GOTHIC MUTABLITY:
THE FLUX OF FORM AND THE CREATION OF FEAR

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For the Wee
I couldn’t have done it without you
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will revise

—T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

The Gothic is an amorphous form that splits and divides into subgenres which in turn overlap upon each other. Jerrold Hogle and Anne Williams respectively call it an “uneasy conflatio[n] of genres, styles, and conflicted cultural concerns” and a “dim, shapeless fiction” (2, 6). Perhaps because of its inherent variability, there has been a compulsion to categorize it, to break it down into more consistent parts, to make better specimens for analysis and to give some kind of shape to this graceless mass. The Gothic, then, is perpetually subcategorized and re-categorized in an attempt to make some sense of it. This is perhaps nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in Eve Sedgwick’s *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. Sedgwick sets herself upon the deceptively simple quest of cataloging the key traits of Gothic novels, claiming “My attempt has been to apply these thematic names [such as ‘unspeakable,’ ‘live burial,’ etc.] to fictional elements at every level” (4). Even more optimistically she adds, “Besides pointing to and naming thematic conventions, the other main critical activity of this study is assimilating those conventions to each other” (Sedgwick 5). But how effective is such an impulse?
In the definition of any genre there is some margin of error (in the Gothic perhaps we should call it “room to squirm”), and even within the sub-categories of the Gothic, or in breaking it apart into “coherent conventions,” we must be forever reconsidering and redefining both the limits we impose and the expectations we possess. Therefore, because of the Gothic’s openness, I find Ellen Moers definition to be the most successfully articulated summation. She states, “what I mean—or anyone else means—by ‘the Gothic’ is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear” (90). By returning to the fundamental idea of fear in my study of the Gothic, I attempt to explore some of the limitations of our existing understanding of the genre.

In order to examine the ways in which fallacious expectations may hinder a more nuanced knowledge of what it means to be Gothic, I will challenge the myth of the genre’s origin and the current critical means of describing its subgenres. I suggest that the genre is far too unwieldy to continue to rely on the creation story as it is now told and offer evidence that complicates this story. Moreover, I will attempt to prove that the divisions of the Gothic based on gender or supernaturalism are much too restrictive for a genre that is notoriously difficult to categorize. Instead I will offer new terms for describing the ways in which the genre divides by returning to the basic concept of fear. To do this I will look at three novels that are recognized as Gothic to different degrees: *The History of Ophelia* (1760) by Sarah Fielding, *Ethelinde; or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789) by Charlotte Smith, and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe. This sampling of novels shows how revision of the genre is useful in a variety of ways. Fielding’s work offers a challenge to the idea of origin; Smith’s novel has been
problematic to classify because of its erratic use of Gothic conventions, and Radcliffe’s arguably definitively Gothic novel does not accurately represent the characteristics that are based upon it.

By examining these three texts, all of which complicate some of the existing definitions that we have for the Gothic, I hope to participate in the necessary act of revisiting and revising assumptions about the genre. However, in offering *Ophelia* as an indication that Horace Walpole’s creation of the genre was not so spontaneous as has been commonly believed and *Ethelinde* and *Udolpho* as instances in which current terminology is insufficient, I do not mean to propose that I have solved some riddle or made “conventions coherent.” But I do think that we must continually refine our understanding of this genre by testing the rules we create to make sense of it. In order to describe and from thence analyze these novels, the terms we use must accurately represent what is happening in them. Additionally, by recognizing and making sense of the overlapping and looping that takes place so often in the genre, we can begin to interact in a more sophisticated manner with Gothic mutability. That is perhaps one of its more intriguing attributes.

Of the impediments to our understanding of the Gothic genre, the myth of its origin—or as Williams eloquently states, “the oft-told tale of Horace Walpole, Father and Great Original, a tale which is itself a full-fledged Gothic narrative”—is perhaps the most difficult to surmount (8). In 1764 Horace Walpole, the eccentric owner of the Neo-Gothic estate Strawberry Hill, published the wild and mutant novel *The Castle of Otranto*. In so doing, legend has it, he established a new genre of writing that united the
modern and historic romance. Walpole created a hybrid of past and present by uniting the terms Gothic and novel. In *The Castle of Otranto*, E. J. Clery argues, Walpole combined the fashion of the day including: “the revival of romance…revisionist accounts of medieval culture, the aesthetics of original genius and the sublime, and the growing cult of Shakespearean tragedy” (Clery 25). Terry Hale offers a slight modification to this recipe and suggests that Walpole’s sources were not quite so English. She postulates that there were many continental influences on the formation of the Gothic: the French adventure stories of the 1730s, the German novels of chivalry, and the *romans noirs* that preceded the French revolution. Because of these influences, Hale argues, one can see how translation and interaction between countries contributed to shaping the genre—yet she does not dispute that Walpole was the first Gothic novelist in England.

Too long has this legend gone unquestioned by so many. Horace Walpole did very much contribute to one permutation of the Gothic, but I find that so did Sarah Fielding. She, using the uncanny to produce fear, is producing Gothic fiction nonetheless. The Gothic nature of her novel seems evident in the following passage:

The Castle was then tottering with Age, and may now, perhaps, by the irresistible Arm of old Time, be leveled to the Ground…The Rooms were extremely large, wainscotted with Oak, which was turned almost as black as Ebony; and all the Light that entered was from small Casements, with a larger Proportion of Lead and Iron than Glass…You may imagine that our Situation was better suited to the Dark, than to the Day; but, in this you are mistaken; for the Horrors of the Night exceeded all the dismal Prospects the Sun could shew us…The old Towers of the House were filled with Owls of every Sort, who, by their hoarse Hooting, and their shrill Shrieking, bore no inconsiderable Part in the Concert, of which the Froggery made the Base. These vocal Performers were accompanied by all Modulations of a bleak Winter’s Wind, which gathering in various Passages of that rambling House, made a continual Whistling, even in the
mildest Weather, roared in the Chimneys, and blew in at a thousand Crevices in the shattered Wainscot. (Fielding 170-71)

Future readers of Gothic novels would be hard pressed to differentiate between this passage from *The History of Ophelia* and the descriptions of ruined parapets that perpetually occur in Ann Radcliffe’s quintessentially Gothic novels published 30 years later. Such identification seems almost inevitable due to the striking similarities of content and style. And yet, little to no connection has been made between Fielding’s style and that of later Gothic writers. The reason is a rather simple one: the prevailing literary historical creation myth tells us that the Gothic genre would not be established for another four years. And thus we are left perplexed. For certainly scholars know that, “Literary genres do not emerge overnight, nor do they arise in cultural isolation” (Hale 63). Why then does the legend of *Otranto*’s originality so often go unexamined, and why is Walpole, the patriarch of the Gothic, still so universally allowed to reign in our accounts of the genre?

Therefore the first of my revisions to the Gothic is to suggest that though previous novelists did not so self-consciously proclaim themselves to be Gothic, there are decided indications that they embodied many Gothic attributes, most importantly fear. This fear has been the complicating factor for critics who would otherwise have read *Ophelia* as a Gothic text. Because they find it lacking, the Gothic characteristics of the novel have been quickly qualified. “As Ann Marilyn Parrish has pointed out,” Linda Bree writes, marveling at the Gothic castle that haunts the middle of *Ophelia*, “one can scarcely believe there was no Gothic novel for Miss Fielding to be satirizing” (141-2). Likewise Peter Sabor claims that “having created her Gothic vision, Fielding at once undermines it;
Ophelia experiences no terror during her sequestration, in the manner of a proper Gothic heroine, but rather disdain and disgust” (16; emphasis added). What Bree, Parrish, and Sabor seem to suggest is that we could attribute an early manifestation of Gothic form to Fielding if she had created fear (possibly the only stable component of the Gothic) and an appropriately flighty heroine.

I argue that because our understanding of Gothic fiction has been defined by the conventions of its “originator” Walpole, we have failed to recognize the Gothicism of the fear that Fielding creates. It is very true that Fielding did not include any ghosts lurking in her moldering castle walls. Yet, this exclusion is not as problematic to classifying it as Gothic as we seem to think. I argue that we should include Fielding from our understanding of this genre even though she does not employ supernatural means to produce fear. The obscured terror in Fielding’s novel and the uncanny doubles who do act rather like “proper Gothic heroines” should be fully studied. My thesis contributes to this project, adding to the depth of our understanding of what brought the Gothic genre into being and what its unusual traits signify. The first chapter of this study, “The Uncanny Case of The History of Ophelia: Sarah Fielding’s Anomalous Premonition and the Nascent Gothic Novel,” looks at the way in which Fielding’s Ophelia presents situations, characters, themes, and settings that become stock features in later Gothic novels, as well as an exploration of how and why fear remains uncannily obscured in the novel.

The next Gothic problem I tackle in this thesis, beyond that of “origins,” centers on the term “female Gothic,” coined by Ellen Moers in 1974. This term has come to be a
simultaneously helpful and restrictive way of accounting for the consistent distinctions among some Gothic texts. The definition that Moers provided was a simple one; by female Gothic she merely meant “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (90). The uses to which later critics put the term have become increasingly complicated. In addition to being a category that describes the writing of women, Williams, for example, has developed an intricate theory about the different formal elements that this gender divide denotes. She finds that the “Male Gothic differs from the female formula in narrative technique, in its assumptions about the supernatural, and in plot” (102). The female Gothic, Williams argues, contains a limited point of view, an explanation of supernatural events, and a happy ending. The male Gothic possesses the opposite characteristics. But the most important distinction lies in the production of fear. Williams finds that “whereas the Female Gothic is organized around the resources of terror, of an imagined threat and the process by which that threat is dispelled, Male Gothic specializes in horror—the bloody shroud, the wormy corpse” (104). Kate Ellis on the other hand softens the divide with the labels “feminine Gothic” and “masculine Gothic” and then further still by identifying important schools of the Gothic instead of genders: Radcliffean Gothic and Lewisite Gothic. Yet implicit still is a female form and a male one.

More recently scholars find that a division based solely on gender can be as limiting as other more harshly gendered descriptions applied by critics in the eighteenth century. Judith Pascoe warns that, with the best intentions, feminist critics have caused “[women writers] to be read too exclusively in gendered terms” (213). By classifying
writers solely on the basis of gender, or more specifically the female gender, “we do not attend carefully enough to other kinds of affiliations” (213). Adriana Craciun has shown the fatality of such an error in her study of one of Romanticism’s “fatal women,” Charlotte Darce, a woman writing in the Gothic form (thus female Gothic in Moers definition), but one who uses the horrifying capacity of explicit violence (thus male Gothic to Williams and masculine or Lewisite Gothic to Ellis). Craciun directly refutes such categories claiming “Dacre’s heroine Victoria is exiled, seeks to master her world and those in it, and is decidedly sadistic, tormenting, and murdering for the pleasure of exerting her will; she is thus neither within the female or male Gothic traditions” (145-46).

This debate may suggest that the genre should not be split along gender lines, but that some sort of split is present seems irrefutable. I argue that it is more fruitful to attribute this split to the means of producing fear, as do many critics. Hogle, for example, divides the genre into terror Gothic or horror Gothic. Terror Gothic, he contends, “holds characters and readers mostly in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety and sanity kept largely out of sight or in shadows or suggestions from a hidden past” (3). Horror Gothic conversely “confronts the principal characters with the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms” (3). Though this categorization does strongly resemble the female/male divide, it is more permeable. Writers, regardless of sex, can fit into whichever best distinguishes their work.

Interestingly, this is precisely the division that Ann Radcliffe formulated in the prologue to Gaston de Blondeville (1826). In her preface, entitled “On the Supernatural
in Poetry,” Radcliffe argues that “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life, the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them” (168). In this description Radcliffe is speaking only of the effect that the different methods of producing fear have on the reader. The expansion that she offers defines these terms more clearly and allows us to make a more lucid connection to the terms as Hogle defines them. Radcliffe says, “I apprehend that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one: and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?” (168). Much like critics today, Radcliffe explains that it is when the thing feared is uncertain and obscured that terror results. Obscurity, one of the elements of the sublime, then causes the soul to expand. Conversely, the clarity of horror, or what Hogle calls “gross physical violence,” in Radcliffe’s estimation, freezes the soul. In this posthumously published novel, Radcliffe, while offering support to a stylistic division revolving around fear, also helps to belie a division based on gender. For in Gaston de Blondeville, Radcliffe, the paradigmatic female Gothicist, indulges in unexplained supernatural events.

Though I think that the terms terror and horror provide insight into the divide in Gothic fear, I disagree with the way in which they are used to categorize this fear and will offer revisions to them on the basis of Burke’s own definitions of the sublime. Contrary to expanding the soul:
The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. (41)

This complicates Radcliffe’s argument considerably; terror, which in her definition is caused by looking upon sublimely obscured fear, has the opposite effect of what Burke tells us is a sublime reaction—a suspension of all motion and thought. Furthermore that which Radcliffe describes as horror seems in every way more sublime than terror. If the sublime is experienced through the contemplation of the terrible, including the depiction of pain, it would seem that the more intense the pain, the more sublime would be our experience. The most intense experience of pain would be a representation of death, because “as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death”—just the horrifying sorts of deaths that are detailed in male Gothic/horror Gothic (13). It is true that there must be a certain distance from this pain/death to allow the spectator to enjoy it—thus Radcliffe would claim the supernatural must not be real, or Hogle might contend the haunting would be only psychological or threatened. This sort of adjustment would bring the fiction back into their definition of terror. Yet such an additional frame is unnecessary because of the nature of fiction itself. For imitation, Burke claims, “is never so perfect, but we can perceive it is imitation, and on that principle are somewhat pleased with it” (25). Therefore when Radcliffe claims that neither Milton nor Shakespeare used positive horror, she is correct, but only because the device of their writing prevents horror from being positive. The clearly depicted
violence in fiction or poetry is fully capable of producing a sublime effect. As Burke says, “No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too” (42). The graphic violence or rampant supernaturalism of male/horror Gothic is distanced from the pain it depicts enough for us to perceive it with sublime enjoyment; after all, “objects which in reality would shock, are in tragical, and such like representations, the source of a very high species of pleasure” (Burke 22).

I find that what Radcliffe calls horror and what many current critics call male Gothic could perhaps be more helpfully expressed as Sublime Gothic. Donna Heiland comes close to making this argument in her study of Gothic novels. She notes that “sublimity often—though not always—derives from scenes of fantastic violence” (34). And those she studies using the sublime would be typically understood as male/horror Gothic writers: Matthew Lewis and Charles Maturin with the troubling inclusion of Charlotte Dacre. Under such a label we can consider the contradictory characteristics of male Gothic (like women writers writing in it) or horror Gothic (it actually being a sublime experience but not necessarily evoking supernatural devices). For, in essence, whether or not the author acknowledges that the supernatural is false, readers are aware of this fact because they are reading a work of fiction. Using the term sublime to include vivid descriptions of pain that astonish the reader without implying a gender or the use of the supernatural would make it possible for critics to categorize the most painstaking descriptions of torture, mutilation, ghosts, and death which result, because of the
comfortable distance of the novel itself, in a sublime experience which “fill[s] our mind so entirely with its object” that the readers cannot seem to put the novels down.

The main element of the sublime Gothic is astonishment, a temporary suspension of agency while one is consumed in the contemplation of a force larger and more terrific than oneself. On the other hand what Radcliffe calls terror and what others call female Gothic seems to revolve around the type of fear that produces action instead of astonishment. To come to terms with how this is created, it is necessary to revisit Radcliffe’s use of obscurity. The impression produced from obscurity, she tells us, “is only a negative, which leaves the imagination to act upon the few hints that truth reveals to it” and “Obscurity leaves something for the imagination to exaggerate” (169). Because of the teasing power of obscurity which propels the imagination, the reader, and the protagonist forward, I think that the concept of obscurity is more important than terror in defining the type of fear that is present. When a threat is obscure, one does not know how it can be overcome for “to ascertain the object of our terror, is frequently to acquire the means of escaping it” (Radcliffe 169). So in addition to leaving room for the imagination to supply the face of the fear, the obscure also produces the impulse to see what one fears more clearly. As shown the supernatural can be horrifyingly clear. But, I contend, the supernatural can also be obscured. By allowing that both men and women produce both types of fear and showing that the supernatural can be present in both categories, while it need not be present in either, these terms are at once more fluid and more refined a way of describing the novels.
To experience obscurity is to see something not as it really is while being inevitably drawn to it in hopes of discovering its “true” form. The psychological implication of such an uneasy confrontation of disguised knowledge matches very closely our current understanding of the uncanny. As Freud defines it, the uncanny is the resulting feeling when something repressed has come to light. When this occurs the object of repression is so distorted that it is experienced as a frightening, shadow version of reality. Uncanny Gothic then may be a more useful way of describing female Gothic or terror Gothic. While this term accounts for many of the stylistic components that Williams describes when defining the female Gothic, it does not imply a gendered condition to the text. Also, this clarifies the active nature of the fear produced by the obscure: it can be attributed to a desire to uncover what is hidden. To use the uncanny to describe a phenomenon of fear in the Gothic is not as anachronistic as it may appear. Terry Castle claims the eighteenth century was in effect the founding moment of the uncanny because it was invented by the distinct implications of the age of Enlightenment. The age of Enlightenment, by privileging factual truths over superstitions, sought to obliteration infantile fears or primitive desires. The Enlightenment, by forcing the population to repress these infantile fears, caused them resurfaced in uncanny ways—hence, Castle argues, the emergence of the Gothic genre. The uncanny Gothic occurs when fear, because obscured, becomes a catalyst into action regardless of gender or supernatural elements.

