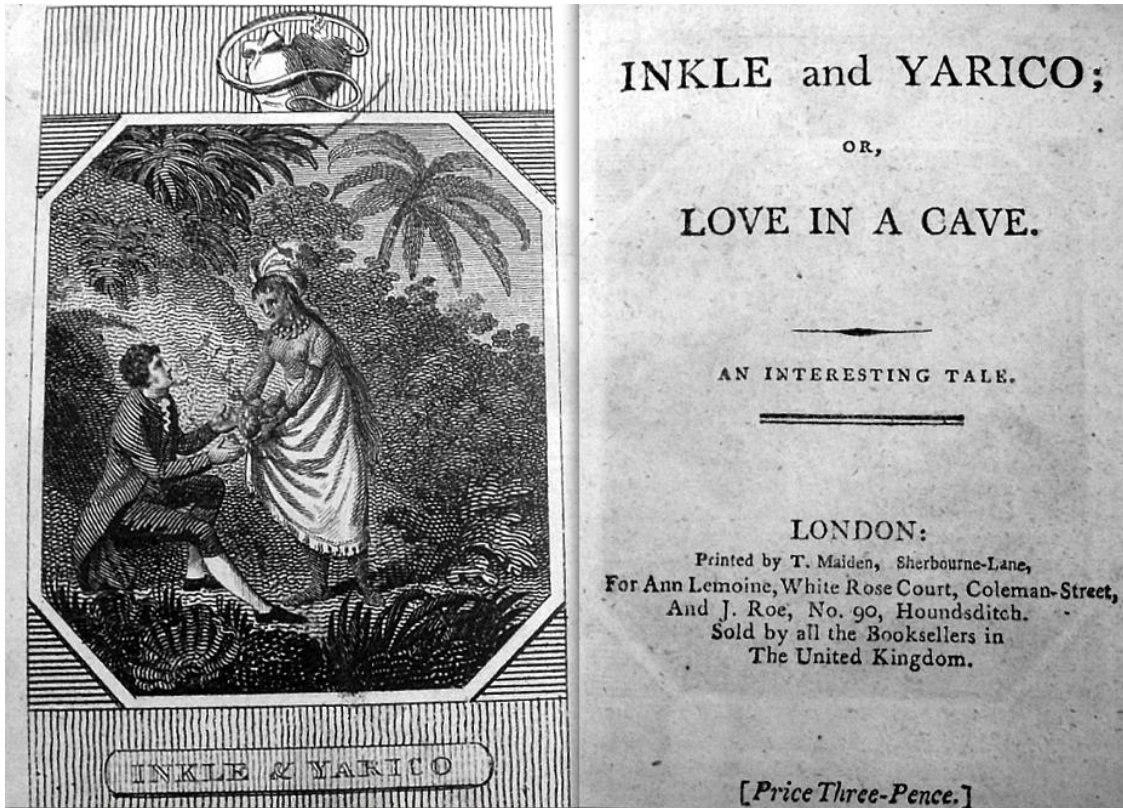


Figure 1. Frontispiece and Title Page of *Inkle and Yarico* (Roe, 1805). Reproduced by kind permission of the Sadleir-Black Collection, University of Virginia Library.

contemporaries Frances Seymour, William Pattison, John Winstanley, Edward Jerningham, and James Wolcot (all available in *Amazing Grace*). Wilkinson's biography is bleak reading indeed (Potter 109-15), and it illustrates that the high point of the gothic trade occurred roughly between 1800-1815, its decline causing Wilkinson to turn to writing children's books after 1820 in order to survive. Within five years, however, that market had also shrunk to such an extent that she was again appealing to the Royal Literary Fund: "I need not point out to you that the depression in the Book trade and consequently scantiness of employ in Juvenile works has been great . . . *Forsake me and I perish*" (RLF, 12 December 1825; emphasis in original). Casting herself as the gothic heroine of her own life story, Wilkinson was, unfortunately, prescient. But before the very bleak death she suffered in 1831 at St. Margaret's Workhouse, Westminster, she was determined to produce gothic chapbooks that would appeal to a

