

Penitence, Punishment, and Pain: Negotiating Personal Authority in Francis Lathom's *The Midnight Bell*

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Abstract: *Francis Lathom's novel, The Midnight Bell (1798), uses conventional gothic themes of crime, guilt, and punishment to interrogate gender roles and to explore how individuals may conform to, reject, or subvert mechanisms of social control in order to preserve their autonomy and sense of self. This paper examines the treatment of two characters, Countess Anna and Count Byroff, who each commit murder and come under the auspices of the Catholic penitential system and French judicial system, respectively. For Anna, voluntary self-flagellation provides an alternative form of self-authorization and subjectivity based on the special status of Catholic female religiosity, while Byroff's state-controlled subjugation results in his being objectified and feminized. While the subversive vision of male and female power dynamics is ultimately reversed, I argue that the novel's radical potential is never entirely contained, the high cost of the "happy ending" interrogating the social values on which such an ending depends.*

Keywords: Francis Lathom, *Midnight Bell*, gothic novel, gender and authority

Francis Lathom's 1798 novel *The Midnight Bell* is best known for its status as one of the "horrid novels" identified by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*. Amusing though this designation is in context, the label unfortunately seems to have colored—and restricted—scholarly thinking about the novel to the present day. Like scores of other second-tier Gothic novels that appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, *The Midnight Bell* has been largely dismissed as formulaic and trite, valuable, if at all, only as an example of generic conventions and of the questions and concerns that pervaded the gothic genre as a whole: gender relations and appropriate sex roles, religious authority and moral behavior, the relationship between the individual and society, the use and abuse of power. The novel has received little credit as deserving analysis in its own right and has thus

rarely received the sort of close reading that would illuminate the complex ways in which these issues are addressed by Lathom.

A close reading of *The Midnight Bell* may not at first glance appear to be a rewarding endeavor. Sarah Green, a nineteenth-century satirist of romantic and Gothic writing, described the writings of Lathom as “sickly and wearisome,” claiming that such writing “disarms criticism by wrapping the passive and unconscious mind in the elysium of a sound nap” (x). While such an accusation may be extreme, it seems apparent that Lathom’s overwrought prose and convoluted plot twists are not particularly appealing to contemporary tastes, at least to those trained to privilege “high” literature and culture over the “popular.” Indeed, my own initial response to the text was “No wonder it’s been forgotten.” Closer examination, however, reveals that, far from being a purely conventional, formulaic gothic novel, *The Midnight Bell* offers a complex exploration of the connections between gender, power, and authority. Even the superficially simplistic romance plot between Alphonsus and Laretta challenges gothic convention. For instance, as Bette Roberts notes in her discussion of “The Horrid Novels,” Laretta marries Alphonsus early in the novel, becoming a model of marital virtue rather than of virginal purity and, in a highly unusual twist, is pregnant when she attracts the attention of the villainous Theodore. Such permutations of the romance plot certainly deserve attention; however, Lathom shows the greatest sophistication in his construction of parallel and polarized experiences of pain and punishment for Countess Anna, Alphonsus’ mother, and Count Byroff, Laretta’s father.

Where the primary romance plot between Alphonsus and Laretta rather conventionally suggests that virtue will triumph over villainy in the end, the stories of Countess Anna, the hero’s mother, and Count Byroff, the heroine’s father, complicate the very notions of virtue and villainy—and of gender,

identity, authority, and autonomy. Both Anna and Byroff commit murder, although neither kills the intended victim. Anna inadvertently kills her husband Count Cohenburg in a mistaken attempt to protect her virtue against his brother, Frederic, while Byroff attempts to kill his wife's paramour but mistakenly kills a Venetian senator's son. Strikingly, Anna's and Byroff's intended victim is the same individual: Frederic, brother of Cohenburg, who will eventually be revealed as Frederic, lover of Countess Lauretta, a seemingly improbable coincidence that serves structurally to tighten the links between the two parental narratives. Fleeing Venice, Byroff subsequently becomes enmeshed in the public legal system of France, while Anna seeks to expiate her guilt through the Catholic penitential system. Byroff is tortured by his captors, while Anna performs self-flagellation as part of her penance. Focusing on the parallel, yet polarized stories of these two characters, the novel becomes an exploration of alternative cultural institutions and the ways in which individuals function within or in relation to them. Penance and punishment, church and state, cloister and prison become avenues for exploring significant cultural and social questions, the characters of Anna and Byroff respectively providing access to these divergent areas of experience.

