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Her Dark Intentions:
Aspects of the Gothic in the Novels of Muriel Spark

Prvky literární gotiky v tvorbě Muriel Sparkové

Master's thesis

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I confirm that I wrote the submitted thesis myself and integrated corrections and suggestions of improvement of my supervising professor. I also confirm that the thesis includes a complete list of sources and literature cited.

In Olomouc ..... ……..……

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Table of Contents

Introduction

'Lord deliver me from this Gothic generation!'[1] exclaims the antiquary in Sir Walter Scott's eponymous novel *The Antiquary* (1816), set at the end of the eighteenth century, the time of inception of literary Gothicism. Walter Scott—although not opposed to Gothicism, but nonetheless refusing to be regarded as a Gothic writer himself—expressed the viewpoint of many a contemporary critic through the voice of his character.

Throughout the literary history—unlike in architecture—the term Gothic has oft been considered pejorative, even among literary scholars disposed to sneer at their colleagues' lowly pursuits. The Gothic literary studies have only been gaining traction in the recent years, as evidenced by the exponentially growing number of publications—spearheaded by David Punter, and the researchers affiliated with the University of Edinburgh, the heart of Gothic research. Indeed, the involvement of the Scottish institution should come as no surprise, for although originally conceived by an English author, the Scots have appropriated the Gothic aesthetic as their own and made it integral to the Scottish literary tradition. As a result, the following thesis shall discuss the bearing of Gothicism—particularly in its Scottish permutation—upon Muriel Spark's oeuvre.

Although Spark spent the better part of her career renouncing her nationality and styling herself as a European, the influence of her native culture is indisputable. While it would be preposterous to argue that Spark is an altogether Gothic author, the aim of this thesis is to examine to what extent she employs Gothic tropes and motifs in her writing.

First, I shall briefly introduce the genre and retrace its milestones, conventions and the shifting thereof over more than two centuries of Gothic writing. For reasons of brevity, I shall only preoccupy myself with the works directly relevant to the later analysis. I shall then narrow my focus to the peculiarities of the Scottish Gothic, and lastly, consider the Gothic in the context of selected works by Muriel Spark.

[1] Walter Scott, *The Antiquary* (Boston, 1893; Project Gutenberg, 2004), chap. 16, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7005/7005-h/7005-h.htm.

1 Inception of the Gothic

In 1764, Horace Walpole stirred the proverbial literary waters with his self-classified 'Gothic story' *The Castle of Otranto*, thus laying the first foundation stone for a genre which would come to shape the literature of the following centenary. The novel, originally posing as a mere translation of a medieval Italian manuscript, released to an unexpected popularity, which spurred Walpole into an admission of his authorship in the preface to the novel's second edition, inadvertently starting a wave of controversy. What the critics previously found forgivable in a supposed archaic text, they criticised as preposterous in a tale of contemporary make and ultimately dismissed Walpole as 'an advocate for re-establishing the barbarous superstitions of Gothic devilism[.]'[2] This had, after all, come to pass during the Augustan Age—an era when 'Reason had gained the ascendancy over imagination and dealt the death blow to chivalry and romance.'[3]

Walpole's story did not emerge out of imaginative vacuum, however; the preface to the second edition is largely a manifesto in which Walpole clarified the artistic intentions involved in the composition of the novel, declaring that *The Castle of Otranto* is a union between the everyday realism of the emerging novel and the supernatural imagination of medieval romance, in his own words:

> It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by strict adherence to common life.[4]

Walpole went on to invoke the most prominent figure of the British literary history—William Shakespeare—as the source of inspiration for the ambivalence

[2] 'Review of The Castle of Otranto,' *Monthly Review* 32 (May 1765), quoted in *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. Michael Gamer (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 119–20.

[3] Audley L. Smith, 'Richard Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance,' ELH 6, no. 1 (March 1939): 64, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2871604.

[4] See Horace Walpole, 'Preface to the Second Edition,' in *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. Michael Gamer (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 9.

and the much derided elements of levity in his tale. If a writer of such magnitude as Shakespeare believed that there was space for the comic in *Hamlet* (1603), Walpole reasoned, then his own minute transgressions following the same suit should be overlooked, for he held Shakespeare's craft in higher authority than the assessments of the critics,[5] as quoted by Walter Scott in his 1811 introduction to Walpole's book:

> [. . .] [*The Castle of Otranto*] is the only one of my works with which I am myself pleased; [. . .] I have composed it in defiance of rules, of critics, and of philosophers; and it seems to me just so much the better for that very reason. I am even persuaded, that sometime hereafter, when taste shall resume the place which philosophy now occupies, my poor Castle will find admirers; [. . .][6]

But *Hamlet* contributed to the Gothic in more significant ways. The supernatural agency features prominently in the play in the frock of King Hamlet's ghost, who shapes much of the plot with his intervention. Although Walpole's ghosts harken back to Shakespeare, more contemporary influences can also be found: namely, Walpole's close personal friend, poet Thomas Gray of the so-called Graveyard school of poetry, a pre-romantic movement concerned with the ambivalent nature of death, life, anguish and loss; the topics that would be taken up by the Romantic Movement.[7] It naturally follows that the Gothic, with its preoccupation with terror and the irrational, was directly at odds with the sober philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason;[8] Walpole's sentiments regarding the subject of philosophy can, after all, be discerned from the previous quotation.

Walpole's voice—although perhaps the loudest of the lot, amplified thanks to his societal and political position—was not the first to advocate the literary value of medieval romance; in 1762, bishop Richard Hurd published *Letters on Chivalry*

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[5] See Walpole, 'Preface,' 11.

[6] See Walter Scott, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, ed. Michael Gamer (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 135.

[7] See Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 52.

[8] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 2–4.

and Romance, beating Walpole to the usage of the attribute 'Gothic' as denotes medieval literature.[9] In this 'critical justification for the literature of the Middle Ages and the use of romance material in modern poetry[,]'[10] Hurd virtually exonerates Walpole's prospective writing, as he argues that the dominion of reason has left in its wake a void of poetic imagination. Examining the medieval romances alongside the Greek classics, Hurd discovers '[t]that there is a remarkable correspondency between the manners of the old heroic times, as painted by [. . .] Homer, and those which are represented to us in the books of knight-errantry.'[11] Whilst maintaining that the Gothic creations should not be held to any other standard but their own,[12] he goes on to encourage his contemporaries not to shun, but embrace the aesthetic 'barbarities of their forefathers'[13] much derided by the Augustans, and celebrates the Gothic-inspired works of Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare and John Milton, elevating them even over the works of classical literature, for he believes that Gothic aesthetics surpass even the Grecian tradition in their poetic potential.[14]

To some critics, however, the Gothic is also affected by the political and religious circumstances. In a chapter of *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (2007), Robert Miles points out the connection between the emerging genre and the enduring British anti-Catholic and anti-feudal sentiments. The Gothic architectonic style, heavily associated with Catholicism of the feudal continental Europe, thus lent its name to a genre, which oft contrasted the mentality and practices of feudalism and the Catholic Church against Protestantism;[15] the

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[9] See Michael Gamer, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, ed. Michael Gamer (London: Penguin Books, 2001), xxvii.

[10] Smith, 'Richard Hurd's Letters,' 58.

[11] Richard Hurd, *The Works of Richard Hurd, D. D., Lord Bishop of Worcester*, 8. vols (London, 1811; Project Gutenberg, 2017), 4: 262, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/54524/54524-h/54524-h.htm#IV.

[12] See Smith, 'Richard Hurd's Letters,' 73–4.

[13] Hurd, *The Works of Richard Hurd,* 4: 240, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/54524/54524-h/54524-h.htm#I.

[14] See Smith, 'Richard Hurd's Letters,' 60.

[15] See Robert Miles, 'Eighteenth-Century Gothic,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 14–5.

tendency of which comes to feature more prominently in the works of Walpole's successors, such as Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Gregory Lewis.

Whatever its widely disputed literary merits and shortcomings, *The Castle of Otranto* became a popular work to follow suit or react against. Walpole himself felt flattered by the thought that other, more accomplished writers might take up his mantle, as expressed in the previously mentioned second preface:

> [. . .] if the new route [Walpole] has struck out shall have paved a road for men of brighter talents, he shall own with pleasure and modesty, that he was sensible the plan was capable of receiving greater embellishments than his imagination or conduct of the passions could bestow on it.[16]

One of the earliest works making use of Walpole's artistic template was Clara Reeve's novel titled *The Old English Baron* (1778), wherein Reeve's aim is to improve upon the formula of *Otranto* by giving the story a didactic value and keeping the supernatural within the bounds of probability to avoid the very excess that had lent itself to ridicule of the critics: 'it seemed to me that it was possible to compose a work upon the same plan, wherein these defects might be avoided[.]'[17] Reeve had thus effectively paved the way for other women writers within the genre.[18] One such woman was Ann Radcliffe, a best-selling author of her time; indeed, it was through Radcliffe and her prominent novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), that the genre truly gained its momentum. It is also at this time that the Gothic begins to thematically split into male and female traditions respectively, each electing a specific set of issues to address. Ann Radcliffe, similarly to Clara Reeve, wrote her novel *The Italian* as a reaction to another Gothic work—Matthew Gregory Lewis's controversial *The Monk* (1796)—and like Reeve, Radcliffe likewise attempts to rein in the eccentricities of

[16] See Walpole, 'Preface', 10.

[17] Clara Reeve, 'Preface to The Old English Baron, 2nd edition,' in *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 125.

[18] See Deborah Russell, 'Gothic Romance,' in *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 67, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/k.ctt1bgzd5s.5.

Lewis's work in her version, going as far as rationalising the phenomena the characters initially perceive as supernatural. The extremities of evil and sexual violence in Lewis's narrative are replaced with more intimate struggles, where the institutionalised deprivation of female agency and their domestic incarceration becomes one of the central causes of terror. The contrast between Radcliffe's and Lewis's style of Gothic is analogous to the contrasts between the subtleties of the literature of terror and the explicitness of horror.[19] Radcliffe herself addresses the distinction in a posthumously published essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826): '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.'[20]

Much of the earliest Gothic novels thus resemble almost a literary competition of a sort, with rival writers constantly reinventing the genre in their battles of talent and wit. But the genre has also been shaped by a competition held on more amicable terms. In the rainy summer of 1816, Lord Byron hosted a ghost-story competition in a Swiss residence of Villa Diodati for his literary associates such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley and John Polidori; the results of which were such literary milestones as Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Mary Shelley's acclaimed *Frankenstein* (1818).[21] Although literary critics have ascribed these works to the Romantic Movement, the boundaries between the Gothic and Romanticism are fuzzy. Romanticism is in many ways a spiritual successor of the Gothic; the Romantics assimilated the Gothic tropes and further expanded upon them, especially the second generation of Romantics among whom Byron and the Shelleys belonged. Alexandra Warwick, writing on the subject of Victorian Gothic, notes:

> [. . .] Gothic did not die; indeed, in the popular imagination the Victorian is in many ways *the* Gothic period, with its elaborate cult

[19] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 25–33.

[20] See Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry,' *New Monthly Magazine* vol. 16 (1826): 149, https://books.google.cz/books?id=pDYaAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA145&hl=cs&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false.

[21] See Jiří Flajšar, 'Gothic Fiction Revisited,' in *Scottish Gothic Fiction* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2012), 7.

> of death and mourning, its fascination with ghosts, spiritualism and the occult, [. . .][22]

Although some authors actively distanced themselves from Gothicism, namely the first generation Romantic poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge—despite the latter poet's contribution to the Gothic aesthetic with poems such as 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798) or 'Christabel' (1816)[23]—for most works the distinguishing factor seems to be merely critical appraisal, as noted by Robert Miles:

> [. . .] while the poems and novels of the period shared the general taste of Gothicism, the later retrospective classifications of literary history dubbed the one Romantic, and good, the other Gothic, and bad.[24]

Some of the critical disdain for the Gothic partially stems from the anti-feminist mentality inherent to the era; as the genre came to be dominated by female writers following the examples of Radcliffe and Reeve, producing female-centric narratives intended for female readership, the critics began to scorn their literary efforts as 'female propensity for light reading[,]'[25] although many later respected authors affiliated with Realism—Elizabeth Gaskell or George Eliot, for example—have dabbled with Gothicism at some point of their career.[26] The snide remarks have incited Clara Reeve to lodge a pointed complaint against the critics in the preface to her book *The Progress of Romance* (1785):

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[22] See Alexandra Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 29.

[23] See Emma McEvoy, 'Gothic and the Romantics,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 21.

[24] See Miles, 'Eighteenth-Century Gothic,' 16.

[25] Miles, 'Eighteenth-Century Gothic,' 16.

[26] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 30.

> The learned men of our own country, have in general affected a kind of contempt for [Gothic] kind of writing, and looked upon Romances, as proper furniture only for a lady's Library.[27]

As a result, many female writers seeking critical appraisal—such as the previously mentioned George Eliot or the Brontë sisters, turn to usage of male pseudonyms in hopes of reducing the misogynistic bias.

But at the heart of the scorn laid also anxiety of a declining empire—in the aftermath of American (1775–1783) and French Revolution (1789–1799), Britain cowered in fear of a possible revolution on their own soil, installing 'draconian laws against assembly and free speech'[28] by way of overcompensation. The Gothic, a genre ever open to various voices of dissent, thus became doubly transgressive. The genre took a proto-feminist turn in the hands of women writers—the female Gothic began to preoccupy itself with the matters of motherhood, domesticity, sexual and social repression, class and economic dependency of women, whereas the male tradition—for the most part—continues with its oedipal themes, or develops them in the direction of queer writing.[29] Andrew Smith points out the new directions of Gothic in his publication *Gothic Literature* (2007):

> [. . .] questions about class, money, and gender [. . .] took on an increasing urgency in the maturely developing industrial society of mid-nineteenth-century Britain. The Gothic is no longer just about aristocratic milieu: it has now moved on to critique the type of bourgeois codes of conduct [. . .] and the idea of gender

[27] See Clara Reeve, 'Preface,' in *The Progress of Romance* (New York: The Facsimile Text Society, 1930), xi, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/inu.30000007087707?urlappend=%3Bseq=22.

[28] Robert Miles, 'History/Genealogy/Gothic: Godwin, Scott and their Progeny,' in *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 40, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvggx38r.5.

[29] See Robert Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 96–8.

> divisions which underpinned the establishment of new social and economic identities.[30]

The split of gendered traditions was by far not the only change the Gothic had undergone during this period—new themes emerge as Gothicism expands beyond the English borders and across the ocean, adapting to the needs of specific audiences. The writers of American Gothic turn to reflection upon 'patriarchy, slavery, and racism, [. . .] Puritan extremes [. . .] and the political horror of a failed utopianism' [31]—the topics plaguing the American conscience; and—through the writings of Edgar Allan Poe—contribute to the formation of detective fiction.[32] Scotland interrogates its uneasy relationship with Calvinism in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824).

The perils of the human nature are also among the central topics of the Brontë sisters, Charlotte and Emily respectively, whose novels *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) deal with domestic violence and emotional abuse. The Brontës abandon the exotic faraway locations for the oftentimes claustrophobic domestic settings, and fill their narratives with flawed characters whose depth exceeds that of the typified Gothic roles of the damsel, her violator and the righteous saviour.[33]

Hogg's entry marks another trend in Gothic literature, the exploration of the human psyche and the blurred line between the manifested supernatural and a mere hallucination.[34] The object of terror is shifted from demonic visitations to the demons of the mind and anticipates works such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1989), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), H. G.

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[30] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 75.

[31] Allan Lloyd Smith, 'Nineteenth-Century American Gothic' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 174.

[32] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 34.

[33] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 30.

[34] See David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 128.

Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)—all considered to be the crucial texts of the Victorian Gothic revival.[35]

Towards the end of the nineteen century, the seedy sections of London replace the desolate castles and monasteries of the early Gothic fiction as the ubiquitous backdrop for the tales abound with decadence and duality. In the previously mentioned stories penned by Wilde and Stevenson, the city appears almost complicit in the vices of the respective characters.[36] The geographical changes are what Alexandra Warwick considers to be some of the defining characteristics of the Victorian Gothic:

> [. . .] eighteen-century and Romantic Gothic were deeply concerned with issues of contemporary political and social life, these were rehearsed in the locations and conditions of medieval Europe. The revival of Gothic, the point at which it could be said to be 'Victorian', is the moment at which it is being used explicitly to articulate the questions of the present, and setting them in that same recognisable present.[37]

These innovations, however, also come to signify an end of the Gothic as a standalone genre. Alexandra Warwick observes that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, no discernible unified form of the Gothic exists; rather, it has become a tool for the authors to add a specific flavour to their narratives.[38] Andrew Smith echoes Warwick's observations in a chapter of his book where he discusses variations of the Gothic emerging in the nineteenth century:

> [. . .] after the Gothic heyday of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Gothic does not disappear but

[35] See David Punter, 'Introduction: The Ghost of a History,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 2.

[36] See Glennis Byron, 'Gothic in the 1890s,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 188.

[37] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 33.

[38] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic' 34.

> subversively infiltrates other forms of writing, including poetry, and the realist Victorian novel.[39]

During the Victorian times the Gothic is thus effectively dissolved as a genre and begins to manifest itself as a literary mode, the form in which it continues to be used to the present day. As David Punter writes in his volume of Gothic criticism called *The Literature of Terror* (1980): 'many contemporary and near-contemporary writers [. . .] regard themselves as personally indebted to the Gothic tradition.'[40]

2 The Sublime and the Uncanny

The Gothic has oft walked hand in hand with an attention to the psyche—whether by evoking the emotions within the reader through the mastery of language or via careful examination of the mind of a character, which became popular particularly with the Gothic authors creating during 19th century. In this, the genre is largely indebted to Irish philosopher Edmund Burke and his philosophical treatise titled *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757); and the psychoanalytical works of Sigmund Freud—particularly an essay titled 'The Uncanny' (1919). The works which Andrew Smith considers as the 'two major intellectual contributions made to an understanding of the Gothic[.]'[41]

In the aforementioned treatise, Burke set an aesthetic precedent for the impending wave of Gothic writing by examining the ways in which language is capable of eliciting an emotional response, not through the meaning of words themselves, but the emotional content associated with their occurrence. Jane Hodson, contributing to *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (2016), makes the following observation in a chapter titled 'Gothic and the Language of Terror':

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[39] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 53.

[40] See David Punter, 'Introductory: Dimensions of Gothic,' in *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 1, *The Gothic Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 3.

[41] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 10.

> Burke offers a radically different account of language to that presented in contemporary grammar books and dictionaries, arguing that the communication of feeling has not been left behind by the rational progress of language, but instead remains inherent within language.[42]

As is already encoded in the name of the publication, Burke's inquiry revolves around two related, but ultimately exclusive, concepts—beauty and the sublime, rooted in positive and negative experiences, respectively. Beauty, productive of love and admiration is defined as a positive experience; whereas the sublime is regarded as its darker, stronger counterpart productive of awe and desire, rooted in negative experiences such as absence or loss;[43] in Burke's own words: 'ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure.'[44] The latter feeling—which Burke holds as superior, forms the focal point of the Gothic narrative, at the heart of which lies the self-preservation instinct and the fear of death:

> The passions which concern self-preservation, turn mostly on pain or danger. The ideas of pain, sickness, and death, fill the mind with strong emotions of horror; but life and health, though they put us in a capacity of being affected with pleasure, make no such impression by the simple enjoyment. The passions therefore which are conversant about the preservation of the individual turn chiefly on pain and danger, and they are the most powerful of all the passions.[45]

Burke then goes on to enumerate the phenomena commonly contributing to the feeling of sublime, such as pain, vastness, obscurity, power, infinity, privation,

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[42] See Jane Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' in *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 292, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bgzd5s.17.

[43] See Edmund Burke, *Burke's Writings and Speeches*, 12 vols (London, 1887; Project Gutenberg, 2005), 1: 165–6, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm#Page_165.

[44] See Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 110.

[45] Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 110–1.

silence and solitude—the concepts evocative of anxiety and terror, which according to Burke are the prime sources of the sublime:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.[46]

That is to say that anything capable of triggering the feelings of apprehension and astonishment is also productive of the sublime. Burke's postulates about the daunting effects of the concepts such as power and infinity are also reflected in his view of the concept of a deity, of which he writes: 'great power must be always precedent to our dread of it.'[47] Indeed, it was only with the dawn of Christianity—and by extension the *New Testament*—Burke points out, that god had become to be characterised as a beneficent father figure to be loved.[48]

Burke solidifies his claim by referring to the Bible itself: 'In the Scripture wherever God is represented as appearing or speaking, everything terrible in nature is called up to heighten the awe and solemnity of the Divine presence'[49] and in return diminish the human spectator. It follows that, just like any other environment in which the aforementioned qualities coincide, a being of such absolute potency is likely to inspire terror and through it, the sublime; an experience—according to Vijay Mishra's article 'The Gothic Sublime,' a contribution to *A New Companion to the Gothic* (2012) curated by David Punter—which makes god appear 'at once religious and demonic[.]'[50] Andrew Smith, in a summary of Burke's writings, identifies the particular type of deity that Burke is referring to:

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[46] See Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 110.

[47] See Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 145.

[48] See Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 145–6.

[49] See Burke *Writings and Speeches*, 144–5.

[50] See Vijay Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 291.

> [. . .] an omnipotent creator who, given these implied links to fear, anxiety, and terror of death, seems to be an Old Testament God of punishment and damnation.[51]

Burke's notion of god is thus consistent with Calvinism oft employed in Scottish Gothic. In his pondering of the sublime, Burke went against the spirit of his era and its reliance upon reason in favour of the forces of imagination, and in doing so prepared a fertile ground for the Gothic—a divergent genre oscillating between the allegorical and irrational with but a negligible, if any, transcendental effect.[52] Thus the Gothic literary tradition effectively builds upon the foundation laid down by Burke nearly a decade before the publication of the first canonically recognised Gothic text—Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*.

By contrast, Sigmund Freud's contribution to the Gothic discourse comes mostly retroactively, in developing the tools for analysis of the Gothic aesthetic; as Steven Bruhm summarises in 'The Gothic Body and Freud,' a chapter of University of Edinburgh's publication *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion* (2019): 'Freud may not have invented the Gothic, but he made possible and inescapable the Gothic as we now understand it.'[53] Although the following section of this text shall focus heavily on 'The Uncanny' in particular, it would be doing Freud—or 'the last of the great Victorian Gothic writers'[54] as Alexandra Warwick calls him—a disservice to condense his contribution to a single essay alone. Sigmund Freud dedicated his career to the examination of the human mind, and although many of his theories come across as, at best, outdated or outright bizarre by modern standards, they carry an important added element of encoding the mentality of the era in which they were created, thus providing valuable insight when applied to the works of Freud's predecessors and contemporaries. If applied to the Gothic literature, a genre deeply ingrained with

[51] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 11.

[52] See Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 291–2.

[53] Steven Bruhm, 'The Gothic Body before and after Freud,' in *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 92, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvggx38r.8.

[54] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 36.

psychological phenomena, psychoanalysis becomes—as American academic Michelle A. Massé verbalises in the chapter 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic' (2012) of Punter's publication—'a toolbox of interpretative strategies'[55] essential to the pursuits of Gothic criticism.

Whilst the bulk of Freud's writing deals with the structure of the psyche—divided into ego, id and the super-ego, each with its own designated functions—and its afflictions, and his preoccupation with sexuality famously borders on obsessive; Freud's initial interest lay with the realm of dreams and the interpretation thereof, to which he dedicated one of his earliest publications—*The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). In interpreting literature, Freud would approach a work of fiction as he would an analysand's dream, often working with the assumption that the author's work must needs be an outlet for their neuroses, an extension of their ego fantasies.[56] Although the hindsight of the present day literary criticism and the advances of modern science allow for a healthy dose of scepticism regarding Freud's frequent generalisations, the Gothic—a genre rife with dread, trauma, non-conformism and ambivalence—lends itself readily for the dream analysis.[57]

Ambivalence, the key concept of Gothicism, also manifests itself in other of Freud's works and theories; in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud describes the very notion of a civilised society as an ambivalent concept founded upon two opposing forces—Eros and Thanatos; the sexual instinct—or 'the embodiment of the will to live'[58]—and the death instinct, respectively, described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) as: 'two kinds of processes [that] are constantly at work in living substance, operating in contrary directions, one constructive or assimilatory and the other destructive[.]'[59] Through their

[55] Michelle A. Massé, 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 310.

[56] See Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,' in *Criticism: the Major Statements*, ed. Charles Kaplan (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 424–8.

[57] See Massé, 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic,' 308–13.

[58] See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, transl. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975), 43.

[59] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 44.

influence, society proves both necessary for the humanity's continuous survival and shackling at once:

> [. . .] Eros [. . .] aims at binding together single human individuals, then families, then tribes, races, nations, into one great unity, that of humanity. [. . .] These masses of men must be bound to one another libidinally; necessity alone, the advantages of common work, would not hold them together. [. . .] The natural instinct of [. . .] aggression is the derivative and main representative of the death instinct [. . .] [T]he meaning of the evolution of culture is [. . .] the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instincts of life and the instincts of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species.[60]

'The Uncanny' builds upon Freud's previous psychoanalytical theories and provides an evaluative lens through which the integral characteristics of the Gothic can be viewed. Freud reiterates many of Burke's points, stating that similarly to the effects of the sublime, the uncanny is inevitably connected to 'all that arouses dread and creeping horror;'[61] according to Freud, fear and trauma are the formative experiences of the self,[62] particularly those connected to Oedipus complex and the castration anxiety, both of which often stand at the forefront of the early Gothic narratives.[63] Alexandra Warwick further suggests that Freud's theories pick up where Burke had left off and elaborate upon those of Burke's ideas that had proved insufficient or were rendered obsolete.[64]

The uncanny, like the sublime, is a two-fold concept oscillating between two poles, which Freud refers to by German adjectives 'heimlich' and 'unheimlich'—

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[60] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, transl. Joan Rivere (London: Hogarth Press, 1930), 102–3.

[61] See Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny,' in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, ed. Ernest Jones, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 368.

[62] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 12.

[63] Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 294.

[64] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 36.

terms previously used by Ernst Jentsch in his psychological work on the subject, titled *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* (1906), whose study Freud chose to expand upon with his own aforementioned essay. Freud starts with restating definitions of Jentsch's crucial terms, in which 'heimlich'—or homely—is represented by everything familiar and comforting, whereas 'unheimlich'—the uncanny—results from the unknown and is thus possibly inductive of terror. Whilst not all that is novel is necessarily fright-inducing, novelty is a prerequisite of terror, for according to Jentsch, familiarity diminishes the uncanny effect.[65] Freud, however, finds Jentsch's demarcation of the two terms simplistic and reductive, and instead suggests that it is in fact the displacement of a solid boundary between reality and imagination that presents the major contributing factor towards the creation of the uncanny:

> [. . .] uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality [. . .][66]

The focal point of Freud's paper is an examination of the mechanism of fear, which he describes as a manifestation of super-ego's failure to contain the repressed emotional experiences acquired during the infantile stage of mental development; these feelings of the id are disassociated from the ego and moulded into so-called 'morbid anxiety' by way of the censorship of the super-ego, which in turn cause the uncanny effect when an individual is forced to confront the sources of their dread upon resurfacing.[67] Through the confrontation with the re-emerging, repetition also becomes an instrument of the uncanny,[68] one of the many items present on Burke's extensive list of features evoking the sublime; in fact, the most prevalent and paralysing morbid anxiety triggers unsurprisingly echo the causes of Burkean sublime:

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[65] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 370.

[66] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 398.

[67] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 393–4.

[68] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 390–1.

> [. . .] factors of silence, solitude and darkness [. . .] are actually elements in the production of the infantile morbid anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free.[69]

Furthermore, Freud's interpretation of the phenomenon as a repressed feeling coming to the surface appears to be consistent with the notion of the uncanny as formulated by one of his predecessors, German philosopher F. W. J. von Schelling, whose thoughts on the subject are paraphrased in Freud's essay as an exposed secret, in Freud's words: 'something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light.'[70] David Punter in a chapter investigating the uncanny in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* echoes Freud's sentiment, verbalising his understanding of the uncanny effects as subliminal pieces of the past, implanted deep in one's implicit memory beyond the reach of consciousness, somehow made manifest in the present like a déjà vu.[71] Combining Freud's theories with those of his successor Jacques Lacan, as well as findings of other scholars, Punter notes the existential implications of the uncanny—that the human condition is inherently uncanny—summarised in the following quote:

> [. . .] the uncanny comes to reminds us that there is no obvious beginning, to life or to thought, that we are composed of prior traces, some of them available for conscious memory but most of them sunk in a primal past which is not recoverable by conscious means but which continues to influence, and perhaps even determine, our sense of our place in the world.[72]

Throughout the rest of his paper, Freud attempts to explain away the most common instances of the uncanny by linking their effects to his other theories; for example, the uncanny effect produced by the sight of severed limbs or other

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[69] Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 407.

[70] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 394.

[71] See David Punter, 'The Uncanny,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 130.