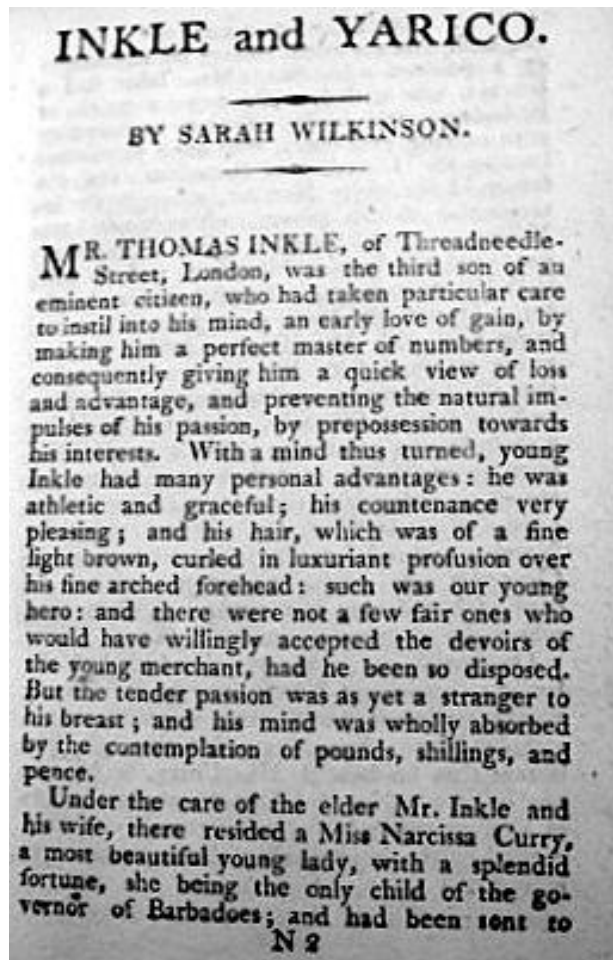


Figure 2. First page of *Inkle and Yarico*. Reproduced by kind permission of the Sadleir-Black Collection, University of Virginia Library.

growing reading audience of literate lower-class females.² As she herself observed in the Preface to her last gothic novel, *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey; or, The Mystery of the Blue and Silver Bag: A Romance* (1820):

Authors are, *proverbially*, poor; and therefore under the necessity of racking their wits for a bare subsistence. Perhaps, this is my case, and knowing how eager the fair sex are for something *new* and *romantic*, I determined on an attempt to *please* my fair sisterhood, hoping to profit myself thereby. If the following volumes tend to that effect, I shall be gratified; but if they meet with a rapid sale, and fill my pockets, I shall be elated. (qtd. Potter 12; her italics)

This statement is as clear as any I have seen about Wilkinson's entrepreneurial motivations and it

disabuses us about Wilkinson as a gothicist primarily writing out of some sense of an essentialized or universalized gendered identity. In

² I present an overview of the close to 300 gothic chapbooks held at the Sadleir-Black collection at the University of Virginia Library (2010b). Also see Frank (1998) on the Sadleir-Black gothic collection. Additional bibliographical information about 217 chapbook titles in the Corvey Collection and various British libraries can be found in Koch, who concludes that, in contrast to the full-length gothic novels by Lewis where horror is a manifestation of moral ambivalence and there is an unrestrained use of the supernatural, “the sentimental and rationalized contents of the bluebooks reveal them as a reactionary mode of the gothic” that reassures general readers that their own concepts of reality are “stable.” Potter (2005) provides two appendices that list some 650 titles for gothic chapbooks and tales published between 1799-1835. It seems safe to say that at least another three to four hundred were published during the earlier phase of the genre (1764-99). St. Clair claims that the height of the “chapbook gothic” craze occurred around 1810 (349). Scholarly sources on the earlier phase include Birkhead, who argues that “in these brief, blood-curdling romances we may find the origin of the short tale of terror” (186).

fact, it suggests that she knew very well that women readers were interested in the sort of clichés she could produce and so she wrote in a style that had only one motive: to sell and to support herself, as she puts it, “to fill my pockets.” Unfortunately, it would seem that whatever “elation” Wilkinson had as an author of gothic chapbooks was short-lived, while her claim to be producing “new” works is more than a bit disingenuous. Before her sad end, however, she did write a number of works that put the lie to any simple essentialist-based definition of the “female gothic.” Instead, she devised a new formula that combined male and female gothic tropes and then disseminated them in more than one hundred titles to a very wide, lower-class reading public.