In her study of Catholicism in Gothic literature, Muriel Tarr argues that "the 'medieval' world of Gothic fiction is inhabited by characters from the Age of Enlightenment" (87), characters created by eighteenth-century writers who view the Middle Ages "through the haze raised by their own emotional attitude towards the past" and who are in most respects only nominally medieval (16). Like Shakespearean actors who performed *Julius Caesar* in Elizabethan dress, Gothic characters wear the trappings of one era, while demonstrating the values and attitudes of another. True though this claim may be in many respects—history, after all, is always only available as a construction of the present, and

historical fiction is doubly implicated in this blurring of truth boundaries—it oversimplifies the way in which medieval Catholicism informs and complicates the identity and actions of Countess Anna, for whom the Middle Ages is far more than “a vague period of the past in which mysterious deeds are enacted in picturesque settings by strange characters” (Tarr 16). While only cursory detail is provided of Catholic penitential rituals, suggesting that Lathom’s knowledge of medieval Catholicism may have been vague, its central significance to Anna’s experience is unmistakable. Arguably, after killing her husband, Anna abandons an eighteenth-century persona to embrace her medieval Catholic heritage. Byroff, on the other hand, becomes increasingly identified with Enlightenment attitudes following his botched murder and entrapment in the French judicial system, relying heavily on reason and distrusting the senses and superstition. His more “contemporary” story thus potentially provides a simpler approach than Anna’s to the questions of transgression, guilt, punishment, and pain that pervade the novel.

It is with Byroff’s transgression and guilt that I will thus open my close reading of the text. Beginning almost exactly at the novel’s midpoint, Byroff’s story is the structural centerpiece of *The Midnight Bell*. Byroff enters the text in the guise of Ralberg, a bandit who has assisted in Lauretta’s abduction. His true identity is disclosed when he recognizes his long-lost daughter Lauretta by her crucifix—a gift from Byroff to his wife—and rescues her, helping to reunite her with her husband. Having listened to Lauretta’s account of her life—including assurances of her mother’s innocence of adultery—a remorseful Byroff recounts his own history, beginning with his “one rash act”: the attempted murder of Frederic Cohenburg (107), and its ripple effects will not only effect Byroff. It is the belief that her husband murdered the man she (innocently) loves that convinces Countess Byroff to flee to a convent where she eventually dies of grief.

It is worry over his beloved's fate that causes Frederic to become "a prey to grief" (189), arousing suspicion in Cohenburg of a romance between his brother and his wife and ultimately leading to Cohenburg's own death and the exile of Alphonsus. On one level, Byroff's actions can then be understood as illustrating what Michelle Masse in *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* identifies as "marital gothic," a subgenre "in which the husband becomes the revenant of the very horror his presence was supposed to banish" (7). Certainly, Byroff (and Cohenburg as we learn later) becomes the cause of his wife's destruction. While such a feminist reading may help illuminate the wives' experience, it provides little insight into Byroff's own experience, wherein he is as much victim as villain.

How then is one to understand Byroff's actions? Despite its failure in execution, the attempted murder of Frederic aligns Byroff with a private system of justice that lies outside the scope of the public realm and favors a male code of personal honor and retribution. In good medieval fashion (or the eighteenth-century perception of medieval fashion), a private wrong is repaid by private vengeance, the wronged husband personally punishing the domestic disturber. As Byroff argues, "'If there be a palliation for shedding human blood, 'tis surely in behalf of him whose injuries loudly call for revenge'" (106). Yet a telling juxtaposition of villain and victim occurs during the attack, as Byroff challenges the supposed Frederic "'in the name of a villain. . .to defend himself against the vengeance of an injured husband'" (107). Byroff clearly understands his victim to be the villain, himself the innocent, yet the ambiguous "in the name of a villain" could as easily apply to Byroff himself. This fluid dichotomy of villain/victim will become even more uncertain the morning after the murder.