As Radcliffe argued that terror and horror are opposites, it is possible to view the sublime and the uncanny as fundamentally different from each other. Heiland
persuasively suggests; “Where the sublime breaks down boundaries between the 
perceiving subject and something outside herself, the uncanny confronts the subject with 
something long repressed or forgotten, but does not allow that breakdown of boundaries. 
Instead the person is literally or figuratively ‘haunted’ by this reminder of the past that 
she cannot identify and cannot escape” (6). Yet, despite these differences, I find no 
reason to view the two modes as mutually exclusive. For as we have noted it is against 
the tendency of the Gothic to be ordered and easily categorized. On the contrary, I 
propose that many Gothic novels contain moments that revolve around both means of 
producing fear: showing it very directly and obscuring it. By acknowledging the overlap 
between these less restrictive categories, critics can study how these two types of fear 
interact with each other. Instead of refusing to recognize the contradictory moments in a 
text, my approach acknowledges them as a place for revision in our comprehension of 
what authors are attempting to accomplish in Gothic novels. 

By adjusting how one perceives the term Gothic and how these different formal 
elements can overlap, it is possible to understand Charlotte Smith’s novel Ethelinde; or 
the Recluse of the Lake (1789) more comprehensively. Such is my project in chapter two 
of this thesis, “Ethelinde’s Disintegration; or the Ruthless Hand of Fortune.” Previously 
this work has been described as a novel of manners in which oddly Gothic sections were 
included. It is true that the novel shifts dramatically in tone and plot; the realism of the 
narrative falls apart, and the supernatural is introduced. I propose that for the majority of 
the novel, Smith is working within the uncanny Gothic. That is, the fear is produced in an 
obscure, repressed figure that recurs and haunts the main characters. However, Smith also
utilizes another, more clearly defined method of producing fear—sublime Gothic. There are demonstrably supernatural scenes in which characters are wholly frozen or absorbed by the sublimity of what they witness. Only by accepting that both of these types of fear are possible in a single work can both be dealt with on the specific terms they demand.

*Ethelinde* is a complex novel that vacillates between modes when the effect produced by the fear is created for different reasons. I claim that these two types of fear, the sublime and the uncanny, are necessary because of the variations of anxiety being expressed in the novel: a fear of poverty and one that is more unspeakable, a despair of being aided by those upon whom we rely for protection. If Smith was attempting to critique the means of making money, as there is considerable evidence to suggest, then to use uncanny Gothic—to cause the fear to be expansive and recurring—seems to make the reader continually look upon the thing feared until they can make it out clearly. It is this way of dealing with fear that earned Smith a reputation as a radical. She causes the reader and the critic to confront again and again things in society that she deemed unacceptable. Conversely, the fears that could not be spoken were frozen, limited, and overpowering, albeit brief. They exist in the novel but because of the improbability surrounding their inclusion are dismissed as irrational and fantastic. The assault of poverty on the morals and virtue of the characters is not experienced in a brief and freezing way but in a way that causes the reader to expand upon the social problem that Smith presents. Smith’s novel demonstrates the ways in which different methods for creating fear function to different ends and why allowing for the existence of both makes for a fuller understanding of the complexities of the text.
In *Udolpho* uncanny fear is interrupted by sublime fear, and it is this interruption that I explore in the final chapter, “The Once and Future Patriarch: Radcliffe’s Revision of Masculine Purity.” Lurking in the corners of the novel and surrounding the (momentarily) supernatural events is an obscure threat to the home that Emily leaves and to which she must return. This uncanny home (and the story of St. Aubert, Sister Agnes and the Marchioness de Villeroi) presents the framework of the novel. Radcliffe causes Emily perpetually to explore her fear of her father’s sexual immorality through uncanny repetitions of character, place, and time. It is only when the feared crimes are absolved that Emily can reach resolution. However, because the mind is called away from contemplation by sublime moments, the investigative thrust is halted, at least ostensibly, and obscures the sexual threat to the ideal home.

Radcliffe, as I have noted, is reputed to be a “terror” Gothicist. Nevertheless, she continually populates the hefty middle section of the novel with sublime moments, those that contract the soul and would fall into her definition of horror. That Radcliffe will later deny these moments cannot change the immobilizing affect that occurs as the reader and Emily experience what is perceived as supernatural, even if it might not be possible to recreate the experience upon a second reading. Regardless of the fact that the reader eventually learns that everything has a rational explanation, when Emily sees murdered bodies, hears the ravings of mad nuns, encounters “ghosts,” and witnesses Montoni’s violence against her aunt, she very often loses consciousness or nearly does because she is overwhelmed—astonished. After the initial thrill has worn off, though, there is only disappointment. This coincides with Radcliffe’s own definition of horror: “the effect,
though sudden and strong, is also transient; it is the thrill of horror and surprise” and seems to complicate the claim that she is working within the mode of terror (168). Furthermore, because of the immobilizing quality of this fear, the narrative seems to lack the forward momentum that could free Emily from the castle, and readers feel that this section of the novel is strangely protracted. I argue that this demonstrates how our current, limiting, ways of describing Radcliffe hinders a full understanding of why the narrative is so alternately compelling and stagnant despite numerous plot developments at the castle itself.

The type of fear that is created in the castle is horrific but not supernatural and is hard to categorize with the existing division of terms. By classifying the fear not on the basis of the explanation that will be provided hundreds of pages later, but on the immediate effect, we can see that the supernatural is far from being the only cause of this horror. This revision is necessary because Radcliffe, though a woman writer and one who denounces the supernatural, infuses her novel with it and shows as positive a picture of horror as may be possible in fiction. Such a categorization does not then contradict the effect that her fiction, if only momentarily, has on the senses. No amount of explanation can change the reader’s initial response. The sublime astonishment has already been felt. This lengthy section does not simply contain only sublime moments, but inspecting those that are sublime helps to account for many of the stylistic irregularities present in the novel.

I conclude that Radcliffe’s requiring the sexual purity of the patriarch is a very radical turn in the genre. But, because this requirement is interrupted so effectively by the
sublime Gothic that prolongs the middle section of the novel, the reader very nearly loses sight of what, stylistically, Radcliffe has repeatedly made us investigate. This may in some way account for the novel’s appeal to conservative audiences. Yet at the same time, I propose that if the uncanny Gothic can be brought to the critical foreground, if only momentarily, the easy categorization of Radcliffe’s conservatism might be made more complicated. I argue that by ignoring for a moment some of *Udolpho*’s more sublimely frightening attributes, the obscured uncanny Gothic comes into focus and gives us a new way to read the novel which helps to account for the conflicted critical positions that Radcliffe is a conservative and that Radcliffe is a radical.

All of these novels have made vastly different impacts on the study of Gothic fiction: Fielding has been scarcely visible in scholarly contemplation of the genre, Smith has been misunderstood, and Radcliffe has been pigeonholed. For this reason, I find that these texts demonstrate the variety of ways in which gothic novels still need attention and revision. This persistent reinvestigation is necessary to further the conversation about what the word Gothic means, how it came into being, and how we can come to terms with the irrational behavior of the genre. As Robert Miles rightly remarks, it is only by being “aware of differences, as well as similarities” that we will “understand more deeply what the tale of terror signified to the diverse constituencies that produced and consumed it at the end of the eighteenth century” (60). Though the thrust of my study has largely been to examine the way in which uncanny Gothic functions, there is still much work to be done in reinvestigating the traditional divisions between male and female and terror and horror to find places of overlap and entanglement. By pursuing these threads we can
find similarities between writers and texts which would previously have been thought incompatible and will give more space for the winding complexities of the Gothic novel to unfold.
CHAPTER TWO

THE UNCANNY CASE OF *THE HISTORY OF OPHelia*:

SARAH FIELDING’S ANOMALOUS PREMONITION AND THE NASCENT GOTHIC NOVEL

Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Ophelia* (1760) tells a strangely familiar tale. An old manuscript is found. It relates the adventures of an innocent orphan who is abducted by a mysterious villain. She is persecuted by lustful men and jealous women; sequestered in a castle; journeys endlessly; and eventually marries the attractive stranger who caused all of the conflict. The similarities between this narrative and later Gothic novels seem to be glaring. Yet, despite parallels of plot, critics find that *Ophelia* resists such categorization because it seems to lack the fear necessary for a Gothic story. Peter Sabor and Linda Bree separate *Ophelia* from the Gothic novel it so strongly resembles because it lacks the supernatural occurrences and psychological terror which would supply fear. This seems a fair observation; one will find no ghosts, bleeding statuary, or mad monks in Fielding’s novel, and Ophelia quite frequently refuses to faint at the appropriate moments. Furthermore Fielding’s novel appears four years before the Gothic’s founding text: Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Nor does she correspond to Walpole’s Gothic vision. However I do not agree that we can separate *Ophelia* from what will become the Gothic novel on these grounds.
Ophelia’s difference from The Castle of Otranto and Walpole’s hyperbolized methods of producing fear is only superficially problematic. The variability of the Gothic in which, as Fred Botting argues, “Ambivalence and uncertainty obscure single meaning,” renders the tale of its creation and its development multifarious (3). Instead of resembling Walpole’s early Otranto, Fielding’s novel seems to anticipate later gothic texts, like Radcliffe’s, in which radically different methods for producing fear are utilized. As we attempt to reconcile Fielding’s novel to the creation of the genre, it seems more helpful to consider if fear is present and if it is present in a world that is deemed Gothic. “In Gothic fiction,” Botting writes, “certain stock features provide the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties” (2). As the opening lines of this chapter indicate, Ophelia contains many of these stock features: a kidnapped young woman, persecution, imprisonment, antiquated castles, and lascivious aristocracy contrasted with pastoral innocence. But, most importantly, these elements combine with fear. Though Fielding does not produce fear in the way of Walpole, it is present—just displaced. The displacement of fear makes the narrative uncanny in ways that will be used consistently in subgenres of the gothic which many call “female” or “terror.” Because of the inclusion of this type of fear as well as the characteristically Gothic “stock features” I argue that The History of Ophelia offers a necessary adjustment to our understanding of early Gothic work.

Fear is inherent in the tale being told, and it is only because of Ophelia’s excessive innocence that it is not overtly visible. Frequently the fear of rape is the propelling force in Gothic novels, particularly those written by women. The terror that
surrounds this threat leads to an oversensitive and active imagination in which superstitions are allowed to take hold. The heroine experiences terror at things she would otherwise be unafraid of if her mind were not in a disordered state. In this case, Fielding’s heroine is significantly different from Radcliffe’s Emily St. Aubert who is simultaneously pure of sexual taint and filled with sexual knowledge. Ophelia cannot contain fear in the conventional ways that other Gothic novels do because the heroine’s complete innocence also implies complete ignorance. Since Ophelia is completely unaware of sexuality, the fear of rape does not fill her with the requisite dread needed to succumb to the “supernatural” experience of terror. So at the moments that would be most terrifying in later gothic novels, Ophelia turns comic. However, fear is not completely absent, the repressed consciousness of sexuality continually reasserts itself at exactly these comic moments, and a darker version of the story emerges, displaced onto uncanny doubles of characters and settings.

In later manifestations of the Gothic, uncanny terror is often achieved by an uncertainty as to whether or not the character is actually having a supernatural experience or (perhaps equally frightening) if we are witnessing the disturbed version of the reality as formulated by a mind gone mad. Freud describes this sensation when discussing Hoffman’s Sandman as being “in doubt whether what we are witnessing is the first delirium of the panic-stricken boy, or a succession of events which are to be regarded in the story as being real” (Freud 228). In this novel, because the knowledge (which “is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and has become alienated from it only through the process of repression”) requisite
to derange the mind is inaccessible, the feelings of terror are projected onto uncanny doubles (Freud 241). This repetition of characters and situations, which undermines the ostensible message of conventional innocence and marriage, subverts Ophelia’s claim to innocence. Yet, by projecting knowledge onto an other, Fielding is able to achieve the desired aim of the story: to have a commercially successful romance, which necessarily has an irreproachable heroine and happy ending, and also to explore the subversive themes that were so important in her previous works. Thus, the gothic element of terror, though in a pre-natal state, serves the same function here as it will in later gothic novels—veiled transgressions. For this reason, looking at The History of Ophelia could prove an enlightening starting point for considering future gothic novels because it demonstrates how the obscured, or uncanny, gothic can be used as a potential device for creating fear.

To become aware of the large part that doubles—be they of character or situation—play in Ophelia, a brief summary of the novel is necessary. Fielding begins by framing her story as a found manuscript which, though she “suspects” it to be “a Work of Fancy,” it, “contains many incidents that bear so much the appearance of Reality, that they might claim some Share of our Belief” (37). The text is further framed by a letter from Ophelia herself describing the reason this “real” testament is made. In this hazy beginning framework of found documents The History of Ophelia unfolds as Ophelia Dorchester (née Lenox) writes to a correspondent to describe her unusual history.

Ophelia, orphaned and taken in by an aunt disgusted by a series of failed or fraudulent loves, is raised in the obscurity of the Welsh countryside. The naïve and
beautiful young girl lives in perfect contentment until the dashing Lord Dorchester happens upon the pair and begins showering Ophelia with her first taste of flattery. Despite her aunt’s better judgment, hospitality is extended to the young rogue only to be rewarded with his kidnapping Ophelia. In the first stage of the kidnapping, she falls ill from the emotional turmoil she experiences. However, the concern Lord Dorchester shows during her convalescence endears him to her. After her recovery and installation at his country estate she is receptive to his friendly overtures (which are in her mind completely innocent). Upon the end of the season, Lord Dorchester informs Ophelia that they must remove to London, at which time she is upset by the idea that she will be deprived of his company for hours together and that she must reside in her own home while in town.

In the course of their journey, Ophelia is put into the wrong coach, mistaken for another young girl who is attempting to elope with her lover. Eventually both the lover and family of the girl realize the mistake and Ophelia is returned to Dorchester, who has been assisting the young lady left behind. When they are successfully reunited, Dorchester houses Ophelia in London and selects her companions so that she remains perfectly unaware of sexuality. He hires, interestingly, a lady of ill-repute, Lady Palestine, to make Ophelia one of her party. Here Ophelia is exposed to hypocrisy, vice, pride, jealousy, and deception to which she gives an outsider’s perspective with predictable disgust.

Not to be left alone for long, Ophelia is abducted by the jealous Marchioness of Trente. The Marchioness demands that Ophelia abandon her shameful life with Lord
Dorchester, but Ophelia, who finds nothing inappropriate with her relationship and is incapable of forbearing to enjoy his company, refuses. She is subsequently imprisoned in a ramshackle castle and jailed by the Marchioness’s comically obsequious relation, Mrs. Herner. A country preacher, Mr. South, presently falls in love with Ophelia and through his obscured plotting she is able to escape. She returns to London only to find that Lord Dorchester believes the lies spread by the Marchioness of her having defected with an eligible youth.

Ophelia’s health suffers from her despair as well as from the unhealthy residual effects of the castle. Lord Dorchester presently realizes his jealousy is ill founded and they are reconciled and journey to Bath to restore Ophelia’s constitution. While at Bath, Ophelia attracts the notice of another young man, Lord Larbourgh, who resents Lord Dorchester’s dishonorable intentions, and discloses Dorchester’s duplicity and the implications of his machinations. By his arrangement, Ophelia is secreted in a closet while a full confession is readily given by Lord Dorchester.