II

Wilkinson’s “Albert of Werdendorff, or The Midnight Embrace” (1812) is a prose adaptation of Lewis’s gothic ballad “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine,” originally published in *The Monk* and then again in his *Tales of Wonder*, and itself based on Bürger’s “Lenora.” As Potter has noted in his Introduction to the reprinted edition, this bluebook “is extremely sensational, presenting unbridled supernaturalism to shock and horrify the reader; yet on the other hand, it is profoundly didactic and moral, emphasizing the necessity of honor, respect, virtue and the sanctity of the marriage contract” (6). In other words, the text presents an abbreviated and interesting mix of conflicted class concerns, with a seduced and abandoned lower-class heroine wreaking vengeance on her aristocratic suitor and his “haughty” bride. Wilkinson’s tale is also interesting in that the female subjectivity presented in the work conforms to lower-class prejudices about the nature of women: the lower-class Josephine is “the ill-fated maiden,” selfless, innocent, duped, and fated to be destroyed by her upper-class seducer, while her aristocratic rival Guimilda is persistently described as “proud,” “revengeful,” and capable of “haughty caprice and tyranny” (18; 19; 22; 23). The access that we have into the subjectivities of both women allows us to see the pain that the worthy Josephine suffers when she realizes that she has been betrayed and deserted by her lover of six months, the wealthy Albert.

We can also see the psychic machinations that run through the mind of Guimilda when she learns that she has a discarded rival in the artless and sweet-tempered Josephine. Not content merely to win her husband, Guimilda wants Josephine dead and she demands that Albert

do the deed himself or she refuses to allow him into their bridal bed. Agreeing all too readily to Guimilda's demands, Albert steals away from his own marriage feast to spread a mock wedding banquet for Josephine, poisoning her food and wine (ironically, a reversal of the wedding banquet scene that Keats was to use later in "The Eve of St. Agnes" [1819/1820]). When she naively asks when he will return to her, Albert replies "that he would return at the dark hour of midnight, and again clasp her in his arms" (22). But this thoughtless rejoinder actually functions as a binding oath in this oral-based community, and commits the two to a "midnight embrace" from which Albert will not emerge alive. Recalling J. L. Austin's theory of speech "performativity," that is, acts of speech that cannot be considered true or false but which none the less are meaningful, this oath is an example of what Austin calls "promising," a phrase that performs its own meaning (Miles 2008; 15). One breaks a promissory oath only at one's own peril in the gothic imaginary. Realizing his error too late, Albert quickly repents his deed and curses Guimilda as "an agent of infernal malice, sent to plunge his soul into an irremediable abyss of guilt" (25).

A day passes and, interestingly, we are not privy to a description of the nuptial bliss of Albert and Guimilda. This elision of their marital consummation stands in stark contrast to the descriptions we have had of the passionate affair between Albert and Josephine. In some ways, then, the two women are doubles of each other in Albert's bed, or perhaps we are intended to think that the sexual colonization of the lower-class woman occurs because of aristocratic female complicity as well as male action. Thunder and lightning flash above the Werdendorff castle as, at the stroke of midnight the next night, the ghastly Josephine appears in the guise of an avenging spirit: "In a hollow, deep-toned voice, she addressed her perjured lover: 'Thou. false one! Base assassin of her who thou lured from the flowery paths of virtue; her whom thou had sworn to cherish and protect while life was left thee. Thou hast cut short the thread of my existence: but think not to escape the punishment due to thy crimes. 'Tis midnight's dark hour: the hour by thyself appointed: delay no, therefore, thy promised embrace'" (26). Reminiscent of the dark ladies in Anne Bannerman's gothic ballads, Josephine takes revenge on her aristocratic betrayer by kissing him with "her clammy lips" and holding him in a "noisome icy embrace" (27). Three times he raises his eyes to gaze on his uncanny "supernatural visitant" before he drops dead "as if [in the act] of imploring the mercy of offended heaven." Guimilda

makes a hasty retreat to a convent and the castle falls into ruins that serve as a backdrop for tourists to the area. Every year on the anniversary of this awful event, the hall lights up and the same scene is enacted again "by supernatural beings": "the groans of the spectre lord can be heard afar, while he is clasped in the arms of Josephine's implacable ghost" (28). The final paragraph of the text presents the reader with pious comments on the importance of virginity, the sanctity of marriage, and a simple moral: "virtue is a female's firmest protector" (29).