Believing himself to be the injured party and Frederic deserving of death, Byroff appears to feel no remorse for the murder until the following day, when

he learns that he has mistakenly killed the son of a senator, that a reward is being offered for the murderer's capture, and that the "state of Venice" is prepared to punish the perpetrator and any accomplices (108). With this revelation, a double transformation occurs. First, Byroff's victim has become fully that, a victim. Innocent of any connection with Countess Byroff, the man died not in an act of justified vengeance, but the victim of willful murder. Second, with the dead man's transformation from villain to victim, Byroff's own status must be called into question. As Valdine Clemens points out in *The Return of the Repressed*, "Gothic protagonists' struggles with hidden guilt, transgression, and retribution point to a larger societal need to confront similar issues of social and moral responsibility" (6). Certainly, these issues are foregrounded in Byroff's narrative. Is Byroff a victim of circumstance or a villain? Is he guilty only of an error in execution—killing the wrong person—or is the enterprise of personal vengeance, the masculine code of honor, itself being challenged? What precisely is his transgression and what is the appropriate punishment? If there is a "gap between official ideology and actual reality" (Clemens 6), where does responsibility for his crime lie, with Byroff or with a society that valorizes honor at the expense of mercy? Lathom offers no easy answer; the question of guilt and responsibility will continue to haunt the narrative until the novel's conclusion.

With the revelation of the victim's identity, the action is transferred from a private world of domestic tyranny and vengeance, however problematic to the public realm of political and judicial power. It is not the murdered man's father, but the state that will demand vengeance for the crime. Byroff assures Lauretta that his horror over having murdered an innocent man was so powerful that he would have gladly accepted death "'with extasy [sic]'" at that moment—except, he explains, from the hand of a public executioner: "'From dying on a public scaffold my heart, humbled as I felt myself, recoiled'" (108). In other words,

Byroff would accept retribution from an injured father, a participant in the world of private justice that Byroff recognizes. In such a private system, Byroff, even in death, would remain a subject, one who willingly accepts punishment from an individual whose right to vengeance he acknowledges. Public execution, on the other hand, would reduce his status to that of a common criminal, open to the public gaze, subjected to, rather than a subject in, his own punishment. Byroff may have felt himself humbled, but not sufficiently so to accept such a humiliation and loss of agency. Knowing that just such a public execution awaits if he is apprehended, Byroff chooses to flee to France rather than risk capture. To preserve his estate from state confiscation, he transfers his property to his father-in-law, Count Arieno, who first alerted Byroff to his wife's supposed infidelity and encouraged his act of vengeance and who promises to remit the property once Byroff has reached safety, a promise he promptly rescinds knowing that the exiled Byroff cannot touch him. Despite this treachery, Byroff does escape to France where he lives quietly under the name Montville. For the moment, the question of Byroff's guilt and responsibility seems to recede; at least he seems to have escaped the full consequences of his actions.

Before I examine the next stage in Byroff's narrative, I want to shift to the parallel question of transgression in Countess Anna's story. If Byroff's story is the novel's structural center, Anna's story provides the narrative frame. It is her "murder" of her husband, Count Cohenburg, which sends her son Alphonsus into exile, and it is the revelation of her secret at the novel's end that facilitates Alphonsus' restoration to home and status. How does this series of events come about?