[72] See Punter, 'The Uncanny,' 132.

missing parts of anatomy—human or otherwise—is connected to the castration anxiety.[73] The most acute instance of the uncanny, Freud maintains, is typically linked to the fear of death, and by extension an assortment of cadavers, spectres and other undead monsters the Gothic is typically rife with:

> Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and tospirits and ghosts.[74]

This fear, Freud claims, originates from one's primitive self and the self-preservative conviction that 'the deceased becomes the enemy of his survivor,'[75] found in equal measure in modern urban civilisations as well as most of the less developed tribal cultures; as such it, too, falls under the repression mechanism and through it creates uncanny sensations.[76] Interestingly enough, Freud observes that children seem to be exempt from this fear: 'children do not distinguish at all sharply between living and lifeless objects,'[77] he writes; this glaring lack of any morbid anxiety after-effects and the subsequent absence of the uncanny results from primary narcissism present in children's minds prior to the development of the super-ego and its repression mechanisms—a necessary precondition for the formation of the morbid anxiety.[78] Andrew Smith, in his publication on the Gothic, reiterates Freud's point in slightly clearer terms, writing that '[a] child [. . .] has no conception of death[,]' essentially believing itself immortal.[79]

The potential developmental gap in the self-preservation instinct leaves room for another popular Gothic trope to materialise—the doppelgänger or the double for short, opening doors for arguably one of the most valuable contributions to

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[73] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 397.

[74] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 395.

[75] Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 396.

[76] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 396.

[77] Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 386.

[78] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 387.

[79] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 14.

psychoanalysis, developed by Freud and his compatriot and collaborator Otto Rank, each taking their turn to examine the split in personality and its causes. For Rank, the disassociation of the id is an act of preservation of the ego threatened by the impulses of the unbridled primary narcissism; it stems in part from the religious idea of the immortality of the soul—a sort of a primordial concept of the double. Freud, on the other hand, argues that the potential for the othering of oneself is not eliminated with the development of the super-ego proper; its ability to self-reflect can, in fact, play a significant role in the process of separation of harmful desires pertaining to the primary narcissism from one's own ego and displacing them into an external representation. Steven Bruhm writes of the double as a psychological phenomenon:

> Wanting to be sure that we are free from the oppressive control of others [. . .], we remain self-possessed, always demonised by our own demons, always a proto-Gothic subject. We are thereby doomed to encounter the other in ourselves that, doppelgänger-like, is always already projected outward [. . .][80]

The sense of the uncanny sets in at the moment of realisation that such an extension of self had been formed, the very need for its creation foreboding.[81] The double becomes, in Freud's words, '[a] ghastly harbinger of death'[82] insofar as it resembles other external visualisations of death productive of the uncanny, such as monsters or ghosts; but moreover that it projects, like a mirror, or the painting of Dorian Gray, our unsavoury qualities back at ourselves in a physical embodiment of the death of the self, or to others in the manner of demonic possession. It is these peculiar states of mind that the Gothic authors find most compelling; incidentally, Steven Bruhm makes a similar observation about the general significance of Freud's body of work about human psyche:

[80] See Bruhm, 'The Gothic Body,' 101.

[81] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 387–9.

[82] Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 387.

> It is both the inheritance and the curse of Freudian psychoanalysis, then, that the psyche can best be understood only when it seems to be split, narcissistically embattled, at war with itself.[83]

Freud ultimately arrives at an impasse once his investigation of the uncanny extends beyond the bounds of the Gothic to the classic fairy tales, which—albeit deploying the very same instruments of childish narcissism that are otherwise used to elicit uncanny sensations—appear to not trigger the expected effects, thus leaving a gap in his theories; in his own words:

> Fairy-tales quite frankly adopt the animistic standpoint of the omnipotence of thoughts and wishes, and yet I cannot think of any genuine fairy-story which has anything uncanny about it.[84]

With this view, I am inclined to disagree, however. Their frequent happy conclusions notwithstanding, many fairy tales rife with Gothic elements are originally intended as cautionary tales to discourage children from participating in potentially dangerous behaviours through the negative reinforcement of fear. This much should be evident from how little it takes to re-imagine a fairy tale as a tale of terror, demonstrated, for example, by Angela Carter's fairy tale-inspired Gothic short story collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). If the fairy tale fails to achieve its effects, it is not for the lack of potential for eliciting the uncanny, but because of the yet underdeveloped mechanisms of fear—and as of yet unrealised morbid anxiety—in the narcissistic mind of a child who still believes itself capable of omnipotence, or the remnants thereof in case of an adult reader. To Vijay Mishra, the distinction lies with the didactic value—fairy tales typically covey a moral lesson through allegory, whereas in the Gothic such catharsis can never be achieved.[85] It is not so for Freud, who instead suggests—based on the fact that most contradictions of his theory come from the realm of literature—that there must needs be a dissonance between the starkness of the uncanny as presented in

[83] See Bruhm, 'The Gothic Body,' 101.

[84] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 400.

[85] Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 294–6.

fiction versus how it is experienced in reality.[86] He finally concludes that the author is vested with the absolute authority over their created world and thus able to set the desired levels of the uncanny or nullify its effects altogether based on their narrative goals,[87] expressing this view as follows:

> The story-teller has this licence [. . .] that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. We accept his ruling in every case.[88]

In summary, through his inquiry into the ambivalent Gothic aesthetic, Freud had set a precedent for the psychoanalytical approach to a genre that has oft acted as an outlet for anxiety, trauma and non-conformism, providing the critics with a toolbox for the examination of a Gothic mind, whereas Burke's earlier turn delves more into the atmospheric architecture of the Gothic, cataloguing a number of set pieces, which allow the author to build an effective Gothic setting. In other words, the uncanny as described by Sigmund Freud appears to be a mental phenomenon, limited in scope and affectivity by subject's own perception and mental conditioning, as evidenced by the absence of the uncanny in situations that would otherwise be amenable to its influence. Edmund Burke's sublime, on the other hand, is a quality inherent to the source object evoking it,[89] and as such, the ensuing sublime sensations can be neither diminished nor separated by the interference of the observer's rationale.

[86] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 401.

[87] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 404–6.

[88] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 404.

[89] See Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 291.

3 Conventions of the Gothic

Any consideration of the conventions of a particular genre must needs be preceded by a clear-cut definition of what said genre entails; and herein lies the first challenge of delineating the Gothic—the lack of consensus regarding what constitutes the genre, as all scholarly attempts to define its bounds have yielded flimsy results at best, and Gothicism, with its tendency to reimagine itself over time, did very little to alleviate the daunting task.[90] Finally, the critics have settled on characterising the Gothic by its contrariness and opposition to the Enlightenment philosophy and its preferred modes of aesthetic and literary expression, and—most notably—the defiance of the public opinion, as Emma McEvoy points out in the chapter 'Gothic Tradition' in her co-edited publication *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*: 'the Gothic is cast as the opposite of Enlightenment reason, as it is the opposite of bourgeois literary realism.'[91]

Throughout the course of its history as a genre, the Gothic has oft been a subject to mockery of the professional critics as well as fellow authors—particularly some of the representatives of the Romantic Movement, despite indulging in much the same tendencies. Although there is much to be said of the qualitative disparities in Gothic writing—for among the assemblage of worthy authors undeserving of ill repute, there are still twice as many hacks to be found—same could be said of nearly every literary genre at any given point in history. Still, the Gothic academia has had to combat the continuous stigma imprinted upon the genre and defend their pursuits in front of other scholars, thus hindering the progress of critical examination of these works.[92] As expressed by the literary scholars Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall, delving into the history of Gothic criticism in another chapter of David Punter's *A New Companion to the Gothic*:

> Critical and historical studies of Gothic fiction have long [laboured] under a curse. The derisive laughter with which William

[90] See Emma McEvoy, 'Gothic Tradition,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 7.

[91] See Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 273.

[92] See Baldick and Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism,' 267.

> Wordsworth greeted the romances of Ann Radcliffe has echoed down the ages, to the discomfort of most scholars of Gothic studies [. . .][93]

As irony would have it, history would come to prove that the very outlandishness of the Gothic would become its greatest merit, for although commercially popular, the majority of its existence has seen it be at odds with the favoured political and aesthetic opinions of the Enlightenment era, documenting—and oftentimes heralding—the eventual shifts in mentality and moral values; Baldick and Mighall stress that the Gothic writing, riddled with inconsistencies as it may, bears a single unifying trait across the board: 'the [. . .] important tendency of Gothic writers to display a thoroughly modern distrust of past centuries as ages of superstition and tyranny.'[94] The Gothic thus finds itself in an ambivalent position—simultaneously moralising and anti-moral, in so far as it adopts the savagery of the past for the purposes of its storytelling, all the while stripping it of the glamorisation of the medieval romance.[95] Ambivalence constitutes the defining characteristic of the Gothic, ever oscillating in between the two opposing poles—Reason and Imagination—a battle realised in the philosophy of Edmund Burke's aesthetic sublime, and later on, Sigmund Freud's understanding of the uncanny:

> The sublime lent itself to these seemingly mutually exclusive moral propositions in that it was seen as a sign of the power of reason as well as source of images which signified its very opposite.[96]

As suggested by my previous scrutiny of the concepts of the sublime and the uncanny and the accompanying elements thereof, the Gothic is a rather formulaic genre, described by Emma McEvoy as 'disturbingly discrete, possessed of a number of recurring motifs, set characters and typical plots[.]'[97] The authors affiliated with the Gothic often construct their narratives out of ready-made stock

[93] See Baldick and Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism,' 267.

[94] See Baldick and Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism,' 271.

[95] See Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 292.

[96] See Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 292.

[97] See McEvoy, 'Gothic Traditions,' 7.

elements and tropes predefined—amongst others—in Burke's aforementioned *Philosophical Inquiry*. After all, the Gothic, at least in its earliest iteration is—as David Punter describes it—'the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed upon by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves.'[98] In accordance with the principles of the sublime and the uncanny, both of which consider fear as the starkest of human emotions, the Gothic authors work to utilise the prefabricated tools on a variety of levels in order to incite the appropriate 'emotional resonance'[99] in the reader, as Jane Hodson notes in 'Gothic and the Language of Terror': 'Writers of Gothic literature aim to ensure that the response of characters to events within the narrative, and, by extension, the response of readers to the text, is one of terror.'[100] David Punter further elaborates upon the significance of fear to the Gothic by observing that the Gothic terror is not restricted to a single facet of the narrative, but rather penetrates it on all levels:

> Fear is not merely a theme or an attitude, it also has consequences in terms of form, style and the social relations of the texts; and exploring Gothic is also exploring fear and seeing the various ways in which terror breaks through the surfaces of literature, [. . .] but also establishing for itself certain distinct continuities of language and symbol.[101]

As such, the usage of language becomes of key importance to the Gothic and likewise a subject to its conventions, closely examined by Hodson in the aforementioned essay, where she stresses that 'language is the medium of Gothic terror, a set of stylistic conventions that render the terror of the characters on the page for the reader to consume.'[102] Hodson goes on to catalogue the ways in which a specific use of language contributes towards the building of the Gothic

[98] See Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 1.

[99] Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 292.

[100] See Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 299.

[101] See Punter, 'Dimension of Gothic,' 18.

[102] See Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 290.

atmosphere not only through the employment of the stock elements and themes or the linguistic communication of ideas, but also—following the logic of Burke's postulates about the function and effect of language described in his treatise on the sublime and the beautiful—by what the text conveys non-verbally; therefore communication breakdowns such as 'silence and interruption'[103]—the privation of language and communicative content—become equally as important as what is said. Whereas most writers—Hodson observes—strive for clarity and absolute control over their narrative, thus bereaving the reader of any agency in interpreting the text, the Gothic authors actively seek to maintain a degree of ambiguity, often riddling their texts with subliminal messages to be unearthed; as Hodson summarises in her essay—for the representatives of Gothicism 'the search for meaning becomes the entire point of the act of communication.'[104] In doing so, the writers delegate a portion of the creative process to the reader, described by Hodson as follows:

> It is this focus on perception that enables these texts to make such effective use of broken and absent language; sighs and silences are not in themselves a source of terror, but require an active mind to interpret them as such.[105]

The Gothic penchant for the clandestine mode of expression can also be ascribed to the increasingly political undertones the genre comes to adopt down the line. To be sure, the Gothic never was meant to be wholly apolitical, assuming an anti-Catholic and anti-feudal stance even as many contemporary critics failed to register its satirical intentions.[106] Later on, its stock elements become proxies for social discourse, at once criticising the society and subtly encouraging progress at the hands of the anti-establishment and proto-feminist writers who begin to work in 'issues of sex, class, race, and culture'[107] into their narratives; in fact, Catherine

[103] Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 298.

[104] Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 291–2.

[105] See Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 299.

[106] See Baldick and Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism,' 274.

[107] Massé, 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic,' 315.

Spooner in 'Unsettling Feminism: The Savagery of Gothic' (2019), a chapter of *The Gothic and Theory*, claims that the beginnings of feminism are intrinsically tied to the Gothic, the first popular outlet of divergent, or otherwise progressive thought and critique of the status quo: 'Gothic denunciation of the injustices of the past allows the emancipatory principle of feminist discourse to be [. . .] realised. The progress of feminism is premised on a Gothic repudiation of past oppression.'[108] The touch of the fantastical—albeit much chagrined by the critics of their time—worked in favour of the revolutionary spirit of the Gothic authors, enabling them to explore potentially controversial topics in subtlety, under the guise of fictionality, and thus without compromising the commercial potential of their works,[109] while also providing the future literary scholars with valuable materials for analysis. Other, more radical novelists, such as William Godwin or Mary Wollstonecraft, were far more outspoken on the matters of the state of society, not shying away from open criticism of its vices both in their fiction and non-fiction works; in the words of Deborah Russell: '[f]or [Godwin and Wollstonecraft], an accurate portrayal of the nation's injustices far surpasses the worst imaginings of villainy and horror in romance[.]'[110]

Furthermore, with the onset of modernism, Gothicism commences its devolution from an autonomous genre into a literary mode—its boundaries subsiding until eventually the Gothic transforms into a stock literary element by itself. With the turn of the century, the Gothic aesthetic starts surfacing in the works not otherwise considered a part of the Gothic tradition—Catherine Spooner lists Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) or T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) as notable examples of second-hand Gothic influence, in addition to summarising the effects this newfound position of the Gothic aesthetic:

> Gothic becomes, rather than the determining feature of the texts, one tool among many employed in the service of conjuring up

[108] See Catherine Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism: The Savagery of Gothic,' in *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 130–1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvggx38r.10.

[109] See Russell, 'Gothic Romance,' 56.

[110] See Russell, 'Gothic Romance,' 69.

> interior terrors. These texts contain Gothic incidents, episodes, imagery, moments, traces: Gothic, we might say, haunts them.[111]

That is not where the impact of the Gothic upon the literary world ends, however; in fact, some scholars—such as previously mentioned David Punter—suggest that the literary Gothicism played a vital role in the formation of present-day Anglophone literature apart of mere thematic influence. In the introductory chapter titled 'Dimensions of Gothic' to his publication *The Literature of Terror*, Punter draws attention to the fact that the Gothic contributed to the structure of the newly emergent novel in ways that the preferred literary pursuits of the Enlightenment era did little to advance, appropriating the techniques of poetry and drama to do so. Gothic writers first introduced tools of suspense and intricate plots to otherwise largely episodic sentimentalist narratives focused on relaying a moral message rather than plot-driven storytelling,[112] and reintroduced the fantastical elements of medieval romances to drown out the signature drab mimesis of the Age of Enlightenment novels bent on mimicking reality.[113] Punter speculates that one of the reasons modern fiction relies on Gothic tropes to such an extent might well be because it is itself partially derived from it, stating this belief as follows:

> [. . .] Gothic fiction can be defined in terms of the nature of plot: not, of course, that Gothic has a monopoly on plot, but that the original Gothic achieved certain specific advances in this area which might be seen as accounting for later traces of Gothic in other fields of fictions.[114]

That is to say, modern fiction is in some capacity indebted to the Gothic movement, as loathe as the critics—present and past—might be to ascribe it any literary merit; Gothicism has pioneered a set of tools and conventions for novelists to exploit, subvert and deconstruct at will, allowing for tempering or tampering

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[111] See Catherine Spooner, 'Gothic in the Twentieth Century,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 40.

[112] See Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 14–7.

[113] See Fred Botting, 'In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 19-20.

[114] See Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 17.

with readers' expectations. In the following sections, I would like to take a closer look at specific Gothic conventions in less abstract terms. To do so, I shall make use of examples from Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, as well as other relevant works.

3.1 Gothic Themes

In a genre that resists precise definition, the subject matter itself becomes a unifying factor across a variety of Gothic narratives; and in an era of didactic and otherwise moralising, or vapid, sentimental literature, Gothicism stands divergent with tangible plot and its peculiar preoccupation with violence and terror—the themes that at once double as the defining characteristics of the genre, a fact that did not escape David Punter when he wrote:

> Gothic fiction is marked by narrative complexity, and by its tendency to raise technical problems which it often fails to resolve, [. . .] this difficulty might reside in the taboo quality of many of the themes to which Gothic addresses itself[—]incest, rape, various kinds of transgression of the boundaries between the natural and the human, the human and the divine.[115]

As expected in a formulaic genre adhering to a set of conventions, the early Gothic plots were initially homogenous, restricting themselves to oedipal narratives perpetrated by predatory males usurping family legacies and virtues of fragile women. Both Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* represent such narratives. *Otranto*'s Manfred seeks to prolong his lineage by discarding his aging wife Hippolita and forcing himself upon his late son's betrothed, a sort of a reverse Oedipus. The plot of Lewis's *The Monk* reads as if the author were checking off a list of Gothic tropes to exploit, containing everything from witchcraft and apparitions, to homicide and incestual rape when Lewis, near the conclusion of his story, comes to a realisation that he has neglected to include incest and posthumously reveals Antonia as Ambrosio's sister. Both of these works solicit Punter's general observations about the works of the Gothic literary tradition—particularly as presented by male

[115] See Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 17.

writers—which he describes as: 'crudely sensationalist, in that they tended to derive their force from the portrayal of extreme situations, mostly situations of terror' and 'pander[ing] to the worst in the popular taste of its time.'[116]

Starting with the engagement of female authors with the Gothic, however, comes its shift from the initial focus on the patriarchal power struggles to make space for more intimate types of terror, all too familiar to the female writers—the incarceration of Gothic heroines in domestic environments and 'social horrors of the sadistic relations of men and women in ordinary life'[117] in the still prevailing patriarchal environment. It is only at their hands that the female characters are vested with a personality of their own and allowed a degree of agency, as minute as it still were. Female Gothic tradition thus emerges as an early form of protest literature, anticipating the feminist movement; Catherine Spooner notes: 'women's literary tradition is a Gothic tradition because patriarchy enacts a Gothic narrative.'[118] However, at the same time—as Spooner further points out—female Gothic authors did little to dispel the established harmful Gothic stereotypes demeaning femininity, and instead continued to reaffirm them—female characters thus retain their limited status as swooning damsels or devilish, wanton temptresses. Spooner deems the very concept of female liberation through flight problematic, an all too passive form of rebellion against the unyieldingly aggressive patriarchy; moreover, this Gothic precursor to feminism often insists on drawing uncomfortable—and by modern standards outright offensive—parallels of female domestic confinement to the institution of slavery as a means of solidifying women's status as the Other.[119]

Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*—her response to Lewis's eccentric *The Monk,* which in turn appears to be a spoof of Radcliffe's earlier literary endeavours—provides the perfect material for comparison of the two Gothic traditions. Andrew Smith even suggests that Radcliffe and Lewis's mutual combativeness in their writing

[116] See Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 8.

[117] Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 31.

[118] See Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism,' 132–3.

[119] See Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism,' 129–34.

gives an impression of an ongoing creative discussion between the two. Lewis's *The Monk* is an over-exaggeration of the Gothic worlds featured in both Walpole and Radcliffe's works, a convoluted rollercoaster of a story with each new situation more extreme and destructive than the last; although *The Italian* strives to be more grounded by probability, it keeps to the patriarchal themes of the male tradition established by Walpole, whilst incorporating some of the story threads inspired by Lewis. [120] At the heart of both narratives stands an innocent young damsel waylaid by machinations of an influential Catholic figure whose past is wreathed in mystery. Completing the trifecta of the central conflict, and contesting the villain's claim is the hero, defined almost exclusively in opposition to the villain, possessing few personality traits outside of goodness of character and devotion to winning the affections of the said distressed damsel. *The Italian* finds its patriarchal oppressor in Father Schedoni, an ambitious Catholic Church official whom we first encounter whilst scheming to separate young lovers Vivaldi and Elena, along with the former's mother, resulting in Elena's kidnapping and confinement to a cloister. Schedoni embodies the classic Gothic 'themes of inheritance, usurpation and oppression' established in Walpole's *Otranto*,[121] in that he, similarly to Manfred, exercises power over a young woman to try and seize family inheritance—first his late brother's wife, claiming her for his own purposes, then Elena herself, thinking her his own daughter born of rape of the former.

Nevertheless, *The Italian* concludes in a happy ending, which—by the demand of the era—requires hero and heroine to be wed. The heroine's true reward for her perseverance, however, is presented not in marriage, but by Elena's reunion with her long-lost mother in a convent, resolving yet another typical Gothic plot device—the absence of a mother, whether through displacement or death, and either implicit or explicit 'search for a lost maternal origin'[122] as said by a theologian and a Radcliffe scholar Alison Milbank contributing to *The Routledge*

[120] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 27–8.

[121] Russell, 'Gothic Romance,' 63.

[122] See Alison Milbank, 'Gothic Femininities,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 155.

Companion to Gothic with an article on 'Gothic Femininities' (2007). Through the restoration of a mother figure and the creation of a feminine alliance to shield each other from the throes of patriarchy, the female Gothic novels thus allow for some semblance of catharsis in their conclusion.[123]

The Monk offers no such respite from the Catholic and oedipal horrors it enacts; where *The Italian* negotiates between the Catholic dispositions of the villain and the Protestant mentality of Radcliffe's heroes, Lewis remains grossly exploitative throughout, and instead of reinstating hope into his world in Radcliffe's fashion, ends his story on the same violent note on which it began, reinforcing his vision of a corrupt, irredeemable world.[124] Lewis offers no alternative of a gentle, nurturing god proffering solace to his subjects, only the prospect of the absent but absolute, vengeful deity inviting terror whom Edmund Burke lists as one of the sources of the sublime.[125] Elena discovers strength within her dire situation in the Protestant way of worship—a personal, unmediated connection to god,—whereas all religious experience in *The Monk* can only be facilitated by the patriarchal institution of the corruptible Catholic Church; Andrew Smith summarises the differing approaches of the two authors thusly:

> In Radcliffe, there is always the possibility of transcendence, whilst in *The Monk* there is no possibility of redemption because the world is presided over by the Devil. In Radcliffe, the world is presided over by God, and any apparently 'evil' acts are later revealed to be the consequence of a misguided view of the world.[126]

Lewis thus eschews the themes of religious polemics proposed by Radcliffe who interspersed her dissenting Whig ideals throughout her books as her protagonists are forced to battle the societal status quo,[127] and instead firmly entombs his

[123] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 31.

[124] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 33.

[125] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 27.

[126] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 28.

[127] See Milbank, 'Gothic Femininities,' 158.

narrative in the irredeemable barbaric Catholicism in order to bring to the page the full spectrum of human vice and corruptibility. Unlike Schedoni, the titular monk of Lewis's novel, Ambrosio, does not enter the stage as a villain, possessing not an ounce of malevolence or vice to begin with but for a single fatal character flaw—the over-encompassing sense of self-exaltation, which enticed the devil himself to try and reverse Ambrosio's virtues, setting a lesser demon to the task. Rather than being portrayed singularly as a villain, Gothic critic Emma McEvoy notes that in Lewis's characterisation 'hero-villain-victim are wrought together in the figure of Ambrosio.'[128] Although it was the secondary storyline with star-crossed lovers Don Raymond and Agnes, who is forcibly made to become a nun by her pious mother, that Radcliffe partially repurposed for her novel *The Italian*, Lewis's book is at its most compelling when fully focused on Ambrosio's devolution into a fiend, blazing the trail for the Victorian tales of decadence to come.

Interestingly, Ambrosio's oedipal episode, which ultimately leads to an unwitting rape and murder of his birth sister and their shared mother, does not originate from the classic Walpolian 'son's conflict with authority'[129] but instead the diabolical intervention of Matilda tasked with orchestrating the downfall of the man who stands as a physical extension of the Catholic Church. Although Lewis does not care to incorporate a Protestant perspective, *The Monk* reads as decidedly anti-Catholic. The ease and extent to which Matilda is able to corrupt the alleged avatar of holiness demonstrates that any man may present himself as a saint when isolated from temptation. When given a mere taste of the forbidden, Ambrosio is instantly propelled into his doom by a violent sexual awakening and forgoes all his undeserved praises and previously unchallenged moral doctrines. Furthermore, Gothic scholar Robert Miles suggests that opting for the themes of sexual and moral deviation enabled Lewis to ventilate his homosexuality under the guise of fiction in a time when the public admission of his orientation would be subject to prosecution.[130] This presents a rare instance where a case might be made for

[128] See McEvoy, 'Gothic and the Romantics,' 23.

[129] Miles, 'Radcliffe and Lewis,' 96.

[130] See Miles, 'Radcliffe and Lewis,' 96–7.

reading the book through the lens of the author's life; in other words—the subject matter invites Freudian dream analysis. Matilda, the demon who appears to Ambrosio, is conveniently sexless, fluidly switching between identities on a whim—at first posing as a monk called Rosario, then assuming the feminine appearance of a Madonna.[131] The ambiguous nature of the character allows for exploration of gender and sexual identity that would otherwise not be afforded by the societal outlook; after all, the Gothic—whether as a genre or mode—was ever an outlet for such thought. In summarising the Gothic curiosity about the violation of what was deemed normative and proper, Vojtěch Novák wrote: 'The Gothic has always been interested in the nature of sexual roles'—in some cases, such examination of sexuality and gender necessitates experimentation and 'crossing boundaries which we often perceive as solid.'[132] Indeed, it is beyond mere coincidence that some of the most influential Gothic works have been penned by authors of non-heteronormative sexual identities, such as Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker or the aforementioned Matthew Gregory Lewis, to name but a few.[133]

The most conspicuous feature of Gothic writing is, of course, the usage of supernatural elements, although as is the custom of the genre, the individual strategies of its implementation vary. Whereas the main plot line of Lewis's *The Monk* relies heavily on the interference of the supernatural, female Gothic tradition often downplays or outright subverts the involvement thereof. While male Gothic writers do not shy away from interspersing their narratives with anything from the ghostly manifestations, to witchcraft and actual dealings with the devil and his underlings in Lewis's case, or a giant suit of armour and an arcane ancestral curse plaguing Manfred's bloodline of Walpole's *Otranto*—all of the aforesaid indisputably supernatural; the early female Gothic exhibits an overt preference for the so-called explained supernatural wherein the seemingly supernatural elements of the story receive a retroactive rational explanation. Robert Miles argues that the female approach to the supernatural stems from

[131] See Miles, 'Radcliffe and Lewis,' 105.

[132] See Vojtěch Novák, 'The Gothic in the New Millennium,' in *Scottish Gothic Fiction* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2012), 102.

[133] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 285.

specific narrative intentions, citing Ann Radcliffe's writing as an example: 'the appearance of the supernatural unhinges her characters' rationality, providing egress for repressed thoughts,'[134] the perceived supernatural occurrences in female Gothic thus function not as the primary source of terror like in the writings of the male tradition, but as a means of introspection—a catalyst for the 'projections of [the] innermost anxieties'[135] dwelling within the characters' minds,—whereas in the male writing these anxieties are unleashed overtly, through the characters' violent behaviour. Although Miles believes that Radcliffe's stylistic choice is mostly motivated by the desire to maintain respectability as an author in an era already hostile to female writing,[136] I find this view somewhat reductive and would argue against it. It is essential to keep in mind that the female Gothic does not aim to caricaturise. In keeping mystery out of the focus of the narrative and choosing to keep the stories otherwise grounded in probability, female Gothic tries to further the idea that Gothic novels are not simply ghost stories dwelling on the past, but allow for exploration of the problematic aspects of the present as mediated by the neutral setting of the past. The works of the female Gothic tradition rehearse the daily terrors of women's existence within the patriarchal society, thus emphasising the evil within the individual and society rather than the demonic kind; as Alison Milbank writes in 'Gothic Femininities': 'the heroine learns to fear human rather than spectral threats [. . .] unlike the "masculine" tradition of the transgressive hero, who is punished by an all too real supernatural force[.]'[137] The usage of the supernatural as accepted physical reality would increase the fictionality of the female Gothic worlds and therefore inevitably diminish the importance of these early attempts at a feminist discourse.

The commercial popularity of the genre and its general acceptance of misfit writers, along with a tone so distinct from anything else the era had to offer, eventually saw the Gothic spread beyond the borders of the British Isles and begin

[134] See Miles, 'Radcliffe and Lewis,' 99.

[135] See Andrew Smith, 'Hauntings,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 148.

[136] See Miles, 'Radcliffe and Lewis,' 101–2.