It is interesting that the lower-class female victim, the dead Josephine, returns from the dead with the power to act as a direct agent of God, not as simply someone seeking her own personal revenge. The lower class, in other words, has divine sanction to seek restitution against its aristocratic oppressors, and such a sentiment would not have been lost on the lower-class readership of Wilkinson's bluebooks. Certainly there are many versions of this tale of betrayal and seduction throughout the gothic, and frequently it was supernaturalized, as it was in Lewis's *The Monk* and here in Wilkinson's adaptation. I want to suggest, however, that this tale can be read as a variation on the secularization of virtue theme. The virgin/whore representation is privileged in uncanny ways, but increasingly in the bluebooks it is the issue of class envy and anger that begins to emerge most blatantly. Guimilda as aristocratic viper is the sort of female monster the reading public had seen earlier in Dacre's *Victoria (Zofloya, 1806)*, a woman who sells her soul to the devil for power and the fulfillment of her lusts. The male aristocrat is equally corrupt and his doom, according to lower-class opinion, is justified, but note the persistence in this work of the power of orality, the privilege that is given to the oath Albert promises to his doomed mistress Josephine. By writing a tale that continues to promulgate the primacy of oral culture, the lower-class bluebook participated in preserving lower-class cultural values: the belief that the transcendent and the immanent can work together in concert, that natural elements will avenge a human crime in order to restore moral order, and that a female supernatural visitant has the ability to claim divine power in order to affect material revenge on her lover.

In addition to their origin in fairy tales,³ three gothic tales can also be understood as rewriting *The affecting history of the Duchess of C***, the most notorious episode in the novelized "letters on education," *Adèle et Théodore* (1782; trans English 1783), produced by the prolific French author Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (1746-1830). By excerpting and then focusing on the horror of a wife imprisoned by her husband for nine years, female gothic novelists found the ideal subplot for a longer novel (i.e., Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance* or Eliza Parsons's *Castle of Wolfenbach*). This inset tale initially served as the source for the explained supernatural of a long gothic novel, the material cause for all the mysterious lights and noises at night. In fact, the imprisoned wife becomes in the female gothic genre the *deus ex machina*, the explanatory first cause brought back to life, much like a lost female matriarch restored to power. As the gothic chapbook evolved, however, it appropriated these intense episodes of suffering as its only content so that the genre, much like gothic drama, was a potent distillation of the immanent and the transcendent, minus the more extended descriptions of scenery, characterizations, and subjectivity that the middle or upper-class reader had come to expect in a novel identified as "gothic."⁴

III

Wilkinson's *The Spectres; or Lord Oswald and Lady Rosa* (n.d.) advertises its connection with the "Duchess C" subplot in its own extended title: *Including an account of the Marchioness of Civetti, who was basely consigned to a Dungeon beneath her Castle. By her eldest Son, whose cruel Avarice plunged him into the Commission of the worst of Crimes, that stain the Annals of the Human Race*. Using the *medias res* device, the chapbook begins with the arrival of a young stranger, Rudolpho, to an Italian castle inhabited only by a pair of

³ Bottigheimer argues for the Italian and Sicilian origins of the fairy tale, while more detailed discussions of the French and German fairy tale traditions can be found in Zipes (2007). Other critics have noted the fairy tale content of gothic tales, but not attempted to examine the issue in any detail. For instance, Frank writes: "Why were the Gothic writers so often drawn to the use of fairytale and folklore motifs of the kinds found throughout the chapbooks? The answer may be that the grotesque motifs and violent patterns of action of these primitive stories provided the distortions of reality and amoral disorientation that the Gothic writers depended upon for rendering their powerful effects. The motifs themselves are variations of the malignant sublime" (1987; 415).

⁴ Much more extended discussions of the transcendent and immanent, as well as the gothic as invested in a secularizing agenda can be found in my *Gothic Riffs* (2010a).

elderly servants. After an uneasy night in which he learns that he looks uncannily like the dead owner of the castle, Rudolpho persuades the pair to tell him its history. As in so many fairy/folk tales, not to mention Genesis, the original dispute is between an older brother, Francisco, who envies his younger and worthy brother Oswald because Oswald has inherited a vast estate on their mother's death (this occurrence, of course, undercuts the aristocratic practice of primogeniture). After marriage to the beautiful Lady Rosa and the birth of their daughter Malvina, Oswald dies shortly after his brother comes to visit. Francisco inherits his brother's property and the pregnant Rosa is declared to have been a mistress, not a legal wife. Held prisoner by Francisco for sixteen years, Rosa dies swearing "retributive vengeance" on her fratricidal brother-in-law. The hints dropped to the reader are numerous and broad during this exposition, such as "Lady Rosa could never be persuaded out of an opinion that her second child was not still born; she would persist that she heard it cry" (298), or "Rudolpho started up, and the room was filled with a supernatural blaze of light, and the spirits of Lord Oswald and Lady Rosa (for as such he recognised them by the pictures he had seen) stood by his couch. They waved their hands over him, as if in the act of giving him their benediction" (298). The second passage is a virtual plagiarism from Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron*, while the kidnapped child stolen at birth had been used in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*. The writing in *The Spectres* is not polished, nor is there control of plot devices, suspense, or motivations. With the appearance of the spirits of the dead parents, the plot quickly moves to its dénouement: Rudolpho is told by his parents to "save a sister's honor, and forgive thy father's murderer. Leave his punition [punishment] to heaven" (299). As Francisco attempts to rape Malvina, Rudolpho arrives to save her and in the process is revealed to be Oswald and Rosa's long-lost son, who had been adopted by a Pisan apothecary who had recently disinherited Rudolpho in favor of his brother, the apothecary's biological son. On his journey to inform said brother of these events, Rudolpho managed to stumble on the family castle just in time to save his sister from incestuous rape (also an act that is threatened in the *Castle of Wolfenbach* and Lewis's *The Castle Spectre*).