Examining the narrative in terms of Masse's discussion of "marital gothic" may be enlightening. Masse claims that in marital gothic "the trope of the husband allows us to consider how and why the figure who was supposed to lay

horror to rest has himself become the avatar of horror who strips voice, movement, property, and identity from the heroine" (12). Where in gothic courtship narratives the marriage that closes the novel represents a restoration of order and safety for the heroine, in marital gothic, it is within and because of the marital bond that terror arises. In the case of Anna, it is Cohenburg's jealousy that is the culprit. Cohenburg, early described as "addicted to suspicion" (Lathom 3), becomes suspicious that his wife and brother are involved in an affair and concocts an elaborate scheme to test their loyalty. Telling Frederic that he suspects his wife's virtue, Cohenburg persuades him to court Anna while Cohenburg is away on business, thus proving or disproving her fidelity, and Frederic reluctantly agrees. Cohenburg then stages his own murder so that he will be able to return in secret and catch the unsuspecting couple. Upon receiving news of Cohenburg's death, Anna, convinced of Frederic's treachery by his romantic overtures, accuses Frederic of the murder and gains a sacred oath from Alphonsus to avenge his father's death, an oath that implicates Alphonsus in the same sort of masculine honor code that surrounds Byroff. At dawn the next day, however, Anna enters Alphonsus' chamber, hands stained with blood, absolving Frederic of guilt, and demanding that Alphonsus leave the castle never to return. Alphonsus agrees, and the bulk of the novel then recounts his adventures and romance with Lauretta, only a brief mention of Anna appearing, when Alphonsus by chance hears of her death.

Only at the novel's end is Anna's true story is revealed: when Cohenburg returned secretly at night to surprise his "faithless" wife, Anna believed that Frederic was invading her chambers and stabbed him in order to defend herself: "Grasping a dagger which she had lately worn to defend herself from count Frederic, should he have attempted force upon her person, and which she now

believed him to be doing, she pierced him who held her to the heart" (191). It is only as the sun rises that she recognizes her victim as her husband.

Again, Lathom raises complicated questions of guilt and responsibility. On the one hand, it is simple enough to dismiss Anna's act as self-defense gone awry. Believing herself in danger from a murderer and potential rapist, she took action to protect her life and virtue. Cohenburg, having himself created the atmosphere of fear and suspicion that culminated in his death, is hardly an innocent victim. On the other hand, Anna's husband unmistakably lay dead by her own hand. The question then becomes "how will Anna and those around her respond to his death?"

Like Byroff, Anna rejects the public legal system in favor of a private mode of justice. In Anna's case, however, public and private are differently signified. In contrast to the masculine honor system with which Byroff aligns himself, Anna's private justice is institutionalized within the Catholic church. Father Nicholas, the priest who relates Anna's story to Alphonsus, explains that the Countess, having banished Alphonsus from home, sent for the priest and confessed her "involuntary crime" (191). She then convinced the priest to hide "the real means of her husband's death, and to circulate an immediate report of her death" (192). Unlike Byroff's escape from Venice, however, Anna's action does not constitute an avoidance of punishment. Rather Anna chooses "voluntary punishments," the self-flagellation of the medieval penitent (192).

From a modern perspective, it would be easy to pathologize Anna's action as mere masochism. Masse, for example, argues that masochism is a central element of the Gothic, in which women learn to internalize a belief in suffering as a feminine virtue (2-3). Such an approach seems reductive, however, denying Anna any real agency. In *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum notes that modern scholarship has so pathologized ascetic practices and

pain that it can become very difficult to understand the constructive role pain may have played for individuals in the Middle Ages (209). Trained to see all pain, especially that which is self-inflicted, as wrong, we are blinded to the meaning pain has held for other peoples. As Lisa Silverman reminds us in *Tortured Subjects*, “pain, like truth, is grounded in culture and history, and it has many meanings, which vary according to time and place” (21), and Clemens points out that Gothic fiction often emphasizes “modes of awareness and apprehension that no longer enjoy widespread public sanction” (24). If pain, and indeed the Catholic penitential system as a whole, are understood as “modes of awareness” or epistemological systems that have lost general public sanction, it becomes important to excavate what those systems signified within Lathom’s novel. What role do pain and penitence play for Anna?