When Ophelia learns of his designs, despite the fact that the relationship has been innocent, she plans her return to her Aunt’s home in Wales but has the unfortunate problem that she doesn’t know where this home is. After several trials with Lord Larbourgh and another encounter with the young lady with whom she was initially confused (who is also suffering from the treachery of her lover), Ophelia is restored to her aunt who has been in conference with Dorchester. Together they win her forgiveness—it is after all society’s fault, not Dorchester’s—and they are married despite Ophelia’s better judgment.
The plot of this novel supplies several places where, if Ophelia had been like later Gothic heroines, she would have succumbed to as many crying-jags, fainting spells, and melancholy-poetry-writing fits to inspire her mind with the superstition that takes hold of Ann Radcliffe’s persecuted girls. But for Ophelia the withheld (or repressed) knowledge, and the fear that it represents, are transferred to a Gothic doppelganger and to uncanny repetition of scenes. It is in the episodes of mistaken identity and in the dark revision of her sequestered home with a lone female companion that Ophelia’s terror is experienced as an uncanny resurgence of her repressed knowledge. Ultimately, the uncanny functions to make this a Gothic novel in two ways: first, it allows it the terror that critics of the novel claim it is lacking. Then, by allowing the doubled situations and characters to express discontentment with marriage as the only viable means of a happy relationship or economic stability, it becomes a tool of dissent in the guise of a romance.

There is a prototypical aura of the Gothic surrounding the tale of Ophelia. Not only is the narrative displaced by a generation—the adult, married Ophelia recounting the havoc of her youth—but also a displacement beyond her years. Such projection into the past becomes a stock feature of Gothic novels. The novel begins by disclosing the events of her aunt’s life which lead to them being so rustically removed into the wildness of Wales. Significantly, this is because Ophelia’s aunt has been twice burned in love. First by being almost forced into a marriage for money: “My Aunt was about twenty-two Years old; and was just then deserted by an Officer with whom every preliminary of Marriage was agreed, when her Father’s Death put a Stop to it” (39). Ophelia observes shrewdly, “it then appeared that her Charms had less influenced her Lover than the Hopes
of obtaining Preferment by her Father’s Interest” (39). And more devastatingly, she is tricked by a “young Nobleman” into a marriage that she believes real until she finds a letter he has written to his real wife in which he reveals the truth, “‘I frankly confess, I have a Woman here, but she is only the Amusement of my idle Moments, while all my serious Hours are spent lamenting your Absence, and studying your Advancement” (42).

The scene set thus by a double display of the misfortunes of matrimony, the orphaned Ophelia, like many Gothic heroines that come after her, is raised in sublime obscurity “too well suited to lovesick despair” by a surrogate mother, nurtured upon a steady supply of instructive, vice-free books and nature walks (43). Not surprisingly this peaceful world is shattered by the entrance of a dangerous and attractive other:

In this happy Tranquility I lived with my Aunt, till one Evening that we were just returned from walking by our little Brook, and admiring the Reflexion of the Moon, then at the full, and which shining on the Water, a new Heaven in its fair Bosom shew’d. Before we entered the House we were greatly astonished to hear a human Voice, a Sound so strange to us, that we could not sufficiently recover our Suprize to return an Answer to the Call; nor was our Wonder abated at seeing ourselves accosted by a young Gentleman whose Cloaths outshone the gentle Lustre of the Moon, at least to eyes so unaccustomed as mine to any but the plainest dress. At first, Suprize had fixed me to the Ground, but as I began to recover from the sudden Impression, the first Effect of my abated Fear was to fly from this strange Phantom, for such it appeared to me (Fielding 45).

The language of their first meeting is striking. Not only the description of the beauty of the night and the moon highly Romantic, her reaction to Dorchester is filled with Gothic moments. The fear she experiences is petrifying and then leads her to wish to fly from him. Dorchester, “this strange Phantom” has obviously inspired a simultaneous desire and terror in Ophelia.
Her fear of him abates as he courts her, much to the distress of her aunt, whose forebodings allows the initial distrust of Dorchester to haunt the reader until being too fully justified by his kidnapping of Ophelia. In this moment, she is as distressed as any gothic heroine, recalling, “At first my Terror reduced me almost to senselessness; I was frightened without knowing what I feared” and “my Ignorance of the Nature of the Dangers which threatened me, gave no Ease to my Mind. A Pannic is stronger than a reasonable Fear, and such mine was. After a Time, Grief succeeded to terror, and then I found some relief from Tears” (Fielding 51, 52). The panic that seizes her mind is not at all comic, but very much a taste of the terror of persecution. She continually fights, protests and is driven to distraction with fear at the prospects that surround her: “I painted my Wretchedness in such strong Colours, that I at last became dumb with Horror at the melancholy Prospect” (Fielding 53).

However, here a vital shift takes place that changes the trajectory of the novel from the plot that will later become so familiar. Ophelia likes him. She is able to cope with this fact and her willingness to be taken from her aunt by the handsome stranger because she is so innocent. Her ignorance is freeing, and she is more truly vulnerable to the sexual dangers that surround her because she is completely unaware of them. Fear is not allowed to seize her mind and make her dream of dark subterraneous passages frequented by banditti; the supernatural is thus kept at bay in this novel. However, terror is not. Though she claims a complete ignorance of what she should fear, the irony of her comfort leaves the reader with a feeling of dread as great, or even greater than, the terror inspired by a heroine who knows her own danger.
In a telling moment, after Ophelia begins to trust Dorchester and is ruminating on the perfection of his grounds, she is almost literally destroyed by a pitfall that she is unaware of: “The Garden is divided from the Park, only by a *Ha ha*, unaccustomed to which Deception, I thought there was no Separation, till on the Brink of it. The Eagerness of an inraptured Fancy, charmed with all the Beauties around me, made me long to pass these Boundaries, but the Evening was so far advanced, I was obliged to defer this Gratification till the next Day” (59). Though she is symbolically in danger of falling in an attempt to pass a deceptive boundary, Ophelia’s danger is continually displayed in less subtle ways as well. She is forced to confront it throughout the novel and the terror that she initially felt, which is reprised by her aunt, takes the form of her uncanny double, a double who does not have such a happy ending at all.

The problem of Ophelia’s innocence, as Nancy Paul surmises, is that her continued insistence upon it seems to demonstrate the exact opposite:

Ophelia herself has a need to self-construct retrospectively, to apply a shapely moral configuration to the past. Looking back, she sees circumstances through which she passed safely, naively, but which she now realizes were overwhelmingly dangerous to her integrity, her sanity, her virtue. It is a terrifying vision. Even more frightening, however to our chaste, rational heroine, is the shadow of belief that she might have been unconsciously complicit—that she had somehow desired the danger. The horror of this spectre keeps Ophelia's sexuality buried. (115)

Paul claims that this buried sexuality “surfaces in her story through the metaphor of language, in the alternating media of silence and conversation” (115). Though this very well may be true, it also refuses to stay buried in character as well as conversation. The melancholy tone and the near tragic end of the story, which despite “its professed romantic-comic structure” contains “an undercurrent of melancholy,” continually
reminds the reader of lingering doubts — exhumed from her psyche in the person of her double (Paul 114). The subtext of these doubts resurfaces in the novel, and it is important to consider these aspects of the narrative when one looks at Fielding’s body of work, which, as G. A. Starr comments, is concerned with motivations and thought as well as action: “For Fielding, access to people’s thoughts and feelings—their ‘inward turns of mind’—is gained largely through conversation. To be understood, however, what people say requires as much ‘penetration’ as what they do; words and actions alike call for interpretation” (108). The type of interpretation that is being done here is an acknowledgment of Fielding’s propensity towards psychological depth which, in this case, makes Ophelia a much more interesting character than her surface innocence would suggest.

The second very gothic scene in the novel contains a doubling of her that demonstrates this resurgence: when Ophelia is mistaken for an unnamed young lady and carried to an unidentified house. Though Ophelia is afraid, she is unable to articulate her fears or even to understand what they are. She is physically unable to make herself heard and remarks that, “I now grew strangely alarmed, though I knew not what to think, and called to the Man to stop, as loud as I possibly could, but with as little Success as before; for my Voice had not received equal Strength with my Impatience” (83). She is too ignorant of the goings on to be filled with the proper amount of dread which would have given rise to any number of superstitious speculations in the gothic heroines of the next fifty years. Instead, she “was in a Kind of Stupefaction”, and could “scarcely…ask the Questions [she] wanted to have answered” (83). The dread that the reader feels of Lord
Dorchester’s intentions towards Ophelia is given no outlet, it is repressed with the knowledge of the sexual danger that Ophelia will not allow herself to feel. However, the double does allow an expression of the dangers that Ophelia finds herself in without having to eliminate the heroine’s intense innocence which is necessary for her behavior to remain blameless. Yet, one is not quite convinced that Ophelia is as oblivious as she appears to be. In fact, several parts of this episode seem that they would, if not illuminate the situation, at least raise doubts in her mind as to the propriety of it. The conversation of a landlady, reminiscent of Richardson’s Mrs. Jewkes, the behavior of the young man, the rebukes of the girl’s parents and her own heart should be convincing proofs that something is amiss in her present circumstances.

But Ophelia is deliberately obtuse when she refuses to understand the conversation of the landlady who remarks, “‘You know he must not come in broad Day-light; but fear not, as soon as it is dark, he will fly to your Arms, like any Sparrow to his Mate; and Pretty Ones they are in Faith. Ay, ay, he has a Hawk’s Eye for Beauty, like to like, Beauty to Beauty, it should be so. All the Women long for him, and happy the she, that he vouchsafes to take Notice of’” (84). She goes on to emphasize intimacy of the relationship stating, “‘What still wishing, and wishing the Sun to make Haste to Bed? Yes, yes, to be sure, the Moon gives a prettier Light to such a sweet Pair as you are. Well! A handsomer Couple one would not wish to see in a Summer’s Day; you are perfect Beauty, Sweeting and a more comelier Gentleman never trod this Earth. But, my pretty Jewel, one cannot live upon sheer Love; you will love the better for a little good Eating and Drinking’” (85). Ophelia allows herself enough insight to be repulsed by the
woman, but never acknowledges why—the woman is giving voice to the facts of the situation that Ophelia’s voice had so frequently failed to and she confesses, “If the first Sight of this Woman disgusted me, her Manner and Discourse were still more odious. As she attempted to lead me into the House, I insensibly resisted; I had no Reason to refuse it, but Confusion and Dislike directed my Actions” (84).

Ophelia is transferring knowledge that she is unwilling to confront (that knowledge which is unspeakable) onto a monstrous other. By abjecting the blame of her feelings for Lord Dorchester onto this grotesque woman she is able to react to them in the way she should. Jerrold Hogle notes that the process of abjection is definitively gothic, for, “all that is abjected is thrown under in another fashion: cast off into a figure or figures criminalized or condemned by people in authority and thus subjected to…their gaze and the patterns of normalcy they enforce” (7). Her own heart has led her quite in the opposite direction. She admits that the quickness with which she was carried away in the carriage was consistent with her desires, stating: “no Pace could seem too fast for me, that was to carry me to the Companion, whose Absence, short as it was, I found Time to regret” (83). Moreover, her own emotions seem to betray her as she is awaiting Lord Dorchester’s arrival. Ophelia admits that her “Heart now felt a Flutter it had never known before; this being the first Time of any long Separation from…Lord [Dorchester]” and that she was, “till now, ignorant of the Pain or Pleasure of Expectation” (86). By separating the implications of these emotions from her sex-less self, Ophelia regains control of the situation and it can become laughable to her instead of terrifying.
Another by-product of transferring her own improper feelings to the unspeakable, disgusting landlady is that Lord Dorchester is also absolved of wrong-doing: “However, as I grew more composed, I began to persuade myself, that a Man whose Love had been so very sincere, could not mean to distress me; he could not be much to blame, Chance must certainly be partly in Fault” (85 emphasis added). His double, however, the young lord who is come in quest of the lady Ophelia was mistaken for, is allowed to be frighteningly lascivious in ways that are blamable, and which Ophelia thus cannot (and the reader must not) associate with Lord Dorchester: “I scarcely could discern him before I found myself in his Arm… the Eagerness of his Embrace astonished and startled me: I never had seen any Degree of such Familiarity in him. I was not sensible of any Impropriety in the Expressions of Affection; but without knowing a Reason for it, I was disturbed with this Address” (86). Gillian Skinner agrees that Ophelia’s innocence is a very complicated one because "such a shrinking, or undefined disturbance, implies innate carnal knowledge as much as—if not more than— innate innocence" (44). To take it somewhat further, though, it is not just the embraces that lead to the undefined disturbance, but the fact that they are not from Dorchester; “the Familiarity of Behaviour which confounded and suprized me, when I took him for Lord Dorchester, appeared odious to me, since I knew him to be another” (91; emphasis added). This has the potential to be quite a dangerous scene indeed, if it were not displaced onto blamable others.

Her own discomfort with the passion of the young man is voiced by the girl’s parents. Upon finding who they think is their daughter in the young man’s arms,
Ophelia’s internalized and unexpressed fears are loudly spoken for her. The young woman’s father flies up the stairs: “crying out ‘Where is this Disgrace to my Family,’” and later “calling to me under the flattering Denomination of his shameless Daughter” (86, 89). Similarly, the young woman’s mother berates the landlady and, “accused her of ruining her daughter” (88). Interestingly once Ophelia is confronted with all of these dark elements of her own fears about the situation, instead of understanding their implications, and thus beginning to experience the necessary fear, the scene switches to a comic mode, and the elements which would have been key in producing terror are made funny. The fight between the father and the young man is ridiculous. Both are contented with yelling at the other but with no intention of disturbing their personal safety to defend the honor of the lady. As Ophelia wisely comments, “they were too great Philosophers not to govern their Actions, though their unruly Tongues could not be controuled. They brandished their Swords, but each was careful to avoid giving any Scratch that might exasperate his Antagonist” (88). Because this fight fails to be horrible, Ophelia is able to be at peace with the situation. Her innocence and chastity are intact and she can resume her living situation with Lord Dorchester without fear, or to put it more eloquently: “Their Swords shone bright indeed, but appeared safe as in their Scabbards; as they were not quite resplendent enough to dazzle the Eye, they seemed perfectly innocent” (87). The fight between the landlady and the mother is equally preposterous. The old woman falls down, too fat to balance herself from the mother’s attack and both of their hats are torn off to reveal ridiculously bald or graying heads. She had “project[ed] that material outward as something foreign” to herself in “the urge towards defense” of the ego of
absolute innocence (Freud 941). The repression of Ophelia’s desires and fears makes her unable to recognize them, even when standing in a shadow version right before her eyes.

However, the young lady for whom Ophelia has been mistaken is not so lucky. True to Gothic form, she who is capable of perceiving and being horrified by plots laid for her is a nervous wreck when she discovers the treachery of her lover. The “very handsome young Woman in the Inn Yard [was] almost frantick [sic]; all the People gathered about her, lamented her ill Fortune, and uttered all the Exclamations of Despair…the young Lady’s Features were altered by Fear and Anguish” (93). She finds nothing comic about being displaced by her double Ophelia, for her this is a circumstance of terrible distress and torment. She proclaims that “‘she was undone, should she be discovered, and was the most miserable Wretch upon Earth’ (94). In this instance then, one can almost reverse the positions of the two women. Ophelia, representing the repression of sexual knowledge and fear, is the double. Upon her appearance, her resurfacing, the young woman is forced to confront the negative possibilities of her situation, the treachery of her lover, the wrath of her father and the vindictiveness of her stepmother. The double, the true face of the heroine in this instance is not one of fairy-tale innocence, but a push back to reality—a terrifying one filled with dangers that exist whether one wishes to face them or not.

Even Ophelia remarks that anyone hearing her version of the events might doubt her veracity. It seems impossible to believe her at her word when the knowledge she claims to lack is so close to her. But Ophelia will not see the other young woman, she will not confront her own danger and thus allows the text to slip back from the potential
terror of her awakening knowledge into one of comic commentary. Ophelia states, “As I had no Notion a man could be guilty of so bad an Action, I simply believed the Story, as my Lord related it, who, chusing rather to take Advantage of my Ignorance, than to place his Hopes in corrupting the Innocence of my Mind, thought proper to conceal Circumstances, which must lead me into Reflections, that could not fail to alarm me on Account of my own Situation” (96). However, what she is repressing and the results thereof are visible to her despite the fact that she cannot comprehend this knowledge.

As Ophelia’s situation is doubled in her interaction with the young woman, her childhood of seclusion with her aunt is echoed in a dark and frightening way when she is abducted by the Marchioness of Trente’s henchman. This “unintended recurrence of the same situation” resembles her previous home and abduction from it, but it also, “differ[s] radically from it in other respects” and it results in “uncanniness” (Freud 237). In the inverse of her original kidnapping by Dorchester, the Marchioness, a spiteful rival, removes Ophelia from town and returns her to the silence of isolation. Instead of the sublime Welsh landscape she is confronted with imprisonment in a most terrific castle which “was then tottering with Age, and may now, perhaps, by the irresistible Arm of old Time, be leveled to the Ground” (Fielding 170). Instead of having the beauty of the moonlight to add pleasantness to her walks, “the Horrors of the Night exceeded all the dismal Prospects the Sun could shew us” (171). Though Ophelia is temporarily rendered almost insensible with fright, lamenting “Fear paints in very strong Colours; my imagination represented to me armed Men of most tremendous Mien and merciless Behaviour; it cloathed them like the Murderers in Macbeth, with the additional Terrors
they would wear when one’s self was to become the Victim of their cruelty,” she soon recovers her composure and states that “Dismal as this Scene must appear, I found, that had I not retained very strong Affections for absent Objects, I could have been very happy even there, if every Face had not worn an Air of Wretchedness” (Fielding 155, 171).