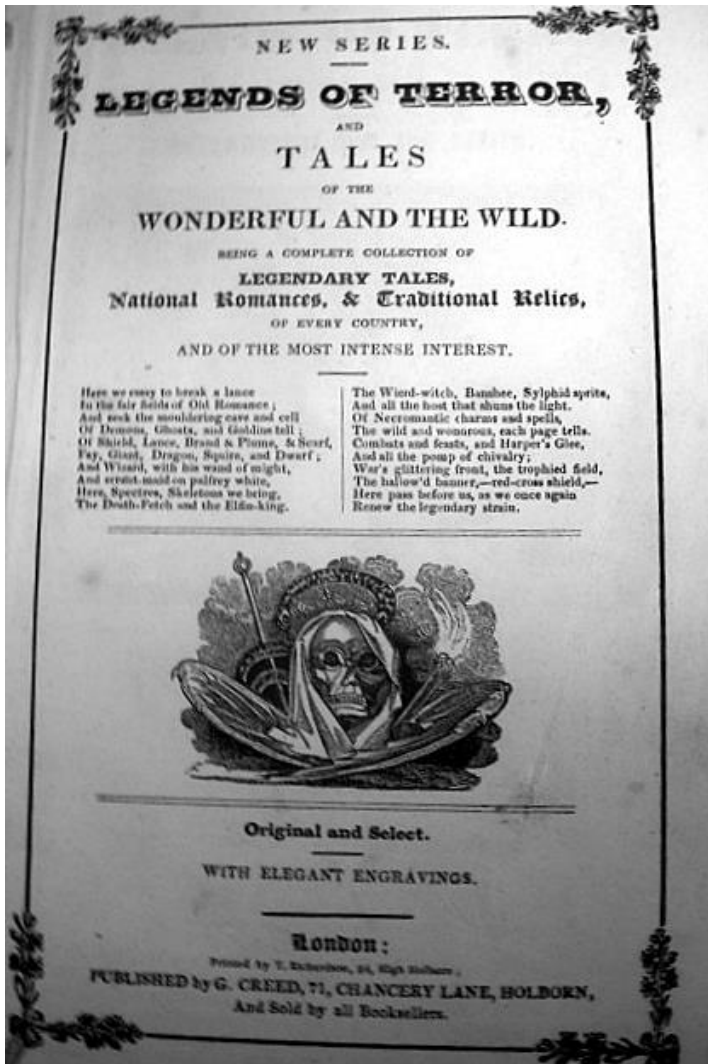
Once he is exposed, Francisco begs to be allowed to make a full "confession" (302) in which he admits his crimes, begs forgiveness, and arranges a marriage between Rudolpho and Eltruda, Francisco's only daughter (thereby reuniting and preserving the family's ancestral estates) all in fairly short order. His final act is to reveal that envy and

greed caused him to stage the death of his mother, so that he buried another woman in her place, and kept her prisoner in a dungeon below the castle for the past twenty years (all of this is extremely reminiscent of Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance*). After ordering the release of his mother, Francisco promptly dies after receiving her "gracious" pardon (305).

This chapbook, as I have suggested, is a virtual catalogue of gothic clichés, but it presents an interesting mix of stereotyped gender tropes as well as a composite of lower-class and bourgeois spiritual agendas. Lord Oswald and his wife, for all their aristocratic wealth and privilege, are presented as helpless victims of the scheming and evil Francisco. Like the lower-classes, they are unlucky enough to have drawn a very evil brother in the lottery of familial relations. In addition to this fatalistic subtext, the work presents a spirituality that is a mix of Catholic and Protestant tropes. On one hand, Francisco needs to relieve his conscience through the act of "confession," while prophetic dreams enable Rudolpho to see and hear the spirits of his parents. All of this residual Catholic "superstition," on the other hand, is contrasted with the bourgeois command to protect virginity at all costs. Also confused is Lady Rosa's dying prayer for "retributive vengeance," contradicted later when she and Oswald instruct Rudolpho to leave their uncle to Heaven, a decidedly more modern and "civilized" attitude.