I want to argue that for Anna voluntary penance acts as an alternative form of self-authorization located within a sacred worldview. It is a means for maintaining some control over her own fate. Though Anna’s autonomy is circumscribed by the penitential system and its male representatives, the priests, there is room for negotiating the boundaries of control. Bynum points out that “deliberate and systematic physical punishment was part of the daily routine for many religious women” of the Middle Ages, and such asceticism was not interpreted as masochism (209). Rather, such practices were empowering and gave meaning to their experience (208). Just as “human beings can renounce, or deny themselves, only that which they control,” the ability to choose or deny pain is an act of control (Bynum 191). By choosing her own punishment, Anna maintains at least partial control of her existence.

Not only does Anna initially contact the priest to confess her crime, she initiates the plan that will protect her from public punishment. It is at her request that Father Nicholas and his fellow priests conceal her crime and announce her

death. Further, once the immediate problem has been handled, it is Anna who determines her future, deciding to reside in seclusion in the castle: “‘She then told me, that she had formed a resolution of passing the sad remainder of her days in solitude in the castle. I reprobated this idea: but she was firm in her determination, and no arguments could divert her from her purpose’” (192). Anna’s determination to maintain control of her circumstances is evident; despite Father Nicholas’ “reprobation” and arguments, she holds to her purpose, and notably, she succeeds. Her decision to remain in solitude in the castle is vital to maintaining her autonomy. The midnight bell, for which the novel is named, is the central symbol of this autonomy, because it is Anna—or Anna’s ghost, according to rumor—who tolls it to summon the priests who “visited her every night to assist her prayers over the body of her husband” and witnessed her self-flagellation (192). By summoning the priests at her will, Anna maintains her subjectivity. Like Byroff who wanted to accept retribution on his own terms, Anna sets the terms for her penance.

In *Religious Imagination and the Body*, Paula Cooley argues that religious experience could at times “play democratizing and anti-authoritarian roles in relation to social institutions from family to government” (45), and Bynum notes that ascetic and ecstatic practices sometimes allowed medieval women to “[bypass] certain forms of clerical control that stood between them and God” (227), thereby gaining access to an alternative form of authority. Yet as Silverman notes, women were often denied membership in penitential confraternities that practiced self-flagellation because such practices were cast as masculine endeavors, the “ability to choose suffering [requiring] a freedom of choice that women were not seen to possess” (128). Anna’s choice of physical penance is thus highly significant. It is both an assertion of her freedom of choice and a form of self-authorization that employs the special status of female religiosity in order

to preserve Anna's status as free agent. The willingness to physically harm herself as punishment for her husband's death identifies her as a pious woman, one whose wifely devotion is deserving of admiration. Penance thus serves as a way for Anna to (re)construct a valid identity for herself by redefining her role from husband-killer to devoted wife and from mere wife to religious devotee.

I do not mean to suggest that Anna's penance is purely instrumental, that she is simply attempting to manipulate the priests to serve her own ends. There is no reason to doubt that Anna has genuine feelings of guilt and remorse for killing her husband. Still, just as medieval women could use ascetic practices as ways of exercising control and authority within their families and communities while still understanding such practices as truly spiritual experiences (Bynum), Anna could simultaneously engage in self-flagellation as an act of genuine contrition and as a mechanism for personal control and identity formation.

Her other realistic option, having placed herself in the hands of the Church, is to retire to a convent, just as her brother-in-law Frederic has chosen to enter a monastery. In a convent, however, she would inevitably be subject to the rules of the nuns and would lack the freedom that her own home provides, even if that freedom is severely circumscribed by her need to maintain secrecy. The limited freedom that Anna's choice buys comes at great cost, but it is apparently a price Anna is willing to pay.

The contrast between Anna's experience of pain and Byroff's could hardly be greater, as is apparent when we revisit Byroff's story. Having escaped Italy, Byroff lives incognito in Paris and successfully avoids state judicial mechanisms for nearly two years. Then, without warning, two men arrive with a *lettre de cachet* for his apprehension and removal to the Bastille. With his passage into the prison "over the draw-bridge which leads to the mansion of wanton tyranny and despair," Byroff disappears from the world as an active agent and becomes the