It is the impropriety of her adaptation to the situation that leaves critics to dispute the Gothic-ness of this scene. For though Bree and others admit that “Ophelia’s first vision of the castle, whose crumbling contours are rendered even more awesome by the dim light of a late afternoon, strongly prefigures a paradigmic gothic scene in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794),” Ophelia, who is “by no means overcome by the experience,” acts in a way that doesn’t allow the trope of the crumbling castle to act as it should (Bree 141). As Hogle describes it, the trope of the castle or the antiquated space is powerful in its ability to be an empty signifier. He argues that, by emptying out the signifiers of their original meanings, one has a place into which to abject current fears into the safety of the past and that “this process soon proves malleable enough for different cultural quandaries to be abjected in the Gothic at different times, in part because the basis of the Gothic in the ghost of the counterfeit includes drives toward change within its own dynamic” (297). But, instead of being frightened by her surroundings which have become place holders for her abjected fears, Ophelia soon finds amusement in the ridiculous behavior of her jailor, Mrs. Herner, and the visiting neighbors.
Yet we may be too quick in dismissing the castle on these grounds. Since the scene seems so uncannily familiar, perhaps the transference to the comic mode (as was seen when she was mistaken for the young lady) is only a veiling of some of the darker subtexts. True, Ophelia is not afraid. But someone in the castle is: Mrs. Herner. This lady, dependent on a capricious and malicious benefactor is imprisoned by her economic situation. Ophelia tells us that “From a continual servile Compliance with the Will of another,” Mrs. Herner has “lost all Liberty of Thought, of which only one’s own Meanness can deprive one” (164). At the mercy of the Marchioness, Mrs. Herner, though comical in her absurd quest for admiration has “exchange[d] her Poverty for Wretchedness” (164). For her this home is filled with the misery of economic dependence, unrelieved by a quest for matrimony which renders its seeker all the more piteous in the process.

I believe that this scene lends support to Gillian Skinner’s argument that Ophelia is a commentary on the lack of ways in which women could find economic stability and retain their virtue. Ophelia is "set up against these compromised women as the absolute standard," Skinner argues, and "she apparently possesses a prelapsarian innocence, befitting her upbringing in Edenic isolation" (Skinner 42). So Ophelia is the foil not only to a fallen woman like Lady Palestine but also to one who has been imprisoned by economics: Mrs. Herner. Yet, Skinner wonders, "Does Ophelia, despite the heroine's thoughts about economics and rank, ultimately gloss over these tensions" (51)? Indeed Fielding does seem to mask the economic rhetoric of the novel in the more acceptable plot of romance. Perhaps she has shrunk from an overt critique of women’s economic
roles in the hopes of making the novel a commercial success, while suggesting these
issues in an embedded discourse about marriage and education. The castle, with its
tumbling, wind-whipped towers may not represent a symbolic dread for Ophelia, but for
Mrs. Herner who is forced into its lonely rooms by an absolute impotence and seems to
be the abjected version of what Ophelia’s aunt cannot represent for her. So, though the
castle doesn’t show the fears of the main character, the subtext of commentary on
marriage and economy can be dealt with in the emptied terms of the castle.

The imprisonment functions in another way as well. Like many gothic heroines,
Ophelia’s journey includes an idyllic home removed from the harshness of society and
necessarily displays its juxtaposition with the appropriately foul grounds of the antithesis
to this home. But, by desiring to return to Lord Dorchester, not her aunt, Ophelia is
rejecting her place as a prelapsarian innocent. Ophelia is now aware of her desires and the
pleasures of society; she finds that the grounds of the castle, the noises of the night, and
the melancholy infecting every inhabitant—be they man, woman, or monkey—abhorrent
in that they necessarily exclude the things she has been taught to love, Dorchester,
clothing and company. Not only does this scene allow Ophelia to reject her previous
home, she also declines the advances of the clergyman, Mr. South, for the excitement of a
continued relationship with Dorchester. She denies an appropriate suitor in favor of an
inappropriate one and escapes the protection of the mother figure (though a comical
version) in an exploit that even Radcliffe would have had to be proud of. We are told
that though “to descend from so great a Height, down a pieced Ladder, in a dark Night,
appeared very terrible to my Eyes, and riding on Horse-back, a Thing never attempted,
and that too in Darkness, was not less dreadful,” Ophelia will dare even this because, her
“Desire for Liberty was so strong, that it overcame [her] Fears” (193). She turns down
safety in favor of frightful independence, adventuring, and a quest to return to one who
we must be very incredulous to believe she thinks is noble—if only in the fact that he
first stole her from her aunt and now is reputed to have forgotten her.

Not yet working within the gothic genre, but undoubtedly establishing
conventions which will continue to evolve in the coming decades, this scene is strongly
similar to those of later novels. That it necessitates that our focus be transferred to a
different object of pity than the expected one should not cause us to disregard it. Much
like the projection of tragedy to the double, the melancholy surroundings and the
imprisoning nature of the castle and economics allow for the gothic setting to be
appropriated for the use of symbolic commentary. It shows a disgust for the economic
dependence of women who are unable to seek their fortune, the humiliation of trying to
procure a successful marriage to escape the imprisonment that economic dependence
implies on one level, and on another, a heroine who will no longer accept being shut up
from pleasant male society by an aunt, but who will spurn the assistance of the church to
run off in the night with men she cannot see.

But perhaps the strongest instance of the Gothic occurs in Ophelia’s second
encounter with the uncanny young lady who serves as a terrifying reminder of the danger
she faces. After Ophelia has learned the truth of Lord Dorchester’s intentions and is in
quest of her aunt’s home, she meets the same young lady at an inn. Again, this young
woman’s life mirrors Ophelia’s situation. She too is fleeing the man she loves after
having learned of his designs—yet her situation is more terrible than Ophelia’s. Her lover is actually married, throwing the bad principles of Dorchester into perspective. The intentions of the two women at this point are identical: “I found her as weak as myself; she was still very much in love with him, and appeared extremely unhappy…she told me ‘her Intention, was to persuade her Aunt to live in the Country where she hoped, by Absence and Reason, to conquer this unfortunate Passion” (253). This melancholy insistence on the double’s doom belies the resolution that will occur. The connection between the two has become inseparable by the interweaving of their fates. The “factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere,” functions to make the two inextricably one; it “forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of ‘chance’” (Freud 237). The lives of both seem destined for unhappiness. Yet after a quick consultation with her aunt, Ophelia blinds herself to Dorchester’s former behavior and marries him. The double, who eschews all that was improper and tainted in her lover, becomes the more commendable heroine and meets with a tragic end. Ophelia on the other hand continues on in a comic mode and marries happily.

Critics have found much fault with this twist. Paul finds the end of the novel highly problematic: “the novel is, logically, all set for an unhappy ending; for were Ophelia to marry Dorchester now it would amount to a deliberate abandonment of principles. To confirm this point, when Ophelia finally agrees to marry him, she regards her compliance as a "Weakness" (Paul 279). Similarly, there is an odd logical jump in her aunt’s behavior when, “the aunt, man-hater and devotee of Nature, now argues
vigorously for the married state—and it is, of course, essential that she does so if the 'necessary disguise' of conventional attitudes to matrimony is to veil the true agenda of the novel" (Dearnley 78). However, though Moira Dearnley claims that after "Having thus made a perfectly open attack on one version of the romantic idea of marriage, Fielding clearly feels constrained to provide a conventionally happy ending," I contend that the darker version of the story, in which the happy ending is impossible, retains that subversive desire which logically makes one expect tragedy in Ophelia (78). Yet, by displacing the villainy and the tragic end to the stories of the doubles, Fielding is able to give a public-pleasing resolution while still condemning compromises in matrimony and virtue.

Ophelia is remarkably different from Fielding’s other texts, even in its very presentation. Peter Sabor points out that, “it is the only one of Fielding’s novels to use, on the title page, the phrase ‘Published by the Author of David Simple,’ rather than merely ‘by the author of David Simple’” (13). Claiming only to have published it adds credence to her framing device of having found the document but it also is a way to distance herself from the text. Ophelia is not given the honor of her name, a feat only her translation boasts. Bree tells us that “Fielding’s pride in her achievement can be measured by the fact that Memoirs of Socrates is the only one of her works to carry her name—“Sarah Fielding”—on the title page” (22). Sarah Fielding was not an author who seemed to enjoy predictable narratives. Her disdain for feminine romance and her preference for scholarly works make this novel so anomalous.
The content and language itself is so radically different from her other work that John Burrows and Anthony Hassall doubt her authorship. In a computational analysis of *The History of Ophelia* there are so many differences in style that they conclude that, “Although Sarah Fielding is never far from the head of the lists, the data shown...gives no support to the belief that she is the sole author of *The History of Ophelia*” (Burrows 78). They theorize that perhaps Fielding did find the manuscript in the “old bureau,” but that the bureau belonged to Henry. In finishing a whimsical premise begun by Henry is seen a combination of his humor and her more somber touch. Yet the data they can form from such analysis is filled with impossible oddities which make us only able to accept this postulation tentatively. For instance, in several cases Charlotte Smith is at the top of the list of probable authors. Though this is quite impossible as “when *The History of Ophelia* was published in 1760, Charlotte Turner (the future Mrs. Smith) was only eleven years old,” the change in writing style to one that so strongly anticipates Smith is worth noting (78). Even under the microscope of word choice and recurrence, this novel is drastically different from anything else composed by Fielding. Given this (dare I say?) uncanny similarity to one of the leading gothic novelists of the coming decades one can hardly turn aside its potential to have made an impact, both stylistically and thematically, on those who came after her.

So one begins to question why Fielding would shift her style so dramatically in her final novel. Of the handful of critics who have looked at the text, the consensus seems to be that she did not. Rather, they conclude that many subtexts are masked in the simple romance. Debra Downs Miers suggests that "Fielding is perhaps the first of the
British women writers who have *consciously* ‘long used a wide range of tactics to obscure but not obliterate their subversive impulses' by 'presenting acceptable facades for private and dangerous visions’” (qtd in Dearnley 68). These dangerous visions can be seen more clearly in the themes of Fielding’s early career. Linda Bree states that “‘Sally the Scholar’ reveals herself as a woman with not only a considerable degree of intelligence and application but also tenacity and a strong streak of intellectual radicalism” (21). This radicalism included nontraditional ideas about marriage, education, the intellectual capacity of women, as well as their economic plight. Though in her previous works, most notably and experimentally in *The Cry*, Fielding is able to flout such constraints, *The Cry* was far from commercially successful. As Bree notes, it “is different from anything else written by either [Sarah Fielding or Jane Collier], or indeed by anyone else of the period: it was in fact so original a combination of genres and discourses that few readers were able to appreciate its strengths” (16). But Fielding’s situation in life was not equal to her ambitions, and after the radically experimental structure and opinions of *The Cry* she was pressured to yield her experimental ideals in favor of economic gain. And “undoubtedly one of Fielding’s main aims” in writing *Ophelia*, “was to add to her income” (Bree 122).

Yet as reluctant as it seems Fielding may have been to resort to the romance genre, there is equal evidence that she was also unable to write within male standards. G. A. Starr finds that perhaps Fielding would have been more disinclined towards the masculine end of the spectrum even though she “could not help being aware of the perils of being thought ‘low’” (116). Her fear of being deemed “a female ‘pretender to
learning,’ guilty of preciosity or pedantry” could be a result of the fact “that Henry had grown jealous of Sarah—whose last publication was a translation of Xenophon’s *Memoirs of Socrates* (1762)—because of her superior classical learning” (Starr 116, Sabor 151). Thus it seems unavoidable that her work would reflect the tensions and contradictions that such an uneasy place between masculine and feminine, high and low, artistic integrity and monetary success would have engendered. However the way in which this tension is dealt with is one of the more intriguing things about *Ophelia*. So veiled in her conventional romance is a “tension…[that] inevitably arises between moral and theoretical certitude on the one hand and the ambiguities and ambivalences of experience on the other” (Bree 124).

Fielding is on the verge of something very different from her usual projects. Though needing an economic success (and thus a conventionally romantic tale) she seems to grudgingly grant the happiness of her heroine while still expressing some of the more subversive messages of her previous works. So while the overt actions of the world might not be one that she is able to confront she instead is interested in “diving into the Motives of…Actions,’ to trace the several Channels into which [the passions] flow, and to get a Clue to guide us through all the winding Labyrinths into which they turn themselves” (Fielding qtd. in Starr 109). In the end, the doubles in narrative and character, ambiguous psychological labyrinths and displaced subversive subtexts serve Fielding in the same ways that would become conventional later for gothic novelists who had equally precarious positions as women and writers.
The uncanny Gothic has allowed Fielding to continually remind the reader of the sexual dangers of her heroine. Yet the displaced nature of the fear allows her to write the text for two seemingly incompatible ends. This model of displaced fear, contradictory messages, and commercial success is capitalized upon again and again as the Gothic genre transformed into a more recognizable form at the turn of the century.

Understanding the texts of Charlotte Smith and Ann Radcliffe is aided by a thorough exploration of the Gothic in this early instance because of the way in which fear is created, obscured, and used by Fielding. Though I don’t propose that *Ophelia* replaces *Otranto* as the fount from which all things Gothic arose, it does seem too strangely familiar to continue to repress in our literary histories.
CHAPTER THREE

ETHELINDE’S DISINTEGRATION; OR THE RUTHLESS HAND OF FORTUNE

“I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away.”
—Julia Kristeva, Power of Horrors

In 1789 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote in the Analytical Review that Charlotte Smith’s second novel Ethelinde; or the Recluse of the Lake (1789) contained “innumerable misfortunes …so entangled together, that sympathy must be worn out” (189). More than two hundred years later, Stuart Curran similarly concluded that “tragedy shadows the novel down to the last chapter” (viii). Though Curran lamented that “None of the critical notices [in the eighteenth century] seem aware of the implication, not just personal, but social and political, of a novel so centered on a universal frustration of expectations,” it has become a matter of interest to current scholars to untangle these misfortunes and ponder Smith’s reasons for writing a novel so tragic in tone (xii).

Lorraine Fletcher, a biographer of Smith, like many others, connects the glum plot to Smith’s personal circumstances, attributing some of the novel’s most distressing scenes to her own life: “In Ethelinde, written six years [after her husband’s imprisonment], she describes the feelings of a woman entering a prison and the scenes she came to know well that winter” (63). “In her own life, then, Smith saw herself
thwarted in the exercise of property rights because she was a woman” concludes Kate Ellis, and thus “the anger in her novels [is] directed at lawyers, at fathers who marry their daughters off to unsuitable men, and at public opinion that applied a double standard to the conduct of women and men” (78). Joseph Rosenblum concurs that “Through her fiction Smith attacked patriarchal laws and attitudes. By rejecting conventional labels…and stereotypical portraits, Smith advocates a new and equal relationship between the sexes” (46). Critics like Jacqueline Labbe defend such biographical interpretations as justified by Smith’s presentation of herself, because she “sexes the body of the writer as a woman. And this is how she directs her readers to understand her poems: as the work of a woman writing in the face of overwhelming sorrows and trials” (5). Ut poesis ficta. E. J. Clery makes the same point of Smith’s prose, stating, “the identity of fictional heroine and female author are merged by her free admission of their shared experiences and sufferings” (129). The current critical consensus, then, about this “universal frustration of expectations” in Ethelinde and surrounding the melancholy tone of Smith’s work in general, seems to attribute it to a radical reaction to events of her personal life.

Despite the relative unity among scholars that Smith’s novels and poetry were derived from real life exigencies, what Smith’s intentions were in portraying such subversive messages about marriage and women’s economic plights cannot be deciphered so easily. Diane Long Hoeveler finds “a cynical and sometimes self-critical portrait of what a woman has to do in order to survive in patriarchy” while the “repetitive structure” of Smith’s novels “suggests that there are a limited number of scenarios
permitted in this world for women” (36). The compulsory marriages that compel Smith’s heroines to eschew their radical politics are, then, “less celebrations than they are quiet acceptances of their new keepers,” implying a pessimistic acquiescence in the futility of such fictional subversion (36). Curran reads Ethelinde specifically as a demonstration of “how arbitrary and finally absurd are the social codes that confer legitimacy and the wealth that accompanies it,” while Kate Ellis seems to find a subversion of the wasteful idleness of the aristocracy and “all the restrictive intuitions and customs that thwart love in the name of propriety” (vii, 78).