The confused and contradictory ideological issues found in chapbooks have been identified by Potter as "dual plots, the horrific and the moralistic" (84), but this distinction can also be understood as caused by unresolved gender, class, and religious issues as well. The "horrific" recalls the typically male gothic tradition, but also the lower-class, transcendent, and Catholic components of the work, while the "moralistic" suggests a middle-class, immanent, Protestant, and "female" agenda at work. It is revealing to note that commentators during the period recognized the persistence of the tropes and even commented on their continued power.⁵ In 1826 the editor of *Legends*

⁵ Mayo was the first critic to recognize the essentially class-based, bourgeois moralizing tone of the gothic tale as published in the periodicals, while he asserted that the gothic bluebook was too crude to appeal to the rising middle-class reader (1942; 448). In a later article (1950), he focused on the chilly reception given the bluebooks by "many critics, editors, and members of the general reading audience in whose eyes *romance* was the hallmark for barbarous superstition, unreason, moral depravity, and bad taste" (787; his emphasis). Killick provides a broad history of the



of *Terror!*, [Figure 3] a collection of 136 tales that claimed to be “a complete collection of Legendary Tales, National Romances, & Traditional Relics of Every Country, and of the most intense interest,” observed:

A few centuries back, superstition gave rise to a general belief that the spirits of murdered persons wandered about the earth, until the perpetrator was either, by revenge or justice, punished for the foul deed he had committed; and that they would appear to their relatives and others, to point out the means by which their violent deaths might be avenged. Such superstitious feelings, though now seldom called into action, are probably not so completely extinguished, even in this enlightened era, as is generally imagined, but are yet cherished by a large portion of mankind. (210-11; qtd. Potter 89; 83)

Figure 3. Frontispiece to *Legends of Terror!*, reproduced by kind permission of the Sadleir-Black Collection, University of Virginia Library.

early British short story and its publication venues, while Potter distinguishes between gothic tales and gothic fragments, arguing that both “contain an abbreviated form of the gothic novel including conventional motifs and characteristics. There is no difference between the two terms except that of length, the tale being the longer of the two; consequently, the term ‘Gothic tale’ applies equally to Gothic short stories, tales of terror, novelettes, fragments and serialized romances” (79). Richter has claimed the “Gothic is to all intents and purposes dead by 1822” (125), while Mayo asserts that “from 1796 to 1806 at least one-third of all novels published in Great Britain were Gothic in character” (1950; 766); earlier he had observed that “the popular vogue for romances of terror was over in 1814, but their appeal was still fresh in the minds of readers” (1943; 64). Baldick claims that Poe’s tales are distinctly different from the earlier gothic tales, which he sees as inferior and merely redactions of the longer gothic novels (xvi).

A chapbook like *The Spectres* gives further evidence of the fact that uncanny, animistic beliefs are not eliminated in the lower-class imaginary, while horror and terror, the traditional male and female markers of the genre, are doled out in equal measure by an author intent on exploiting all of the permutations that earlier gothicists had perfected.

IV

Wilkinson's *The Castle Spectre: An Ancient Baronial Romance* is actually her second attempt to capitalize on the popularity of Lewis's 1797 drama *The Castle Spectre*. The other version, called *The Castle Spectre: or, Family Horrors, a Gothic Story*, had been published by Hughes in 1807. The two works are virtually identical and indicate how authors as well as publishers had no qualms about "borrowing" literary texts from others as well as themselves (in this case, was Wilkinson plagiarizing herself?). Set in Castle Conway on the border of Wales, the action once again concerns fratricidal envy, usurpation, attempted rape and murder, and vengeance by a maternal spectre that appears at just the right moments to expose evil and protect virginity. A two-paragraph frame places the tale in superstitious territory when it describes the "supernatural visitants" to the Castle Conway: Lord Hubert, we are told, continues to be seen "riding over his dominions on the first of every moon, mounted on a milk white steed, clad in glittering armor," while his faithless wife Lady Bertha is still heard shrieking from the western tower, "where he had immured her for incontinence while he was at Palestine." The third ghost haunting this castle is the unlucky Baron Hildebrand, who stalks around the great hall "every night, with his head under his arm" (2). While the author claims that she cannot assert to the truth of these earlier legends, she does assure the reader that the tale of "the Spectre Lady Evelina and the base Earl Osmond" is indeed true. Interestingly, the frame revisits the Germanic ballad material of Bürger's "Der Wilde Jäger," made popular in England by Walter Scott's translation of it as "The Chase" or "The Wild Huntsman."