object of his captors' "wanton tyranny" for the next decade (112). I suggested above that Byroff becomes increasingly associated with Enlightenment ideas as the novel progresses, and it is during his imprisonment that this becomes most clear. That Byroff has "exited" the Middle Ages and is now participating in an Enlightenment conversation about the individual, the law, and state power is readily apparent. Most obvious is Lathom's employment of the dreaded *lettre de cachet*, a much abused tool of the French aristocracy that British Enlightenment authors frequently condemned. Subtler evidence that Lathom intends Byroff's experience to be recognizably contemporary also abounds. Lathom carefully secularizes Byroff's experience: he is in the hands of the state, not the Church; his alleged crime is spying, not heresy; and his torturers are state authorities, not Inquisitors. In other words, nothing in his imprisonment or punishment is identifiably medieval, while it is easily recognizable as an aspect of the social criticism of the late eighteenth century. As John Bender and David Punter both note, criticism of the law and legal institutions was common in eighteenth-century literature, and certainly Byroff's experiences of arbitrary imprisonment—arbitrary both in the use of the *lettre de cachet* and in the fact that he has been imprisoned nearly a year before his captor's inform him that he was arrested for spying, not for his actual crime of murder, of which the French law is unaware—, torture, and abuse by the prison warden closely reflect the social criticism of Lathom's day. Punter points out that eighteenth-century writers frequently depicted prison as "a hell, a bestiary, a jungle," an apt description of Byroff's experience of the Bastille (58).

Recognizing that Byroff's experiences reflect the social concerns of Lathom's era is simple, but how do these abuses function in the context of the novel? In contrast to Anna, Byroff has no control of his surroundings or his circumstances once he enters prison. Where Anna tolls a bell to summon the

priests, Byroff is solely at the mercy of his captors who, but for providing him with food and drink, may leave him unnoticed for months at a time. If he tries to draw his guards into conversation, "[his] efforts [are] ineffectual" as are any attempts to question the officials: "You are to answer, not to question, young man" he is warned (115). Nor do his declarations of innocence have any effect: "I could clearly see that their opinions were decided, and that either they were not, or would not be, moved by my vows and asseverations" (117). Such instances illustrate that Byroff has been effectually silenced. While the physical capacity for speech exists, the ability to make himself heard, to influence his circumstances through his own words, has been denied him.

The ultimate silencing of Byroff's voice occurs through the act of torture. The priests who acted as witnesses to Anna's pain, in the process validating her identity as an agent, are replaced for Byroff with guards "demons, in the shape of men" who inflict pain at will and on a whim (117). He is not a subject, but the object of their brutality. In *Gothic Bodies: The Politics in Pain in Romantic Fiction*, Steven Bruhm points out that

the later eighteenth century was the age of an emphatic reform in the management of physical sentience, a reform whose primary agenda was to rid the world of unnecessary pain. In utilitarian judicial theory, for example, sweeping changes in the procedures of punishment sought to reduce pain and corporeal affliction, thereby replacing torture and flogging with more humane, gentler methods of correction. (6)

In the Bastille of Byroff's imprisonment, this transformation has yet to occur. Eventually, through the act of torture, even the act of speech becomes impossible, and Byroff is reduced to "[shrieking] violently" (118). The brutal torture brutalizes literally, as Byroff loses the capacity for speech and is reduced to voicing the incomprehensible cries of a beast.

Incapable of meaningful and effective speech, Byroff has no opportunities for negotiating the boundaries of his freedom or for constructing an identity beyond that of victim, as is vividly depicted when he tames a robin that has entered his cell through the barred window. For seven winters, Byroff is visited by the robin, his one contact with the outside world—and the one aspect of his life which is apparently outside the control of the prison authorities. This comforting illusion is abruptly destroyed, however, one morning when a jailor enters the cell and sees the robin sleeping on its perch. Before Byroff can intervene, the guard “seized [his] unconscious favourite, and wrung his neck” (121). This senseless brutality is apparently insufficient, however. Faced with Byroff’s request to let him have the dead body, the guard instead flings it out the window. Byroff’s only thought on comparing his situation with that of his “lamented” companion is, “Thou, little bird, art still the happier” (121-122). Long gone is the privileged nobleman who saw fit to take vengeance into his own hand; in his place is a victim who cannot even protect a pet from harm. In an interesting juxtaposition of gender roles, it is Byroff, not Anna, who must passively accept the abuse of a male-dominated power structure, Byroff who does not act but is acted upon.