To a lesser extent, recent critics have considered how Smith was able convey such a radical discontent about gender, politics, and unfortunate marriages through her novels. The current theory, that Smith made use of “interpolated Gothicisms” because they “provided a particular kind of space in which can be acted out certain 'subversive impulses,’” is problematic (Ellis 51). That the Gothic form, “in which all normative…configurations of human interactions are insistently challenged and in some cases significantly undermined,” was particularly useful in a transgressive narrative seems undeniable (Haggerty 3). But if this form is “interpolated,” or if Smith’s are “not…Gothic novel[s] from beginning to end,” one may question how Smith could sustain such challenges to normative configurations in the more realistic mode of the novel (Ellis 51). What Markman Ellis describes as the “novel’s regime of formal realism,” is unable to “describe the marvels and wonders of the supernatural” which

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1 Though Hoeveler is describing Emmeline: or the Orphan of the Castle (1788) at this moment, Ethelinde’s similarities to Emmeline, which as Wollstonecraft remarked, “shares the faults and beauties so obvious in Emmeline, [that] the two heroines might be taken for twin sisters” allows such an extrapolation to remain pertinent (188).
provide transgressive spaces in the Gothic (21). I contend that instead of merely containing “interpolated Gothicisms,” or having a Gothic form that shifts in and out of focus, Ethelinde employs a sustained, though obscured, Gothic plot in which is explored a more diffuse threat to the heroine’s safety. Smith consistently uses the uncanny Gothic, in which characters are propelled into action by obscure threats, in conjunction with the sublime Gothic or supernatural interludes which produce the terror necessary to justify her transgressive narrative and sustain the subversive tenor of the novel. The way she does this complicates our current understanding of what it means to be “female Gothic” and necessitates an adjustment of our current categorization in order to accommodate its peculiarities.

Ethelinde fits into the paradigm of “the female Gothic” in many ways. Yet there are moments for which we cannot account in this current formula. The subgenre “female Gothic” is characterized as “a novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine” (Moers 91). Moreover, Ethelinde is a “traveling gothic heroine” as defined by Moers. Such a heroine appears when the novel is used as a “device to send maidens on distant and exciting journeys without offending the proprieties” (126). But because it is only when “in the power of villains,” that “heroines are forced to do what they could never do alone,” one could conclude that Ethelinde was lacking a key catalyst of the “female Gothic,” the villain (Moers 126). Though there are several evil men who attempt to blight Ethelinde’s peace and innocence, it is poverty, not a person, which doggedly persecutes her throughout the entire narrative. The propelling force then is money, money that has the power to
imprison, sully, and kill: a formidable foe that encodes the novel with a Gothicism that is not overtly demonstrated through stock characters and settings but insinuated nonetheless dangerously. If we expand the traditional definition of a Gothic villain in a way that accommodates more abstract threats like fortune (in this case monetary, not providential) as the impetus for action, it is possible to read this novel in a more nuanced way. In the case of *Ethelinde* the catalyst into action is not a character, but an uncanny and obscure fear.

In addition to deviating from presenting the traditional villain, *Ethelinde* is problematic in the current definition of “female Gothic” because of the supernatural and near supernatural occurrences that have previously been called “interpolated Gothicism.” Allowing the supernatural to break down the realism of the novel is a device that has been identified as masculine. I argue that Smith is complicating her narrative by including both types of Gothic experience, the uncannily obscured and the sublimely clear. The ways in which these two methods are intertwined demonstrates the complex balance between monetary anxieties which can be confronted and a more unspeakable despair of powerlessness.

Smith invariably switches into a sublimely visible Gothic mode when the “heroes” are directly battling fortune, with an uncanny twist. The triumphant heroes die, or come as close to it as a novel of sensibility would allow. The deaths (or virtual deaths) of hero figures when battling fortune highlight the inevitability of despair, deconstructing the “happy endings” and leaving the reader with the sense of tragedy that Smith’s contemporaries and ours find so inescapable. However, the momentary visibility
of despair, via the death of the heroes, is complicated by the fact that they are allowed to return from the dead. The brief and overpowering fear that the heroine cannot escape the crushing hand of the villain is a transient thrill and is quickly rewritten in a way that brings the novel back within the realm of resolution. Much like Fielding in *The History of Ophelia*, Smith in *Ethelinde* puts all of the elements of tragedy in place and disrupts her narrative trajectory with an artificially happy ending.

In reacting to the ominous, ubiquitous hand of fortune Ethelinde is acting in a way that is not in keeping with conventional behavior for young ladies, as a summary of the plot reveals. *Ethelinde* begins as the titular heroine accompanies her cousin, Lady Newenden, to Grasmere Abbey. Lady Newenden’s party also includes Sir Edward, Lady Newenden’s husband; the pliable Davenant; scheming Lord Danesforte; and Sir Edward’s masculine sister, Miss Newenden. Lord Danesforte persuades Davenant that he is in love with Ethelinde, but she refuses the match as she has fallen in love with the mysterious Mr. Montgomery, who resides with his mother in a cottage on Grasmere Lake (and who serendipitously saved Ethelinde from various sticky situations). Ethelinde repeatedly visits this poor, though noble, family and discovers that her father, Colonel Chesterville, assisted Mrs. Montgomery when her son was very young. Because of this circumstance Montgomery obtains permission to call on Colonel Chesterville in London.

Ethelinde is called away from the party when her father sends word that her brother, Harry, has gotten into extensive financial trouble because of his love of gambling, and it is here that fortune first exerts its power. It forces Ethelinde from Grasmere Lake, or the “early-romantic Eden far from London’s debased social world”
(Fletcher 112). This paradisiacal place functions as do the idyllic homes of many gothic heroines, especially those of Smith’s younger contemporary Ann Radcliffe. By first displaying a place of innocence and security, the evil of the villain is shown in full contrast, as is the necessity that the heroine exert herself beyond the bounds of convention to restore it. The language of Eden and innocence can be seen as an extension of Ellis’s reading of the Gothic novel. She claims that in a Miltonic trajectory, in being cast out of the “garden” and allowed to return to it with the appropriate knowledge, the Gothic novel is sanctioning a noble quest for the Eve substitute. Ethelinde is just such a character. The power that forces Ethelinde into battle with the world is not a character, though Davenant may have made this home slightly less comfortable than it otherwise would have been. The villainy is exerted in the shape of a letter from her father:

Particular and most unpleasant circumstances oblige me to solicit the favor of you to send my daughter back to me as soon as possible. I will not, dear Sir Edward, attempt to conceal my situation from you—the unhappy conduct of my son, added to the unfavorable turn in my affairs, has involved me I fear beyond all recovery. (42)

Wrenched from the sublime storms and awesome views of Grasmere, Ethelinde begins the first of her many travels which contain several divergences with propriety. She is escorted by the ardent Davenant, is able to manage another pathetic rendezvous with Montgomery, and travels unprotected, indulging in melancholy reflections all the way to London.

This obscured threat then gives rise to numerous circumstances that ensure the heroine is sufficiently harassed. The depletion of her father’s fortune in attempting to alleviate Harry’s debts leaves Ethelinde destitute and thus effectually severed from her
lover, Montgomery. Additionally, it becomes the cause of her being bestowed on another, unsuitable admirer, her cousin’s husband, Sir Edward. Sir Edward, in love with Ethelinde despite his most honorable efforts, discharges Harry’s debts, secures him a position in the army and at the same time earns himself the prize of Ethelinde’s safe keeping. As a direct result of Sir Edward’s assistance of Harry, Colonel Chesterville leaves “her in case of his death entirely under the protection of this generous and affectionate friend [Sir Edward]” (127). Fortune assumes the power necessary to separate her from the man of her choosing and places her in a position that can only compromise her virtue and test her lover’s perseverance.

As the stage is thus precariously set, fortune soon more fully severs Ethelinde’s happiness as it effectually kills her father and drives her brother mad. It is soon discovered that Harry has sold out of the army and returned to England where he is imprisoned for further debts. As the Chestervilles visit Harry in prison, Colonel Chesterville’s despair is as violent as if it could be attributed to a villain, perhaps more so because of the futility of resistance:

The faculties of Colonel Chesterville were absorbed in the greatness of a calamity that now seemed without remedy…and the man who had so often seen, with an equal eye and an undaunted heart, death in all its most terrible forms, who had bled in Germany, amid fatigue, alarm, and famine; who had traversed the desolate wilds of America, and beheld with firmness the savage scenes of slaughter from which humanity recoils; shrunk in despondence and dismay from the spectacle of…confinement and degradation. (194)

He is unequal to the fight and his death is only weeks away. Like his father, Harry cannot bear to face an enemy so unconquerable: “Fool! villain! monster! parricide that I am! I will not live to bear this! Leave me!” shrieked he in the most furious tone, stamping
and striking his forehead with his hand; ‘leave me this instant! for I am mad! I am tormented! more tormented than the damned!’” (197). As is commonly the case in the Gothic novel, the heroine is removed from the protection of her male relations. Just such a series of circumstances occurs in this novel, only in more distant terms.

Her father and her brother thus disabled, the next obvious peril is to Ethelinde’s chastity. However, because of the sublimation of the villain, this threat is theoretical only. Ethelinde’s complete economic reliance on Sir Edward forces her to become a virtual prisoner in his home, and her reputation suffers as a result. This sullying of her reputation is made synonymous with losing her virtue, as is explicitly stated by Sir Edward, “innocence and goodness like yours have nothing to fear; but next in infamy to him who would deprive you of the reality of those virtues, is the despicable wretch who would by falsehood and defamation obscure their lustre and their purity” (323). As Lady Newenden is separated from her husband for, among other things, his improper love of her cousin, the world censures Ethelinde’s stay in his home. She becomes its mistress and mother (with no small amount of space dedicated to celebrating Ethelinde in a maternal role with Sir Edward’s children). To save her virtue, if only from the slander of her relations, she must leave Sir Edward’s protection, but because of her dependence, she is confronted with as many difficulties as a winding catacomb would present.

Thus the oppressive monetary circumstances before and after her father’s death have catapulted Ethelinde into a situation that is highly inappropriate—a fact that even the virtuous heroine blushes to consider. Sir Edward is not easily persuaded to let her leave his house, and Ethelinde, after contemplating with pain the ruin of her virtue (in
reputation, if not in actuality) is reduced to begging him for permission to escape it: “Suffer me then, Sir Edward, to go—suffer me to go immediately, and remove what appears now to be (however strange that it should be so) considered as an impediment to your re-union with Lady Newenden” (292). Her language is one of imprisonment, and she is as much at the mercy of fortune as her brother, when raving in his jail cell. Much like the more overt imprisonment that would take place in Radcliffe’s novels, Smith’s exploration of villainous poverty leaves Ethelinde in a state of despair for her chastity and wholly at the mercy of a man who desires to keep her separated from her lover. Sir Edward exercises his economic power by commanding her to desist in “giv[ing] the foolish and fleeting reports of idleness and malice, which you ought to despise, as reasons for quitting the protection where your father left you, and where, in the eyes of all the estimable part of mankind, you might with propriety remain” (293). It is not his own malice or passion that demands she remain in his custody, rather it is the compulsion of her poverty. Sir Edward instead of berating or emasculating Montgomery, reiterates his inability to provide her with finical support as evidence that he cannot rescue her. Montgomery is sent to the East Indies to become worthy of Ethelinde by “extort[ing] from the helpless natives of another hemisphere—gold, the curse of mankind; that having plundered a distant country he may return to corrupt his own” (369). He is effectually disabled, the slave of fortune.

Yet Ethelinde persists in defying the threats to her virtue and heroically disavows the appropriateness of the protection her father allowed for her. She demands her independence and she is permitted to remove to Miss Newenden’s home. Ethelinde
begins another of her travels and arrives in a place which under all other circumstances would be unthinkable, a home in which a young unmarried woman governs herself: “His sister, the only female relation to whom he could entrust her, lived rather like an independent man than in the retirement fit for a young woman situated so as Ethelinde” (356). Even here Ethelinde is pursued by her poverty and is, perhaps, even more imprisoned in Miss Newenden’s home, in which the coarse huntress makes Ethelinde’s sensibility her sport. Without male protection, Ethelinde is exposed to the insults and insinuations of her two male houseguests who find their power to be located in their pocketbooks: “[Davenant’s] mean and ungenerous spirit found a malignant and unworthy gratification in believing that, subdued as she now was, he could obtain as a mistress her who had refused to become his wife” (392). After several frightening encounters of this sort, Ethelinde once again defies the prison of her poverty. She flees in the night with the assistance of servants and throws herself onto the protection of her mother’s sister. In this home a rescuer comes forth in the guise of Mr. Harcourt, Harry’s father-in-law. His fantastic riches seem to be capable of defeating fortune and restoring Ethelinde to a paternal sanctuary that was destroyed by poverty, and it is through the dispersal of his wealth that the happy ending is possible.

As this long summary demonstrates, there is no consistent villain upon whom Smith could abject all of the fears of her heroine, making them palatable in the form of a horrific other. Instead, Smith allows her villain to be much more obscure. Such an alteration of the “standard” villain seems to be the component that Mary Anne Schofield is searching for in her frequently problematic reading of Ethelinde. She argues, “the
‘romance’ plot of Ethelinde, then, involved conquering all the opposition that separates Ethelinde and Montgomery and will not allow them to be hero and heroine. (That is she is pursued first by Sir Edward, then by Davenant. She must face family debts, debtors’ prison with her brother’s extravagance, and so on)” (152). Though the plot of *Ethelinde* does include such a conquering of opposition (or the attempt of it), to attribute the pursuit of the heroine to Sir Edward is missing a step. Smith is exceptionally careful to allow her heroine to be completely ignorant of Sir Edward’s adoration of her; likewise his restraint is tenderly and empathetically presented. It is in this characterization of a love not disinterested, but determined to act as such, that the novel gains much of its poignancy and “a refined emotional delicacy,” which Curran commends as “a clear advance in Smith’s artistry” (x). That Davenant pursues Ethelinde is less debatable; however, the incidents of his pursuit are limited and separated by hundreds of pages of struggle.

By adjusting the terms of the “female Gothic” one can more easily account for the comportment of the heroine. She is compelled to act in unconventional ways, not because she persecuted by a lecherous man but by the obscure threat of poverty. But if the terror is established thus, it is necessary to consider the function of the starkly Gothic scenes, or the “interpolated Gothicism,” that critics find so remarkable. According to Gary Kelly,

mysteries, including the supernatural, in Gothic romance can be taken to stand for the complex processes of mystification by which an unjust system of privilege and powers masks its true character, as that system appears to and is registered by those outside of and often victimized by it… In Gothic novels…these mysteries may be dispelled, explained, illuminated by the kinds of texts very familiar to members of the predominately professional and middle-class reading public, such as wills,
documents, testaments, oral and especially written confessions and eyewitness accounts. (xxiii)

One might conclude that these Gothic moments, which include a moonlit, bloody battlefield; the ghost of Ethelinde’s father; and the haunting of Grasmere Lake, should involve a restoration of proper order, an illumination of the unjust system, a correction to the plight of the heroine. But because these Gothic scenes involve the death and the diminished return of the hero, they are unable to effect these changes. The resurrections of the heroes are set on Gothic stages that accommodate the horror felt “in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts” (Freud 241). With them resurfaces also the terror of helplessness in the uncanny, mutilated form of the protector. In their reduced forms the heroes emphasize what many critics would conclude were Smith’s personal messages about economics and also helps us make sense of the nihilistic pessimism that gives Ethelinde its haunted tone. Instead of discounting these Gothic scenes as incompatible with the form in which Smith is supposedly writing, they complicate and adjust our understanding of what this novel and the “female Gothic” can do: contain competing types of Gothic fear and voice different levels of anxiety.

The first instance of this occurs in the embedded narrative of Mrs. Montgomery. She tells Ethelinde a history of her family, beginning with her mother, Mrs. Douglas. Soon after her marriage, Mr. Douglas dies leaving her and Caroline (the future Mrs. Montgomery) destitute. Despairing of being left a dependent on heartless relations, Mrs. Douglas soon becomes involved with the married Lord Pevensey. His wife had previously fallen prey to small pox with most devastating side-effects that “deprived her of the slender share of reason she ever possessed, and threw her at length into confirmed
idiotism” (50). Mrs. Douglas moves to France and becomes his mistress. When he dies, her illegitimate status leaves her without legal recourse. In the struggle over his will she seeks the help of Pevensey’s friend Montgomery. Though Montgomery is unable to secure her Pevensey’s fortune, he has fallen in love with Caroline and marries her, to rescue her from the poverty that she would otherwise be left in. The new Mrs. Montgomery, respectably married, has escaped her mother’s shame, and her husband has the means of supporting her; he is a soldier.