[137] See Milbank, 'Gothic Femininities,' 158.

to branch out, new authors pouring in. Many nations start to develop distinct Gothic voices and themes—notably Britain's own prodigal son, the United States of America. Following the lead of the female Gothic, the American authors—particularly Charles Brockden Brown—cultivated a grounded Gothic world absent of overpowering supernatural influences of Walpole and Lewis, questioning instead the realities of the new-born nation just starting to write its history.[138] On the subject of differences between the British and American Gothic traditions and their specific concerns, Andrew Smith remarks that the American Gothic writing does not come from a place of cultural and political anxiety, the looming threat of emancipation of the barbarous Other: 'The principal difference between these two traditions is because America has had a revolution, rather than is in fear of one.'[139] That is not to say that the American Gothic is void of social concerns, on the contrary, due to the nation's very brief history, American authors are forced to confront the present rather than languish in the past—Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) delves into the vices and prejudices of a New England Puritan community and its systemic oppression of an emancipated heroine, to name an example.

Later American Gothic comes to focus heavily on the topics of religious fanatism, especially prominent in the so-called Southern Gothic, as well as the issues of slavery and race—ever a sore spot of the American history and a topic which has carried over into contemporary writing and continues to penetrate the works of African-American and ethnic authors, such as Toni Morrison in her haunting novel *Beloved* (1987). According to the scholar Teresa A. Goddu, Gothicism becomes an essential tool of American self-criticism; in her words: 'the mode through which to speak what often remains unspeakable within the American national narrative[.]'[140] In speaking of the Gothic as a vent for the unspoken and the transgressive—both past and present—she echoes David Punter's opinions on

[138] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 41.

[139] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 41.

[140] See Teresa A. Goddu, 'American Gothic,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 63.

the particularities of Gothic themes and their unique psychological effects, both calling for a new expression form:

> [. . .] all themes prescribe a style; [. . .] Gothic themes do because of their uneasy social and psychological situation. In dealing with terror, Gothic deals with the unadmitted, and it is not possible to do that in modes which have already been appropriated for other purposes.[141]

Although Goddu speaks of the American experience, specifically—calling attention to the institution of slavery and its aftermath—the sentiment is very much applicable on a global scale, as many cultures come to integrate post-colonialism as part of the Gothic experience. Already in the Victorian period, the perspectives of the genre have broadened significantly, addressing more varied social discourse elements oftentimes in more domiciliary settings and in a far less implicit manner than previously; the effects of these new developments can be summarised in the following statement by Alexandra Warwick, who writes: '[Victorian Gothic] narratives have convincingly been read as rehearsing contemporary question of gender, sexuality, immigration and imperial power'[142]—the topics which have retained relevance to the Gothic writing until the present day.

A kind of a North American literary late-bloomer, Canada has for the longest time struggled with finding its own voice isolated of the influences of its colonial past and the dominating culture of its southward neighbour, as well as amalgamate its newfound literary independence with the voices of the previously silenced Aboriginal Other.[143] According to the viewpoint of the renowned Canadian critic Northrop Frye, expressed in 'Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada' (1965), the overarching topic of Canadian literature is survival, whether that be in the primordial Canadian wilderness or the more contemporary savage landscape in

[141] See Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 18.

[142] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 35.

[143] See Coral Ann Howells, 'Canadian Gothic,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 112–3.

the shape of urban wasteland.[144] Naturally, the initial Canadian Gothic was situated in the wilderness, where writers found a source of the sublime in the distinct void of the traditional qualities of the European Gothic—its lack of haunting the very cause of anxiety; not because the land itself would be storyless, but due to the unfamiliarity of the occupant with the occupied.[145] Of course, it can be argued that the Canadian predisposition itself invites the Gothic—ambivalence embedded deeply into the national identity, ever negotiating between the anglophonic and francophone facets of its colonial past, eventually joined by the formerly ostracised Aboriginal Other. Of the contemporary Canadian writers, Margaret Atwood stands out as one of the most prominent figures—Gothic or otherwise; her most popular novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) espouses traditional Gothic themes and Canadian survival in a patriarchal setting of political dystopia, other of her Gothic-inspired works include a Gothic parody *Lady Oracle* (1976) or a historical novel *Alias Grace* (1996). Atwood elaborated on the Gothic influences in her work and her creative process in a non-fiction book called *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (2002), where she posits that the theme of survival is always explicitly or implicitly connected to the fear of death: 'perhaps all writing [. . .] is motivated, deep down, by a fear and a fascination with mortality'[146]—words which recall Freud's convictions about the uncanniness of the idea of death as the primary source of human terror.

Nevertheless, there is one iteration of the Gothic that is going to be of most interest to me—the Scottish Gothic, to be discussed later in its own dedicated section.

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[144] Northrop Frye, 'Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada,' Northrop Frye – The Bush Garden, http://northropfrye-thebushgarden.blogspot.com/2009/02/conclusion-to-literary-history-of.html.

[145] See Cynthia Sugars, 'Canadian Gothic,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 409, 411–2.

[146] Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (London: Virago, 2003) 140, quoted in Howells, 'Canadian Gothic,' 108.

3.2 Gothic Settings

Along with supernatural visitations, setting used to be one of the integral traits of Gothic writing. But the exotic Mediterranean settings of the early Gothic novels functioned as more than a mere backdrop for the plot; the spatial—oft accompanied by also temporal—dislocation allowed for criticism of religious institutions and society, past and present, without the pointing of accusing fingers at oneself and thus raising suspicions of one's dissenting motivations, whilst reassuring readership of their superior predicament; Baldick and Mighall explain:

> Italy, Spain, and southern France were chosen because, to the Protestant mind, they were firmly associated with the twin yoke of feudal politics and popish deception, from which they had still to emancipate themselves. [. . .] Gothic (that is, 'medieval') practices were believed still to prevail there. [. . .] the middle-class Protestant readership [. . .] could thrill to the scenes of political and religious persecution safe in the knowledge that they themselves had awoken from such historical nightmares.[147]

However, the agreeable southern climate of Italy and Spain does not coordinate with the principles of Burkean sublime, which favours gloomy, dark and decrepit environments, whether sprawling or cramped, claustrophobia-inducing, in order to inspire terror the Gothic must needs seek these qualities elsewhere. It need not look far—the Gothic literary movement coincided with the neo-Gothic architectonic revival, a fashion initiated in part by Horace Walpole's efforts to renovate his estate Strawberry Hill in a mock medieval style,[148] validating the ornamental architecture of the barbarous past in the eyes of the Enlightenment society as '[sombre] but picturesque and sublime additions to cultural and natural landscape.'[149] Unsurprisingly, the early literary Gothicism is strongly associated with medieval structures as conduits of the sublime, in particular castles or ruins

[147] Baldick and Mighall, 'Gothic Criticism,' 278.

[148] See Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 7.

[149] Botting, 'In Gothic Darkly,' 15.

thereof, haunted mansions, monasteries and cathedrals—all bastions of patriarchy and oedipal terrors.

In talking of the significance of medieval castle to the Gothic, David Punter and Glennis Byron in a joint publication titled simply *The Gothic* (2004), stress the inherent ambivalence of the structure that—with its labyrinthine systems of halls and catacombs—has the potentiality to be at once a sanctuary and a prison, both domestic and asphyxiating.[150] Castles—ruined or otherwise,—along with monasteries and convents and the religious functionaries of dubious morality residing wherein, often function as sites of confinement and violence against the heroine. The sublime in ecclesiastic settings originates from the feelings of isolation and privation inherent to the incarceration therein; Punter and Byron write: 'The monastery or convent [. . .] provides a scenario within which all manner of deprivation and violence can proceed,' usually to the purpose of religious critique.[151]

Andrew Smith observes that in Gothic literature the refuge of the cloister is generally not sought out of piety, but due to the inability to deal with the reality of life outside of it, and by extension the uneasy reality of facing one's self; or as Smith puts it: 'Convents and monasteries appear to be places one goes to in order to escape a kind of worldliness, rather than to cultivate spirituality.'[152] This much rings true for Ambrosio, the villain-protagonist of Lewis's *The Monk*. In her article on 'Gothic Theology' (2016), Alison Milbank points out the irony that monasteries and other such sites of religious abnegation often come swarming with sexual predators in Gothic works: 'the convent paradoxically becomes the site for the expression of sexual longing.'[153] In the isolation of the convent, Ambrosio is able to cultivate his self-image of undisputed righteousness, as well as realise his perversions against the innocent, hapless heroine later on. Not by

[150] See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 261–2.

[151] See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 288.

[152] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 24.

[153] See Alison Milbank, 'Gothic Theology,' in *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 362, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bgzd5s.21.

chance is there a demonic lair—where Matilda ventures to commune with her kith and kin—hidden beneath the grounds of the monastery in Lewis's *The Monk*, as well as a dank vault to trap Antonia in:

> [Matilda] led him through various narrow passages; and on every side, as they passed along, the beams of the lamp displayed none but the most revolting objects; sculls, bones, graves, and images whose eyes seemed to glare on them with horror and surprise. At length they reached a spacious cavern, whose lofty roof the eye sought in vain to discover. A profound obscurity hovered through the void; damp vapours struck cold to the friar's heart, and he listened sadly to the blast while it howled along the lonely vaults.[154]

> The aspect of the vault, the pale glimmering of the lamp, the surrounding obscurity, the sight of the tomb, and the objects of mortality which met [Antonia's] eyes on either side, were ill-calculated to inspire her with those emotions, [. . .] Even his caresses terrified her from their fury, and created no other sentiment than fear.[155]

In Radcliffe's *The Italian*, Elena, too, is not afforded the comforting presence of light in her captivity, as she finds herself imprisoned in a spacious, but barren room, bereft of any familial embellishments:

> It was a large apartment, unfurnished and unswept of the cobwebs of many years. The only door she discovered was the one by which she had entered, and the only window a lattice, which was grated. Such preparation for preventing escape seemed to hint how much there might be to escape from.[156]

Both Antonia and Elena are quite literally being kept in the dark, with only the barest amount of light, which serves to only further their terror. In fact, the

[154] See Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 217–8.

[155] Lewis, *The Monk*, 306.

[156] See Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian* (Richmond: Alma Books, 2017), 229.

juxtaposition of darkness and light presents a contributing factor of the sublime mood permeating these sites, listed as one of the triggers in Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry.* On the subject of obscurity and its propensity to make any threat seem starker, Burke himself wrote: 'When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.'[157]

The contrasting elements give rise to the frequently used and abused sublime motifs such as 'shadows, beams of moonlight, flickering candles or the only source of light failing'[158] that serve to further engender terror within the characters. That the Gothic motifs are inseparable from their effect on the psyche is quite obvious, however, the reverse approach is equally viable in producing the sublime, or as McEvoy terms it: 'the stuff of the psyche is presented in material terms'[159]—in such a case the Gothic mood is projected from the character's mind onto the environment instead. The act of representing mind and emotions through material means is in literary circles known as pathetic fallacy, a type of reverse personification;[160] whilst not exactly conventional use of the trope, the desolated environments in Gothic literature often come to reflect the characters' own desolation, as presented in the following example describing the family estate from Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839):

> Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. [. . .] Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token

[157] See Burke, Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 132.

[158] Flajšar, 'Gothic Fiction Revisited,' 12.

[159] See McEvoy, 'Gothic and the Romantics,' 19.

[160] Chris Baldick, s. v. 'pathetic fallacy,' in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 187.

> of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.[161]

Poe uses this descriptive passage to foreshadow the events to come, just as the gloomy weather accompanying the narrator's arrival sets the mood of the story—in merely contemplating 'the melancholy House of Usher' with its 'the vacant eye-like windows'[162] the narrator is overcome with unease. The integrity of the structure mimics that of its disease-ridden, inbred occupants—the frail twins Roderick and Madeline Usher, the last spawn of an ailing bloodline of aristocrats who have wed brother to sister for generations, their line equally as despicable as the mansion they reside in. But the house is not a mere place of residence, for the Ushers are as much a part of the house as the building is an extension of themselves—indeed, their very existence appears confined solely to its interior—and when the bloodline is finally annihilated, the house, too, falls into ruin:

> Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, [. . .] The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon, which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure, of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened [. . .] my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher."[163]

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[161] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' in *Complete Tales and Poems* (New York: Fall River Press, 2012), 301.

[162] Poe, 'House of Usher,' 299.

[163] Poe, 'House of Usher,' 313.

A visual example of the trope can be found in Guillermo del Toro's 2015 movie *Crimson Peak*, a cinematic homage to the Gothic genre. The titular mansion—much like in Poe's 'House of Usher'—stands on the verge of collapse, its halls exposed to the elements and haunted by the bloody past of its proprietors, the walls quite literally oozing crimson. The plot of the movie also references the classic fairy tale 'Bluebeard,' complete with a forbidden room which stores all of the household's secrets.[164]

An important development distinguishing early Gothic works from their later Victorian counterparts lies in the genre's departure from the pseudo-medieval, secluded continental settings in favour of the familiarity of the British Isles. This change is accompanied by a move from 'Protestant triumphalism'[165] of the early Gothic, and thus the cessation of anti-Catholic narratives monopolising the Gothic genre. Driven by the desire for social change, the writers begin to feel confident in tackling the British issues head on, in their native environment, when they arise. The previous need for dislocation is rendered void, but the themes, for the most part persist—Gothic heroines continue to be terrorised in domestic environments, only this time on the British soil. The realisation that the English mansions are no less haunted that the ones overseas—may the Brontë sisters' *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* serve as notable examples of such—corresponds to the Freudian notion that civilisation is in its very essence an ambivalent concept, eternally at war with itself, ever fuelled by the combative nature of mankind, and therefore possessing the capacity for the uncanny. Glennis Byron argues that this geographical shift does not come as a new, unforeseen development of the genre, but a mere re-focalisation of the original Gothic premise, which she defines as 'the drive to define and categorize the features of a culture in crisis, to determine the exact nature of the agents of dissolution and decline.'[166]

The novelty, if indeed any is to be found, lays in the newfound potential for self-reflection with the onset of Victorian decadence and its dismantlement of the

[164] Guillermo del Toro, *Crimson Peak* (2015; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures), DVD.

[165] Milbank, 'Gothic Theology,' 361.

[166] Byron, 'Gothic in the 1890s,' 187.

Enlightenment era values and the adjoined sense of superiority. The divide between the barbarous and the civilised grows ever more ambiguous, and the British literary circles are no longer able to ignore that Britain itself is not exempt from barbarity. It is also at this time that the Gothic becomes increasingly harder to pinpoint as its elements begin to bleed into other genres; many critics have noted recurrent Gothic motifs and themes in the works of Charles Dickens, otherwise a proponent—though less so a practitioner—of literary realism.

Gothicism is not content with merely invading the British shores, however. Following the surge of urbanisation in the aftermath of Industrial Revolution, the Victorian Gothic authors take the trend of 'the domestication of Gothic figures, spaces and themes'[167] even further, penetrating ever deeper into the readers' personal spaces, and begin to accumulate Gothic evils in the cities instead of isolating them in derelict landscapes or otherwise secluded communities:

> The city, with its dark, narrow, winding streets and hidden byways replacing the labyrinthine passages of the earlier castles and convents, is established as a site of menace through the importation of various traditional Gothic motifs and scenarios.[168]

In fiction, this trend is exemplified in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, as the titular antagonist migrates from the prototypical early Gothic setting of his mountainside castle dwelling in his native Transylvania, to stalk the streets of London—'the key site of the 1890s Gothic monstrosity.'[169] In her article on Victorian Gothic, Alexandra Warwick lists off some of the possible new Gothic settings—or, as she calls them 'contemporary arenas'—afforded by this development: 'city streets, slums, docks, scientific laboratories, and, perhaps most conspicuously the ordinary bourgeois home.'[170] In the spirit of marginalisation of the early Gothic, the evil enters cities from the outskirts of urban society. Nevertheless, the Burkean principles still apply to these new Gothic staging areas—the city streets are oft

[167] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 26.

[168] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 28.

[169] Byron, 'Gothic in the 1890s,' 188.

[170] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 34.

wreathed in fog, obscuring the dangers afoot; as remarked by Robert Mighall: 'Fog is a supremely sublime element, [. . .] Fog makes certainty difficult, and yet reveals the city's sinister and menacing aspect[.]'[171]

Although the focus of this thesis lays with the British anglophone Gothic literature specifically, Robert Mighall recognises that other notable urban Gothic epicentres besides London emerge worldwide, in light of the new urban trend. In France, Paris becomes a unanimous heart of French decadence, crafting narratives that often quite literally situate themselves in the underworld—the eponymous phantom of Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1911), for example, resides beneath the opera house that he is said to be haunting. In this, Leroux is a mere follower of a trend, however, for its progenitor happens to be none other than Victor Hugo who, according to Mighall, was the first to ' [literalise] the idea of a criminal "underworld",' noting his penchant for 'using Parisian sewers as the dark and mysterious counterpart of the world above.'[172] His novels feature—oftentimes quite literally—seedy undercity of Paris, perhaps most famously featured in *Les Misérables* (1862).

Although many American authors present the American soil as quite literally haunted and thus a source of anxiety and guilt, Mighall suggests that New Orleans stands out as a prominent and unique locus within American Gothicism. The city stands as a cultural 'outpost of the Old World' and an exception from the American melting pot philosophy; its position at the edge of two civilisations and the gloomy, hostile marshland surrounding it, lend it ambivalence that invites the Gothic in, instead of shunning it.[173]

[171] See Robert Mighall, 'Gothic Cities,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 54–6.

[172] See Mighall, 'Gothic Cities,' 57.

[173] See Mighall, 'Gothic Cities,' 58.

3.3 Gothic Character and the Other

The complexity of the following subsection bears some prior elaboration. In it, I shall trace the development of Gothic characters from their initial flat selves to their later, decidedly more complex iterations. As the genre evolves and comes to reflect the society—its new passions and fears—so do the Gothic characters change reflects the trend of the genre at large; as best summarised by Punter and Byron in their joint publication:

> The romantic Gothic villain is transformed as monks, bandits and threatening aristocratic foreigners give way to criminals, madmen and scientists. The exotic and historical settings that serve to distance the horrors from the world of the reader in earlier Gothic are replaced with something more disturbingly familiar: the bourgeois domestic world or the new urban landscape.[174]

As mentioned, this new era of the Gothic brought about significant changes to the genre—namely less emphasis on romance overall, but especially so in the works written within the male Gothic tradition where love is often removed from the equation entirely, and the emphasis is put instead on taboo sexuality, explicit violence and horror, particularly of the psychological variety. Informed by the growing interest in the examination of human nature, and later the newly established field of psychoanalysis, the Gothic authors' focus often falls upon the psyche of their players moreso than the plot they are participating in; as David Punter observes when speaking of the Gothic treatment of character: 'The characters are caught, stuck like flies in amber, while the authors carefully dissect them, laying bare their obsessions and motivations.'[175] It is only natural that in this subsection I should do no less. As briefly and concisely as I can, I shall delineate the most prominent types of characters found in Gothic literature. For my breakdown, I shall make use of combined theories of Freudian psychoanalysis which is particularly suited for critical reading of the Gothic.

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[174] See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 26.

[175] See David Punter, 'The Dialectic of Persecution,' in *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 1, *The Gothic Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 136.

As previously, I shall draw examples from both Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* to begin with, and present examples from other relevant works as I arrive at new developments brought about by the writers creating within the Romantic and Victorian eras of the Gothic respectively.

To start with, it is important to note that like the other Gothic elements, the characters, too, appear to come in binaries—pairs of opposing elements; within the context of the initial Gothic as encoded by the likes of Walpole and Lewis, such oppositions were necessarily oedipal—a conflict of a young male with a typically older, sinister male at the forefront of the text, whilst also indulging in an ongoing negotiation between the masculine and feminine forces.[176] The plot-driving trifecta of characters consists of a young hero, a male villain dead-set on thwarting the hero's plans and attempting to control, or otherwise assert ownership, over the innocent young damsel whom the hero is courting and whose virtue he is striving to protect. These characters were flat initially, equally as formulaic as the plots they were participating in, often receiving characterisation through their actions only. The hero's primary characteristic then lies in his opposition to the villain's goals, and the figure of the heroine has the unfortunate fate of receiving characterisation solely through her victimisation by said villain and the absolute dependency on the hero for the reversal of her fortunes.

The number three is notable from the symbolic perspective, but as Massé notes, it also corresponds to the three-way analytical system put in place by Sigmund Freud: 'the structural model of id/ego/superego'[177] in which each of the three constitutes a different aspect of a person's psyche. If approaching a Gothic text from an allegorical perspective, the prototypical, cardboard cut-out nature of these characters allows for such a functional aspect of the psyche to be assigned to each character type. If the figure of the hero corresponds to Freudian ego—the rational, external self; then the id constitutes of the instinctual, darker aspects of self, lurking at the edges of the unconscious, concealed from public, but ever present and poised to seize control. [178] In Gothic fiction, this would be embodied in the

[176] See Massé, 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic,' 316.

[177] See Massé, 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic,' 311.

[178] Massé, 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic,' 311.

character of the villain whose goals typically align with the hero's, but with a darker turn. In *The Italian*, both Vivaldi and the main antagonist Schedoni seek to possess Elena, albeit for different reasons—Vivaldi is driven by love, whereas Schedoni is motivated by spitefulness and greed. For all its lack of subtlety, *The Monk* chooses to depict this confrontation in a less metaphorical manner. Although the book features a traditional heroic figure in the character of Don Lorenzo, who sets out to save Antonia from Ambrosio's grasp, the focus remains on Ambrosio throughout, whose ego-id conflict is fully internalised, setting a precedent for the future Gothic fiction.

The heroine herself represents an object of desire through which the hero's Oedipus complex is negotiated, and—given that oedipal struggles initially lay at the forefront of the Gothic plot—thus functions as the driving force of the story without whose existence the events of the plot could not have taken place to begin with. Ambrosio's confrontation with his oedipal desires first comes by way of temptation by the demonic Matilda appropriating the visage of a Madonna, whose nefarious influence merely serves to aggravate his inner oedipal conflict. As a result, Ambrosio is rendered unable to resolve his Oedipus complex and so succumbs to toxic masculinity and the aggression that comes with the territory, leading him to an unwitting matricide, as well as rape and murder of Antonia, his own sister. Whereas the protagonist of *The Italian*, Vivaldi, is able to deny the wishes of his domineering mother and unite with Elena, the non-oedipal object of desire in the story.

The characters are subject to the same developmental trends as the settings, adjusting to the demands of the ever-evolving genre. Thus, the flat characters of the initial Gothic come to gain dimension over time, as the complexity of the Gothic plots grows. Michelle Massé in 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic' notes that new dyad structures arise as the Gothic themes progressively move away from the strictly oedipal: 'binaries such as male/female, gay/straight, mother/daughter, upper-/working-class are added to the older/young male divide that figured in the Gothic and psychoanalysis from the first.'[179] The initial dichotomy of good against evil is abandoned in favour of the exploration of more complex, non-

[179] See Massé, 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic,' 316.

archetypal characters—no longer is the Gothic a domain reserved for helpless maidens, impassioned heroes, overbearing parental figures and ill-intentioned religious dignitaries; in fact, with the move to urban settings, the prominence formerly given to the ecclesiastically aligned villains gradually fades, to be replaced by more nuanced antagonists.

3.3.1 *Female as the Other*

As previously mentioned, the first major change comes by way of female Gothic authors, who choose to shift the focus to the heroine and the adversities that coincide with femininity. This is perceivable in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, which—although retaining a conventional male protagonist in Vivaldi—presents the plot through a decidedly female lens, with Elena's journey at the forefront. In this, the novel functions as an effective reversal of *The Monk*, which remains firmly focused on Ambrosio and the secondary male leads throughout, with Antonia—and, to a lesser extent, the other female characters featured therein—serving as a mere accessory to be desired, mutilated and killed. What both authors share, however, is the failure to satisfyingly characterise these women beyond their virtue and desirability by the hero and the villain alike; expected from Lewis, but somewhat disappointing on Radcliffe's part. Female characters in the early Gothic are nigh exclusively dehumanised, presented as possessions for the heroes and the villains to squabble over, mere pawns in patriarchal schemes without a semblance of agency of their own. Swooning happens in abundance. Whereas Antonia acts outright naïve and helpless, vesting Ambrosio with her absolute confidence, Elena seems considerably more vary of men, but passive all the same, resigned to being blown about as a weathervane wherever the plot requires.

Nevertheless, Radcliffe does take a step forward by defying the stereotype of women as emotional, hysterical creatures. Elena's sentiments remain muted throughout, tempered, contrasting with the unhinged, violent Catholic male antagonists such as Lewis's Ambrosio and Radcliffe's own Schedoni, or even Vivaldi, the hero whose indomitable passion for Elena had set the events to motion. In so doing, as Deborah Russell points out, Radcliffe 'stages conflicts

between old and new systems'[180]—Radcliffe consciously projects her Protestant inclinations onto the character, mediating Elena's connection to God through self-restraint and delight in pastoral landscapes in which her idea of the divine is mirrored, as opposed to mere deference to the institutional church like her literary predecessors Antonia and Agnes of *The Monk*, for whom their encounters with the representatives of the Catholic Church prove fatal. Elena's continual serenity and perseverance in the face of adversity are finally rewarded, in the true proto-feminist fashion, 'with social and economic advancement.'[181] The Gothic stereotype of virtuous, but ultimately powerless woman dating back to Walpole's *Otranto* is provided with means at last—with the discovery of her mother in a convent through divine providence, Elena's heritage is revealed, and her blood rights restored, allowing her to espouse Vivaldi without further opposition. Yet the marriage itself appears to be merely a conventional component of the plot, as Elena exhibits only minimal investment in Vivaldi's affections; rather she seems to accept marriage as an inevitability of female existence. Robert Miles summarises Radcliffe's non-conformity to the genre conventions as follows:

> Radcliffe's heroine is not romantic, in the sense of being fatally overcome by her love interest. Generally, her heroine's attitude towards marriage is not an avidly sought consummation of romantic passion, but a prudential contract with a being she can entrust with her fortune and her freedom.[182]

By contrast, Vivaldi tends to leave all rationale by the door and rush into situations without sparing a thought for possible consequences, to say nothing of his general propensity to make dramatic proclamations, and thus seems to embody the stereotypes usually ascribed to women.

As previously noted, however, many contemporary female and feminist critics have taken issue with the passive resistance of Gothic heroines, believing that it contributed but little towards the dismantlement of patriarchy. Spooner in

[180] See Russell, 'Gothic Romance,' 68.

[181] Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 32.

[182] See Miles, 'Radcliffe and Lewis,' 98.

'Unsettling Feminism' is quick to point out that the very concept of resistance through flight is inherently problematic, as it appears to further engender female helplessness in the face of patriarchy rather than empowerment.[183] The fault does not lay with Radcliffe or her fellow female writers exclusively, though, Spooner notes that even the revolutionary Mary Wollstonecraft is guilty of perpetrating the standing stereotypes in her works of fiction as well as the politico-philosophical commentary *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), or as Spooner calls it, one of 'the foundational texts of Western feminism.'[184] Part of this trend can no doubt be attributed to the underlying continuation of oedipal themes and objectification of women in female writing—a form of passive resistance in itself. After finally finding a level playing field in the Gothic, female writers begin their protest quietly, in the subtext, outwardly adhering to the genre expectations delineated by their male peers, if only to be tolerated in the then male-dominated literary industry.[185] After all, the act of literary creation was then considered a phallic endeavour and hence unbecoming of a lady to engage in. The feminine invasion of the Gothic was only made possible by virtue of it being regarded as a low-brow genre and thus inconsequential to the larger literary market; even then, female writers were only able to gain credence through emulation of the prescribed formulae, or concealing their identity from the public like the Brontë sisters.[186]

Therefore, even though Radcliffe's novel focuses primarily on the tribulations of the female character, for all intents and purposes Vivaldi remains the protagonist and as such he, too, is forced to overcome his oedipal feelings—through defying the authority of his domineering mother and attracting into his life a gentler, more amenable feminine character in the form of Elena. Secondly, it is only natural that in order to begin addressing a problem, it must needs be recognised first. As

[183] See Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism,' 132–3.

[184] See Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism,' 131.

[185] See Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism,' 133.

[186] See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000), 6–13.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar wrote in their famous volume of feminist criticism titled *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979):

> Before the woman writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy, [. . .] she must come to terms with the images on the surface on the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face [. . .][187]

Nevertheless, in their effort to demonstrate the terrors of patriarchy, women's oppression through domestic incarceration, the female Gothic also unwittingly consolidates the harmful image of the genre as perpetrating 'a sado-masochistic dynamic that appears to enjoy the spectacle of violence against women and the reaffirmation of cultural stereotypes projecting women as either victims, monsters or *femmes fatales*.'[188] The Gothic divide between chaste women and wily seductresses dates all the way back to the myth of the Garden of Eden, to the figures of Eve and Lilith; or—in Gilbert and Gubar's terminology—angel versus monster, both designed to alienate women and brand them as the Other. These extreme polar images of femininity have been appropriated by the patriarchy with the purpose of trapping female identities on one side or the other of the scales of this dichotomy for millennia.