At this point, escape is Byroff’s only recourse, but escape too is out of his hands. Fortunately, Byroff is befriended by a sympathetic young guard, Jacques Perlet, who is appalled by the brutality used against the inmates. Again, Byroff is entirely passive. Jacques not only plans the escape, but Byroff is unconscious throughout. Having been provided a sleeping draught to simulate death, Byroff sleeps as Jacques frees him under the guise of disposing of his dead body. The idea that Byroff has been feminized is reinforced when he is forced to dress as a woman to escape detection: he is to play the role of Jacques’ wife, a simple enough deception since “[his] features are very delicate, and [he] may easily

pass for a woman''' (133). We are left with a striking contrast in the novel between two "womanly" figures: a feminized male who is purely victim and a woman who clings to control of her own fate.

How then do the fates of Byroff and Anna ultimately play out? Despite the feminization that he undergoes as a result of his imprisonment, Byroff ultimately recovers his autonomy. I have already mentioned that, at the time of his reunion with Laretta, he was living as a bandit, outside the bounds of legitimate social control. It is not this unlawful lifestyle, however, that represents the restoration of Byroff's subjectivity. Cooley notes the significance of voicing pain for torture victims who seek to reestablish their subjectivity. Indeed the voicing of one's pain "[presupposes] an agent who knows herself in some sense to be an agent" (63), and it is in voicing his pain, telling his story, to Laretta and Alphonsus that Byroff reestablishes his position as agent. The lack of voice that characterized (and feminized) Byroff during and after his imprisonment is replaced by an active narration of his own history. Byroff is the subject of his own story and the speaker who shares that story with his audience.

Anna, on the other hand, loses her voice at the novel's end. Where previously she had controlled, or at least actively influenced, her circumstances, with Alphonsus' return, she is reduced to an object. Notably, it is not Anna who relates her story to Alphonsus, but Father Nicholas. Although he describes the active role that Anna played throughout, that active role is related in the past tense. The description of her self-inflicted pain is mediated by the priest, and she gains no subjectivity by voicing her own pain. Her commanding voice is subsumed by the voice of Father Nicholas, and even the fate she had previously avoided—seclusion in a convent—she must now accept. On the very night that Father Nicholas relates her story to Alphonsus, he has transported her to a convent whose residents "'are not permitted, when they have once entered its

walls, ever again to hold converse with the world'" (194). Thus, her voice will be permanently lost to the world outside the convent walls. Anna's words and actions will be controlled by the convent authorities. Though their control will hopefully be gentler than that imposed by the Bastille guards, it is nonetheless an external authority to which Anna is now subject—and one under which she will not thrive. Lathom notes that Anna "lived but a few months" in her new surroundings (197).

Ultimately, the domestic status quo has been reestablished by banishing Anna's disruptive presence. Alphonsus and Lauretta reopen Castle Cohenburg and raise their family within its walls. Byroff is restored to a preeminent position in the family, "revered by his son and daughter; beloved and caressed by their offspring" (197). The medieval world has apparently succumbed to Enlightenment values. Is the novel finally to be understood as a conventional narrative where the restoration of order demonstrates and validates a patriarchal system? Is the conservative, orthodox world of eighteenth-century reason ultimately privileged? To some extent, the answer must be yes; however, Lathom's characterizations of Anna and Byroff significantly complicate and undermine such a simple reading. Though he has endured years of imprisonment, Byroff has never taken responsibility for the murder he committed, his unpunished transgression remaining a subliminally threatening specter in the text: if the Gothic teaches any lesson, after all, it is that unpunished crimes have a way of coming back to haunt one. And, of course, Anna's ghost continues to haunt the narrative, an eerie reminder of the cost of an order that can only be maintained through the exclusion of any disruptive influences.

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