Instead of telling the tale of their bliss, Smith radically undercuts it as she switches into a Gothic mode. Mr. Montgomery’s problematic ambivalence between French and English armies prevents him from acquiring fortune—“he could never rise to that rank in England which his high birth would have entitled him otherwise to expect,” — and is ultimately the cause of his being on the losing side in battle between the French and the English (57). In a battle of the Seven Years’ War, Mrs. Montgomery despairs of her husband’s life and tells Ethelinde, “My faculties were suspended by the most dreadful apprehensions that could agonize the human heart: this frightful suspense was terminated only by the certainty of all I dreaded… he fell at the head of his company, his arm broken by a musket shot and receiving a thrust from a bayonet in the breast” (59). Yet she refuses to accept the death of her husband and adventures into the Gothic scene of destruction with her tiny baby in her arms. Determined to find his body she describes the following grisly landscape:

I went forth on this dreadful errand; to a scene of death and desolation so terrible, that I will not shock you by an attempt to paint it—livid bodies covered with ghastly wounds, from whom the wretches who follow camps, making war more hideous, were yet stripping their bloody
garments. Heaps of human beings thus butchered by the hands of their fellow creatures, affected me with such a sensation of sick horror, that I was frequently on the point of fainting (60).

After having found the body, perhaps because the realism of the world has broken apart into Gothic improbability, Mrs. Montgomery becomes convinced that her crushed husband lives: “in the wildness of my phrenzy protested that I would never remove from the spot where he lay…but a new idea now struck me—I insisted that Montgomery was not dead” (61). It happens that a pulse is allowed to return to this casualty of the field. However, what had been revived is not restored. We are soon told that “Montgomery returned a cripple; for his arm, which had been with difficulty, and only by the extraordinary skill of the English surgeon, saved from amputation, was rendered wholly useless, and he wore it always in a sling” (63). Smith transfers from one type of Gothic fear to another; she no longer presents obscure threats, but very clear ones including sublimely rendered images of pain and death. This switch implies a shift in the narrative. We are moved into an alternate realm in which fear is experienced not as a catalyst into action but as the astonishment of defeat and despair.

Though Montgomery rescued Mrs. Montgomery from the financial peril that her mother’s illegitimate relationship caused, the daughter’s happy resolution is belied as the novel shifts into a Gothic scene of a midnight walk through a field of death. Montgomery has failed to defeat his lack of fortune, and he falls in battle. Nevertheless convention would not allow for him to remain fallen. The hopelessness which this defeat represents is repressed in the narrative through the Gothic return from the dead. The reduced form of the hero (perhaps in anticipation of Brontë’s Mr. Rochester) makes him an impotent
presence. The lack of identification with either France or England renders the undead Mr. Montgomery powerless.

This powerlessness becomes visible in his physical body and is passed on to his son. Mr. Montgomery grooms his son for military service but transfers to him this precariousness of national identity. Mrs. Montgomery recounts, “Though brought up himself in the Catholic religion, Montgomery was so little of a bigot, that he suffered me to educate my son a Protestant; and that circumstance only prevented his early entrance into the French army. Measures, however, were taken to procure him a commission among the Swiss in that service, when a violent and sudden illness deprived him of his parent and protector” (63). Montgomery dies in an unsuccessful attempt to defeat fortune on behalf of his son. The young Montgomery takes on these contradictory and disabling forces and perpetuates the feeling of futility in the present of the novel.

More fascinating than this incident of the undead hero is that this plot device returns and returns. The next of the fallen heroes to rise again is Ethelinde’s own father. This occurs when Ethelinde visits Abersley, the home of her uncle Lord Hawkhurst. The visit to Abersley seems to be the wish of her dead father, as if set into motion by the hands of fate, “He had often expressed to his daughter a wish to revisit it with her; and now! she was, by a chain of unexpected events, to go thither” (458). The inevitability of the scene that has chained her to her destiny—in addition to the strong suggestion that Lord Hawkhurst has been forced to acknowledge the Chestervilles as having a right to the castle—leads the reader to expect a restoration of the natural order of familial affection.
as would seem compatible with Kelly’s reading of Gothic restorations of legitimate power.

The realism of the scene begins to dissipate in “a process of formal insurgency, a rejection of the conventional demands of novel form…causing a disruption and inconsistency” (Haggerty 3). Ethelinde, spurning the idle recreation of the family in the billiard room, “walked alone through the spacious apartments and galleries of the house. At the end of the gallery she came into a room that seemed to have been forsaken by the family…she was struck instantly with [a portrait] of her father…the likeness was so strong, that it gave her instantly the idea of him as she remembered” (459). She is venturing into a Gothic disruption, removed physically from the family and removed in time to a forsaken room where her rights to the family wealth are reinforced by the portrait on the wall. Nature and architecture unite to create a mood in which she can depart from all of her more rational logic into one that is compatible with such an unnatural defection of family love and the forcible restoration of it. The sky is filled with “deep red clouds” which the personified castle “admitted…reluctantly,” and gave to the room “that gloom and obscurity which inspired and encouraged the most melancholy thoughts. Ethelinde remained gazing on the picture of father till the canvas no longer received any rays of light” (459). The light of rationality and realism having deserted her, Ethelinde loses her Enlightenment skepticism. She is catapulted into the superstitious and terrific past in which the infantile fantasies that the dead are not lost return. Because this scene has shifted into Gothic disruption of the real, it facilitates the
“improbable and remote conditions” upon which the “emotional attitude towards [the] dead” can become once more “a highly ambiguous and ambivalent one” (Freud 243).

Setting the stage in such a Gothic way before allowing the interference of the supernatural is following current aesthetic traditions. As the superstitious was dismissed as barbaric, so long as one acknowledges it as such, one could indulge in it for sublime aesthetic pleasure, says E. J. Clery. Thus the “the significance of a spectre is to be determined by the quality and intensity of the feeling it arouses. In any scene of haunting, the fear is the true aesthetic, the apparition is the mere catalyst” (Clery 46). Ethelinde’s intense feelings and the fear that this specter represents require the Gothic machinery to be deployed. In this shifted state she “turned in her eyes towards the spot where the form, which was there represented in youth and health, was mouldering in the dust” (459). She is overcome by her disgust for the family and for her brother’s heartlessness, and she cries out to her father to save her. As she “utter[s] aloud an apostrophe… a gust of wind rushed through the long gallery” (460). Ethelinde becomes convinced that she is seeing her father and exclaims, “‘surely he hears me, and comes from the grave to meet me!’” She is convinced that she sees him “standing there and beckoning to her to follow him” (460). Much like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, Ethelinde’s father seems to desire to be heard, to reveal the dreaded secrets of his death, or perhaps to lead her to a casket containing some key information that will right all of the wrongs she has felt.

Smith does not obscure the terror of this scene and therefore does not follow female Gothic conventions. Instead of being compellingly distant, the ghost of her father
The sheer improbability of this moment is Gothic in its excess. The inescapable power of fortune shatters the reality of the narrative and becomes overpowering. Remarkable is the position of her body in being thus disappointed. She is kneeling. Stuck in a supplicating position, one that recalls a Catholic superstition, she has forsaken her reason and logic to beseech the help of her dead father. And though he returns (at least in her mind) the effect is not just futile but destructive. As Fletcher notes, “the lightning marks her as a passive victim. The heroine never returns in triumph to Abersley...there is no sense of a possible rejuvenation of the old order” (111). The order of her family and Ethelinde’s place in it is not recovered despite what the Gothic convention might lead us to suspect.

Contrary to restoring the proper family order, this visit only serves to increase Ethelinde’s estrangement from it. Harry’s reconciliation with these relatives, facilitated by the respectable wealth of his father-in-law, Mr. Harcourt, demonstrates his identification with the illegitimate heartlessness of the greedy Hawkhursts. Now neither brother nor uncle seems to care about the indigent Ethelinde’s claim to familial protection. Instead of offering relief, Mr. Harcourt’s wealth reiterates Ethelinde’s helpless against the villainous fortune as well as the powerlessness of her father to restore her
happiness. The sublimely Gothic disruption expresses the unspeakable lack of faith in the kindness, or alternately powerlessness, of one’s family in temporary but brilliantly visible ways.

After reflecting on this moment in the coolness of rationality, removed from the gloom of the room, she does not reject her vision as seems necessary to female/terror Gothic conventions. Instead she takes pleasure in it, “the idea of having seen her father recurred again to her mind with all its force; and far from thinking with terror on it, she cherished the soothing melancholy it impressed” (461). But the pleasure derived from the acceptance that the natural, old order cannot be restored, which leaves maidens prone and senseless, amounts to a very subversive fatalistic lack of faith in her father’s abilities. Unfazed by the lack of assistance that this encounter offered, she becomes convinced that it is a warning of future woes. And this turns out to be very true. For it is as she is recovering (surprisingly quickly for one who has been struck by lightning) that she discovers the document it seems her father had been meaning for her to find. Yet as becomes the tragic tone of the novel, this discovery is not a moment of restoration but a “further protraction of its dark entropy” (Curran viii). She finds several French newspapers in which she reads of Montgomery’s death.

Thus begins the third instance of the undead hero. Ethelinde, now returned to Grasmere Lake with Mrs. Montgomery, is perpetually haunted by Montgomery’s memory. Similar, even in phrasing, is her interaction with this specter. She “uttered an apostrophe to Montgomery.—‘I go,’ cried she, as if he really heard her—‘I go to acquit myself of my duty to your mother. Oh! come with me, beloved of both our hearts! and in
dreams at least let me see thee, though we in this world may meet no more!’” (477; emphasis added). In addition to speaking to the spirit of Montgomery, she fancies she hears him as well: “She often sunk into such absence of mind, and yielded so entirely to the impressions of fancy, that she believed she really heard the voice of Montgomery” (476). Because of the emphasis on subjective responses, like those one had to sublime grandeur, “the Gothic novelists attempted to give imaginative worlds external and objective reality. In doing so, they were not simply ignoring the shift in focus to the subjective but were looking for ways of giving private experience external manifestations” (Haggerty 7). The subjective suffering of the heroine functions to externalize the haunting despair of Ethelinde in a fashion similar to that of more overtly Gothic texts. The despair, caused by the menacing of fortune and the inability of the hero to combat it, is as poignantly rendered and terrifying as the evil villains and “supernatural” events for which they stand in, as is evidenced by the similitude of the heroine’s response.

Smith goes to great lengths to convince the reader of the irrevocability of Montgomery’s death. The original report of the newspaper is confirmed by Sir Edward: “The information that paper contained, my Ethelinde, is unhappily too true. When I received your letter, I made enquiry at Paris. The accounts I have from thence leave no doubt” (478). The double certainty of this report is reinforced by his remonstrations with Ethelinde to control her grief, for he argues, “what have I told you that you did not before know, at least that you had not too much reason to suspect” (478)? The reader also sees the inevitability. Montgomery, the continuation of his powerless father, is not equal to
combat fortune. But Sir Edward, whose nobility has never been made to suffer under its hands, is presented as the alternative, as the solution to this fight. He is provided as the rescuer from extreme poverty that Mrs. Montgomery’s quickly approaching death promises. He, whose generosity, self-restraint, and friendship should now be rewarded, confirms the awful truth of Montgomery’s death—a fact that even Montgomery’s mother surrenders to. She is in collusion with Sir Edward in his love for Ethelinde: “I will however try what is to be done; and believe me, Sir Edward, that you are the only man on earth to whose protection I would give Ethelinde, the only one who is in my eyes worthy of a place in the heart which has been occupied by the image of Charles Montgomery” (486).

Yet, despite proof piled on proof (the newspaper, the haunting, the confirmation, his mother’s conviction), Montgomery rises again. Or rather, he is heard again. Before one can see him, he makes himself perceivable as a voice, “a voice which struck motionless its auditors” (492). Ethelinde’s resolution to give herself up to Sir Edward’s protection, and thus to be secure from fortune’s grasp, is destroyed and regrettably so. As they ride alone together back to Mrs. Montgomery’s cottage the scene is mournful instead of joyous. Ethelinde, “almost involuntarily she lifted [Sir Edward’s] hand to her lips: a tear fell upon his hand; he kissed it off; sighed deeply, but said nothing till the chaise stopped at the door” (494). This seems an odd moment as she should be happily in the arms of her no-longer-lost beloved. Instead she mourns the promising future of security that is lost by his (unprofitable) return. Ethelinde’s financial rescue by Sir Edward is disrupted by Montgomery’s Gothic resurrection.
The diminution of Montgomery is continually emphasized, as is his failure: “The altered looks of Montgomery as well as his dress, which was that of a common sailor, gave his mother and Ethelinde painful impressions of all the suffering and hardship he had undergone” (497). He has not returned in glory, instead he admits, “I come, shipwrecked and a beggar, to my country” (492). The description of his physical reduction to the status of a beggar is reiterated by Mrs. Ludford, to whom he applies for information: “Why are beggars suffered to come to this door?” she asks upon seeing him (498). At the home of Lady Newenden’s parents, Montgomery reports that “there again my appearance had nearly precluded me from all intelligence” (499). He is not even recognized by Davenant, his once bitter rival. Instead Davenant, “accosted” Montgomery “by the name of honest Jack, I suppose from my sailor’s dress” (501). Montgomery returns from his battle with fortune, dead to all his former acquaintances. His memory is lost (to all but Ethelinde), and he is more destitute of a means of providing for her than when he left.

Even more tragic is the loss of self which Montgomery must now go through. He did not find fortune in the Indies because, as Fletcher notes, “Charlotte invests her heroes and heroines with scruples that prevent financial success” (115). He was unable to sink to the level of depravation necessary to make his fortune in the exploitation of others. When he returns even this moral victory is lost. Diminished and ghostlike, all of his fondest dreams of being able to provide for Ethelinde in a respectable way are destroyed. Like his father and Ethelinde’s father, his return essentially constitutes no resolution. Having so forcefully disavowed mercenary means of procuring money, he devolves to
the point of accepting the fortune that “Mr. Harcourt had already settled on him” (506). This money is equally problematic, however, as it was derived from the exploitation of the West Indies and “all of them are finally dependent upon the slave economy of islands half a world away” (Curran ix). Altering the hemisphere does not quite obscure the incompatibility of the profits with the hero. The inescapable power of this villain and the ways it compels the heroes and heroines alike to bend to its whims reinforces the melancholy, tragic tone of Ethelinde.

There is an odd intertwining of different Gothic modes in this novel. The villain, obscure and uncannily recurring, propels the plot as the characters attempt to overcome it. In this way Smith forces her reader to view the moral and physical battles between her characters and fortune/poverty. She is able to critique various aspects of fortune by obsessively recalling it with uncanny repetitions throughout the novel. Characters are condemned for gambling, exploitative fortune seeking, and for profiting from the deadly military battleground. Inextricable from uncanny threats are sublimely clear descriptions of heroes falling in battle to this foe and returning diminished and powerless. Yet, though these moments of defeat seem transient and oddly separate from the realism of the narrative, they too recur and tragically color the novel. As this complex tangle of fear and hopelessness demonstrates, it is important to recognize the Gothic as a shifting mode which can function to “address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural” (Hogle 4). I conclude that Smith’s novel is doing just that. If we wish to more fully understand the use of the Gothic, it is necessary to allow for the amorphous
possibilities of terror as is seen in Smith’s utilizing less conventional, but nonetheless Gothic means of development, or disintegration, in *Ethelinde*. 
CHAPTER FOUR

THE ONCE AND FUTURE PATRIARCH: RADCLIFFE’S REVISION OF

MASCULINE PURITY

Emily St. Aubert, heroine of Ann Radcliffe’s infamous *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), “drew a very interesting picture,” the narrator informs us, “which, though it would not, perhaps, have borne criticism, had spirit and taste enough to awaken both the fancy and the heart” (188). Radcliffe’s own artistic production likewise has had the contradictory effect of drawing the censure of critics even as they admit that their fancy has been awakened (despite their taste)—if only enough to compel them to write about her. “I will try to take seriously the artistry of Ann Radcliffe” promises Marshall Brown moments before assuring us that “as a plot-writer, she has always seemed at best typical of a group, and as a crafter of sentences perhaps even less than that” (xii, xv). Similarly J. M. S. Tompkins prefaced her broader study by noting, “I have treated this inferior fiction with perhaps over-scrupulous gentleness and consigned its most ludicrous manifestations to notes; for these are not good books, whose vitality springs from an inner source, but poor books” (v-vi). Such apologetic language for venturing to explore this “poor book” seems almost to supply the place of the perfunctory, contrite preface that Radcliffe has had the nerve to exclude. She makes no apology for her fiction, at least not until after carrying it on for several hundred pages. The final sentence does acknowledge hers to be
a “weak hand,” but (true to style) Radcliffe then denies what she suggests, claiming: “the effort, however humble, has not been in vain, nor is the writer unrewarded” (672). Thus critics stand apologizing in her stead, nonetheless compelled to return to the novel, if only to find out and hopefully discredit the spell whose tastelessness threatens to expose their own.