The biblical tales consign the descendants of Eve to a life of subordinance, having created her not as Adam's equal, but a thrall with the singular purpose to attend to Adam's desires and further his breed after the attempted autonomy of her predecessor Lilith has been punished and villainised by men who felt emasculated by her refusal to be subservient.[189] These aberrant, monstrous women are frequently depicted as weaponising their sexuality against men, and even other women, embodying the true object of patriarchal horror. The prevalence of this idea is further evidenced in what Sigmund Freud identified as the Madonna-whore complex—a dichotomy created by the infantile libido still under the sway of the unresolved Oedipus complex, which prevents the transfer of previously incestual

[187] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 16–7.

[188] Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism,' 129.

[189] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 20–8, 34–6.

feelings onto a non-incestuous object-choice. The affected are as a result unable to form healthy, fulfilling relationships with women, perceiving the first type as too saintly to engage in sexual relations with, and the latter as mere carnal vessels too debauched for anything but.[190] Freud himself explains it in the following terms:

> The erotic life of such people remains dissociated, divided between two channels, the same two that are personified in art as heavenly and earthly (or animal) love. Where such men love they have no desire and where they desire they cannot love.[191]

This psychological phenomenon is interestingly manifested in Ambrosio who, bereft of father and mother-figures of his own, experiences his Oedipus complex through the parental figures of the Christian mythology and the institution of the Catholic church and comes to sexualise a painting depicting Madonna, a mother figure no less than divine.[192] Nevertheless, he is not content in simply maintaining a relationship with a demon mimicking her likeness, finding the readily available sexual satisfaction she offers insufficient. It is by sheer irony of fate—or perhaps divine contrivance—that he unknowingly comes to choose an actual incestual object for his gratification in virginal Antonia.

Nevertheless, even though like other women of her era, Antonia is groomed to be meek and provide pleasurable company to men, she is not compliant like a corpse and protests her abuser until she is made into one. Antonia's assertion of free will in the moment of masculine aggression, much like mythical Lilith's, serves to demote her from the category of angel to the monster, and—along with her loss of virginity outside of marriage bed by way of rape—bereaves her of all value within the patriarchal society, at last leading to her death at the hands of the man who is at once her rapist, her mother's murderer, and her brother in blood. This outcome also serves as a reversal of the situation in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, or rather vice

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[190] See Sigmund Freud, 'Contributions to the Psychology of Love: A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men,' in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, ed. Ernest Jones, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 193–8.

[191] See Sigmund Freud, 'Contributions to the Psychology of Love: The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life,' in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, ed. Ernest Jones, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 207.

[192] Massé, 'Psychoanalysis and the Gothic,' 315.

versa. While Elena, by finding her mother, gains an ally in her resistance against the oppressive forces of the patriarchy, Antonia's mother dies in a futile attempt to protect her daughter from a patriarchal figure who in turn becomes the undoing of them both. Moreover, as later expressed by Edgar Allan Poe in the essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' (1846), at the time, 'the death of a beautiful woman' was considered the height of art—a reliable tool of eliciting sympathy and sorrow.[193]

The persistence of this divide is apparent decades later still, when the modernist writer Virginia Woolf called for the dismantlement of the women's image as created by men, lest women be suffocated by it. In one of her essays, Woolf imagines a confrontation with her double, which she calls 'the angel in the house'—a censored version of herself that bids Woolf to exercise angelic restraint and submit to the conventions of the patriarchy in both her personal and creative life.[194] Coincidentally, the characteristics Woolf invests this double with positively match those of the ideal Gothic heroine:

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of the family life. She sacrificed herself daily. [. . .] she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. In those days [. . .] every house had its Angel.[195]

The constancy of patriarchal entrapment of women has often been likened to a form of slavery, as the ownership of the woman is passed from father to husband. Although this comparison was later divorced by the present day feminists in

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[193] See Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition,' in *The Raven and the Philosophy of Composition* (San Francisco and New York, 1907; Project Gutenberg, 2017), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/55749/55749-h/55749-h.htm.

[194] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 16–7.

[195] Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*, ed. Michelle Barret (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 59.

consideration of the victims of the institution of slavery, the majority of Gothic writing undeniably reflects women's status as the colonised Other.[196] In light of this trend, Elena's choice to accept Vivaldi's advances appears all the more as an act of pure pragmatism rather than romance. Elena, aware of her limited choices in life, opts to embrace the role of a compliant angel—if she is to have a master or be dehumanised like Lilith, then she would rather pick a lesser evil. Such treatment was not limited to fiction, unfortunately; Gilbert and Gubar list several female writers who found themselves confined to their homes by controlling patriarchs, among them the Brontë sisters.[197] When Catherine Earnshaw laments her bygone girlhood in *Wuthering Heights*, free from the restrictions and expectations put in place by the patriarchy, she seems to be speaking for Emily Brontë herself:

> [. . .] I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free… and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills…[198]

The theme of imprisonment is thus deeply personal for female writers, with flight being the only viable, if evasive, response to female oppression.[199] In choosing to adhere to the set bounds of female agency, Radcliffe avoided being torn apart as an author. The Romantic and Victorian female authors grew decidedly bolder. They begin flirting with the monstrous liberty of Lilith and utilise such-minded characters to ventilate their own forbidden longings for autonomy. Monster-women worm their way into the narratives, if only as shadow selves at first, doubles to be overcome and destroyed by the heroine's angel.[200] Thus the monstrous first wife of Edward Rochester, the proverbial madwoman in the attic

[196] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 74.

[197] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 83.

[198] See Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Harper Press, 2013), 132.

[199] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 84–5.

[200] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 77–80.

Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* eventually dies in a suicide to clear the way for the considerably more repressed, angelic Jane, whose earlier displayed rebellious qualities appear to die along with Bertha.[201] Although not a direct example of Gothicism, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) serves as a rare illustration of a woman's liberation story without compromising the heroine's angelic status; by refusing to be victimised any longer by her abusive addict of a husband and fleeing, Helen Graham gains the ability to execute free will, but also—in a true proto-feminist fashion—a chance to provide for herself, earn her own fortune through her art and live comfortably without the aid of a man, and though she does eventually remarry, it is on her own terms and by her own choice. The preservation of Helen's angelic status comes at a cost of a great deal of self-policing, disassociating from her art or undermining of her own talents and creative output as mere trifles—much like the author that has penned her and her other female literary peers.[202]

To recall the words of Virginia Woolf—in an effort to achieve true emancipation as women or writers, women must first do away with the images of femininity imposed upon them by men. But this was not to happen until centuries later, and, even now in the 21st century, one cannot confidently say that it had been wholly accomplished.

3.3.2 *Byronic Male and the Double*

Just as heroines finally begin to enjoy a degree of agency at the hands of female authors, the other two components of the trinity also gradually cease to be simply flat representations of archetypes, and gain dimension—the status of hero and villain grows more ambiguous, oftentimes merging into a single ambivalent figure or, later still, stands overtaken by villainy completely. After all, as David Punter has pointed out: '[t]he villain was always the most complex and interesting character in Gothic fiction'[203] and it is therefore unsurprising that the Gothic writers' focus should shift from the bland, well-intentioned heroes to more

[201] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 30.

[202] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 80–2.

[203] See Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 9.

complex figures when the genre begins to develop an interest in psychoanalysis. The so-called Byronic hero—named so for Lord Byron, the most famous proponent of this character type—becomes the staple male character of this transitional period between the early and Victorian Gothic; such a figure—as Baldick defines it in his dictionary of literary terms—is a 'boldly defiant but bitterly self-tormenting outcast, proudly contemptuous of social norms but suffering for some unnamed sin.'[204] Yet Byron's characters were far from the first men to be torn in between the ever-warring poles of the 'reason/passion dyad'[205]—in many ways Lewis's Ambrosio is a predecessor of the Byronic hero, grappling with his passions, his arrogance fanning the flames until his infantile reasoning can no longer keep them at bay:

> [. . .] the different sentiments with which education and nature had inspired him, were combating in his bosom: it remained for his passions, which as yet no opportunity had called into play, to decide the victory. Unfortunately his passions were the very worst judges to whom he could possibly have applied. His monastic seclusion had till now been in his favour, since it gave him no room for discovering his bad qualities. [. . .] his ambition was justified by his acknowledged merit, and his pride considered as no more than proper confidence. [. . .] he was ignorant of the pleasures in woman's power to bestow; [. . .] but no sooner did opportunity present itself, no sooner did he catch a glimpse of joys to which he was still a stranger, than religion's barriers were too feeble to resist the overwhelming torrent of his desires.[206]

Before Ambrosio still, Manfred of Walpole's *Otranto* or John Milton's Satan of *Paradise Lost* (1667) stalked the page as proto-Byronic villains.[207] These

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[204] See Baldick, s. v. 'Byronic,' in *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 31.

[205] Brian Baker, 'Gothic Masculinities,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 165.

[206] Lewis, *The Monk*, 188–9.

[207] Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 301.

'Gothicised monstrous male[s]'[208] personify the eternal conflict between the forces of Eros and Thanatos that Freud placed at the foundation of civilisation. Whether employed to play the part of the hero or the villain, Byronic hero is ultimately set to fail as his violent nature, the prideful disdain for the trappings of a civilised society, yet, at the same time, antithetical craving for its validation prove mutually irreconcilable; in McEvoy's words: '[his] supremely passionate sensibility, although it spurns social bonds, temporality and morality, nevertheless proves to be his own prison, his doom, reinventing for him that which he would cast away.'[209] In Ambrosio's case, his passion inevitably consumes all that he had desired, strips him of his position, and through his sins, his humanity, too, is forfeit. When he begins to shun even the tenets of Christianity—of which he claimed to be a proud adherent—as inconsequential, the devil himself manifests to spit in the face of his antinomian delusion of sanctity and claim his soul:

> […] hell boasts no miscreant more guilty than yourself. Hark, Ambrosio, while I unveil your crimes! You have shed the blood of two innocents, Antonia and Elvira perished by your hand. That Antonia whom you violated, was your sister! that Elvira whom you murdered, gave you birth! Tremble, abandoned hypocrite! inhuman parricide! incestuous ravisher! tremble at the extent of your offences! And you it was who thought yourself proof against temptation, absolved from human frailties, and free from error and vice! [. . .] Know, vain man! that long have I marked you for my prey: I watched the movements of your heart; I saw that you were virtuous from vanity, not principle, and I seized the fit moment of seduction.[210]

Similarly, in Radcliffe's *The Italian,* the villainous Schedoni, in a true Byronic fashion, cultivates an image of a reclusive outlander of unknown origin and history, but whose secretive countenance rouses avid speculation within the

[208] Baker, 'Gothic Masculinities,' 168.

[209] McEvoy, 'Gothic and the Romantics,' 25.

[210] Lewis, *The Monk*, 349–50.

convent as evidenced in the following description, which matches Baldick's definition of the character-type nearly word for word:

> [. . .] an Italian, as his name imported, but whose family was unknown, and from some circumstances it appeared that he wished to throw an impenetrable veil over his origin. [. . .] There were circumstances, however, which appeared to indicate him to be a man of birth, and of fallen fortune; his spirit [. . .] showed not, however, the aspirings of a generous mind, but rather the gloomy pride of a disappointed one. [. . .] Some [. . .] believed that the peculiarities of his manners, his severe reserve and unconquerable silence, his solitary habits and frequent penances were the effect of misfortunes preying upon a haughty and disordered spirit[—]while others conjectured them the consequence of some hideous crime gnawing upon an awakened conscience.[211]

Even in killing his brother Count di Bruno in a fit of jealousy and raping his wife, Schedoni fails to attain his brother's station as desired; and he proves his cowardice by committing the Catholic sin of suicide rather than face justice at the hands of the Inquisition when his crimes come to light at last.

The era of the Byronic hero coincides with the departure from the overseas monastic environments and religious criticism, therefore the villains similarly cast away 'the monastic habit and cowl[.]'[212] In their place, Gothic authors supplant Byronic strangers 'not [. . .] associated with institutionalised power' who, as McEvoy notes, unlike the religious functionaries that preceded them, often do not go out of their way to oppress women in their quest for self-affirmation unless it serves their end goals.[213] Perhaps the most famous example of such a character is Heathcliff, an orphaned outsider who through a grave misunderstanding of the situation brings about the destruction of the very thing anchoring him to his humanity—Catherine Earnshaw and his love for her. When Catherine resolves to

[211] See Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 39.

[212] Punter, 'Dimensions of Gothic,' 9.

[213] See McEvoy, 'Gothic and the Romantics,' 24.

marry Edgar Linton, she does so in hopes to improve Heathcliff's position, he, however, vows to haunt the two for a lifetime and beyond—and so he does, thriving on the anguish of others until the moment of his death. Andrew Smith views Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* as a bridge between the individual stages of Gothic—featuring the unexplained supernatural of the early Gothic, the rational heroine as pioneered by Ann Radcliffe, a bland love interest in Edgar Linton, and a Byronic hero in the figure of Heathcliff.[214]

The other notable trend is the increasing usage of the double. The reason for its popularity appears to be twofold. As previously examined, women were conditioned to view their femininity as an uncanny space,[215] and thus learnt to seek realisation in the monstrous selves they craft in their fiction, dislocating their yearning for liberty into their doubles, whereas male characters were ever allowed a greater capacity for self-expression and complexity. However, with the genre's retreat from the exotic, barbaric locations of the early Gothic novels in favour of the more familiar urban settings of Britain, Gothicism had surrendered its capacity for spatial and temporal dislocation, therefore soliciting the need for a new type of distance-creating device to increase the suspension of disbelief lest the readership were to arrive at an uneasy realisation that the genre-typical violence—which they believed alien to their own Enlightened society—was not exclusive to the feudal Europe of the past or the much abhorred Catholicism, and that the human nature possesses a capacity for evil far exceeding that of any supernatural visitation. Removing the unsavoury aspects of a character's id from their repressed, carefully cultivated, seemingly respectable public ego, and displacing them into a loathsome, degenerate double was one such distancing device. The deployment of the double thus functions as an avoidant mechanism—a means of denial, 'refusal of agency, of responsibility.'[216] This artificially created other must be disconnected from the greater, better self to maintain the delusion of one's personal goodness; as Byron and Punter note in their joint publication:

[214] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 68–72.

[215] See Milbank, 'Gothic Femininities,' 161.

[216] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 290.

> The self that acts in a Gothic fashion, the self that brings onto the stage of the real the most violent of fantasies, must be *another* self; it must be a self that [. . .] is somehow disconnected, dislocated from us: these actions are, after all, ones that we only perform in our sleep, they have no place in the waking world.[217]

This harkens back to Freud's 'The Uncanny' where he described the split that facilitates the creation of a double as an instinctual reaction of 'self-protection which has caused the ego to project such content outward as something foreign to itself.'[218]

Furthermore, doubling of the self is often likened to a sleep-walking experience—the ego is locked away in the unconsciousness whilst the id, overriding its control of their shared vessel, purges the pent-up repressed impulses. The moment of hesitation upon waking and the ensuing inability to discern reality from a dream manifestation then extends the uncanny sensation to one's self. Thus, when the id relinquishes control, the ego often has little to no recollection of id's actions. Byron and Punter list Jack Torrance from Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977) as an example of such an omissive consciousness,[219] but one need not venture so far into the future to find suitable examples: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* from the pen of the Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson puts Dr Jekyll in a similar position when he crafts for himself an alter ego Mr Hyde—a tool of indulgence without consequence. In the post-Enlightenment era, still plagued by its forbear's inhibitions, the individuals that cast off the shackles of morality and abnegation, deny all rationality, and begin indulging in hedonistic revelry and violence previously unheard of on the civilised British soil, prove to be the most conducive of terror.[220] David Punter, in the second volume of his book *The Literature of Terror* (2013), in a chapter called 'Gothic and Decadence,' makes a connection between the Victorian terror and Charles Darwin's recent

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[217] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 290.

[218] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 389.

[219] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 290–1.

[220] See Brian Baker, 'Gothic Masculinities,' 165–6.

scientific discoveries about the origin of mankind, forever re-contextualising the human existence as merely that of a more sophisticated type of animal, bringing into the forefront the anxiety of the remnants of one's primordial, animalistic self. Irish author Bram Stoker encompassed these fears in the titular character of his novel *Dracula*. The enigmatic ancient vampire arrives to London as a disruptive force of erotic freedom, indulging in his passions freely and openly, without the employ of an alter ego. Not only that, but he takes it upon himself to absolve others of their inhibitions—most notably women—turning his followers into a race of immortal quasi-deities, immortals that need no longer conform to the rules of repressed mortal society.[221] In other words: the core fear of the Victorian society is decadence. And in turn, the pressure of conformity, the compulsion to cultivate virtue, to maintain moral superiority, can spark a neurosis.[222] But as Dale Townshend notes in his article 'Gothic and the Question of Ethics: Otherness, Alterity, Violence' (2019), it is the purpose of the Gothic—whether as a genre or mode—to bring to the public consciousness the 'disturbing uncanny and abject material that otherwise exists beneath the bar of cultural proscription[.]'[223]

Throughout history, these dissociative phenomena have also been observed outside of fiction, in what was then believed to be demonic possession. Contrary to the pre-Freudian stance on the subject, the demon does not invade the mind from the outward, but from its interior; as observed by Bruhm: 'conflicting libidinal investments arise in the psyche to be doubled back upon it in a grotesque distortion.'[224] In fiction, this is oft accompanied by a physical deformity or an all-encompassing sense of facelessness, as elaborated upon by Townshend: 'face is *the* expressive non-substance of the Other rather than a secondary and external means of representing it.'[225] The alterity of the double's countenance is therefore

[221] See David Punter, 'Gothic and Decadence,' in *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 2, *The Modern Gothic* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 15–21.

[222] See Byron, 'Gothic in the 1890's,' 191.

[223] See Dale Townshend, 'Gothic and the Question of Ethics: Otherness, Alterity, Violence,' in *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 285, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvggx38r.18.

[224] See Bruhm, 'The Gothic Body,' 94, 106.

[225] See Townshend, 'Gothic and the Ethics,' 284.

integral to the uncanny sensations it triggers; as Townshend writes: 'encounter with the face of absolute otherness marks the advent of absolute anxiety, discomfort and fear.'[226] This notion further corresponds to the quote by Ann Radcliffe from her essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry,' where she spoke of the significance of appearance for the villainous, or othered, characters: 'The wild attire, the look not of this earth, are essential traits of supernatural agents, working evil in the darkness of mystery.'[227] As a rule within the framework of the Gothic, barring a few exceptions, the alterity of spirit comes be mirrored in the character's physical form. In Stevenson's book, Dr Jekyll's double—Mr Hyde—seems to defy concrete description outside of the general consensus that there is something very wrong and twisted about his appearance. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, on the other hand, presents us with a protagonist who is objectively beautiful, but in choosing to live a life of decadence, he leaves unremovable stains upon his soul, stains which physically show on his hidden double—an enchanted painting that mirrors the true face of his depravity.[228]

However, Gothic doubles can also be bodily disjointed—as already noted in the discussion about the women in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Gilbert and Gubar consider Bertha Mason to be a double of Jane Eyre. By that logic, and through employing the previously mentioned idea that hero and villain oft represent the opposing sides of some internal conflict, then realistically any protagonist and antagonist duo within a narrative can function as polar representations of a single self—or doubles. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a modernist work written in the Gothic mode,[229] the protagonist Charles Marlow is put through a series of challenges appealing to his libidinal urges, id threatening to breach his ego-identity. Whilst tempted to give in to his primitive self, Marlow's ego prevails over the id, but the consequences of failing to do so are on display in Kurtz. Kurtz fails to protect his mind from the onslaught of the id and is consumed by it.

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[226] Townshend, 'Gothic and the Ethics,' 291.

[227] See Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry,' 147.

[228] See Punter, 'Gothic and Decadence,' 1–7.

[229] See Spooner, 'Gothic in the Twentieth Century,' 40.

A somewhat different example can be found in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; whilst the Creature is an extension of his creator, the titular Victor Frankenstein, and it is—although created to be beautiful, as irony would have it—a terrifying projection of the madness of science, it is not inherently evil or insane as its othering would otherwise be wont to suggest.[230] On the contrary, the Creature is very much a tabula rasa, and its corruption only comes by way of contact with humanity who predictably respond to its existence—much like its creator, Dr Frankenstein himself—by lashing out in violent prejudice. Frankenstein's Creature is therefore less of an ill-willed fiend as is usually the case with the double and more so a remnant 'of a more primitive moment in the development' not unlike a child.[231] In so doing, Shelley made a bold choice of villainising humanity as a whole and subverted expectations by encouraging the reader to empathise with the monster, pioneering the direction that the Gothic would later take, in which the monster is not an aberration but 'society's logical and inevitable product: society, rather than the individual, becomes a primary site of horror.'[232] Coincidentally, Victor Frankenstein, along with his successors Dr Jekyll, Dr Moreau and many others, doubles as a new type of villain-protagonist—the mad scientist—that fully displaced the villainous religious dignitaries of the early Gothic works sometime between the Romantic period and the Victorian era, embodying an all new source of public apprehension, in Punter's words: 'scientific progress and [. . .] the direction of this progress if undertaken in the absence of moral guidance[.]'[233] The Gothic thus moves to address the potential ethical issues posed by the scientific advances, as Glennis Byron expressed: 'The scientist at the [centre] of Victorian Gothic [. . .] are frequently shown dabbling with forces that are better left alone.'[234]

Contemporary literature in the Gothic vein frequently follows in Shelley's footsteps, showcasing the other as sympathetic figures that are often 'defenceless,

[230] See Townshend, 'Gothic and the Ethics,' 287.

[231] Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 294.

[232] See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 265–6.

[233] See Punter, 'Gothic and Decadence,' 3.

[234] Byron, 'Gothic in the 1890's,' 190.

friendless and abject, and each lacking in vital points of social protection, anchorage and support.'[235] Such works readily lend themselves for post-colonial analysis as well as queer studies readings, with these types of Others standing in as proxies for the figures ostracised outside of fiction throughout history until the present day, allowing for a broad variety of social commentary; as Vijay Mishra writes on the subject in 'The Gothic Sublime':

> Monsters, vampires, ghosts, and others of a similar ilk populate the genre; their acts dismantle a unitary concept of reason; the genre provides postcolonial writers especially with discursive registers and thematic entry points for a dismantling of an instrumental rationality which, in the hand of imperialism, was aimed at transforming all colonial subjects into unified Enlightenment beings.[236]

The victims of slavery, colonialism, antisemitism, misogyny, homophobia and a broad spectrum of other misanthropic phobias—in short, the victims of white patriarchy—come to identify themselves with these 'monsters, vampires, ghosts, and others'[237] who are forced to live out their existence on the margins of society. The stereotypical qualities these marginalised Others are typically vested with are not lost on Tia Sherèe Gaynor, who makes it a point to demonstrate the parallels between the real-world minorities and their assigned supernatural counterparts in her article titled 'Vampires Suck: Parallel Narratives in the Marginalization of the Other' (2014):

> [. . .] cultural imperialists [. . .] strategically conceptualize images that are rarely representative of social groups but are effective in shaping images that are far too often undesirable [. . .] In popular culture, this is evident in discussions of supernaturals—vampires are soulless blood-suckers; werewolves lack self-control and reason; witches are bitter and vengeful. American narratives

[235] Townshend, 'Gothic and the Ethics,' 291.

[236] Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 300.

[237] Mishra, 'The Gothic Sublime,' 300.

> parallel this discourse, suggesting that blacks are lazy and shiftless, gays are immoral and promiscuous, Latinos are all undocumented immigrants, and women are overly emotional and lack the competitive edge to lead.[238]

To name a more concrete example, upon their introduction into the genre, vampires have initially represented transgressive sexuality—homosexuality, nymphomania, or otherwise taboo sexual practices, breaching the established 'boundaries between "normal" and "deviant" sexuality[.]'[239] The vampires of yore were typically oedipal creatures of terror preying on innocent maidens, hence not entirely unlike the priests and monks of the early Gothic despite being codified as anti-religious creatures. Their bite then stood as a metaphor for sexual intercourse. However, the cultural developments that have since occurred have also rendered the core of these narratives obsolete. Instead, modern Gothic re-focuses on the themes of integration of the Other into the wider society, and in so doing it comes to appropriate elements of racial, LGBTQ+ and gender inequality struggles, along with their striving for emancipation, mediating the aforementioned social discourses through a neutral group that even the most bigoted of readers can sympathise with. The book series *Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2001–) from the pen of Charlaine Harris decides to tackle these issues head on—her vampires have their own iteration of NAACP, receive their own United States Constitution amendment, and find a key antagonist in a hostile religious organisation akin to the Westboro Baptist Church. Romantic relations between humans and vampires are discouraged and face similar stigma as interracial couples, and the vampires' inability to procreate directly parallels various anti-gay marriage narratives.[240]

Rather than an altogether new development, however, this direction of the contemporary Gothic-adjacent literature stands as a continuation of the ideas first put in place by the female Gothic writers. Over the history of the genre, the Gothic characters have progressed from mere flat archetypal manifestations

[238] See Tia Sherèe Gaynor, 'Vampires Suck: Parallel Narratives in the Marginalization of the Other,' *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 36, no. 3 (September 2014): 348–9.

[239] See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 269.

[240] See Gaynor, 'Vampires Suck,' 362–3.

driving the plot, to psychologically complex individuals with morally ambiguous agendas and demonic othered selves vying for control over the whole, to the sympathetic tools of open social discourse.

3.4 Scottish Gothic

British history has ever regarded Scotland as England's rebellious, less civilised, less eloquent double—a colonised Other held on a leash simultaneously too short and too long to allow for its precise puppeteering, ever at the ready to try and wrench itself free, and therefore an inherent threat to its southern neighbour. So much so that England outlawed its culture in the wake of the Scottish defeat in the Jacobite rebellions, banning the use of national symbols, the native language, even the discordant music of the bagpipes. In so doing, England has attempted to effectively erase some of the defining characteristics of the Scottish identity, and supplant it with a composite British culture, thus plunging the Scots deeper into their ambivalent, self-inquiring disposition. It is then unsurprising that the first attempts to situate the Gothic narrative on the British soil would take place in the North of England, and—farther still—the seemingly Burkean sublime, foggy savage Scotland.[241] A country, at least from the English perspective, given to primitive vices, beset with Catholic fiends preying on the civilisation, much like Spain and Italy of the other early Gothic novels.[242]

Such a view is highly reductive, however, for although deemed brutal and primordial, chock-full of warmongering clans, Scotland at the time was in fact a bastion of the Enlightenment philosophy, the Lowlands a rapidly developing industrial centre.[243] Likewise, in the matters of politics Scotland was hardly of one mind—indeed, some Scotsmen supported the Union, embracing their new British

[241] See Ian Duncan, 'Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 123–5.

[242] See Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity and the Aesthetics of Disjuncture: An Introduction to Scottish Gothic,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 2, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.4.

[243] See Davison and Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity,' 1–2.

identity.[244] The Scottish identity has always had a degree of duality to it, even before the annexation to England, composed of a collection of dyads, or binaries, notably: industrial Lowlands/rural Highlands, Enlightenment/Romanticism, Protestant/Catholic, philosophy/folklore, the linguistic dyads of 'English/Scots [and] Scots/Gaelic.'[245] Even the ongoing rivalry between Edinburgh as the cultural centre of the country versus Glasgow, the beating heart of Scottish economy. Scotland encompasses within it two cultures. This duplicity of Scottish character was highlighted in G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919), who terms this particular affliction as 'the Caledonian antisyzygy'[246] and speculates that such an identity crisis is likely a consequence of the constant cultural onslaught by their assertive southern neighbour. Of the Scottish character itself, Smith writes:

> [. . .] the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgement, which is the admission that the two sides of the matter have been considered.[247]

Since Smith views Scottish national character as contrarian, oxymoronic, in nature, it stands to reason that such duality would come to be mirrored in the literature of their make as well—an invitation for the Gothic to slither in and monopolise Scottish literary exploits. Indeed, no other literary mode has become as quintessentially Scottish as the Gothic. This duality manifests as what Smith calls 'the "polar twins" of the Scottish Muse'[248]—on one side the enlightened

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[244] See Angela Wright, 'Scottish Gothic,' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 73.

[245] Monica Germanà, 'Doubles: Bodily Duplications and Schizoid Selves,' in *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction since 1978* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 98, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r22fm.8.

[246] See G. Gregory Smith, 'Two Moods,' in *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1919) 4, https://archive.org/details/scottishliteratu00smitiala/page/4/mode/2up.

[247] Smith, 'Two Moods,' 4.