Beginning *in medias res*, we are initially introduced to two young peasants, Angela and Edwy, inhabiting a sort of pastoral idyll that is rudely interrupted when Angela is mysteriously taken to Castle Conway as the long-lost daughter of Sir Malcolm Mowbray, deceased, and now under the guardianship of his best friend, Earl Osmond. Edwy, however, is not who he seems. He is actually Lord Percy, heir to

Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, who has chosen to assume the disguise of a peasant in order to court the lovely Angela and discover if she can love him for himself and not his wealth. After her disappearance he comes to realize that she also is not who she appears and is, in fact, the missing and presumed dead daughter of Earl Reginald, the lawful owner of Conway Castle and the elder brother of Earl Osmond, the usurper. The bulk of the text consists of positioning the principals in the castle in various threatened postures. Angela is twice the target of her murderous uncle's attempts at incestuous rape; Percy is imprisoned in a tower only to escape and attempt a rescue of Angela; and two black slaves, Hassan and Saib, alternately hurt or help the "white folks" (11).

Anti-Catholic markers and appeals to the lower class appear in this work in a number of ways. First, Gilbert describes Father Philip to Percy as "that immense walking tomb of fish, flesh and fowl....no more fit to be a monk, than I to be maid of hour to the Queen of Sheba" (12). The humorous mockery of the clergy in this work suggests the anti-clericalism at the heart of so much gothic textuality, but in this work Father Philip is not a murderous, greedy, lecherous hypocrite, but merely a misogynistic meddler looking for his next meal. It is the ambivalent depiction of the characters of the black slaves, in fact, that bears the ideological ire of the lower-class reading audience. Saib is described as the "good" black, "the untutored child of nature," who balks when he is ordered by Osmond to murder Kenrick, one of Osmond's trusted henchmen (13), and the man who had delivered the baby Angela to her foster parents. Osmond does not want any witnesses to his earlier crimes against his brother and his family, so he thinks that killing Kenrick will protect his reputation. Saib instead warns Kenrick so that he does not drink the poisoned wine that Osmond has prepared for him, and he is at the conclusion of the work "rewarded with a comfortable asylum for the remainder of his days" (24). In contrast, Wilkinson presents Hassan as the "evil" black slave, a man embittered because he has been stolen from his "Samba and our infant son....here my sooty hue renders me an object of contempt and disdain. O memory, torturing memory! But since the tyrants forced me from Afric's valued shore, I have vowed hatred; yes, hatred eternal to all mankind!" (11). Hassan participates in the murderous assault on the Lady Evelina and remains loyal to the evil Osmond to the end, attempting to kill Reginald. Not surprisingly, we learn at the conclusion of the text that Hassan dies along with the "other blacks [who] met the fate their crimes deserved" (24).

But Earl Osmond has not been sleeping well of late, plagued with “dreams of the most appalling nature, in which he beheld the specters of the murdered persons threatening him with everlasting perdition” (18). Believing in the truth of visions, hallucinations, and supernaturally charged dreams is, according to Jan Vansina, a common characteristic of oral societies, and continued to persist in the popular imagination well into the early modern period (7). Similarly, Theo Brown has argued that the continued prevalence of ghost stories during this period actually functioned in a number of different ways: as a form of social correction, as an externalizing of a collective bad conscience about the Reformation, as nostalgia for medieval Catholicism, and as indignation at the manner of its dissolution (41). In a similar manner, the text shifts here from being one that had earlier laughed at ghostly legends and superstitions to one that makes increasing recourse to the reality of the transcendent realm and the unexplained supernatural. At the point when Angela is once again threatened with rape by Osmond, the spectre of her mother appears: “a flowing drapery, or veil, expanding over her head and shoulders, leaving her bosom bare, on which was seen a ghastly wound, and the blood still appeared, as if flowing from it, over her white garments” (20). This is the moment that lower-class readers would have been waiting for, the horrific and supernatural reappearance of the undead bloody mother. It may be too much to ask so slight a text to bear so much ideological freight, but in this scene (as well as its source in Lewis’s drama) it is possible to detect the traces of the dead/undead Virgin Mary, the “mother” of Catholicism, the spirit who will not die no matter how vehemently bourgeois Protestantism works to eradicate her image. I make this claim because Wilkinson’s text clearly presents the Spectre of Lady Evelina as something more than a mortal mother to Angela: “Our heroine sunk on her knees, the Spectre bended over her, and seemed to bless her, but spoke not. She then, with a slow solemn pace, and soundless footstep, returned to the Oratory, stopping a short time before the picture of Reginald, on which she seemed to gaze with interest. The doors then closed, music was heard, with a chorus of heavenly voices chanting songs of triumph, and then silence reigned” (20).