Deciphering Mysteries of Udolpho has been more problematic than it should be given its pedestrian reputation. As famously remarked in a review commonly attributed to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “the reader, when he is got to the end of the work, looks about in vain for the spell which had bound him so strongly to it” (Rogers 17-18). It may be that the discovery of its secrets is elusive not because the work is so tedious but because it is “bigger and baggier and more uncanny than one thought it was” (Castle vii). Terry Castle (an unapologetic reader of Radcliffe) concludes that these disingenuous attempts to discredit Radcliffe’s novel result in the obsessive recalling of a few quintessential scenes. This type of investigation can perpetuate the recitation of “familiar commonplaces,” but it cannot “account for Udolpho’s extraordinary appeal” (Castle 121). Therefore my purpose shall not be to apologize, to discredit, nor to revisit the pregnant midsection of the novel in which is detailed the sojourn in Udolpho which has supplied so much material for censure, critique and satire. Instead, I hope to try to account for some of the mysteriousness by investigating the uncanny significance of the beginning and ending which Richard Albright finds to be so “remarkably similar” as to effectually “sugges[t] that nothing really did happen” in this sprawling novel (52). In this chapter, I look at the way in which the home La Vallée frames the narrative. In this home is
displayed an uncanny repetition of patriarchal characters with one significant
difference—the patriarch must be absolved of sexual immorality. This radical, though
obscured discourse about sexual fault complicates our understanding of Radcliffe as a
conservative and demonstrates an interesting formal occurrence in the text. As stated in
the introduction, because the sublime section on Udolpho interrupts this subtext and
astonishes our attention, the purification of the patriarch becomes nearly invisible.

Emily’s paternal home, La Vallée, marks the happy beginning and provides the
happy end of the novel. As if awakened from a dream (nightmare?), readers find
themselves just where they started, somewhat incredulous about where they’ve been. But
belying the suspicion that nothing has happened is a “tension between similarity and
difference” which “is sufficient to produce the uncanny effect” (Albright 58). In this case
the uncanny\(^2\) effect is caused by the transformation of La Vallée’s master from St. Aubert
to Valancourt. The doubling of St. Aubert and Valancourt is just one instance of the
repetitions that proliferate in the novel. As Terry Castle argues,

Characters seem uncannily to resemble or to replace previous characters,
sometimes in pairs. Even as they assume quasi-parental control over the
heroine, M. and Mme. Montoni become in the mind of the reader,
strangely ‘like’ a new and demonic version of M. and Mme. St. Aubert.
The Count and Countess de Villefort are a later transformation of the
Montoni pair—and of M. and Mme. St. Aubert. Du Pont, of course, is
virtually indistinguishable from Valancourt for several chapters. Blanche
de Villefort is a kind of replacement-Emily, and her relations with her
father replicate those of the heroine and St. Aubert, just as the Chateau-le-
Blanc episodes recombine elements from the La Vallée and Udolpho
episodes, and so on. (Castle 127)

\(^2\) The uncanny is the somewhat flawed English translation of “unheimlich”—more accurately translated as
“unhomelike.” Particularly pertinent then is the uncanniness of the home. The transformation of the
paternal head from St. Aubert to Valancourt makes the home, unhomelike.
Given the attention paid to the trope of repetition, one might conclude that the significance of these two characters would have been exhausted; oddly this is not so. The rare critical notice that Kenneth Graham makes of the similarity of St. Aubert and Valancourt, calling them “two almost interchangeable male figures,” does not pursue the connection beyond noting its existence (169). Instead he uses them as a singular representative of “a comforting world of pastoral domesticity and sensibility” that stands in opposition to the evil father/lover, Montoni (169).

I argue that while the two characters do both represent a “pastoral domesticity,” they also threaten the destruction of that domestic sphere with the illegitimatizing effects of adultery/infidelity. If fidelity and legitimacy are extremely important to domestic peace, and adultery is eschewed as a symptom of dangerous excess, it is significant that Radcliffe includes a shadow narrative that expands the fault lines of the risks to the home to men as well as women. For not only does Radcliffe project the evil of uncontrolled sexuality onto (aristocratic) women, it is also projected onto Valancourt and by extension to St. Aubert. Indeed the propelling force is a repressed male culpability and the radical assertion that male infidelity is just as harmful as female. This threat is introduced in the paternal home at the start of the narrative, and it must be dissolved before the next generation of patriarch can take possession of the home. In this way the very similar beginning and ending are radically, though obscurely, different.

By requiring sexual purity of the patriarch of La Vallée, Radcliffe is resisting much of the discourse that perpetuated sexual double standards. For Bernard Murstein notes in describing the sexual politics of the late eighteenth century, “the man who led an
adulterous existence was envied or admired, but a woman whose adultery was identified was ‘dishonored’” (232). One piece of his historical evidence, in which Samuel Johnson precociously states the prejudice against female sexuality, is useful to quote at length:

Confusion of progeny constitutes the essence of the crime; and therefore a woman who breaks her marriage vows is much more criminal than a man who does it. A man, to be sure, is criminal in the sight of God: but he does not do his wife a very material injury, if he does not insult her; if, for instance, from mere wantonness of appetite, he steals privately to her chambermaid. Sir, a wife ought not greatly resent this. I would not receive home a daughter, who had run away from her husband on this account. A wife should study to reclaim her husband by more attention to please him. Sir, a man will not, once in a hundred instances, leave his wife and go to a harlot, if his wife has not been negligent of pleasing. (Johnson qtd. in Murstein 232)

Nor does Radcliffe conform to Romantic notions of love that viewed “Nature and destiny” as taking “precedence over bourgeois conventionality” and in which, “lovers should feel free to defy unnatural man-made laws and rebel against authority” (Murstein 246). Radcliffe condemns infidelity gendered male as harshly as that gendered female despite Enlightenment rhetoric of sexual double standards and the new Romantic sensibility that resists conventional rules.

By requiring the sexual purity of Valancourt before allowing him to occupy the rural haven La Vallée, Radcliffe is making a radical adjustment to a conservative home. Given this conclusion it may be possible to reach a sort of critical middle ground that accommodates Radcliffe’s conservative reputation and the unshakable feeling that she was up to something. One need not view her in one of two categories: preposterous/profound, but instead read her fiction as containing vacillating critiques of and submission to her social moment. And while I suggest that Radcliffe, the
conservative, might not have been questioning “the requisite qualities that will bring forth the founding members of the bourgeois order,” as past feminist critics have claimed (and which Rictor Norton seconds), she could be offering a correction to the conservative, rural world (Ellis 108). So, contrary to being unaware “that this bucolic tradition was wrapped up and complicit with a flawed and already-outmoded gendered code of behavior that went under the name of Sensibility,” it is possible that she does question some of these gendered behaviors (Hoeverler 88).

Yet I don’t wish to take the implications of this (to use Claudia Johnson’s phrase) “regendering” of sexual fault too far. It is necessary to consider the warnings of critics like James Watt. He states that “[t]he temptation to read Radcliffe as a proto-feminist writer of ‘female Gothic’ should perhaps be qualified” (107). The basis of this qualification is that “many conservative readers did find her work to be eminently ‘legitimate’ and readable, and in addition many other Gothic novels and romances by contemporary women writers were far more searching in their social criticism” (Watt 107). Tompkins similarly states that, although “[t]he French Revolution…had engendered an atmosphere of insecurity and excitement that quickened the nerves of literature,” Radcliffe, nevertheless, “was a conservative” (Tompkins 251, 250). Even as we consider Norton’s compelling new evidence that Radcliffe associated with Dissenting culture, reminders like Watt’s serve as a well deserved correction for critics. Some have seemed “to focus on the subtext of Radcliffe’s work, and its feminist potential,” as Watt remarks, “rather than the congeniality of Radcliffean romance for conservative critics in the 1790s and early 1800” (Watt 103).
Norton also warns that the novels might be put to a somewhat convenient use: “because Gothic novels confront issues of horror and sexual violence, it is common to interpret them using the tools of Freudian (and more recently Lacanian) psychoanalysis” (114). He concludes that, “Gothic novels of course are not simply case studies of internalized hysteria and paranoia, but interpretations based upon psychoanalytical (rather than sociological or aesthetic) theories do have a compelling attraction” (141). Such psychoanalytic readings can be found in the work of Claire Kahane and Leona Sherman. John Stoler, in introducing various approaches to Radcliffe’s work, quotes Sherman’s somewhat extreme reading with criticism: “If rape is a fate worse than death, Emily’s horror of entrance via the back door of the ‘double chamber’ indicates to me her fear of a fate still worse than rape, anal penetration” (Sherman qtd in Stoler 28). He rightly reads this as “stretching to make a point” (28). In such readings the scathing critiques of Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall seem more justified. They call this “Gothic Criticism” in which scholars have “abandoned any credible historical grasp upon its object, which it has tended to reinvent in the image of its own projected intellectual goals of psychological ‘depth’” (209). Despite all of the caution, as Norton notes, these readings do remain compelling. Kahane’s conclusion that “the novel allows me first to enjoy and then to repress the sexual and aggressive center of Udolpho, which as the mad nun has warned, leads to madness and death, and leaves me safely enclosed—but significantly, socially secluded—in an idealized nurturing space, the space provided for heroines by patriarchal narrative construction” does not appear as easy to dismiss (340).
I argue that Radcliffe is presenting a somewhat radical idea about the conservative home but, because of the narrative structure, this dissent is almost entirely cloaked in the novel. Radcliffe distracts the reader and distances herself from this subtext as the plot is displaced to Italy and the castle of Udolpho. After the death of Mme St. Aubert, Emily’s glimpses the unspeakable possibility of her father’s infidelity. Emily is unable to confront her father; M. St. Aubert also dies. Emily is given possession of documents which, if she dared to read them, seem as if they would confirm this fear. She is unable to do so, the narrative shifts away from La Vallée and Emily accompanies her aunt, Mme Cheron, to Toulouse. Here, her aunt marries Montoni—a smolderingly attractive Italian. He stops Emily’s upcoming wedding with Valancourt (her father’s chosen suitor for her) and moves the family to Udolpho. At Udolpho Montoni reveals himself to be a villain, imprisons and torments Mme Montoni (previously Cheron) to death, and then threatens to sell Emily to the highest bidder because she refuses to give over her property. Emily escapes with the assistance of servants and finds herself in the home of the Count de Villefort who assists her in recovering her estates. She reconciles with Valancourt (who reputedly acted the rogue during her imprisonment) and returns to La Vallée.

To bring about this adjustment of potentially damaging male sexuality and return to La Vallée, Emily must first acknowledge her father’s adultery and cleanse him of it. However, as Cynthia Wolff has argued, Gothic “fiction is constructed in such a way that the figure who embodies explicit sexual passion is always repudiated. The villain is punished or killed, and the problem of love divided is resolved in the direction of
“chastity” (104). Radcliffe’s world is more complex because the terms of explicit sexual passion don’t just involve the villainous Montoni but Emily’s father. This would be something of a problem if not for the uncanny sameness between St. Aubert and Valancourt. By openly allowing Valancourt’s integrity to be questioned and his infidelity punished, Radcliffe is virtually condemning St. Aubert’s corruption of the domestic sphere and offering a correction to it.

Not only can St. Aubert and Valancourt be viewed as doubles, they almost merge into one man at different moments in the text, further entangling their fates. This odd symbiosis is established when Valancourt encounters Emily and her father as they journey through the Pyrenees. The details of their travels read almost as a courtship between the two men while the mention of Valancourt’s shy glances and Emily’s rosy blushes seem an afterthought. Valancourt is demonstrably devoid of interest in Emily when he is subsumed in cares for her father, which even St. Aubert reflects on in astonishment, stating “he would accept this kindness [of Valancourt’s room], though he felt rather surprised, that the stranger had proved himself so deficient in gallantry, as to administer to the repose of an infirm man, rather than that of a very lovely young woman, for he had not once offered the room for Emily” (33). Likewise, St. Aubert is wooed by Valancourt immediately: “‘This is a very promising young man; it has been many years since I have been so much pleased with any person…He brings back to my memory the days of my youth, when every scene was new and delightful!’” (57). Inherent in the love they have for each other is an unconscious acknowledgement of the cyclical nature of time. St. Aubert tells Emily,
‘There is something in the ardour and ingenuousness of youth, which is very particularly pleasing to the contemplation of an old man, if his feelings have not been entirely corroded by the world. It is cheering and reviving, like the view of spring to a sick person; his mind catches something of that spirit of the season, and his eyes are lighted up with a transient sunshine. Valancourt is this spring to me.’ (57)

Not only does Valancourt recall the general spirit of youthfulness for St. Aubert, but Valancourt is a reification of his own past self. “I remember when I was about his age,” St. Aubert muses, “and I thought, and felt exactly as he does” (57).

If, as Albright contends, “the novel’s embedded discourses on temporality were a response to the unprecedented forces that were reshaping the concept of time in England, and the novel’s construction of an alternative temporality contributed to the novel’s popular reception,” then this alternative temporality could be serving competing purposes (50). By interacting with current conceptions of time, Radcliffe is establishing a popular appeal (and perhaps conservative approval). But at the same time, if “[t]he past is so vividly imposed on the present that the dead seem to come to life again,” then Valancourt’s presence is a continuation (a reincarnation of sorts3) of St. Aubert (Albright 56). The transgressions of the former become affiliated with the latter and vice versa; M. St. Aubert’s questionable past becomes synonymous with Valancourt’s questionable present.

This is brought to the foreground through the corrupting implications of the city. St. Aubert repeatedly comments to himself that “this young man has never been at Paris” (36). In order to make the sage remark that Valancourt’s purity has not been

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3 To say Valancourt is a “reincarnation” of St. Aubert would give some possible explanation to the odd scene of the gun shot. St. Aubert shoots Valancourt, and after nursing him back to health, their fates become as linked as their travels.
tainted by the effects of Parisian voluptuousness, St. Aubert reveals that he has been at Paris. And as if this suggestion was not strong enough, a few pages previously, when Emily’s uncle, M. Quesnel, asks him how, he “who ha[s] lived in the capital, and ha[s] been accustomed to company,” could possibly “exist elsewhere” (12). St. Aubert significantly admits of his time in the city by replying, “‘I am now contented to know only happiness;-- formerly I knew life” (12). Thus the almost prophetic remark, “he has not been at Paris,” implies that once he has been, Valancourt will “know life” as inevitably as St. Aubert did. Paris becomes a destined place of corruption in the inevitability of St. Aubert’s comment on Valancourt’s current innocence and in St. Aubert’s own behavior. Valancourt’s purity rests not in his own integrity but in his temporal stage. If St. Aubert felt exactly as Valancourt did as a young man, one can extrapolate the fall of Valancourt to be a testament of St. Aubert’s past, played out in the present and through the character of one with whom Emily can compel herself to find fault.

Far from being able to fault her father, Emily denies and ignores the possibility of his transgressions even when the proof is (seemingly) before her eyes. Emily walks in on St. Aubert, whom she supposes to be weeping over her recently deceased mother’s letters only to find him caressing the portrait “of a lady, but not of her mother” (26). As she continues to watch, she sees that “St. Aubert gazed earnestly and tenderly upon this portrait, put it to his lips, and then to his heart, and sighed with a convulsive force. Emily could scarcely believe what she saw to be real” (26). Not only does she scarcely believe it, but from that moment on it is not real to her. To confront the implications of such a
sight, that her father was in love with a woman besides her mother, would have changed St. Aubert from benevolent patriarch to duplicitous villain.

She promises St. Aubert before he dies that she will burn his papers “without examining them” (78, emphasis Radcliffe’s). Upon attempting to fulfill these orders, Emily inadvertently breaks her promise:

Returning reason soon overcame the dreadful, but pitiable attack of imagination, and she turned to the papers though still with so little recollection, that her eyes involuntarily settled on the writings of some loose sheets, which lay open; and she was unconscious, that she was transgressing her father’s strict injunction, till a sentence of dreadful import awakened her attention and her memory together. (103)

She becomes complicit to the point of betrayal of her mother by her willful ignorance of her father’s guilt. And without further questioning, she declares to the empty room, “it is not my business to argue, but to obey” and burns the papers (103). Emily’s blind obedience and her repeated assertions that she cannot doubt her father’s honor may have earned Radcliffe approval in conservative circles. Yet when Emily interacts with Valancourt she is easily persuaded of his infidelity, and the anger and distrust she burns away in conjunction with her father flare up against her lover.