[248] See Smith, 'Two Moods,' 19–20.

regard for truth, on the other, the nostalgia for the superstitions of folklore. Much of the Scottish fiction revolves around the negotiation between reality and the forces of the supernatural, often challenging the notion that the presence of one precludes the involvement of the other. According to Smith, a Scottish mind seeks not to exclude either one in favour of the other, but instead invent a setting where both can stand on equal footing, ideally in an amalgamation of the two.[249] Smith elaborates upon this twofold nature of the Scottish writing further:

> Does any other man combine so strangely the severe and tender in his character, or forgo the victory of the most relentless logic at the sudden bidding of sentiment or superstition? Does literature anywhere, of this small compass, show such a mixture of contraries as his in outlook, subject, and method; real life and romance, everyday fact and the supernatural, thing holy and things profane, gentle and simple, convention and 'cantrip,' [. . .][250]

His sentiments are echoed by the later critics speaking out on the topic, perhaps most prominently David Punter, who—in one of his many texts dissecting the Gothic—addresses the Scottish writers' propensity for the use of the uncanny, especially as a means of negotiating one's identity, opining that such a disposition is an inevitability, coming from a nation possessed of 'a history that is constantly under the threat of erasure.'[251] Angela Wright, likewise, notes that given Scotland's status as an ostracised Other at the mercy of another's narrative, their writing must needs reflect this scrambled sense of self, or in Wright's own words: 'the literary impossibility of a coherent Scottish identity.'[252] Conflicting histories and doctored narratives lay at the heart of the Scottish Gothic. The Scottish authors seem particularly preoccupied with at once disentangling and entangling the intricately woven webs of history, with a particular focus on reconstructing their own identity, an effort in which they lean heavily onto the folklore for

[249] See Smith, 'Two Moods,' 36–7.

[250] See Smith, 'Two Moods,' 20.

[251] See David Punter, 'Scottish and Irish Gothic,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 105.

[252] See Wright, 'Scottish Gothic,' 73.

support, hoping to restore themselves through the recovery of the oral tradition.[253] Wright summarises these tendencies in the following quote:

> [. . .] Scottish Gothic debates the process of uncovering histories. Graves, castles, manuscripts and inscriptions are all warmly contested sites of authenticity and authority. Such items are constantly argued over by masters and servants, editors and shepherds. Scottish Gothic is intimately concerned with distilling the right narrative from any story, [. . .][254]

Like its English counterpart, the Scottish Gothic, too, derives its roots from poetry, at the time similarly divided into two traditions—the authored works of the emerging Lowland bard Robert Burns, and the fabricated tradition of a Celtic minstrel named Ossian, as created by the academic James Macpherson. Whilst Burns capitalised on his status as an unforeseen poetic prodigy emergent from the commonplace, a farmer-turned-poet, his poetic prowess like a rose sprung from the barren soil of illiteracy—a talent the like of which the English thought unattainable for a Scotsman; Macpherson's *Ossian* sought validation in laying claims to authenticity as a figure of the Highland folklore. Of course, the public reputation of Burns was wholly ill-informed, for—like Macpherson's forged histories, which he compounded of assorted morsels of Gaelic lore—Burns's talent and literary education was informed by the Scottish oral tradition.[255]

Although the English critics spared not a word of appreciation for Macpherson and his attempts to mend the broken spirit of the Highlanders and revive the Gaelic culture; in Scotland, as it happened, Macpherson's poetic works—or translations from Gaelic as he had then presented them—were received in a much warmer manner. As Ian Duncan notes in a chapter of Punter's *A New Companion to the Gothic*, the reaction to Macpherson's publication has managed to somewhat unite the Scottish literary sphere, Highland and Lowland alike, charming even the proponents of Unionism with the histories of honourable folk heroes that instilled

[253] See Wright, 'Scottish Gothic,' 79–81.

[254] See Wright, 'Scottish Gothic,' 76.

[255] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 124–6.

a sense of national pride. Despite this choice of topic, Macpherson wrote in English, framing the Gaels as a nation belonged to legends, their language dead or near to it, just as the heroes that lived in its words, now forever consigned to that uncanny cataleptic state—not dead, but not quite living either—as Duncan says, 'a ghostly presence'[256] of the past that would continue to influence the Scottish Gothic for generations to come. Macpherson left behind a legacy which painted 'the image of Scotland as a site of sublime ruin, a fallen, melancholic nation haunted by a glorious past,'[257] where the material and the esoteric coincide, creating ripe soil for the psychological focus of the Gothic.[258] Unlike Macpherson, Robert Burns, as if enacting his own personal anti-English rebellion, insisted on writing in his native Scots dialect, incorporating into his poetry the superstitious elements of Scottish folklore that he presented as a living, breathing portion of its identity, while also creating an environment to mediate social and religious discourse, often in a satiric way.[259] Scottish Gothic—as Davison and Germanà express—therefore constitutes 'an important cultural continuum that finds its roots in the oral literature of the ballad tradition'[260] that was unearthed and resurrected, or subverted by these poets, later to be applied to prose.

Enter the three Scottish literati to follow in the footsteps of the aforementioned; the figures that continue to loom as measuring shadows over the Scottish fiction to the present day, influencing all the authors to come after: Sir Walter Scott, James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson, respectively.

Walter Scott is often accredited with the revival and popularisation of Scots-produced fiction, sparking a newfound interest in the Scottish culture even among the English readers, at last lending a voice to the silenced. He at first launched his

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[256] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 125.

[257] See Carol Margaret Davison, 'The Politics and Poetics of the "Scottish Gothic" from *Ossian* to *Otranto* and Beyond,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 36, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.6.

[258] See Davison, 'Politics and Poetics, 36.

[259] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 125–6.

[260] See Davison and Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity,' 3.

literary career as a poet and a collector of folk tales,[261] and although he continued to dedicate significant amounts of his time to the study of the supernatural and all things esoteric—particularly in producing the compilation titled *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830)[262]—he became most famous for his prose ventures that are mostly preoccupied with the re-examination of Scottish history; in fact, Angela Wright describes Scott as 'almost pedantically obsessed with the multiplicity of historical interpretations that have been freighted onto Scotland.'[263] Although Scott outwardly refused to be classified as a Gothic author—mostly out of a desire to be treated as a serious writer rather than any personal or artistic reservations—modern critics have recognised many of his novels as adjacent to the Gothic mode of writing,[264] even appropriating some of Ann Radcliffe's techniques for use in his own historical novel framework.[265] One such notable novel written in the Radcliffean style is *Guy Mannering* (1815), a classic tale of a lost and found heir raised below his station returning from abroad to reclaim his estate. The titular hero of the novel embodies within him the dissociative aspects of Scottish identity—a stranger in his homeland raised by foreigners in another, yet not fully belonging to either one, grappling with his clashing identities, whilst simultaneously trying to reconcile the resurfacing memories of his earliest days.[266] Whereas in *The Antiquary*, Scott abandons the obvious Gothic tools, and instead fully channels his obsession with tugging at the narrative threads of history, legend and hearsay in a meta-narrative that scrutinises the methods of recording and interpreting the past, and the inherent bias thereof. His characters attempt to discern these winding threads from one another, often in vain, showcasing the futility of the search for a singular truth.[267] In doing so, Scott alludes to the view

[261] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 127.

[262] See Fiona Robertson, 'Gothic Scott,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 112, https://www.jstor.org/ stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.11.

[263] See Wright, 'Scottish Gothic,' 76.

[264] See Wright, 'Scottish Gothic,' 76–7.

[265] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 127.

[266] See Wright, 'Scottish Gothic,' 78.

[267] See Punter, 'Scottish and Irish Gothic,' 108–10, 113.

that the history of the Scots has been tampered with, the truth of it unknowable; that their current cultural image is not unlike the other stories laying about in archives and libraries—a fabrication, bereft of authenticity, wrought wholly to the victor's biased image. The resultant ambivalence becomes the focus of the Scottish Gothic—to use the words of Davison and Germanà:

> [. . .] the Gothic, in fact, draws attention to the ways in which a story always emerges from a polyphony of clashing voices, throwing light on the fabricated nature of both story and history. [. . .] [the] contested territory that the contradictory narratives of a Gothic text frequently uncover.[268]

Out of this peculiarity arises another unique indulgence of the Scottish Gothic—its openness to self-reflection and the lack of need to conceal its criticism by using temporal and spatial dislocations in the typical early British Gothic fashion. On the contrary, Scottish authors choose to review their national history, and particularly their relationship to god and the ways of worship head on, typically in real time and setting.[269] For a time, Scotland stood as the sole surviving holdout of Catholicism on the island of Britain, but also witnessed a Protestant turn to its own particular breed of extremism—the Church of Scotland's increasing sympathies for the Calvinist theology.[270] The Scottish religious disputes and the conflicting narrative frames combine to form the backbone of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), another Scots author seemingly risen from the common rabble like Robert Burns, earning for himself the moniker Ettrick Shepherd. Although Scott's literary ward of a sort, Ian Duncan points out that the two have not always agreed in their approach to the narrative; notably, the supernatural is unapologetically present in Hogg's writing, asserting itself as a crucial part of the Scottish cultural landscape, whereas Scott employed it mostly for allegorical purposes, following Radcliffe's suit in

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[268] See Davison and Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity,' 5.

[269] See Davison and Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity,' 4.

[270] See Alison Milbank, 'Calvinist and Covenanter Gothic,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 94–5, https://www.jstor.org/ stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.10.

rationalising it away in other contexts in order to keep his works grounded and modern.[271] For Hogg, Scott Brewster observes, the confrontation of the anglicised sensibilities of the urban Lowlands with the fantastical fancies of the local folklore is a recurring process—an ouroboric negotiation between the seemingly rival views,[272] which Hogg, along with Scotland's dual religious identity—as Duncan observes—appropriates for the purposes of social commentary and satire; Duncan further describes the nature of Hogg's writing as follows:

> [. . .] narratives that invoke the supernatural in order to affirm the potency of rural culture[—]a potency that may reside in its power to reorder worldly affairs, or more disturbingly, in an irreducibility to outside terms of explanation, a final, opaque otherness.[273]

Hogg chooses to leave it ambiguous whether the events within his works are truly supernatural or merely reflections of the characters' disturbed psyches—it is so in *The Justified Sinner*, wherein Hogg pits two conflicting narrative frames against each other—the editor's versus the narrator's—both of which contest the attention of the reader, sending them on a wild goose chase for the truth that might lie with either or neither account, or perhaps even somewhere in between. While the editor attempts to reassert realism to the point of irrationality, dismissing the esoteric aspects of the narrator's account entirely, the narrator insists on the legitimacy of the manifestations that could be equally as likely a product of supernatural visitation or delusion.[274] The protagonist Robert Wringhim is born into a noble household that is the staging ground to an unceasing domestic warfare between a rowdy Laird and his Calvinist-leaning, reserved wife who prefers to keep the company of god and her preacher. The marital conflict feeds into Robert's birth, whom the Laird immediately denounces, convinced that the boy is in fact a spawn of his wife's supposed infidelity with her confidante Reverend Wringhim.

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[271] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 129–30.

[272] See Scott Brewster, 'Gothic Hogg,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion,* ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 116–7, https://www.jstor.org/ stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.12.

[273] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 130.

[274] See Rebecca A. Pope, 'Hogg, Wordsworth, and Gothic Autobiography,' *Studies in Scottish Literature* vol. 27, no. 1 (January 1992): 218–20, https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol27/iss1/18.

Wringhim, an avid subscriber of the predestination doctrine, believing himself one of God's elect unconditionally destined for heaven, likewise raises the boy in the antinomian beliefs. Robert thus grows up led to believe that his sins are pardoned pre-emptively, his soul pristine, absolving him of any sense of personal or moral responsibility within society. In his adulthood, this delusion of grandeur—or in Freudian terms, the assumed omnipotence of thoughts—becomes a target for a devilish fiend called Gil-martin, a trickster figure manifestation of the ego-insert, who goads Robert into committing increasingly atrocious acts, including abetting a murder, which he justifies as a part of God's holy war on sinners. Although Robert is at first convinced that his visitation is of divine origin, further bolstering his already inflated sense of sanctity, the true identity of Gil-martin remains a point of contention. Gerard Carruthers, in an article called 'The Devil in Scotland' (2008), argues that Hogg uses Gil-martin's treacherous nature to assume a hostile stance towards Calvinism and highlight that 'predestination is the Devil's doctrine, since morality and conscience become irrelevant in the face of "faith."'[275] Gil-martin's presence also signals the decline of Robert's mental health—he begins to lose grip on his sense of self and reality, losing months at the time, unable to recall his actions. Finally, he seems to assimilate the persona of his supernatural tormentor, unsure where one ends and the other begins, interrogating himself if perhaps he had always been both,[276] as evinced in the following excerpt:

> [. . .] I seemed hardly to be an accountable creature; being thus in the habit of executing transactions of the utmost moment, without being sensible that I did them. I was being incomprehensible to myself. Either I had a second self, who transacted business in my likeness, or else my body was at times possessed by a spirit over which it had no controul, and of whose actions my own soul was wholly unconscious. [. . .] I was many times, in contemplating it, excited to terrors and mental torments hardly describable. To be in a state of consciousness and unconsciousness, at the same time, in

[275] See Gerard Carruthers, 'The Devil in Scotland,' *The Bottle Imp* 3 (May 2008), https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2008/05/the-devil-in-scotland/.

[276] See Bruhm, 'The Gothic Body,' 99–101.

> the same body and same spirit, was impossible. I was under the greatest anxiety, dreading some change would take place momently in my nature; for of dates I could make nothing: one-half, or two-thirds of my time, seemed to me to be totally lost. I often, about this time, prayed with great fervour, and lamented my hopeless condition, especially in being liable to the commission of crimes, which I was not sensible of, and could not eschew.[277]

However, at the same time, Hogg also provides several witness accounts to Gil-martin's antics to subvert the theory of Robert's personality split, maintaining ambiguity of whether or not is the enigmatic tag-along trickster a mere trick of mind. During these encounters, Gil-martin's particular brand of the uncanny seems to stir extreme sensation of loathing wherever he goes, recalling an earlier discussed article by Dale Townshend, in which he states: 'the encounter with the face of absolute otherness marks the advent of absolute anxiety, discomfort and fear.' [278] Such is the initial reaction of one Mr Blanchard, who eventually pays for his opinion of Gil-martin with his life; along with Wringhim's own anxiety at the mere sound of his voice later on:

> 'I never saw any body I disliked so much in my life, Mr Robert; and if it be true that he is a stranger here, which I doubt, believe me he is come for no good.'[279]

> Nay, I can scarce conceive it possible that any earthly sounds could be so discordant, so repulsive to every feeling of a human soul, as the tones of the voice that grated on my ear at that moment.[280]

As Townshend further writes on the subject: 'the Other's face is deliberately harnessed to provoke recoil, retreat and flight,'[281] although Townshend's focus is

[277] James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Edinburgh: Canongate Classic, 2005), 149.

[278] See Townshend, 'Gothic and the Ethics,' 291.

[279] Hogg, *Justified Sinner*, 107.

[280] Hogg, *Justified Sinner*, 154.

[281] See Townshend, 'Gothic and the Ethics,' 291.

on the Other as a dehumanised figure that should evoke empathy, his words still apply to the figure of Gil-martin, as evidenced in the excerpts above. This trend carries over into the thematically similar, iconic work from the pen of another Scotsman—Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*—an exploration of the duality of man; as Gerard Carruthers writes: 'evil is not actually lurking extraneously out there but is something emanating from within humanity.'[282]

Robert Louis Stevenson himself embodies a degree of duality as a son born to a family of Lowland industrialists, yet brought up with folk tales in mind, leaving him in the perfect position to treat the Enlightenment, the Calvinist and the folklore aspects of the Scottish national character.[283] Although Stevenson situates the story of *Jekyll and Hyde* in London, as was the popular direction of the Gothic at the time, its atmosphere is distinctly Edinburgh,[284] haunted by the shadow of the Calvinist past still fresh in the collective memory. Stevenson's narrative employs the Gothic by way of a mode, unfolding as an investigative mystery rather than a tale of love interrupted by violence as is the case with many a full-fledged Gothic novel. Like Hogg's *Justified Sinner*, Stevenson's narrative is divided into multiple frames, each of them an account of an encounter with the mysterious Edward Hyde as conveyed to Utterson, an audience surrogate and a close friend of the titular Henry Jekyll; with the individual threads coming together in the final chapter in a twist reveal of Mr Hyde's true identity in the format of Dr Jekyll's own written confession, or a testament, if you will—a classic Gothic framing device.[285] The narrative approximates Hogg's work even thematically—taking up the discourse of duality, ego-id split, and applies them to a man of science by name of Dr Henry Jekyll, as opposed to his predecessor

[282] See Carruthers, 'The Devil in Scotland.'

[283] See Roderick Watson, 'Gothic Stevenson,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 142–3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.14.

[284] Alistair Braidwood, 'We're All Henry Jekyll's Bairns: Robert Louis Stevenson's Enduring Influence on Scottish Literature,' *The Bottle Imp* 12 (November 2012), https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2012/11/were-all-henry-jekylls-bairns-robert-louis-stevensons-enduring-influence-on-scottish-literature/.

[285] See Punter, 'Gothic and Decadence,' 3.

Robert Wringhim, a man of faith. Therein also lays the first distinction in the nature of these doubles and the characters' perception thereof. Whereas Wringhim views his double as at first a herald of divine favour, then a demonic presence—if not the devil himself—encroaching upon his mind, and while his elusive nature lends itself equally to the interpretation of Gil-martin as a visitation or a hallucination, in either case something Wringhim learns to fear; Jekyll readily acknowledges his double as coming from within himself—an integral, inseparable component of self. Not a mere foil, but a lesser, more primordial part of himself vested with the repressed desires harkening to the days of Jekyll's youth.[286] Furthermore, although Wringhim suspects that Gil-martin is able to seize his body for his own nefarious purposes, it is beyond any doubt that Jekyll and his double Hyde share a body, showcasing Jekyll's 'pre-existent duality.'[287] In his last writ, Jekyll admits to his mind being of two halves—split between the virtuous public façade and the deformed id-projection self as embodied by Hyde, thus uncovering the terrifying ambivalence at the heart of humankind:

> [. . .] With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. [. . .] It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both [. . .][288]

Fuelled by the desperation to rid himself of this duality, to keep to the oppressive Victorian standards of virtue, restraint and respectability,[289] Jekyll first invented his potion to repudiate the evil within entirely—an ultimate attempt at delivering

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[286] See Punter, 'Gothic and Decadence,' 3–4.

[287] Milbank, 'Calvinist and Covenanter Gothic,' 98.

[288] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (London: Harper Press, 2010), 68.

[289] See Punter, 'Gothic and Decadence,' 2–3.

oneself from yet hypothetical sins; to banish the villainous fragment of himself that he comes to call Edward Hyde, into an identity of his own, and free Jekyll of the dark temptations and the guilt that come along with them:

> […] I had learned to dwell with pleasure, as a beloved daydream, on the thought of the separation of these elements. If each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hand if this extraneous evil. It was the curse of mankind that [. . .] these polar twins should be continuously struggling.[290]

Instead, the elixir surrenders control to Hyde for a period of time, allowing for whatever nagging impulses to be fulfilled without Jekyll's active participation, thus absolving him of any regrets to follow. Naturally, this initially provides relief, but as all indulgences, this one, too, comes at a price—as Bruhm notes, a simple taste of a fulfilled want can oft transform into a destructive need—a possession.[291] Dr Jekyll's control over his own body and mind erodes the more he indulges in the lack of scrutiny the form of Mr Hyde offers, threatening to annihilate his ego-persona entirely; and the more Jekyll attempts to subdue Hyde, the more his atrocities escalate, or in Jekyll's own words: 'My devil had been long caged, he came out roaring.'[292] At last he begins to transform into his monstrous double involuntarily, in his sleep, without the aid of the chemicals, with the effect persisting well beyond the intended duration. However, while the Hyde persona precludes recognition of his true identity, the transformation itself seems imperfect—unlike when Robert Wringhim's body supposedly falls under the sway of the demonic shapeshifter Gil-martin, losing track of events and time in

[290] Stevenson, *Jekyll and Hyde*, 69.

[291] See Bruhm, 'The Gothic Body,' 94.

[292] Stevenson, *Jekyll and Hyde*, 79.

the process, Dr Jekyll's consciousness is not entirely locked out when his body is seized by Hyde, maintaining a degree of awareness if not control. Notably, their handwriting is identical in either form—giving way to a more personal kind of terror, further facilitating mental health debate begun with *Justified Sinner*. In both these works—Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*—the Gothic element of fear is displaced from the environment and its occupants and turned inward—to the individual instead of the society in general, examining one's susceptibility to evil, as expressed by Alistair Braidwood:

> This horror comes from the individual's fear of losing control, of the desires of the dark heart overcoming the rational mind, or perhaps the greater fear that the rational mind will fail and no longer exist.[293]

The similarities do not end there, however; like Hogg, Stevenson also envelopes the protagonist's double in a shroud of alterity, making Hyde both morally corrupt and physically deformed, sparking the same revulsion within others as Hogg's Gil-martin. Roderick Watson summarises this phenomenon in the chapter on 'Gothic Stevenson' (2017) of the Edinburgh Companion dedicated to Scottish Gothic: 'No one can meet Hyde without experiencing a kind of existential nausea that defies rational explanation.'[294] And although, unlike the shapeshifting Gil-martin, Hyde's form is singular, he somehow remains indescribable:

> '[…] God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? [. . .] or is it the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through, and transfigures, its clay continent? The last, I think; for, O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend.'[295]

[293] Braidwood, 'Henry Jekyll's Bairns.'

[294] Watson, 'Gothic Stevenson,' 150.

[295] Stevenson, *Jekyll and Hyde*, 16.

> This person [. . .] was dressed in a fashion that would have made an ordinary person laughable; [. . .] Strange to relate, this ludicrous acoutrement was far from moving me to laughter. Rather, as there was something abnormal and misbegotten in the very essence if the creature that now faced me[—]something seizing, surprising and revolting [. . .][296]

Like Wringhim, Jekyll, too, finally caves to the pervading sense of guilt and decides to end his miserable existence, his will implying that he has committed a suicide before the one last Hyde transformation that would wrench control from him forever and the choice be denied him altogether. The violent ends met by both Wringhim and Jekyll enforce the notion of dualism as fatal, but mediating understanding of the self, as Milbank writes:

> [. . .] the embrace of duality is not so much a death as an opening to the possibility of self-knowledge, and a way forward *through*, rather than an entrapment *in*, the Calvinist past. Scottish Calvinist Gothic is very often a protest against a murderous dualism, whether in the psyche or the nation [. . .][297]

Although the story of Jekyll and Hyde stands as one of the most notorious pieces of Stevenson's writing, and no doubt his most famous Gothic venture, and while Stevenson himself is rightfully considered as one of the most well-known and influential Scottish writers worldwide; as irony would have it, his talent went unappreciated by the Edinburgh-based popular Gothic outlet *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, a monopoly on the market of short terror fiction produced in Scotland of which James Hogg was a frequent contributor.[298]

Founded by an editor, publisher and bookseller William Blackwood, *Blackwood's* tried to introduce a new kind of Gothic by rejecting all that came before and forging an altogether new path. It spurned the romances of Radcliffean tradition

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[296] Stevenson, *Jekyll and Hyde*, 62–3.

[297] See Milbank, 'Calvinist and Covenanter Gothic,' 101.

[298] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 132.

as well as the sprawling exploitative tales of Lewis and his followers, but also sought to shape Scotland's own emerging permutation of Gothicism—and the nation's literary identity in general—in which Hogg's contributions played an essential role.[299] As a result *Blackwood's* published, in Ian Duncan's words: 'some of the age's most of innovative writing'[300] including that of Lord Byron's, and influenced even the likes of Edgar Allan Poe or the Brontës. *Blackwood's* endorsed fiction at the heart of which lay terror stripped down to the barest bone, divorced from Radcliffean romantic entanglements or barely concealed politico-religious finger-pointing of yesteryear. Rather it showed a growing interest in fear as a psychological phenomenon and the Gothic as the means of eliciting said sensation, reviving and revising older tropes—and sometimes entire works—for new purposes.[301] In a *Blackwood's* Gothic tale, Robert Morrison notes, there is no room for 'love interest, no subsidiary plots or minor characters and [. . .] no escape[,]'[302] leaning into what Radcliffe once defined as the horror territory.

In the matters of politics, *Blackwood's* kept to a Unionist stance, asserting the view of Scotland as a distinct culture that nevertheless exists within the Union as England's equal, not an outlier. As far as literature was concerned, however, *Blackwood's* promoted the idea of Scottish Gothic as its own entity, correlating the Scots identity with the uncanny—the real coinciding with the myth.[303] In addition, Scottish Gothic is unique in that it does not just demonstrate the barbaric past as a subtle turning of a mirror onto the society—its dual narratives outright pit rationality and the supernatural against each other.

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[299] See Robert Morrison, '"That Singular Wrought Out into the Strange and Mystical": Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine and the Transformation of Terror,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 129, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.13.

[300] See Duncan, 'Scott, Hogg, and Scottish Gothic,' 132.

[301] See Morrison, 'Blackwood's and the Transformation of Terror,' 129–32.

[302] See Morrison, 'Blackwood's and the Transformation of Terror,' 133.

[303] See Morrison, 'Blackwood's and the Transformation of Terror,' 130, 134.

3.4.1 *Contemporary Scottish Gothic*

Although many believe the classic tales of Scottish duality to be a cliché of the past, the contemporary Scottish Gothic still regularly explores the horror of a rational mind overcome by its darker inclinations, appropriating these themes for modern purposes. Regardless of the opinion on the matter, Alistair Braidwood writes: 'the idea that Scotland's writing has such a duality at its heart is one that endures.'[304] At times reinventing this tradition happens through a direct rewrite of a classic story, as Davison and Germanà note: an 'uncanny repetition emerges in the works of some authors who engage with the past with deliberate critical intentions.'[305] Negotiating the nature of the present therefore happens by way of scrutinising and re-engaging with the past, often through examining the lingering Calvinist trauma as well as attempting to ascertain the extent of the English cultural influence.[306] Initially, this trend sparked also a revival of the Scots language tradition. In the latter part of the twentieth century, this tendency returned partially as a result of Scotland's latest national identity crisis—the Scottish authors, in the wake of the failed referendum about the devolution of the Scottish Parliament of 1979, turn to the past in order to renegotiate the Scottish identity through the classic tales of duality.[307] Concurrently, as the contemporary authors interrogate their relationship with the haunting spectres of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson whose works constitute a background against which the Scottish nationhood is defined, they also engage with the overarching presence by whose theories the Gothic is defined—the 'Freudian machinery,' as Steven Bruhm calls it; most prominently, those of Freud's ideas relating to the clash of the primal instincts of the id, the repression of the superego and their separate efforts to control the ego come under inspection—meaning that new dual tales are written as self-aware of their own underlying Freudian themes, or as Bruhm claims: in the contemporary Gothic-adjacent works, Freud stands as 'more than a tool for

[304] See Braidwood, 'Henry Jekyll's Bairns.'

[305] See Davison and Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity,' 6.

[306] See Gerard Carruthers, '"Fully to Savour Her Position": Muriel Spark and Scottish Identity,' *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 492, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26286979.

[307] See Davison and Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity,' 6.

discussing narrative; it is in large part the subject matter of the narrative itself.'[308] One of the more recent examples being James Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006)—a modern rewriting, or a spiritual sequel if you will, of James Hogg's *Justified Sinner*, in which the titular protagonist Gideon Mack, an atheist minister of the Church of Scotland, seemingly meets the Devil during a near-death experience, who supposedly watches over humanity in god's absence. Just like his literary predecessor, Robertson leaves the nature of this encounter ambiguous—a possible hallucination conjured by a mind under stress. But Gideon subsequently becomes possessed with the idea of reuniting with the trickster figure whose presence—in direct contrast with Wringhim's progressively deteriorating relationship to Gil-martin in *Justified Sinner*—has brought him a semblance of comfort. [309] According to Milbank—and mirroring an earlier cited argument by Carruthers about Calvinism as the devil's doctrine—this meeting opens the protagonist's eyes to the fatal nature of duality which he himself embodies; in her words: 'The Devil helps Gideon to see that secular modernity is locked into dualist modes of thought as deadly as Calvinism.'[310] Just like in Hogg's case, the narrative is split into two viewpoints—Gideon's account, which takes the form of a manuscript, and the publisher's framing thereof. Another prominent example of such rewriting is Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992), a story of a female sort of Frankenstein Bella Baxter whose clinically dead brain had been replaced by an infant's—or so would her husband Archibald McCandless have the readers believe. Naturally, she refutes his claims in an enclosed letter that accuses Archibald of a morbid obsession with bygone Gothicism. Although *Poor Things* bears some feminist overtones, Gray ultimately leaves it up to the reader whether they choose to believe the Gothic narrative that presents Bella as a mere construct of a mad scientist and her equally crazed husband, or her own rather rational claim that she is a person of free will able to determine her own future. Gray takes the intertextuality of his book a step further

[308] See Steven Bruhm, 'The Contemporary Gothic: Why We Need It,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 262.

[309] See Milbank, 'Calvinist and Covenanter Gothic,' 99–100.

[310] See Milbank, 'Calvinist and Covenanter Gothic,' 100.

by outright including a list of sources—both existing and fictional—that he had plagiarised. Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar* (1995), on the other hand, deals with the theft of intellectual property—a manuscript written by the late boyfriend of titular Morvern, which she publishes under her own name, after devising an unsettlingly gruesome way of disposing of said boyfriend's corpse.