The final climax of the work occurs when Angela, assisted by Saib, is reunited with her undead father, held captive in an underground dungeon in the southern tower of the castle by Osmond these past sixteen years. In a desperate last bid to assassinate his brother, Osmond orders Hassan to do the deed, but at that very moment

"thunder rolled, and all the elements seemed in commotion: a shock, as if from an earthquake, seemed to rend the building to its centre, and a part of the southern tower fell" (22). Again, we can see the continued prevalence of magical thinking in the lower-class imaginary, with the natural world believed to possess the ability to respond immediately to unnatural human designs. Amid the devastation that the earthquake has wrought, Angela finds her father stumbling out of his dungeon only to be assaulted by Hassan: "The slave lifted his dagger, when our heroine rushed forward with a loud shriek, and her father started up" (23). This scene is a virtual repetition of the earlier attempt on Reginald's life, the one that ended with the fatal blow given to Evelina. This time the scene abruptly stops as Osmond attempts to barter with Reginald for Angela's hand in marriage ("Osmond then offered his brother life and liberty, and one half of his possessions for the hand of Angela"). Reginald promptly repulses the notion of "an incestuous marriage: never shall the bosom of my child be made a pillow for the head of her mother's murderer" (23) and the fight is on yet again, with Angela on the verge of agreeing to the marriage in order to save her father's life. Just at the point when Angela would have "terminated the oath," the Spectre of Lady Evelina appears again, Hassan drops his dagger in fright, and Angela plunges hers into her uncle (24).

The Spectre of Lady Evelina departs to "solemn music," declaring that her work is completed. Osmond lives long enough to receive his brother's "merciful" forgiveness and Angela and Percy marry amid the strains of "the minstrel's harp" (24). Oaths and music have been foregrounded in this text in ways that suggest the continuing power of and attraction to an oral-based community. But the text closes on a discussion of what is to become of Angela's lower-class foster parents, the Allans. Angela wants to "raise them to a superior station in life," but it is their choice to remain in their humble cottage and to receive as gifts the many presents that Angela sends to them "to soothe their advanced years, and ameliorate the pains and infirmities of their old age" (24). The work concludes, then, in validating the status and goodness of the lower classes, suggesting that their moral superiority and self-chosen rural isolation protects them from the evils that have characterized the life of the aristocratic Osmond. The work, in other words, is nostalgic for a lower-class pastoral culture that was increasingly under siege by the early nineteenth century, while at the same time middle-class anxieties about the nature of marriage and religious beliefs emerge in a fairly chaotic manner.

The question that is most frequently begged in so many discussions of the gothic chapbooks is the reason for their popularity.⁶ Fred Frank claimed that they appealed to “the type of reader who had neither the time nor the taste for a leisurely Gothic experience. That there were many such readers during the Gothic craze is a well-documented fact” (1987; 420). But this is just another way of saying that you will always have the poor with you. A more important question might be to ask, why were the gothic chapbooks so attractive to women authors and readers like Wilkinson? As part of its secularizing and modernizing agenda, this culture saw a dramatic rise of literacy among the lower class, and the circulating library emerged as an important component of the public sphere in which commercial interests would ideally be complemented by secularizing and moralizing trends. In a culture in which literacy was seen as advancing the bourgeois cause of promulgating moral and civic responsibilities and inculcating “investment” values, the library and its publication arm, even one as lowly as the Minerva Press, produced works that would attempt to accomplish important civilizing work at the same time they made a profit. But finally, the gothic chapbook provided an entrepreneurial woman like Wilkinson with a literary technology that was capable of being manipulated and adapted to sell to a wide range of avid readers committed, regardless of gender, to the full horrors and terrors of the gothic pleasure principle.

⁶ Frank characterizes Wilkinson’s writings as “plundering” (1987; 412) and “automatic Gothicism produced and marketed for the reader’s fee of six pence” (1987; 413). James discusses the authors of gothic chapbooks as “hack writers” and “lower-class writers . . . [who] had not enough skill to create through atmosphere a suspension of disbelief” (80-81). More recently, Kelly has stated bluntly, “Wilkinson was a hack” (II; xxi).

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