Understanding the relationship between Valancourt and St. Aubert, then, also accounts for another of the troubling mysteries of Udolpho: Emily’s lack of concern for her mother. Mme St. Aubert’s death, burial, and the period devoted to mourning her memory is detailed in a single seven-page chapter. The illness, demise and burial of St. Aubert spans six chapters and over 70 pages, and Emily’s mourning for her father persists throughout the entire narrative. Furthermore, despite considerable evidence that St. Aubert has been unfaithful to his wife, Emily refuses to sympathize with her mother
or even to acknowledge the peculiarity of the fact that St. Aubert insists on being buried in a place separate from her (and near the mysterious Marchioness de Villeroi). The sympathy she feels for her mother is subsumed in concern for herself, and the guilt of her father is acted out in the character of Valancourt. Having willfully remained ignorant of the past, Emily’s clandestine knowledge of her father’s faults is acted out in the present.

Though the reader is compelled to remain as ignorant (though perhaps not as generous) as Emily about her father’s past, Valancourt is observed very carefully. The fall St. Aubert predicted is enacted symbolically before Emily’s face and then after to higher degrees in Paris. While they are still together in Tolouse, Valancourt has begged for Emily’s hand only to be disappointed by a resounding “no” from Mme Cheron, Emily’s guardian. Hours after receiving this crushing news, Emily sees how fickle Valancourt’s affections are: “she perceived Valancourt; saw him dancing with a young and beautiful lady, saw him conversing with her with a mixture of attention and familiarity, such as she had seldom observed in his manner. She turned hastily from the scene” (130). Though Emily turns from the scene, she is forced to acknowledge the reality of it to herself and thoughts of “Valancourt, rejected by her aunt, and Valancourt dancing with a gay and beautiful partner, alternately tormented her mind” (133). Not only does she torment herself with these reflections, Valancourt confirms them to her. No explanation of his conduct is offered and he anticipates future faithlessness when he attempts to convince Emily that he will soon forget her: “I shall look, and cannot see you; shall try to recollect your features—and the impression will be fled from my imagination;—to hear the tones of your voice, and even memory will be silent!” (154).
In this forgetfulness he does not disappoint. After he is gone to Paris, he is soon convinced to leave his pining for Emily. He instead occupies his time at Madam La Comtesse’s parties where, the narrator tells us, “Valancourt passed his pleasantest, as well as most dangerous hours” (294). What filled those dangerous and pleasant hours the narrator declines to speculate on, but in the choice of his next Parisian friend, there can be little doubt: “There was also Marchioness Chamfort, a young widow, at whose assemblies he passed much of his time. She was handsome, still more artful, gay and fond of intrigue. The society, which she drew around her, was less elegant and more vicious” (294). These scenes recall the ambiguous “knowing of life” to which St. Aubert alluded, and which his youthful counterpart is currently experiencing.

Far from being so willfully blind to these faults, here in this regressive repetition of fulfilled prophecies is enacted not only Emily’s outrage but also that of the absent Mme St. Aubert. The terms of her break with Valancourt seem to be wholly absorbed in his infidelity. When the Count de Villefort tells her that Valancourt was “engaged in deep play with men, whom I almost shuddered to look upon” Emily dismisses his fears, and justifies Valancourt saying, “the Chevalier has, perhaps been drawn only into transient folly, which he may never repeat. If you had known the justness of his former principles, you would allow for my present incredulity” (507). Her incredulity vanishes completely when she hears Valancourt accused of “having a taste for every vicious pleasure” (507). The Count tells Emily that Valancourt accepted money and favors from “a well-known Parisian Countess, with whom he continued to reside, when I left Paris” (507). This intelligence effects the change in Emily’s affections which the love of gambling did not
and upon hearing it, “her countenance change[d],” and “she was falling from the seat” (507). With his sexual betrayal she resigns herself to consider Valancourt “a fallen, a worthless character, whom she must teach herself to despise” (509).

Interestingly, the revelation of Valancourt’s fall literally takes the place of St. Aubert’s. Before Valancourt returns, Emily had been in conversation with a servant who has awakened all of her repressed suspicions about St. Aubert and the lady in the miniature, over whom he was weeping before his death. Emily’s behavior when attempting to find out the truth without overtly seeking the knowledge her father denied her leaves her full of contradictory emotions:

She laid on the table the miniature which Emily had long ago found among the papers her father had enjoined her to destroy, and over which she had once seen him shed such tender and affecting tears; and recollecting all the various circumstances of his conduct, that had long perplexed her, her emotions increased to an excess, which deprived her of all power to ask the questions she trembled to have answered. (497)

It is odd that she should fear so much to ask these questions while, as she assures us, she did not doubt her father’s honor. Or perhaps it is not odd at all. In Radcliffe’s fiction, “we never behold the naked form of terror, but always its image obscurely reflected in the victim’s mind,” thus the repression of the possibility of what she fears is incidental as we can all see quite plainly the fear in Emily’s trembling face (Tompkins 252). Before Emily can receive the intelligence of the housekeeper’s story (which will all but confirm her worst fears: that she is not her mother’s daughter and that her father was subject to illicit passions) her attention is completely called away by Valancourt’s behavior: “It was long before she could sufficiently abstract her mind from Valancourt to listen to the story, promised by old Dorothée, concerning which her curiosity had once been so deeply
interested; but Dorothée, at length reminded her of it” (523). She loses interest in exploring the mysteries of the past which the certainty of the present makes undeniable. After this occurs she begins to allow for the possibility of a “mysterious connection, which she fancied had existed between [the Marchioness] and St. Aubert” (563).

Emily’s uncanny resemblance to the Marchioness of Villeroi, the woman in the miniature, reaffirms her status as a living representation of the past. Dorothée states, “if you were her daughter, you could not remind me of her more” after commenting on how the past seems to live on. Dorothée continues: “Time runs round! it is now many years since she died; but I remember every thing that happened then, as if it were yesterday. Many things, that have passed of late years, are gone quite from my memory, while those so long ago I can see as if in a glass” (491, 498). She pursues the past that cannot be erased because it incessantly makes itself felt in the present, if only in the mind of Emily, who now that she has become aware of the past by “unwarily observing the few terrible words in the papers,” finds that past cannot be “erased from her memory” (497).

More important than just losing her lover is the implication that the rural haven La Vallée is destroyed as a result. Emily had previously preserved the land because she wished to bestow it on Valancourt. So, when persecuted by Montoni she found the will to deny him⁴ “Recollecting, that it was for Valancourt’s sake she had thus resisted” and because she was suffering for him, “she smiled complacently upon the threatened sufferings” (381). This sacrifice is almost destroyed by his infidelity which would have

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⁴ Emily only defies Montoni to a point. When he threatens to remove his protection (i.e.: allow his friends to rape her) Emily signs over the papers. If the creation of the ideal home is dependent on the chastity of both of its inhabitants, then “allowing” herself to be raped would just as effectually destroy this possibility as handing over the estate.
made the ideal home unattainable and thus all of her suffering for naught: “what have I gained by the fortitude I then praticised?—am I happy now?—He said, we would meet no more in happiness; but, O! he little thought his own misconduct would separate us, and lead to the very evil he then dreaded” (584). The home, now radically without a master is devoid of all the conservative domestic pleasures that it formerly had or may have had.

It is the sexual fall that destroys the sanctity of La Vallée. For when Emily returned to her paternal home before she learned of Valancourt’s betrayal it still was a place of refuge. St. Aubert was a ubiquitous presence and his image, as recreated in Emily’s mind, nearly made him a physical presence despite his death. Emily remarks that “melancholy memorials of past times” supply his place (92). The spirit of St. Aubert still resides in the home through the ability of his artifacts to recall himself, his previous lessons, and as a benevolent spirit which looks down upon her: “‘Yes,’ said she, ‘let me not forget the lessons he has taught me!...O my father! if you are permitted to look down upon your child, it will please you to see, that she remembers and endeavours to practise, the precepts you have given her” (92). Additionally Emily has palpable reminders of her past happiness in the housekeeper, Theresa, and the dog, Manchon, her father’s favorite, who rushes forth to greet her.

Yet after Valancourt falls, and with him the past indiscretions of St. Aubert are brought to the foreground, La Vallée is strangely silent. The pleasures of this home are muted. Instead of the voice of the housekeeper, the barks of the dog and the wisdom of her father imbuing the chateau with “pastoral domesticity,” there is a “silent and deserted
air of the place” which “added solemnity to [Emily’s] emotions” (585). The alteration of the home is commented upon by Annette, Emily’s maid from Udolpho who has never been to La Vallée before: “Dear madam, how melancholy this place looks now,” said Annette, ‘to what it used to do! It is dismal coming home, when there is nobody to welcome one!’” (582). Annette is acting as Emily’s voice as she has often done previously within the corridors of Udolpho, and Emily’s own surmise of the alteration which has robbed the home of its contentment are obscurely reflected onto the servant. The ruin of what should have been a reward, not for herself but for Valancourt, gives this silent homecoming both radical and conservative implications. The silencing of her father’s memory at La Vallée when Valancourt’s sexual purity is suspected is the fruition of the obscured fear that provides the novel’s framework: the possibility that the home will be destroyed by illicit sexuality.

It also demonstrates the tangle of time: “She remembered how anxiously she had looked forward to the futurity, which was to decide her happiness concerning Valancourt…now that futurity, so anxiously anticipated was arrived, she was returned—but what a dreary blank appeared!—Valancourt no longer lived for her!” (581). Emily’s recollection of her past, in which she looked forward to her future, soon gives way to St. Aubert’s recollection of his past as a presentiment of Valancourt’s future. She recalls “An observation, which had fallen from M. St. Aubert more than once,” that “‘This young man,’ said he, speaking of Valancourt, ‘has never been at Paris;’ a remark, that had surprised her at the time it was uttered, but which she now understood” (584). Emily’s conservative impulse is to preserve her father through his chosen suitor and thus to hand
him over the keys to La Vallée. Yet she refuses to compromise her radical sense of Valancourt’s sexual impurity and thus “worthlessness” when opposed to her own perseverance.

The explanations that Radcliffe provides for both of the men are as exasperating as the “explained supernatural” scenes that are so famous in her novels. The real history of St. Aubert’s relationship to Marchioness de Villeroi and Valancourt’s vindication “are at times almost more improbable than the [in this case non-] supernatural explanations they are meant to displace” (Castle xxiii). It is interesting that Radcliffe cleans up this “natural” behavior as diligently as she cleared away the apparitions of Udolpho. To rewrite Emily’s dead end at the deflated La Vallée, Radcliffe offers a conservative “rational explanation” to the tale of sexual impurity and abjects this behavior onto women. By denying the possibility of the good hero to be flawed, Radcliffe returns to a conservative position through what Claudia Johnson calls “regendering.” In Johnson’s argument, “regendering⁵ almost all of the guilt and suffering in the novel” from female to male “realigns the novel with the dominant discourse of male sentimentality” (114). She concludes that “far from signifying any empowerment to women, [the criminalization of women and the deflation of masculine power] only conceals the male-to-female violence which is endemic under sentimentality” (Johnson 115). Much as suffering is only made legitimate in masculine terms, adultery is only made knowable in feminine terms and the

⁵ Courtney Wennerstrom takes some issue with this reading, especially the regendering of the “corpse” behind the veil. Rather than seeing this as undercutting the legitimacy of female suffering, she reads it as a refusal to allow the male gaze to linger on the fetishized dead female body. She concludes that (male) critical complaint about the explained supernatural was owing to a disappointment in being denied this pleasure: “Coleridge, who, in his 1794 review of the Mysteries of Udolpho, likens Radcliffe to a sexual tease” (200). She then presents the wording of his review “Curiosity is raised oftener than it is gratified; or rather it is raised so high that no gratification can be given it,” (Wennerstrom’s emphasis) as evidence that Coleridge “faults her for not bringing him to the climax of his reading pleasure” (200).
resolution of the novel is dependent on restoring the appropriate gender to the behaviors that threatened the masculine paradise of La Vallée.

The strange behavior of her father was not the fault of his sexual appetite but a woman’s, Signora Laurentini or the mad Sister Agnes. In her raving death-bed accusations she declared that Emily was the daughter of the Marchioness de Villeroi, but this is soon explained as the projection of her own guilt onto the woman who she murdered. Thus,

all the circumstances of her father’s conduct were fully explained: but her heart was oppressed by the melancholy catastrophe of her amiable relative, and by the awful lesson, which the history of the nun exhibited, the indulgence of whose passions had been the means of leading her gradually to the commission of a crime…which whole years of repentance and of the severest penance had not been able to obliterate from her conscience. (664)

And though Emily “was released from an anxious and painful conjecture,” about the honor of her father, we are assured that “her faith in St. Aubert’s principles would scarcely allow her to suspect that he had acted dishonourably” (663). The woman he mourned so passionately and near whom he was buried was not his lover but his sister. As this seems to undercut the radical possibility of holding men to the same sexual standards as women, Diane Hoeveler views it likewise as a conservative nod to aristocratic morality. She states, “[t]he upper classes, further, based, their status and social claims on the notion of their ‘blood’ while the middle class based its claim for status on its ‘sex,’… In choosing ‘blood’ over ‘sex,’ St. Aubert in death reasserts his upper class privileges and effectively traces his middle-class wife out of existence” (Hoeveler 95). I argue, however, that this is just an instance of improbable explanation.
Though Radcliffe does seem to privilege the upper class rural haven as opposed to the taint of the city in her juxtaposition of La Vallée and Paris, in the case of St. Aubert’s burial, I think she is just being duplicitous. His choice of burial locations, and the inordinate love he has for his sister are not so much an avowal of the upper class, but an artificial rewriting of the more plausible suggestion that St. Aubert had a lover. Radcliffe capitalizes on this mystery to question his actions and the sanctity of the upper-class home in such circumstances. While this temporary investigation does not destabilize the upper class in favor of its bourgeois alternative, it experimentally places rules upon it that transcend gendered codes of sexuality.

As her father’s past is cleared of stain, so are Valancourt’s Parisian activities revealed to be faultless. The Count (whom some have noted to be a stand-in St. Aubert) facilitates their resolution just as conveniently by informing Emily that his previous information was mistaken and that “though his passions had been seduced, his heart was not depraved” (652). She learns that Valancourt encountered debt in the assistance of others and was not in a party of hustling gamblers. Though this bit of knowledge is nice, no account of Valancourt’s financial worthiness can induce Emily to forgive him, as is evidenced by her persistent refusals of him even when Theresa, the housekeeper, reveals that he has provided her with a home and money during Emily’s time in Udolpho. What really allows her to forgive and forget is the assurance that, “to the ignominy of having received pecuniary obligations from the Marchioness Chamfort, or any other lady of intrigue...Valancourt had never submitted” (653). Though Valancourt had previously admitted to Emily that he was guilty, his confession is shown to be erroneous because the
circumstance that Emily most dreaded—his sexual betrayal—was such as she “could not name to the Chevalier” (653). So, “when he confessed himself to be unworthy of her esteem, he little suspected, that he was confirming to her the most dreadful calumnies” (653; emphasis added). Therefore the narrator assures us “the mistake had been mutual” (653). The fault is projected onto Emily for suspecting such an unspeakable thing while Valancourt’s fault lies in judging himself too harshly and inadvertently confessing to crimes that he did not commit.

If the danger of uncontrolled sexuality is regendered female from male, I turn back to Albright’s remark, has anything really happened? Have we gotten no where? I would argue that we have been to a place, if only in our dreams, that momentarily allowed for the more radical gendering of sexual fault to take place. The fact that we are only allowed to awake from this dream by the cleansing of the heroes and the punishment of infidelity, be it male or female (as Valancourt’s second shot wound can attest), causes a difference in La Vallée. The difference is a certainty (though an artificial one) that an impure patriarch cannot rule Radcliffe’s rural Eden.

The reader may be distracted from the development and resolution of the obscured threat to the home because Radcliffe shifts our attention to the more astonishing and clearly rendered fear at Udolpho. However, the presence of this sublime fear should not compel critics to think and write only about the novel’s distended middle. Radcliffe’s novel seems to demonstrate the act of repression in its narrative structure and modulating use of fear. But despite this repression, the home returns again—unhomelike because an idealized space, if not of sexual equality, of equal sexual purity.
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