That is to say the interrogation of authorship and authenticity, intertextuality and the attempts to resolve narrative conflicts between the imaginary and the real remain at the forefront of the Scottish Gothic—particularly of the female authored variety.[311] The commonest preoccupation of the contemporary Scottish writing—Gothic or otherwise—is undoubtedly the investigation of gender and sexual identity by way of deconstructing the dualistic Madonna-whore complex, mediating self-discovery through these contrarian narratives that can bear to emancipate the voice of the Other and raise it above the rest of its uncanny chorus.[312] Monica Germanà in a chapter on the use of the double in contemporary Scottish female writing describes the double as a dissociative phenomenon born from trauma: 'The double personifies a translated self, a traumatic sense of fracture and dislocation. It embodies the notion of being other than oneself[.]'[313] This idea becomes all the starker in conjunction with femininity and the feelings of unease that come bundled with it. The Gothic trope of 'the self's confrontation with the other'[314] is used as a means of foregrounding the struggle of the Other—often not exclusively feminine, but also representative of LGBTQ+ identities, and to an extent, racial struggles—to carve for themselves a path within a society heretofore dominated by the images of oppressive straight white masculinity.

In the frequently cited Emma Tenant's take on Hogg's and Stevenson's duality, Calvinism of *Justified Sinner* and *Jekyll and Hyde* is translated to radical feminism and the Scottish permutation of postcolonial anxiety, whilst retaining

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[311] See Monica Germanà, 'Authorship, "Ghost-filled" Islands and the Haunting Feminine: Contemporary Scottish Female Gothic,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 223, 234, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.20.

[312] See Davison and Germanà, 'Borderlands of Identity,' 6.

[313] See Germanà, 'Bodily Duplications and Schizoid Selves,' 99.

[314] See Germanà, 'Bodily Duplications and Schizoid Selves,' 99.

the theme of the effects of dogma and mental conditioning upon something as vulnerable as human psyche. Like many other contemporary female-authored Gothic rewritings, her books *The Bad Sister* (1978) and *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* (1989) focus on deconstructing the stereotypes of femininity that have haunted women's identities for millennia, untangling the frequently conflated concepts of femininity and motherhood through the confrontation with the Other. In her publication Germanà highlights another, more literal example of dual identity to be found in Alison Fell's *The Bad Box* (1987). The book follows two narratives stylised as coming of age stories, one of which is a folklore-inspired tale of a girl that is part human, part deer, and torn between devotion to her parents and their supernatural world and love for a human—a situation that will eventually force her to choose one over the other. The other thread follows Isla and her embittering journey into womanhood, while her identity and allegiances are likewise divided between two worlds—the unruly, boundless Highlands to which she feels an intimate connection, and the repressed Lowlands where she is ostracised for her affiliation with the former.[315]

Among the male-authored works on the topic, a stand out is Iain Banks's controversial debut novel *The Wasp Factory* (1984), which chooses to examine gender in a patriarchal environment from a biological perspective when the grotesquely violent male protagonist is revealed to be assigned female at birth. The character—Frank—undergoes a forcible transition at the hands of their father, who without their knowledge or consent uses hormone replacement therapy to mould his offspring to his misogynistic image. Although Banks intended his novel primarily as a commentary on the military and the inherent aggression thereof, as well Scottish emasculation brought about by the long-stretching history of English anti-Scottish propaganda,[316] the plot can also stand as an allegory for the deeply problematic tendency of women to adopt traits of toxic masculinity in order to find success and acceptance within patriarchal society.

[315] See Germanà, 'Bodily Duplications and Schizoid Selves,' 104–18.

[316] See Carol Margaret Davison, 'Monstrous Regiments of Women and Brides of Frankenstein: Gendered Body Politics in Scottish Female Gothic Fiction,' in *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, ed. Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 204.

Overall, many of the contemporary Scottish texts appear to embrace the latest literary trend of postmodernism, seeking to break down the barriers between the narrative, the author and the reader,[317] as well as the genre boundaries, thus continuing the Scottish tradition of challenging the existence of a singular truth. Critic Andrew Smith summarises this literary trend as follows:

> In a contemporary, postmodern age one can no longer believe in coherent, universal, claims to truth which [. . .] are replaced by moral relativism. Such a world is defined by the absence of absolute meaning, and in literature this becomes manifested through stylistic play in which narrative forms are run together to create synthetic worlds which foreground issues about representation above any moral or metaphysical concerns. In other words, postmodernism seems to be peculiarly suited to the Gothic because it questions the notion that one inhabits a coherent or otherwise abstractly rational world.[318]

The chronology and authenticity of the text are met with frequent interruptions of analepsis or prolepsis, and the twists of narrative as fabricated by unreliable narrators. Some types of interruptions can even come directly from the author in the form of metafiction—oftentimes by way of addressing the audience directly, thus breaking the proverbial fourth wall and drawing the reader's awareness to the story's fictional nature, or crafting alternate narrative threads for the readers to engage with, choose-your-own-adventure style. Likewise, the characters can become conscious of the fictionality of the world they reside in, receptive to the author's creative process and their own designated part in the narrative, escalating the sense of the uncanny as their existence is being written out and they struggle against the constraints of their role, frequently to the sadistic amusement of the author and their audience. Something that Muriel Spark positively excels at, as I shall demonstrate in the next part of this thesis.

[317] See Germanà, 'Contemporary Scottish Female Gothic,' 223.

[318] See Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 141.

4 Muriel Spark as a Gothic Author

The life of Dame Muriel Spark is in and of itself reminiscent of a Gothic tale. Born on 1 February 1918 as Muriel Sarah Camberg to a Jewish-Presbyterian household in Edinburgh, the capital city of lingering Calvinist spirit, she was consigned to ambivalence before ever having a say in the matter. She married at a young age to Sydney Oswald Spark, a Byronic figure suffering from a bipolar disorder, whom Muriel would come to call S.O.S. The couple spent their brief marriage living in Rhodesia (current Zimbabwe), where Muriel gave birth to their son Robin. After much distress, she decided to divorce her abusive husband and return to wartime Britain, leaving her son to be raised by his grandparents in Edinburgh, while she went on to begin her literary journey in London.[319] She had spent the better part of her life feeling estranged, frequently changing addresses, set on escaping her native Edinburgh at the cost of even the relationship with her son. As she wrote in an essay called 'What Images Return' (1962):

> It was Edinburgh that bred within me the conditions of exiledom; and what have I been doing since then but moving from exile into exile? It has ceased to be a fate, it has become a calling.[320]

She then switched at first between living in various neighbourhoods of London, then moving to New York and Rome, until at last—after a lifelong quest for belonging—she decided to settle down in Tuscany where she lived along with her friend and confidante Penelope Jardine until her death in April 2006.[321]

The tipping point of her career was no doubt her conversion to Catholicism in 1954, influenced by the writings of Cardinal John Henry Newman. Although she has been active in the literary circles for years, mostly as an author of non-fiction, poet and editor of *Poetry Review*, from where she was later unceremoniously

[319] See Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009), 1–59.

[320] Muriel Spark, 'What Images Return,' in *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland*, ed. Karl Miller (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 151–2, quoted in Norman Page, *Muriel Spark* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1990), 2.

[321] See Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 121, 529–31.

ousted;[322] it was only after her conversion that she has truly found her voice as a novelist and started piling successes at last. Her debut novel *The Comforters*, published in 1957, released to critical acclaim, earning her a position alongside the other prominent Catholic literati of her generation—Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene, who were also to become her friends and supporters.[323]

All throughout her life, Spark has been frugal with the details of her private life, even her autobiography stands similarly devoid of emotional involvement—not without a reason did Parul Sehgal of *The New Yorker* magazine call it 'a work of almost sinister dullness[.]'[324] Concerned mostly with dispassionately recounting the details of her childhood and earlier life, the aptly titled *Curriculum Vitae* (1992) succeeds at showing the circumstances formative to Spark as an author, but divulges very little about Muriel Spark, the person. In an interview with Robert Hosmer, Spark herself admits to her focus being on factuality—especially clearing up the many misconceptions generated by a biased account of her life shared by her former lover and collaborator Derek Stanford without her consent—choosing to omit the emotional aspects of her life.[325] Furthermore, as she often drew upon her own experiences as inspiration for her writing, many critics—including Ruth Whittaker in her monograph *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (1982)—came to believe that she reserved such details for use in her novels.[326] Spark herself all but confirmed this speculation in a letter to playwright and screenwriter Harding Lemay, expressing a wish for her life to be read through her fiction rather than vice versa: 'There's nothing I can tell the public about my life that can clarify my books, it's rather the books that clarify my life.'[327] It is

[322] See Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 94.

[323] See Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 150–79.

[324] See Parul Sehgal, 'What Muriel Spark Saw,' *The New Yorker*, April 8, 2014, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/what-muriel-spark-saw.

[325] See Muriel Spark, 'An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark,' interview by Robert Hosmer, *Salmagundi* 146/147 (Spring-Summer 2005): 129–31, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40549783.

[326] See Ruth Whittaker, *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), 18.

[327] Muriel Spark to Harding Lemay, August 12, 1963, quoted in Martin Stannard, 'Time/Life,' in *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009), 289.

almost as if she decided to live by the words once spoken to her by John Masefield, her favourite poet: 'All experience is good for an artist.'[328]

Her conversion to Catholicism, to recall an obvious example, is re-enacted through many of her protagonists. Although her works are not intended to preach her religion to the reader—on the contrary, many of her convert characters appear to be somewhat ill at ease with the rules of their newfound religion—they all exist within a framework wherein the Catholic views of the universe are true, although the institution itself is marred by a violent, problematic history and therefore must needs be scrutinised, as should the hypocritical, blind adherents of faith.[329] Spark notably rejected the label of Catholic writer, styling herself rather as a writer that happens to be a Catholic, opining that 'there is no such thing as a Catholic novel, unless it's a piece of propaganda.'[330]

Adjacent to her faith—and frequent autobiographical tendencies—is also her authorial modus operandi. Whereas Spark's contemporaries practise the-death-of-the-author approach to the narrative, attempting to detach their personas from the contents of their work as best they could, Spark's narrator inserts make their presence within her novels very much known. As a believer, Spark often situates her novels within a simulacrum of the divine plan, with the narrator posing as a deity substitute—a figure of absolute authority presiding over the text, allowing the author to assume control over her creation at will.[331] This approach to the narrative likely inspired the generation of Scottish female authors whom Germanà describes as 'preoccupied with authorial control.'[332] Incidentally, it also recalls the following quote from Sigmund Freud's 'The Uncanny':

> The story-teller has this licence among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the

[328] See Muriel Spark, *Curriculum Vitae: A Volume of Autobiography* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2009), 197.

[329] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 38.

[330] Spark, interview, Hosmer, 155.

[331] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 7–9.

[332] See Germanà, 'Contemporary Scottish Female Gothic,' 233.

> realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. We accept his ruling in every case.[333]

This is made apparent whenever a character attempts to break free from the preordained plot and assert agency, defying Spark's authorial control. Such interference is rarely successful and the perpetrators are oftentimes subject to ridicule, sometimes injury or even death—such as Caroline Rose, the protagonist of Spark's debut novel, whose efforts to resist the voice of narration result in a car accident, which confines her to a hospital bed for several weeks.[334] With but a few examples to the contrary—all of which must first receive her proverbial seal of approval—Spark ensures that the plots of these non-conforming characters are doomed to fail; in Whittaker's words: '[the characters'] choices and actions function merely as components in both a novelistic and a divine plot.'[335] Whittaker further suggests that through the emulation of divine authority, Spark appears to be celebrating her beliefs: 'By sabotaging her own creation of an autonomous, fictional world [Spark] endorses her view of God as an omniscient author.'[336] *The New Yorker* contributor and novelist Thomas Mallon makes a similar observation about the connection between Spark's creative endeavours and her faith in an article titled 'Transfigured' (2010):

> What kept [Spark's] fiction extraordinary was not its interest in God but her identification with Him, a sense that her vocation as an artist demanded that she act as He would.[337]

Moreover, Spark's attitude towards these characters channels some of the more petulant, vengeful aspects of divinity as depicted in the Old Testament—the very qualities that Edmund Burke once classified as productive of the sublime, later to

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[333] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 404.

[334] See Muriel Spark, *The Comforters* (London: Virago, 2009), 93–4. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *TC*.

[335] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 41.

[336] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 11.

[337] See Thomas Mallon, 'Transfigured,' *The New Yorker*, April 5, 2010, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/04/05/transfigured.

be appropriated by the Gothic aesthetic. Through the character's futile efforts to defy the plot—and by extension its creator—Spark also allegorises one of the everlasting dilemmas of faith—the debate about the existence of free will versus the predeterminism of fate—or, as Whittaker translates Spark's convictions: 'the absurdity of human behaviour in the context of divine purpose.'[338]

Religion thus became one of the central themes of Spark's oeuvre, along with the underlying, oft repressed, Scottishness. There is a great deal of ambivalence concerning Spark's relationship to her nationality—although the influence of the classic Scottish themes is palpable within her work, she has spent a large portion of her career denying her Scottish heritage, convinced that her works would never be met with appreciation in her homeland, all too small and conservative to embrace her literary efforts. Try as she might, however, she could never quite strip herself of her Scottishness and the ambivalence that comes bundled with it; in an interview with Martin McQuillan, Spark begrudgingly admits: 'I consider myself a Scot. I can't consider myself anything else. I've got foreign blood of many types but sooner or later you become a Scot.'[339] Furthermore, in her autobiography titled *Curriculum Vitae* (1992), Spark acknowledges the influence of the Scottish folklore upon her writing: 'The steel and bite of the [Border] ballads, so remorseless [. . .] entered my literary bloodstream, never to depart.'[340]

To Martin McQuillan, Muriel Spark presents an epitome of an Other; he ponders the different—oft contradictory—facets of her identity: 'brought up Christian with a Jewish heritage, being British in Africa, being a Scot in London, being a Catholic in Edinburgh.'[341] As a result, Spark's writing, much like herself, is a cultural hybrid—Scottish influenced, but diverging from the stylistics of the concurrent Scottish fiction,[342] deliberately exiling herself from her roots; creating

[338] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 27.

[339] See Muriel Spark, '"The Same Informed Air": An Interview with Muriel Spark,' interview by Martin McQuillan, in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 227.

[340] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 98.

[341] See McQuillan, interview, McQuillan, 219.

[342] See Ian Rankin, introduction to *Symposium*, by Muriel Spark (London: Virago, 2006), xi.

in England, yet defining herself in opposition to the English realist novel tradition and choosing to align herself with the French noveau roman instead, but nevertheless finding success in spite of her contrarian nature and cultural otherness.[343] Ironically, some of Spark's best works often explicitly channel her Scottishness in some way, however; from the Calvinist-thinking titular spinster from her most popular novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), to the Gilmartin type trickster Dougal Douglas in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), or the unwitting red-headed witch Margaret Murchie in *Symposium* (1990). Spark's fears of not finding recognition in Scotland would at last be assuaged by her visit to the Edinburgh International Book Festival shortly before her death, where she finally saw herself celebrated by the nation that she had believed would never appreciate her work. Nowadays, as Kirsty Gunn recently wrote in an article for *The New Yorker*, Muriel Spark is hailed as 'Edinburgh's most famous daughter.'[344]

In terms of form, Spark's prose is sparse, nigh minimalistic. She does away with the unnecessary embellishments, the sprawling narrative, keeping the language of her novels concise, often to an unsettling degree. This particular choice of style, Spark explains in her autobiography, stems from her background as a poet, utilising the precision, brevity and directness of the poetic expression, particularly Scottish Border ballads, even after transitioning to the novel form:

> I felt, too, that the novel as an art form was essentially a variation of a poem. I was convinced that any good novel, or indeed any composition which called for a constructional sense, was essentially an extension of poetry.[345]

To Whittaker, Spark's choice of form is also reflective of her topic and beliefs, in her words: 'a simultaneous demonstration of God's undeviating purpose, and the

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[343] See Martin McQuillan, 'Introduction: "I Don't Know Anything about Freud": Muriel Spark Meets Contemporary Criticism,' in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 11.

[344] See Kirsty Gunn, 'How Muriel Spark Came Home to Scotland,' *The New Yorker*, December 19, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-muriel-spark-came-home-to-scotland.

[345] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 206.

unremitting nature of the novelist's plot[.]'[346] Interestingly, Spark's novelist-poet mantra and Whittaker's observation appear to coalesce within the following passage from Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in which the two contemplate the relationship of the poet to their work:

> Defining poetry as a mirror held up to nature, the mimetic aesthetic [. . .] implies that the poet, like a lesser God, has made or engendered an alternative, mirror-universe in which he actually seems to enclose or trap shadow of reality. [. . .] In all these aesthetics the poet, like God the Father, is a paternalistic ruler of the fictive world he has created.[347]

By aligning herself with the poetic tradition, Spark begins her long-standing custom of defying convention at every turn—as a woman, she chooses to distance herself from the feminist movement,[348] as an author she rejects realism on the grounds of it having become insufficient for the purposes of translating the absurdity of human experience into the novel format—especially in an era where media other than literature have successfully taken its place.[349] On the contrary, instead of mimicking reality, Sehgal notes, Spark's twisted reflection of it actively 'draws our attention repeatedly to the artifice of the novel.'[350] In fact, Spark suggests that modern literature should divorce itself from these tendencies altogether and especially from the attempts to elicit sympathy from the reader, as she has expressed in an address titled 'The Desegregation of Art' (1970):

> [. . .] the art and literature of sentiment and emotion, however beautiful in itself, however striking in its depiction of actuality, has to go. It cheats us into a sense of involvement with life and society,

[346] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 127.

[347] See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 5.

[348] See McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 6.

[349] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 7.

[350] See Sehgal, 'What Muriel Spark Saw.'

> but in reality it is a segregated activity. In its place I advocate the arts of satire and ridicule.[351]

Unsurprisingly, Spark's involvement with her characters comprises mostly of surface level observation, designating their roles, hindering their efforts to break free of her schemes, and occasionally engaging in dry mockery at their expense. In addition—and somewhat ironically, given the topic of the present thesis—she appears to reverse much of the developments of the novel form that were first brought on by the Gothic movement. Norman Page in his monograph on Spark observes that she appears to be aiming 'to reduce a novel to its barest essentials.'[352] Formulaic, simple plots ridden with cleverly deployed, recognisable clichés and tropes, flat archetypal characters with little to no personality, and the barebones descriptive passages are the reason critic Warner Berthoff, in his article on Muriel Spark and Iris Murdoch, suggests that Spark's writing is more reminiscent of a screenplay.[353]

Furthermore, Spark is wholly disinterested in following the popular established patterns of relaying the experiences of the victimised Other in order to evoke sympathy; on similar grounds she rejects psychoanalysis and deep dives into the character psychology, opining that such an approach 'left too much unsaid.'[354] In the same article, Berthoff summarises the aforementioned points as follows:

> Spark show[s] a kind of airy disregard for that progressive refinement of interior observation and description that typifies the major tradition of the novel through the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries.[355]

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[351] See Muriel Spark, 'The Desegregation of Art,' in *The Golden Fleece: Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014), loc. 47 of 319, pdf.

[352] See Norman Page, *Muriel Spark* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1990), 68.

[353] See Warner Berthoff, 'Fortunes of the Novel: Muriel Spark and Iris Murdoch,' *The Massachusetts Review* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1967): 328–9, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25087583.

[354] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 138.

[355] Berthoff, 'Muriel Spark and Iris Murdoch,' 329.

In place of psychology, Spark supplants 'theological, metaphysical or mythic elements'[356] that better suit her purpose and interests. Her topic of choice, combined with the uncanny sensations triggered by her deliberate use of plain language,[357] the occasional flirtation with the supernatural, and the detective story form that dominates her repertoire—subverted though it is—all work to grant Spark the capacity to veer into the Gothic territory at will. After all, the central part of the Gothic, according to Jane Hodson, is the manipulation of reader via the use of language,[358] at which Spark without a doubt excels. Likewise, her post-modern methods of engaging with genre, stock elements, and the insistence on challenging the chronology within her works, also correspond to the critic Julian Wolfrey's notion of the Gothic, who believes that: '[t]he gothic mode is [. . .] both excessive and fragmentary in its discursive and narrative patterns[.]'[359] Indeed, as I shall demonstrate in greater detail, Spark exploits a variety of techniques by which her works come to implement the Gothic mode as delineated in Wolfrey's observation. Spark herself comments on her possible Gothic affiliation thusly:

> Some of my work can be described as gothic because it deals with the supernatural. I have often found that the supernatural is a good factor for intensifying the vision of a story. It gives an extra dimension.[360]

Even with these details in mind, it would still be rather ridiculous to pronounce Spark a Gothic writer in the traditional sense. It is now up to me, to identify the concrete Gothic elements and influences in Spark's fiction in the following subsections of this thesis, namely in *The Comforters*, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Driver's Seat* (1970), *Loitering with Intent* (1981) and *Symposium*, and to a lesser extent, *Memento Mori* (1959),

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[356] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 15.

[357] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 10.

[358] See Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 298–9.

[359] See Julian Wolfreys, 'Biography's Ruins: The Afterlife of Mary Shelley,' in *Occasional Deconstructions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 78.

[360] Muriel Spark, 'Pensée: The Supernatural,' in *The Golden Fleece: Essay*, ed. Penelope Jardine (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014), loc. 218 of 319, pdf.

The Bachelors (1960), *The Public Image* (1968), *Not to Disturb* (1971) and *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973).

5 The Postmodern versus the Supernatural

Literary scholar Timothy C. Baker, in the introduction to his publication titled *Contemporary Scottish Gothic: Mourning, Authenticity, and Tradition* (2014), suggests that the phenomenon of haunting is not restricted merely to the supernatural kind, nor, in fact, to the context of the narrative itself. As Baker further notes, the previous literary texts tend to exact a haunting presence over any that come after—a view best illustrated in the following quote:

> Gothic is not limited to a preformed series of tropes and images, but is instead used both to foreground the relation between texts and the world and between texts and other texts.[361]

That is to say, instead of merely adhering to the established Gothic formulae, the modern iterations of the Gothic can also trigger the uncanny indirectly, through the utilisation of particular stylistic choices or—more specifically—the methods of metafiction. Metafiction—or 'self-conscious fiction'[362] as Patricia Waugh calls it in the title of her publication on the subject *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984)—provides authors with a means of direct intervention within the narrative, a way of breaking the barrier between the their creation and the reader, and in turn their immersion in the textual world, calling into question its authenticity and thus reminding the reader of its fictional nature. In simple terms, '[a]ny text that draws the reader's attention to its process of construction'[363] is a work of metafiction. Although hardly a novel approach to writing—after all, experimentation with metafiction can be traced to as early as Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-

[361] See Timothy C. Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic: Mourning, Authenticity, and Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6.

[362] See Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001).

[363] Waugh, *Metafiction*, 22.

1767)[364]—within the context of the latter half of the 20th century, the era which saw Spark create the majority of her oeuvre, metafiction anticipates the nascent postmodernism and, later still, emerges as one of its primary tools.

Rather than a stylistically united literary front, a lashing out against the ideals propagated by the previous generations of writers the way modernism had, postmodernism in literature emerges as philosophical question posed about the nature of the medium itself. In discussing the postmodern novel, Patricia Waugh notes that the ever-increasing diversity of the late 20th century writing prevented the newly emerging movement from selecting a singular target for their collective dissent, other than perhaps the act of fiction-making itself. The metafictionists turn their critical attention inward—towards interrogating the novel form and the way one's utilisation of language can engender certain representations of reality, and the dogmas implicit in those images.[365] The postmodernists recognise that language is an inefficient means of accurately translating the reality due to its innate ambiguity and implicit subliminal messaging, which auto-curates the content produced. In other words, a writer is only allowed to express those thoughts that the language permits them to; to quote Waugh:

> [. . .] language is not simply a set of empty forms filled with meaning, but that it actually dictates and circumscribes what can be said and therefore what can be perceived.[366]

It is notable that the postmodernists are by far not the first to have discerned the significance of language and its various facets of meaning and the ways in which they can be evoked in order to stir certain affectations within the reader; Edmund Burke—the philosopher behind the concept of the sublime and an unwitting forefather of the Gothic—has beaten them to the epiphany by a margin of over two hundred years.[367] Through its pathological fixation upon the inner workings of language and its meaning, the rules of genre fiction, and the examination

[364] See Waugh, *Metafiction,* 23–4.

[365] See Waugh, *Metafiction,* 10–3, 22.

[366] See Waugh, *Metafiction,* 25.

[367] See Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 292.

thereof by means of metafiction, postmodernist literature attains an inherently Gothic flavour—a literature at war with itself.

As a result, the postmodern era introduces a generation of authors whose writing displays—in Waugh's words—'an extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing fictions' in addition to 'a pervasive insecurity about the relationship of fiction to reality;'[368] Waugh then goes on to stress the inevitable paradox faced by the authors attempting to write with an objective, realistic mindset in a postmodern, metafictional era—the realisation that 'the world, as such, cannot be "represented"'[369] because of the aforementioned ambiguity of language, but also because what one perceives as reality is already undergoing the process of fictionalisation through the eyes of its observer.[370] Therefore, whilst modernism still clung to the extratextual reality as a narrative crutch, postmodernism chooses to divorce itself from the notion, shamelessly embracing the self-referential simulacra that supplant the real world.[371]

These sentiments are echoed in Muriel Spark's aforementioned address called 'The Desegregation of Art,' in which she conveys her scepticism about the value of realistic narratives, particularly those concerned with depicting socio-political injustices. She argues that the purpose behind these types of narratives is rendered impotent by an existing disconnect between the textual world and that inhabited by the reader such a narrative is trying to affect; as she has said herself: 'It cheats us into a sense of involvement [. . .] but in reality it is a segregated activity.'[372] Likewise, Spark's expressed preference for ridicule over the more serious modes of storytelling, accompanied by her decisive mockery of the established literary conventions, appear to be choices symptomatic of the so-called self-conscious writing, and—at least partially—motivated by the desire to render unknowable the

[368] See Waugh, *Metafiction,* 2.

[369] See Waugh, *Metafiction,* 4.

[370] See Waugh, *Metafiction,* 49.

[371] See Waugh, *Metafiction,* 23.

[372] See Spark, 'The Desegregation of Art,' loc. 47 of 319.

medium that has otherwise become predictable and 'inauthentic,'[373] an inclination broadly summarised by Waugh as follows:

> [. . .] parody renews and maintains the relationship between form and what it can express, by upsetting a previous balance which has become so rigidified that the conventions of the form can express only a limited or even irrelevant content.[374]

These convictions signal Spark's postmodern way of thinking which is further reinforced in her writing. Even in constructing her own autobiography, Spark does not trust herself to accurately recreate reality through her memory alone, choosing to rely on documentation instead.[375] Within her fiction, Spark does her utmost to prevent the reader from completely immersing themselves in her stories and accepting them in any way as objective or representative of reality—to remind them that what they are partaking in is in fact, as Spark herself worded it, 'a segregated activity.'[376] 'Fiction to me is a kind of parable,' she has said. 'You have got to make up your mind it's not true.'[377] To achieve this, Spark employs a number of metafictional immersion-breaking tools, the concrete manifestations of which I shall examine in the following section.

[373] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 64–5.

[374] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 68.

[375] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 11.

[376] See Spark, 'The Desegregation of Art,' loc. 47 of 319.

[377] See Ali Smith, 'The Typing Ghost,' *The Guardian*, July 18, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jul/18/the-comforters-muriel-spark.

5.1 Metafiction as a Source of the Gothic

By rule, practicing the self-aware, postmodernist approach to writing necessitates an unrelenting grasp on the language and a deep understanding of how it shapes the meaning of the text. And few authors are as apt and exacting in these areas as Muriel Spark; as a fellow Scottish writer A. L. Kennedy noted in an introduction to Spark's novel *Memento Mori*, hers is 'an authorial voice of exceptional authority, clarity and economy.'[378] Spark's plain, nigh claustrophobic style was informed by her wartime experiences of working in the secret service under Sefton Delmer, an expert in 'the dark field of Black Propaganda or Psychological Warfare,'[379] and her own literary beginnings as a poet, the tenets of which have persisted even after Spark's shift to novel form: 'I can't somehow think of myself as a novelist as such, because I have a poetic way of seeing things.'[380]

Combined, these insights enable Spark to exercise absolute control over her composition—both in form and content—as well as the reader's perception of it, while maintaining a degree of sardonic playfulness. Spark's writing veers off from the compensatory motivations that Freud had once ascribed to all art;[381] even when weaving her personal experiences into her fiction, Spark never appears to course-correct or rectify personal slights, nor is she attempting to empower herself at the expense of others—if anything her work serves to highlight the human powerlessness in the face of the divine plan that she replicates in her fiction. Her writing is neither a masculine power fantasy nor a feminine act of erotic self-fulfilment—to use Freud's views on the subject—rather, she appears to use fiction to interrogate these experiences and deconstruct them, or exaggerate the events and the characters involved to their most extreme potentiality, as if creating tales at once cautionary and ridiculous. Still, by assuming the role of a divine surrogate, she explicitly embraces the play aspect of the Freudian perception of art, going as

[378] See A. L. Kennedy, introduction to *Memento Mori*, by Muriel Spark (London: Virago, 2010), x.

[379] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 147–8.

[380] See Spark, interview, Hosmer, 135.

[381] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 34.

far as to involve the reader as one of the pieces in her narrative games.[382] The way she goes about her purpose is twofold—stylistically, through her employ of language; and thematically, through plot-making and characterisation. In both areas, Spark prefers eerie simplicity, as if deliberately undoing the developments of the novel first brought about by the Gothic, thus restoring an element of the unknown to the form[383]—the fear of the unknown is, after all, the original trigger of the Gothic experience. At the same time, in order to maintain the ambivalence necessary to produce the uncanny, the newly restored sense of unfamiliarity must needs be directly contrasted with the familiar:

> There has to be some level of familiarity. In metafiction it is precisely the *fulfilment* as well as the *non-fulfilment* of generic expectations that provides both familiarity and the starting point for innovation. The well-worn conventions of realism or of popular fiction are used to establish a common language [. . .][384]

As Waugh says in the quotation above, these recognisable narrative conventions and clichés form a backbone of a storytelling lingua franca—a norm from which the writer may diverge; as Waugh further notes: 'One method of showing the function of literary conventions [. . .] is to show what happens when they malfunction.'[385] In practical terms this means that Spark systematically uncovers the underlying structures and brings them to the reader's attention—and in so doing activates their mental conditioning—only to sardonically defy them later. There is a patently Gothic component to Spark's macabre sense of humour that a Scottish writer Ali Smith attributes to 'the influence [. . .] of the Scottish Border Ballad[s] [. . .] where terrible things are reported with a dispassion [that is] almost merry'[386]—a peculiarity which Spark decided to make her personal brand.

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[382] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 35, 42.

[383] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 119.

[384] Waugh, *Metafiction*, 64.

[385] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 31.

[386] See Ali Smith, introduction to *The Comforters*, by Muriel Spark (London: Virago, 2009), xv.

From a stylistic standpoint, Spark's novels are 'sparely written, impersonally narrated, fable-like'[387]—her plots are straightforward and uncomplicated, as are her typically flat, archetypal characters recall that of the early Gothic novels, her prose follows suit with the nigh Hemingwayesque, minimalistic language repertoire, and the bland, nondescript environments reflective of it; as the Scottish novelist Ian Rankin has remarked: '[Spark] presents us with a bare room of prose, beneath the surface of which may lie many ornaments and gadgets.'[388] Rankin's observation aligns with another made in Whittaker's monograph, where she asserts that: 'Spark uses even the simplest language as metaphor, so that its very bland quality sends alarm bells ringing in our minds.'[389] Without a doubt, Spark's writing has an inherent ambivalence to it—whilst her prose presents as measured and rational—'succinct and tightly structured' as Whittaker would describe it[390]—the actual contents thereof teeter between the mundane and the ludicrous.

The unease that the reader experiences—the proverbial 'alarm bells'[391] of Whittaker's metaphor—forms the foundation stone of the Gothic, the same primordial sensation once designated as the sublime and the uncanny by Burke and Freud respectively. The proximity of death in the psychological and physical sense that the Freudian definition of the concept originally utilises is supplanted by a more figurative kind of death—that of language and the conventions of the medium itself. While Waugh's aforesaid statement addresses merely the uncanny effect produced by the breakdown of the rules of fiction, Jane Hodson notes that a similar process is at work with regard to the language aspect of story-crafting, essentially echoing Waugh's position: 'Gothic literature returns repeatedly to moments in which language breaks down and acts of communication founder.'[392]

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[387] Page, *Muriel Spark*, 44.

[388] Ian Rankin, 'Surface and Structure: Reading Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat*,' *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 148, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30225122.

[389] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 10.

[390] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 127.

[391] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 10.

[392] See Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 298.

The uncanny within the context of metafiction appears to arise precisely from such disruptions of the norm.

Additionally, the metafictional approach to writing allowed Spark to negotiate her newfound identity both as a novice novelist and a converted Catholic.[393] By interrogating the novel form through the methods of metafiction, Spark is attempting to determine whether or not she—a poet by persuasion—has a future as a novelist, whether she could express herself in an adequate manner within the confines of prose, and if there even was satisfaction to be found in such a mode of expression; the reasoning is perhaps best explained by Spark herself:

> I had to sit down and write a novel about somebody writing a novel to see if it was aesthetically valid and if I could do it and live with myself, writing such a[—]as I thought[—]low thing as a novel.[394]

Her interrogation probes and challenges the limits of the novel form at every turn, just to see how far she can push them. This is most apparent in her debut novel *The Comforters*, in which the protagonist Caroline Rose suffers from auditory hallucinations that allow her to hear the story she inhabits as it is being created by a phantom, seemingly omnipotent author-narrator, all the while she—a novelist herself—is at work on an in-depth analysis of the novel form. *The Comforters* is a book about writing a book about writing a book about writing. Muriel Spark the Author writing a novel about a fictionalised version of herself—Caroline—inside a novel that is being written by yet another of Spark's fictionalised selves—that of Muriel Spark the Narrator—in which Caroline is a character struggling to free herself of narration. In an article on the Sparkian approach to metafiction, Len Gutkin rightfully refers to *The Comforters* as Spark's most metafictional venture, operating on a level of self-referentiality that Spark would not revisit until more than twenty years later, in *Loitering with Intent*. Within the framework of Spark's other novels, these disruptions of immersion assume a more postmodern form.[395]

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[393] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 206–7.

[394] Muriel Spark, 'Keeping It Short,' interview with Ian Gillham, September 24, 1970, transcript, Writers of Today, BBC World Service, 411; quoted in Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 11.

[395] See Len Gutkin, 'Muriel Spark's Camp Metafiction,' *Contemporary Literature* 58, no. 1 (2017): 54–5, https://www.academia.edu/30182775/Muriel_Sparks_Camp_Metafiction.

Fittingly, in an interview with Martin McQuillan, Spark nonchalantly accepts the postmodernist label while sharing her own understanding of postmodernism:

> [. . .] it means that there is another dimension which is a bit creepy, supernatural . . . not supernatural but not necessarily, consequential. I always think that causality is not chronology. [. . .] one thing doesn't necessarily lead to another inevitable thing, although it does lead to something else in actual fact.[396]

Immediately salient is that Spark's definition of postmodernism hinges on her view of time. Spark ventures as far as to proclaim linear storytelling as 'vulgar' in her Gothic novella *Not to Disturb*.[397] Martin Stannard postulates that two types of time exist within Spark's work—'human time' and 'God's time'—while humans experience time as limited in scope and objectivity, a deity's access to time and events is limitless, absolute; through her narrator-avatars, Spark can appropriate divine omniscience in order to meddle with the continuity of her narratives.[398]

Unsurprisingly, chronology interruptus appears to be Spark's favourite metafictional exploit; flashback and flash-forward—or analepsis and prolepsis—constitute the essential components of the Sparkian narrative play. The magnitude of these narrative disruptions can be as subtle as brief, typically snarky, interjections, or entire scenes that wholly re-contextualise the narrative, yanking the reader's proverbial chain, diverting their attention from the initial expectations and forcing them to re-examine the narrative; Stannard elaborates by listing some of the more concrete realisations of Spark's wilful breach of audience immersion and the sequential flow of time, which include: 'using ghost narrators, revealing endings early to destroy conventional suspense, starting at the end or in the middle, fracturing the plausible surfaces of obsessive detail with sudden discontinuities.'[399] Spark's ongoing revolt against the linear narrative manifests in her oeuvre in a variety of ways: *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, for example, utilises

[396] See Spark, interview, McQuillan, 216.

[397] See Muriel Spark, *Not to Disturb* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), 36.

[398] See Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 316.

[399] See Stannard, *Muriel Spark*, 316.

reverse chronology, starting at the end: 'It wouldn't have happened if Dougal Douglas hadn't come here,'[400] and steering the reader towards the already known conclusion through retrospective narration, Spark directs the reader's attention towards the 'hows' and the 'whys' of the story instead of merely leaving them to the anticipation of a conventional resolution.[401] Or, in Waugh's words—through the decision to divulge the ending ahead of the time—'The question "What happens next?" is subordinated to the question "Why did it happen?"'[402] Rather than trudging along blindly, the reader is then subjected to the uncanny sensation of knowing the end of the story ahead of time, but without the catharsis that should entail. In Spark's opinion, this method 'creates suspense more than the withholding of information does.' [403] Another of Spark's novels that similarly divorces itself from sequential storytelling—*Symposium*—alternates between various points in the timeline and several focal characters, adding more layers as the story builds up to its climax—the titular dinner party. The key reveal comes partway into the book by way of a simple statement: 'But Hilda Damien will not come in after dinner. She is dying, now, as they speak.'[404] This flash-forward interrupts the immediate plot in order to introduce an element of mystery which Spark believes should be of a greater interest to the reader. Novelist Dan Gunn elaborates upon this particular quirk of Spark's further:

> [. . .] Muriel Spark appears to have decided that foreshadowing, or mere adumbration of catastrophe, was not for her. It is as if she had said to herself: Why hint at what is about to happen, when it is already obvious to me the writer, and when the honest thing is surely to inform the reader of what is going to be the outcome?[405]

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[400] See Muriel Spark, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 7. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *TBPR*.

[401] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 131.

[402] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 82–3.

[403] See Spark, interview, Hosmer, 150.

[404] See Muriel Spark, *Symposium* (London: Virago, 2006), 32. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *S.*

[405] See Dan Gunn, introduction to *Not to Disturb*, by Muriel Spark (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), ix.

A flashback and flash-forward are in essence Gothic devices in that they fulfil the Freudian purpose of 'something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light.'[406] As noted in Waugh's extensive study of metafiction, the trangressive, postmodern writing dismantles not only the narrow conceptions of genre, literary conventions and tropes, but also something to which Freud alludes only vaguely in his own theories, but Carl Jung would later define under the term collective unconscious—a sort of a reservoir of memories and primordial experiences that are not directly accessible to the conscious mind, but can be reintroduced into the consciousness when aroused by the circumstances reminiscent thereof.[407] However, as the postmodernist disavowal of the norms renders the connection between the extratextual reality, the textual world, and even the tools of creating and interpreting the text, void; the very medium is reduced into what the postmodernists call a simulacrum—an approximation of a reality which this copy no longer resembles, nor does the reality itself necessarily exist, and therefore becomes in itself a ghostly presence within the text. There is no longer such a reservoir of memory, or collective unconscious, wherefrom an analogous reading emerges.[408] Instead, the reality of the text 'is simultaneously formed in relation to [it]'[409] and as such, the antecedent of this uncanny effect—or déjà vu, if you will—must needs be present in the text itself. Flashback and flash-forward—especially so if used to reveal key plot points ahead of time—are explicit realisations of this uncanny effect. The outcome is already clear, however, not the journey thereto—the reader is trapped in the ambivalent state of knowing, yet remaining ignorant at once; the resulting uncanny sensation brings David Punter's words into mind: 'if we have a sense of the uncanny, it is because the barriers between the known and the unknown are teetering on the brink of collapse.'[410]

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[406] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 394.

[407] See Punter, 'The Uncanny,' 130.

[408] See Waugh, *Metafiction,* 24.

[409] Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic,* 74.

[410] See Punter, 'The Uncanny,' 130.

While perhaps the most extensive usage of flashback and flash-forward within Spark's oeuvre is to be found in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*—Whittaker counts fourteen examples of each[411]—the way in which they are employed is rather conventional. Instead of reframing the narrative as Spark's authorial interventions are wont to do, or directly contributing to the plot at hand, she merely provides additional characterisation and shock value by emphasising the consequences of Miss Brodie's narcissistic influence. Other interruptions of the plot are provided by Sandy Stranger—one of the Brodie set girls—inventing her own fictions about Miss Brodie's colourful personal life, past and present.

The Driver's Seat, Spark's most overtly postmodern novel, is uniquely suited for the purpose of demonstrating a wider array of her narrative techniques. The fragmentary nature of the narrative and the seemingly random, disjointed plotting based on a series of coincidences recalls Timothy C. Baker's statement that 'Gothic explicitly questions any narrative of cohesion[.]'[412] Arguably the most effective—and shocking—usage of such a flash-forward is present in this very novella. Within a single paragraph, Spark manages to subvert the expectations that she had instilled in the reader to begin with, discarding all the previously made allusions to the romantic framing of the plot:

> She will be found tomorrow dead from multiple stab-wounds, her wrists bound with a silk scarf and her ankles bound with a man's necktie, in the grounds of an empty villa, in park of the foreign city to which she is travelling on the flight now boarding at Gate 14.[413]

In an instant, what at first presents as a formulaic romance with an eccentric lead turns into a postmodern murder mystery at the heart of which lays not the search for the killer, whose identity is unceremoniously revealed shortly after, but the motive; rather than following the typical detective formula, *The Driver's Seat* chooses to style itself as a whydunnit, thus suspending the conventions of crime

[411] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 131.

[412] See Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic*, 16.

[413] See Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 25. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *TDS*.

fiction, and in so doing breathing a degree of novelty into an otherwise stagnant, predictable genre.[414] The detective story first emerged as an offshoot of the Gothic preoccupied with the search for rational answers to the uncanny mysteries of the worlds depicted therein, [415] at the end of which a catharsis in the form of 'the triumph of justice and the restoration of order' should await.[416] However, nothing of the sort occurs in *The Driver's Seat*—the irrational aspects of the plot prevail, and the reader is forced to contend with the absence of catharsis. The murderer is apprehended, yet questions remain that Spark refuses to give concrete answers to, and Lise's behaviour will thus continue to vex the reader even after the story has concluded—in this Spark seems to have been influenced by the writings of Alain Robbe-Grillet, about whose works Waugh wrote the following: 'the reader is not offered a resolution of the enigmatic dispositions of the text, and his or her attention begins to focus on how the code is constructed, how mystery is produced.'[417]

In writing *The Driver's Seat*, Whittaker suggests, Spark 'exploits the conventions of a detective novel in order to reveal the mechanics of plot-making.'[418] Certain narrative structures do, after all, promise certain developments. Indeed, the flash-forward revealing Lise's fate spurs the reader to an investigation of their own, observing the murder mystery as it is being crafted in real time, as if they were watching the author at work;[419] as Whittaker explains the process: 'Clues are carefully planted, coincidences arranged, irrelevancies and red-herrings coped with. Suspects are introduced and given alibis; motive and opportunity are arranged.'[420] The deceptive familiarity of the detective formula grants the reader an illusion of being able to reverse engineer the mystery, to follow along without

[414] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 82.

[415] See Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic,' 34.

[416] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 82.

[417] Waugh, *Metafiction*, 83.

[418] See Ruth Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 96.

[419] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 83.

[420] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 96.

fail and uncover the inner workings thereof. Each minute detail is afforded attention that would otherwise seem unwarranted in a linear narrative, but Spark manages to exploit this heightened attentiveness to mock the reader by countering their curiosity with overly exaggerated details bordering on the ludicrous, which ultimately turn out to be irrelevant.[421] Moreover, Spark presents the reader with yet another subversion that cannot be reconciled with the conventions of the detective story—the reveal that Lise's holiday adventure is not driven by Eros, but by its more sinister brother Thanatos—the death instinct;[422] contrary to the initial impression, Lise is supposedly not seeking a lover, but a type of man that would kill her—and once her bizarre wish is fulfilled, the book ends, with no further explanations given, denying the reader the catharsis they seek as if the author were having a last laugh at their expense. The reader's delusion of restoring rationality to the textual world dissipates as its alignment with the irrational is reasserted, thus solidifying itself as Gothic.

Spark's narrative games extend beyond the mere genre switcheroo, however; the author appropriates even the stylistics of a given genre—from Lise's romance-adjacent proclamations of searching for her type of man, the unprompted pathetic outbursts of self-loathing and self-pity, or the odd, contradictory accounts of her life, and her seemingly spy thriller-informed borderline paranoiac behaviours, to the character description more reminiscent of a police report than a novelist's account, reading as follows:

> Lise is thin. Her height is about five-foot-six. Her hair is pale brown, probably tinted, a very light streaked lock sweeping from the middle of her hair-line to the top of her crown; her hair is cut short at the sides and back, and is styled high. She might be as young as twenty-nine or as old as thirty-six, but hardly younger, hardly older. (*TDS* 18)

[421] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 83–4.

[422] See Fotini E. Apostolou, *Seduction and Death in Muriel Spark's Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood Press 2001), 42–3, http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/281329/files/Seduction%20and%20Death.pdf?version=1.

This indulgence is likewise symptomatic of Spark's postmodern inclinations—casting away the conventions and refusing to be limited to a single genre; instead she chooses to move between them freely, crafting a curious mosaic of styles and influences. It is for this reason that the Scottish novelist Ian Rankin said that Spark's work 'defied easy categorisation' further stating that 'you never knew quite what you were going to get [from her].'[423] An observation made by a Greek scholar Fotini Apostolou in her monograph *Seduction and Death in Muriel Spark's Fiction* (2001), works as a perfect summary of the Sparkian postmodern ventures: 'Muriel Spark slides in and out of genres, using autobiographies, novels, newspaper articles, films, surveys, religious texts, and poetry.'[424] The resulting collage of genres and styles can be classified under the term pastiche, defined by Chris Baldick as follows: 'a literary work composed from elements borrowed either from various other writers or from a particular earlier author.'[425]

While Baldick's definition neglects to mention the experimentation with genre blending, he does connect the term to postmodernism. He then goes on to distinguish pastiche from parody, stating that the distinction lays with the author's intent; to Baldick, pastiche is 'using imitation as a form of flattery rather than mockery,'[426] in case of Spark, however, an argument can be made for both. Spark imitates the flat, detached narratorial voice of the Scottish Border ballads and the French nouveau roman—and in particular the previously mentioned Alain Robbe-Grillet[427]—and employs it across her novels, its function resembles a camera lens impartial to the comings and goings within the plot, merely conveying the events as they unfold without the evaluative commentary that most narrators are wont to do.[428] 'Between the narrating voice and the events it recounts an unbridgeable gap

[423] See Rankin, introduction to *Symposium*, xi.

[424] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 27.

[425] See Baldick, s. v. 'pastiche,' in *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 185–6.

[426] See Baldick, s. v. 'pastiche,' 186.

[427] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 8.

[428] See Jonathan Kemp, '"Her Lips Are Slightly Parted": The Ineffability of Erotic Sociality in Muriel Spark's The Driver's Seat,' in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 174.

is maintained: everything is observed while nothing is comprehended,'[429] Paddy Lyons writes in an essay titled 'Muriel Spark's Break with Romanticism' (2010). Most extremely so in *The Driver's Seat*; not only is the reader denied any glimpse of Lise's inner life, Spark actively relinquishes a part of her authorial omniscience in order to denounce her: 'Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?' (*TDS* 50) Spark's comment is clearly intended to mock the inquisitiveness of the reader and their expectations that the narrator—and by extension the author herself—should possess the answers to all of the questions posed within the narrative. Yet the act of narrating should not be conflated with that of understanding, or even knowing—as John Glavin has expressed: 'Muriel Spark does not impose her knowing on her invention.'[430] In a chapter of *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (2001), a volume of criticism edited by Martin McQuillan, Judith Roof catalogues a number of the noveau roman influences found in Spark's writing, summarising them as follows: 'the absence of elaborate plot, linear chronology, heavily psychologised characters, and the conventions of certainty, and a focus on writing itself.'[431] These breaks from the anticipated novel-writing practices engender a discontinuity between what should be a highly emotional subject of the novel—the classic Gothic tragedy of a violent rape and murder of a woman—and its actual realisation, bereft of all the sentimentality the topic typically invites.[432] Lise's histrionics and the subsequent violent death are contrasted by the narrator's relative apathy resembling, in McQuillan words, 'an unnerving police report.'[433]

In fact, as Whittaker observes, emotional components of the narrative are being intentionally neglected: 'it is as though [Spark] cannot accommodate within her

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[429] See Paddy Lyons, 'Muriel Spark's Break with Romanticism,' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*, ed. Michael Gardiner and Willy Maley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 92.

[430] See John Glavin 'Muriel Spark's Unknowing Fiction,' *Women's Studies* 15, no. 1–3 (1988): 235.

[431] See Judith Roof, 'The Future Perfect's Perfect Future: Spark's and Duras's Narrative Drive,' in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 50.

[432] See Roof, 'Spark's Narrative Drive,' 49.

[433] See McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 3.

ordered prose the imprecision of passion. Anger is suppressed, refined into hatred, which breaks out in sudden and unexpected violence.'[434] Love, notably, appears to have no place in Spark's textual worlds—romantic relationships are portrayed as decidedly asexual, typically accompanied by resigned, tepid co-dependency.[435] Even the man attempting to woo Lise does so to maintain a balanced diet of 'one orgasm a day' (*TDS* 38) rather than genuine romantic interest. In contrast with the otherwise drab world of the novel, Lise appears as a Byronic-adjacent character tormented by some unknowable guilt driving her to her doom, whose outbursts of emotion are perceived as vulgar by the onlookers—particularly the scene where much ado is made about the stain resistant properties of a dress she picks out:

> The customer, a young woman, is suddenly tearing at the fastener at the neck, pulling at the zip of the dress. She is saying, 'Get this thing off me. Off me, at once.'
> The salesgirl shouts at the customer who, up to now, has been delighted with the bright coloured dress. [. . .]
> 'You liked the colours, didn't you?' shouts the girl. 'What difference does it make, so it resists stains, if you liked the fabric before you knew?'
> The customer picks up her bag and goes to the door almost at a run, while two other salesgirls and two other customers gasp and gape. (*TDS* 7–8)

The above scene in which Lise fails to maintain composure as is proper and expected within a Sparkian narrative, expressing heightened emotions in a situation that does not call for it, is juxtaposed by her lack of emotional response in situations that do, for example: the harassment perpetrated against her by the countless male aggressors whom she dismisses as mere hindrances to her purpose, for they are not potential killers and thus cannot aid her in completion of the plot. Whittaker summarises this emotional duality of the character thusly: 'for Lise emotion is a distraction from the dynamic of her plot, and is therefore to be avoided. [. . .] The plot is relentless, and Lise denies herself spontaneity or

[434] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 12.

[435] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 13.

disinterested action in order to comply with it.'[436] Within this mindset, Lise's subversive, hysterical behaviour—as loud as her clothing—not conforming to Spark's usual pattern, becomes yet another unresolved puzzle piece of the mystery that is *The Driver's Seat*.

Spark's explicit disinterest in deep characterisation and 'refusal to engage with the emotions or motivations of [her] characters'[437] appears to be symptomatic of her alignment with the postmodernist writing, with its emphasis on the textual components of the narrative rather than psychology of the characters.[438] Thomas Mallon rightfully states that 'Spark was never a creator of character; she was a trickster of circumstances[.]'[439] Parul Sehgal notes the recurring qualities of Sparkian protagonists, offering a following elaboration:

> They [do not] excite empathy. They [do not], in fact, differ much from one another. With a few variations, your Sparkian heroine will be a large, intensely clever woman, an editor or a writer, a bit lonely, a bit criminally inclined. Above all, she's a superb 'sighter,' as Spark would say.[440]

And indeed, Spark habitually makes use of flat characters, typically constructed around a single characteristic—in Lise's particular case, this characteristic would be her victimhood; while at the same time exploiting literary tropes and devices that fall firmly onto the *tell* side of the show-not-tell continuum—yet another pattern consistent with postmodernism.[441] These devices serve to further 'insulate us, the readers, from emotional reaction to Lise's tragedy.'[442] As Spark herself has expressed in an interview with Ian Gillham: 'I think [it is] bad manners to inflict a

[436] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 117–8.

[437] McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 3.

[438] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 23.

[439] See Mallon, 'Transfigured.'

[440] See Sehgal, 'What Muriel Spark Saw.'

[441] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 130.

[442] Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 119.

lot of emotional involvement on the reader—much nicer to make them laugh[.]'[443] That laugh, however, often comes at their expense. Spark forces the reader to emotionally distance themselves from the content and ponder it from a position of an observer, as opposed to living through the experiences of the characters as typically intended; continuing on that note, Whittaker further suggests that Spark attempts to trick her readers into 'accepting horror [of Lise's fate] without protest for the sake of a satisfactory pattern'[444]—to accept Lise's fate with the same amount of emotional detachment that the narrator displays, the same sense of inevitability with which Lise orchestrates her own murder. It is only in its closing lines that the novel sees to it that the reader is reminded of the tragedy, through the figures similarly insulated against it, of all things:

> [The killer] sees already the gleaming buttons of the policemen's uniforms, [. . .] sees already the holsters and epaulets and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear. (*TDS* 107)

Ironically, Whittaker observes, Spark's techniques are typically used to invite emotional investment rather than discourage it:

> [. . .] irony and satire, methods of detachment by the author which should, paradoxically, evoke in the reader a sense of involvement with the positive values negatively defined.[445]

The resulting uncanny taunts the reader for their initial preconceptions about the narrative, and again for nearly baiting them into sympathising with Lise's killer rather than the victim; as Whittaker aptly comments: 'The reader seldom finishes a novel by Muriel Spark without coming under attack.'[446]

This kind of lampooning extends to the given genre as well—as stated by both Ruth Whittaker and Norman Page—the very concept of a holistic plot and its

[443] See Spark, interview, Gillham; quoted in Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 15.

[444] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 119.

[445] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 16.

[446] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 145.

eventual satisfying resolution is dismantled as Spark habitually expresses her irreverence for the established conventions and the presuppositions linked thereto; instead she takes the fragments thereof and reshapes them to her own liking, often recycling material from her previous works and utilising them in novel ways, in Page's words: 'each novel is a fresh start, [but] it often learns something from its predecessors.'[447] In this approach—the ridiculous plots and the unabashed mockery of the conventions of the genres they are actively appropriating—Spark appears to have aligned herself with Matthew Lewis, of all people; in writing about Lewis's magnum opus *The Monk*, Fred Botting describes motivations similar to those by which Spark goes about creating her fictions: Lewis 'twist[s] [. . .] the conventions of the Gothic tale [. . .] interweav[ing] horror with a general mockery of the genre.'[448] Similarly to Spark's derision of her predecessors, the genre and the emotive content thereof, and even the novel form itself, '[Lewis] eschews and satirises the sentimentality of Radcliffe's work.'[449]

However, although Spark might style herself as a satirist, and admittedly her work possesses many qualities that would qualify her as such, concretely: 'the wit and inventiveness as well as the critical, questioning view of people and society'[450] as Page observes; her work lacks the didactic component of satire. Spark merely ridicules, with no ambition to change the status quo, whereas satire is explicitly reformative in its intent. In fact, she has made her view of reformative literature expressly clear in her famous 'The Desegregation of Art' address, in which, as previously mentioned, she is patently critical towards such narratives, questioning their merit in the age of digital media. Page further states that 'judgement, on the part of writer and reader, is essential to satire,'[451] yet Spark typically refrains from making or encouraging any such judgements within her work: 'Fully aware of

[447] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 52.

[448] See Fred Botting, 'Gothic Writing in the 1790's,' in *Gothic* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 50.

[449] Botting, 'Gothic Writing in the 1790's,' 49.

[450] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 89.

[451] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 92.

human folly and sin, Muriel Spark accepts them as part of the order of things.'[452] As it stands, Spark's techniques are more indicative of parody rather than satire proper, with Whittaker noting that Spark employs this literary device for subversive purposes, particularly when experimenting with various genres.[453] The absence of any notable didactic tendencies further supports Spark's closer affiliation with the exaggerated, exploitative Male Gothic tradition, rather than the more overtly reformative and conciliatory Female Gothic.

As previously mentioned, *The Driver's Seat* is at once a 'macabre parody of a "holiday romance" theme'[454] and a murder mystery, but another parodic element can be found within the execution of these themes—the novella can be read as a fulfilment of the victim blaming narrative, gleefully embracing the sheer absurdity of a scenario within which the victim could actually be held culpable for her own death. McQuillan embraces this reading in an introduction to the volume of Sparkian criticism which he personally edited, calling the novel an 'institutionally patriarchal report' which 'blames the female victim [. . .] for being complicit in her own rape and murder.'[455] It is undeniable that Lise courts her own death, after all, she admits as much in this exchange with her killer:

> 'A lot of women get killed in the park,' he says, [. . .]
> 'Yes, of course. It's because they want to be.' (*TDS* 104)

However, her motivations remain undisclosed, private. While McQuillan argues that the novel is in essence yet another case of a female victim's tragic story usurped by patriarchy in order to justify the behaviours of the male aggressors, and thus functions as feminist meta-commentary.[456] I am inclined to disagree. Not only did Spark publicly deride politically charged literature, she has also no less explicitly distanced herself from the feminist movement;[457] she did not strive to be

[452] Page, *Muriel Spark*, 89.

[453] Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 148.

[454] Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 96.

[455] See McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 3.

[456] See McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 3.

[457] See McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 6.

remembered as a feminist author—she rejects the 'woman writer' label in the Hosmer interview—but as an accomplished one.[458] She limits her women's issues commentary to minor sarcastic remarks, and emancipates her women by affording them an illusion of agency, while also allowing them to be unapologetic about their femininity. Thus it would appear out of character for her to engage with the topic from a purely feminist angle, especially when there is a more plausible motivation available. All of Spark's works contain within them a commentary on the Catholic faith and *The Driver's Seat* is no exception to this pattern. At its core, Mark Lawson aptly states, *The Driver's Seat* is 'an exploration of personal will versus divine predestination[.]'[459] Lise's search for a killer to aid her in her quest for self-annihilation is driven by her faith. Like most Sparkian protagonists, Lise is a Catholic and as such cannot voluntarily end her own life; nevertheless, in her desperation to take control of at least one aspect of her life, she figures out a caveat—she may yet seek death at the hands of another.[460] The novelist Ian Rankin makes a following summary of the plot:

> Lise has decided to commit suicide, yet cannot bring herself to do it. So she must hunt down a surrogate self, her murderer. Also, [. . .] the modus operandi of her suicide and her actions during the hours preceding it, will ensure her at least posthumous recognition in the world. [461]

As Rankin points out, Lise's actions throughout the novel are intended to afford her a visibility in death that is otherwise denied to her in life. She behaves in loud, suspicious ways, drawing attention to herself every step of the way; she attempts to communicate herself in four different languages, betraying the desperate desire to convey herself to others. Lise is aware of the one guarantee she has in life—its eventual end, recalling Freud's sentiment that 'the aim of all life is death'[462] from

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[458] See Spark, interview, Hosmer, 153.

[459] See Mark Lawson, introduction to *Loitering with Intent*, by Muriel Spark (London: Virago, 2014), x.

[460] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 117.

[461] Rankin, 'Surface and Structure,' 154.

[462] See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 32.

his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Lise endeavours to take control over this one certainty—to borrow Apostolou's words: 'to seize this possibility, to master the spectacle of her murder'[463]—and let death be her last communicative act; Whittaker describes her motivations as follows:

> Lise is reduced to making drama out of the most elemental plot of all, the knowledge that her life will end. Having no other purpose for her poor life, she makes her design the ending of it [. . .][464]

In taking ownership of her death, she is also attempting to place herself in the proverbial driver's seat of the narrative—to wrench control from the author, as Whittaker observes: 'She tries to take over the plot-making, to become one with the creator of the story.'[465] However, despite her best efforts, she does not achieve her intended sinless exit; critic Allan Perro, in his contribution to David Herman's volume of Sparkian criticism, states that her plan's 'dependency on [her killer] shows that she is not the master of death.'[466] Her attempt to seize control of the narrative ultimately fails when her murderer of choice refuses to comply with the instructions and rapes her: 'All the same, he plunges into her, with the knife poised high.'(*TDS* 106) The novel revolts against her bid for power, reinstating the supremacy of the narrator's original design—that Lise will die a victim and not as a woman asserting her agency—in accordance with, to quote Apostolou, 'Spark's preoccupation with metafictionality and plotting, which imprison her characters and mark their inability to escape writing.'[467] In fact, even the killer himself attempts to escape the suicidal plan hatched by Lise—not once but twice—he has been rehabilitated but is nevertheless forced by the plot to relapse,

[463] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 42.

[464] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 118.

[465] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 117.

[466] See Allan Pero, '"Look for One Thing and You Find Another": The Voice and Deduction in Muriel Spark's Memento Mori,' in *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives*, ed. David Herman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 199.

[467] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, xiv.

trapped within the plot that finally leads to his abduction at the hands of his victim.[468]

In failing to enact agency over her death, Lise's last communicative act also falls through; she is killed both in the physical and linguistic sense, her parting message to the world intercepted by her murderer and thus not conveyed in the way she had intended. This linguistic death creates an uncanny effect when considered within a Gothic context—to deny the reader understanding of Lise's motives is to subvert one of the fundamentals of novel-writing through the employ of Gothic methods; to quote Hodson again:

> Gothic literature returns obsessively to moments where language breaks down, [. . .] where the search for meaning becomes the entire point of the act of communication.[469]

But the question remains whether Lise's fate is self-inflicted or preordained; is determinism at work here—meaning that, ironically, Lise is merely fulfilling her intended role—or is she being punished for straying from her predetermined path? In *The Driver's Seat*—unlike Spark's many other works, perhaps most notably *The Comforters*—this question remains outwardly unanswered. The narrator's explicit disavowal of authorship and the detached approach to narration keeps the boundaries of the author-narrator continuity blurred. However, as Roof notes in her analysis of the novel, there are yet hints that the novel does conform to the Sparkian pattern:

> [. . .] the narrator drops hints in the future and future perfect tenses that make it apparent that Lise's present actions are part of a plan whose fulfilment will correspond to the end of the novel [. . .][470]

Direct metafictional interventions of this sort are not unheard of in Spark's work; in fact, many of her characters are made aware of their own fictional nature—one of the common attributes of postmodernist writing, as described by Waugh:

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[468] See Page *Muriel Spark,* 76.

[469] See Hodson, 'Gothic and the Language of Terror,' 292.

[470] See Roof, 'Spark's Narrative Drive,' 50.

> Some may read about the story of their lives or write the books in which they appear. Sometimes they know what is going to happen to them and attempt to prevent it.[471]

In discussing a different postmodern work, Waugh writes that 'each person is to some extent the victim of his or her own games with reality, but the mistake is to search for a perfect form of order.'[472] Lise seeks mastery over her reality and in so doing challenges the authority of its creator, only to be denied the right to self-determine. That is because the concept of free will is a mere simulacrum in Spark's novels, with the novelist ever-presiding over the textual world like a deity, quelling any and all attempts to usurp the narrative. That is to say that for Spark, writing fiction is like emulating god and the plot itself functions as an approximation of the divine plan; or as Waugh would simplify it: 'in fiction characters are trapped within the novelist's script, and in "reality" people are part of the book written by the hand of God.'[473] That is why—John Lanchester suggests in the introduction to *The Driver's Seat*—Spark habitually reminds her readers through her interference with the plot that her novels are mere works of fiction to be consumed but not to be invested in; in short: they are simulacra—only approximating, but never truly reproducing reality:

> The need to gesture at the fictionality of her fictions is [. . .] rooted in Spark's Catholicism, and particularly in her wish to not compete with God. The particular author is always subordinate to the final Author; our fictions must not ever seem to compete with His.[474]

Spark's metafiction thus has a clear religious component to it, informed by her own experiences as a Catholic convert; as Waugh states: 'Acceptance and simultaneous subversion of both her faith and the novel form provide her

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[471] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 93.

[472] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 44.

[473] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 119.

[474] See John Lanchester, introduction to *The Driver's Seat*, by Muriel Spark (London: Penguin Books, 2006), viii.

metafictional base.'[475] It is so integral, in fact, that Rankin argues 'much of her best work reads like an extended dialogue with herself about the nature of God.'[476] In this stance, Spark diverges from her much admired Alain Robbe-Grillet, who perceived world as simply existing without a greater purpose, whereas she found the meaning of life in the possibility of heaven and hell, and a purpose in providence.[477] Within her work, the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church are upheld as almost a sinister, inescapable truth that her convert characters find themselves testing or actively combating like Caroline Rose, flouting like Lise; or just experiencing the uncanniness of being held hostage by the novelist's absolute authority looming over them like a supernatural presence, their only means of escape the eventual conformity to the plot, which almost exclusively comes by way of embracing the Catholic truth and the divine guidance it affords. In so doing, Spark vests her characters with her own Catholic anxiety, expressed in her novels through metafictional means—the consciousness of their status as a pawn at the mercy of a larger narrative; her novels as a continuum 'form a coherent account of the convert's experience,'[478] and thus serve as a meta-commentary on the subject of faith itself.

Through combining metafiction with Catholic discourse, Spark manages to fuse the religious critique of the early Gothic tales, emulate a haunting presence within the text through her meddlesome author persona, and instil in her characters the uncanny sensation of captivity and helplessness in the face of the plot, while at the same maintaining the fickle illusion of free will. However, Whittaker notes that in her later novels—*The Driver's Seat* included—the religious component is pushed to the background as Spark embraces the postmodern aspect of her writing more overtly, her focus shifting towards the composition and the simultaneous subversion of the novel-writing practices, as well as the machinations between the characters themselves:

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[475] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 121.

[476] See Rankin, introduction to *Symposium*, x.

[477] See Ian Rankin, introduction to *The Hothouse by the East River*, by Muriel Spark (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), xii.

[478] Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 63.

> One of the ways in which [Spark] makes this increasingly secular statement is by transferring her attention from God's patterning in the world to men's designs for one another. As an analogy, she concentrates reflexively on the formal design which constitutes a novel, her protagonists being aware of their roles as manipulators of characters and events, and the narrator commenting on the novel's structure.[479]

The making of fictions is one of the primary themes found in Spark's oeuvre. In one way another, whether conscious of their role within the narrative or not, Spark's protagonists are often engaged in the act of fiction-making, either by being novelists themselves or simply by manipulating the characters or plot in their favour, thus attempting to create their own fictions. Not without reason does McQuillan observe that 'the telling of her stories are always bound up with questions of power, authority, domination, and the proper'[480]—Spark's novels are positively brimming with ambivalent, manipulative characters trying to affect the textual world. In seeking recognition and wilfully drawing attention to herself, Lise is cultivating her own mythos that she intended to outlast her tragedy. While she fails to fulfil her vision, there are yet characters to be found across Spark's novels whose endeavours are met with success. The means of achieving their success are twofold—either through the acceptance of their predicament and surrendering to the narrative, or through becoming fictionalised themselves. I shall take a closer look at these types of narratives in the following subsections.

[479] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 81.

[480] See McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 4.

5.1.1 *The Text at War with the Creator*

In many works of metafiction, the conflict between the characters aware of their fictional status and the author-insert—typically manifested as a disembodied narratorial voice—has often come to represent the author's own struggle with the conventions and limits imposed upon them by the form. In *Seduction and Death*, Apostolou makes the following observation about Sparkian metafiction:

> Spark's narratives are framed mirrors which reflect the struggle of the author, the character, and the reader to possess that which [cannot] be possessed, to seduce the narrative into their power[481]

As previously mentioned, this very struggle forms the premise of Spark's debut novel *The Comforters*, which she self-admittedly used for the purposes of negotiating her identity as a novelist. The protagonist Caroline Rose, a novelist herself, while at work on a non-fiction study of the novel form suddenly realises that she lives inside a novel herself. The proverbial fourth wall separating her world from that of her creator—whom she nicknames The Typing Ghost—is breached and Caroline can hear the author typing out the events dictating her life either ahead of time or announcing them after the fact, thus punctuating the inevitability of her predicament:

> Just then she heard the sound of a typewriter. [. . .] A typewriter and a chorus of voices: What on earth are they up to at this time of night? Caroline wondered. But what worried her were the words they had used, coinciding so exactly with her own thoughts.
> Then in began again. Tap-tappity-tap; the typewriter. And again, the voices [. . .]
> *What on earth are they up to at this time of night? Caroline wondered. But what worried her were the words they had used, coinciding so exactly with her own thoughts.*
> And then the typewriter again: tap-tap-tap. She was rooted. 'My God!' she cried aloud. 'Am I going mad?' (*TC* 34–6)

[481] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 18.

This repetitive, almost mocking self-referential echo which parrots Caroline's own thoughts back at her triggers an uncanny déjà vu as reliably any haunting, supernatural presence found within the traditional Gothic fiction would, albeit here it is given a more prosaic form, mediated through these metafictional interferences. In addition, to a recent Catholic convert still ill at ease with the tenets of their newfound faith—as Caroline herself tepidly says on the subject: 'there's nothing wrong in being a Catholic' (*TC* 18)—such an experience serves as a reminder of determinism that the faith prescribes, the subordination of their personal plots to those invented by the divine forces presiding over them; or as Whittaker explains in her analysis of Spark's novel:

> Caroline struggles with the problem of exercising free will in a divine context, and her role as a Roman Catholic convert has frequent parallels with her role as a character in a novel.[482]

As previously mentioned, with perhaps the exception of *The Driver's Seat* in which the narrator's role is more that of an observer than creator, Spark poses her inserts as omniscient deities presiding over the textual worlds, judging the characters' actions depending on whether they follow this predetermined pattern. In this way, Waugh suggests, Spark engages in a discourse about the nature and significance of free will in the face of the divine plan, which is in itself a kind of a narrative: 'in fiction characters are trapped within the novelist's script, and in "reality" people are part of the book written by the hand of God.'[483] On occasion, Caroline is even given to speculations about the identity of the author, the options of which include: 'Satan [,] a woman' and 'a Holy Soul in Purgatory' (*TC* 111), curiously forgoing god as a possible author in spite of her faith.

For Caroline, an author herself, it is as if her understanding of fiction-making grants her insight into this divine plot, allowing her to hear the creator of the story in which she is but a chess piece to be moved about at will. Naturally, Caroline's first instinct to her uncanny predicament—as is the commonality in Spark's fiction—is an attempt to combat it:

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[482] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 91.

[483] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 119.

> I won't be involved in this fictional plot if I can help it. In fact, I'd like to spoil it. If I had my way I'd hold up the action of the novel. It's a duty. (*TC* 93)

Her resistance is thwarted and Caroline's refusal to comply with the plot results in her injury and a prolonged convalescence in a hospital, but eventually, Caroline begins to discover new ways to assert a degree of agency within her pre-defined role—or 'self-conscious role-playing'[484] as Waugh terms it—concretely, by endeavouring to make herself a nuisance to the narrator and commenting on the short-comings of their prose:

> 'The Typing Ghost has not recorded any lively details about this hospital ward. The reason is that the author doesn't know how to describe a hospital ward. [. . .]' It was by asking exasperating remarks like this that Caroline Rose continued to interfere with the book. (*TS* 146–7)

Eventually, even the narrator appears to be at their wit's end about Caroline's interferences as a curious reversal of roles takes place in which they begin to be the haunted party.[485] Through Caroline's sheer petulance, the author is pulled into the textual world and, to their own chagrin, fictionalised as part of it and thus no longer wholly superordinate:

> It is not easy to dispense with Caroline Rose. At this point in the tale she is confined in a hospital bed, and no experience of hers ought to be allowed to intrude. Unfortunately she slept restlessly. [. . .] Caroline among the sleepers turned her mind to the art of the novel, wondering and cogitating, those long hours, and exerting an undue, unreckoned, influence on the narrative from which she is supposed to be absent for a time. (*TC* 123–4)

In so doing, the previously distinct and very much separate worlds inhabited by the characters in the novel and the author-narrator appear to collide and a bilateral

[484] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 119.

[485] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 23.

connection between the two is established. The narration takes on a metafictional twist as the narrator appears to engage in almost an indirect dialogue with Caroline, reprimanding her for her attempts to derail their vision, where before the narrative commentary was limited to merely expediating the plot.[486] Caroline draws upon her power as a fiction-maker to force the narrator to afford her experiences undue attention even when they are not plot relevant or particularly compelling as demonstrated above; as Caroline herself says upon being asked whether her belief that she is a character in a novel could not be merely a result of professional deformation: 'It [is] convenient that I know something of the novel form[.]' (*TC* 83) Although she cannot alter the course of the story itself, she is set on occupying the centre of the narrative even as the author-narrator tries to shift their focus to other characters. The author becomes, on some level, imprisoned within their own text.

This, too, Apostolou suggests, comes as a part of Spark's negotiation of her identity as a novelist, as Caroline finds empowerment through creating fiction reflecting her experiences, so does Spark through her novelist characters, who are often vested with bits and pieces of her own personal history.[487] To accomplish this, Spark employs a framing method called mise-en-abyme, a duplicate of an image inserted within another.[488] In *The Comforters* this eventually forms a narrative loop, a sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy, when at the end of the book, it is revealed that Caroline is currently at work on a novel inspired by the very events of the novel she inhabits when her boyfriend Laurence starts lamenting his own fictional status: 'I dislike being a character in your novel. How is it all going to end?' (*TC* 187), sharing the same anxieties that Caroline had expressed to him earlier on in the story. The authorship of the text comes into question through this reveal, inviting the thought if perhaps Caroline had been the author all along, putting a fictionalised version of herself through the throes that would eventually lead to her growth as a writer and a Catholic respectively, allowing her to create the story in a curious case of the chicken and egg dilemma:

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[486] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 131.

[487] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 23.

[488] Baldick, s. v. 'mise-en-abyme,' in *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 158.

> The two texts—the one in italics that transcribes the voices and the actual text of the narrative—merge in the novel that Caroline is about to write, or has already written. [. . .] which further complicate the question concerning the origin of the text, and underline the vanity of trying to disentangle the complexity of the writing process.[489]

As Apostolou suggests, it thus becomes wholly impossible to separate the plot of the novel from the self-referential, metafictional layer inhabited by the author-insert; she further argues that to Spark, writing is 'a process of self-recognition, the painful struggle of the author to get outside her narrative, while being inside it, to write the text, while she is being written by it[.]'[490] Through this lens, Caroline's decision to author an account of these events can be understood as an attempt to reinvent her own identity, thus reclaiming herself—at last managing to wrench control from the spectral author figure. However, if Caroline's resistance is already written into the plot is it then really a show of agency or merely an intended part of the narrative?

As previously mentioned, *The Comforters* was intended by Spark as a way of excising her doubts about the novel form and Catholic faith both—a novel written in an attempt to reconcile these new attributes of herself. Her struggles are made manifest through Caroline's own and subsequently resolved in fiction as Caroline seemingly suffers from hallucinations not unlike those that have spurred Spark into writing this novel in the first place,[491] thus creating a similar loop. Through Caroline's auditory encounters with her supposed creator and their ongoing passive-aggressive conflict over the control of the narrative, Spark is at last able to purge her own Catholic anxiety that she, too, might be a character in somebody's narrative and that her free will only extends as far as the preordained plot allows. It is only when Caroline accepts her predicament and shifts her focus to observing the plot as it unfolds around her—oftentimes accompanied by sarcastic

[489] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 23.

[490] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 19.

[491] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 206.

commentary—rather than forcefully combating it, Whittaker claims, that she ceases to be controlled by it:

> Caroline, through suffering, ultimately understands the Christian paradox that total freedom demands total submission to God's 'plot', which in turn brings understanding of its purpose.[492]

To borrow the words of a Scottish critic Gerard Carruthers, used in his contribution to a Spark-focused issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* journal, aptly titled 'Fully to Savour Her Position' (2008): the author and creation both reach the point of 'Catholic acceptance that the numinous might commingle with the everyday reality.'[493] As an author presides over their text and guides the plot along so, too, believers presume, does god.

Before moving onto the next point of my analysis, I would like to draw attention to one last detail of interest in *The Comforters* and that is the character of Mrs Hogg and the otherness thereof. Georgina Hogg, as the name should already suggest, is a Gothic figure; a Catholic with a Calvinist attitude to her, an embodiment of hypocrisy, self-assured in her elect status—at once a Wrighim and Gil-martin from the pen of her namesake James Hogg. However, while Mrs Hogg bears many of the non-descript physical attributes of a Gothic Other, including the air of uneasiness she instils in anyone in vicinity, as one character expresses: 'there's something so unwholesome about her' (*TC* 130)—a point that I shall resume later; I hesitate to qualify her as a double in the truest sense as unlike Gil-martin or Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr Hyde, the presence of one does not preclude that of the other, and neither can Mrs Hogg seize Caroline's mind and body, wish it though she may, nor is she visible only to her and none else. Moreover, her otherness asserts itself in a metafictional way—that is Mrs Hogg quite literally disappears whenever the plot seems to have no use for her.[494] In other words: 'fictional characters, constructs of the novelist, "exist" only at the

[492] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 92.

[493] See Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 493.

[494] See Waugh, *Metafiction*, 56.

precise invocation of their creator.'[495] The fictionality of Mrs Hogg is not only highlighted by the narrator's own commentary:

> [. . .] as soon as Mrs Hogg stepped into her room she disappeared, she simply disappeared. She had no private life whatsoever. God knows where she went in her privacy. (*TC* 142)

But also noticed by the other characters within the novel—including Caroline, who describes her as 'Not a real-life character, [. . .] 'only a gargoyle.' (TC 126), and later this time appropriates the words of the narrator rather than vice versa:

> 'She simply wasn't there,' Helena declared. [. . .]
> 'Maybe when she goes to sleep she disappears as a matter of course,' Caroline said with a dry laugh so that Helena would not take her too seriously.
> 'What a gruesome idea. Well, I swear that she did apparently vanish. All I saw when I first looked round was the empty seat.'
> 'Maybe she has no private life whatsoever,' Caroline said, and she giggled to take the grim edge off her words. (*TC* 170)

The circumstances of Mrs Hogg's death towards the end of the novel are no less enigmatic, as upon drowning Mrs Hogg seems to disappear in the stormy waters as if she had never existed at all; even the narrator remarks with palpable apathy: 'Mrs Hogg subsided away from her. God knows where she went.' (*TC* 181) Her purpose within the story fulfilled, Mrs Hogg re-enters the realm of myth, where she—a mere figment—belongs.

But *The Comforters* is not the only of Spark's novels to be concerned with the questions of self-discovery through authorship—in many ways, her later novel *Loitering with Intent* is a thematic continuation of *The Comforters*. Fleur Talbot is yet another in line of Spark's novelist-protagonists who simultaneously serve as her author avatar within the plot; to Whittaker, Fleur 'seems a mature version of Caroline.'[496] Though the choice of first-person narration typically—but not

[495] Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 93.

[496] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 35.

necessarily—warrants a degree of identification with the character as is, in Fleur's case this is reinforced through the fact that much of the novel is dedicated to sharing her authorial modus operandi with the reader, about which Whittaker further observes that 'many of her pronouncements on writing are echoes, almost word for word, of statements made by [Spark] in interviews'[497] and later her own autobiography *Curriculum Vitae*, thus blurring the line between memoir and fiction. Most famously, perhaps, by appropriating Spark's stance that novel-writing is in fact a form of poetic expression, as Fleur likewise states: 'I've started a novel which requires a lot of poetic concentration because, you see, I conceive everything poetically.'[498] Indeed, the book itself is framed as Fleur's autobiography, a retrospection of the formative years of her nascent literary career, recalling the mystifying circumstances coinciding with the construction of her debut novel titled *Warrender Chase*:

> I was finding it extraordinary how, throughout all the period I had been working on the novel, right from Chapter One, characters and situations, images and phrases that I absolutely needed for the book simply appeared as if from nowhere into my range of perception. I was a magnet for experiences that I needed. (*LWI* 7–8)

Loitering with Intent is yet another case of Spark's 'examination of the creative process.'[499] An aspiring novelist, Fleur Talbot starts working as a secretary for the Autobiographical Association—quite a collection of colourful characters attempting to author accounts of their lives under the leadership of one Sir Quentin Oliver, a Gothic figure—aristocratic and privileged—who seems to closely resemble the eponymous villain-protagonist of Fleur's upcoming novel:

> I saw before my eyes how Sir Quentin was revealing himself chapter by chapter to be a type and consummation of Warrender Chase, my character. (*LWI* 42)

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[497] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 121.

[498] Muriel Spark, *Loitering with Intent* (London: Virago, 2014), 17. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *LWI*.

[499] Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 12.

Akin to *The Comforters*, this novel, too, comes to work on a metafictional level when Fleur's writing seemingly begins to bleed into reality as if she were predicting the future or unconsciously moulding it into her own image, thus creating an uncanny echo. It starts rather innocently, with Fleur taking artistic license whilst editing some of the Autobiographical Association members' memoirs, enlivening their lives with invented details that some of the characters appropriate as part of their truth, suggesting that perhaps Fleur's tampering has possibly altered their memories:

> 'Indeed, you have made some very interesting changes. Indeed, I wondered how you guessed that the butler locked me in the pantry to clean the silver, which he did indeed.' (*LWI* 28)

Although Fleur does so for her own amusement, to alleviate the tedium of her occupation—rather than malintent like her employer later on, or the impulse to control the narrative she is part of like Caroline—she does come to feel a sense of authorship over the members of the Association: 'through typing them out and emphatically touching them up I think I had begun to consider them inventions of my own,' (*LWI* 23) until eventually even they begin to hold her accountable for their fates: 'is it true you've written a novel about us, Fleur?' (*LWI* 83) one of the autobiographers questions.

The autobiographies themselves are simulacra, doubly fictionalised—first by their authors who, as Fleur suspects, are trying to present themselves as better people than they are in actuality (*LWI* 19), then again through Fleur's embellishments and alterations, thus straying ever further from the truth. Although, if the authors of the autobiographies themselves are to be believed, it would appear that Fleur's talent for fiction-making somehow enables her to peer into the redacted truth of their lives without intending to—Irena Księżopolska claims in her essay titled 'Loitering with Intent: Daemonic Author and Self-Inventing Heroes' (2012) that: 'The truth is a by-product of her creativity, unwanted by Fleur.' [500] Fleur, much like Spark, is disinterested in reproducing the reality: 'Such as I am, I'm an artist,

[500] See Irena Księżopolska, 'Loitering with Intent: Daemonic Author and Self-Inventing Heroes,' *Kronos, A Philosophical Journal* 1 (December 2012): 80, https://www.academia.edu/3745331/Loitering_with_Intent_daemonic_author_and_self_inventing_heroes.

not a reporter.' (*LWI* 116) However, her creativity operates on the Sparkian logic that 'Fiction is not truth. But through these lies some truth emerges.'[501] As Fleur herself evaluates toward the end of the novel: 'The theme of *Warrender Chase* was indeed valid. Such events as I'd portrayed, even in a different way from the reality, could happen.' (*LWI* 161–2)

However, Fleur's talents are ultimately turned against her once Sir Quentin acquires her manuscript via illicit means and seemingly endeavours to carry out the plot of her novel, having embraced his designated role as the villain of her story, as Fleur notes: 'I think he's putting my *Warrender Chase* into practice. He's trying to live out my story.' (*LWI* 136) And indeed, Sir Quentin quotes from Fleur's novel extensively: 'I recognized that his words 'Don't you think you've had delusions of grandeur?' were the very words of my Warrender Chase;' (*LWI* 88) and takes the necessary steps to bring Fleur's story to its conclusion, including arranging his own death at the end. The uncanny in *Loitering* is thus generated by the déjà vu-like repetition of the pattern of events as predicted by her fiction.

Furthermore, his attempt to take control of the plot and challenging Fleur's authority as its creator recalls that of Lise—he will fulfil his destiny, but on his own terms. The text thus comes to be possessed by him both in the physical and metaphorical sense. As irony would have it—and similarly to The Typing Ghost from *The Comforters*—Fleur, too, becomes trapped within her novel and fictionalised therethrough, a realisation that comes upon catching herself going through the same exact motions she had prescribed to her heroine:

> In the end I went, having first bundled the autobiographies back into my clothes cupboard and locked it. Anyone who has read *Warrender Chase* will know what happened to those autobiographies during my absence. In fact, the possibility was already half in my mind that I was falling into the same trap as Marjorie in my novel when she was called away from Warrender's papers [. . .] But the very fact that it was half in my mind almost, to the other half of my mind, precluded the possibility that my

[501] See Spark, interview, Hosmer, 157.

> suspicions could be valid. It seemed quite unlikely that my own novel could be entering into my life to such an extent. (*LWI* 138)

Although *Loitering with Intent* counts as one of the more secular works of Spark's oeuvre—the religious component of Fleur's life backgrounded as Spark no longer feels impelled to use her characters as means of reconciling her Catholicism—to Page this patterning serves as evidence of a divine presence within the book, lending Fleur's *Warrender Chase* a prophetic quality of sorts—life mirroring fiction rather than vice versa; or in Page's words: 'not a copy of life as [Fleur] has observed it but a part of God's master-plan for human destinies.'[502] Fleur herself makes frequent disclaimers as the authenticity of her narrative is repeatedly brought to question, stating: 'the story of *Warrender Chase* was in reality already formed, and by no means influenced by the affairs of the Autobiographical Association.' (*LWI* 42) In fact, on occasion, Fleur actually uses the insight afforded to her through her talents as a novelist to glean the truth behind Sir Quentin's intentions:

> I said I would be able to explain when I had written a few more chapters of my novel *Warrender Chase*. [. . .] 'It's the only way I can come to a conclusion about what's going on at Sir Quentin's. I have to work it out through my own creativity. [. . .]' (*LWI* 47)

If the reader is to rely on Fleur's interpretation of the events—in spite of Sir Quentin's persistent gaslighting of Fleur and others—it would appear that she has become haunted by her own creations come to life, as opposed to Caroline who is at first the haunted party and then in turn becomes a defiant haunting presence to her creator. About the recurring theme of these metafictional hauntings found within Spark's work, Apostolou has the following to say:

> Spark is often preoccupied with the idea of the text coming to life and pursuing the author, who is desperately trying to get hold of it and reassert her power.[503]

[502] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 102.

[503] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 26.

Fleur and Sir Quentin are embroiled in a vicious struggle for the possession of the plot, both employing unsavoury methods to maintain their authority over the text, because as Apostolou states: 'possession of the text means victory, liberation, mastery.'[504] Through appropriating Fleur's novel and forcing his will upon the narrative—to which he, as the protagonist of Fleur's novel, feels entitled—Sir Quentin is attempting to neuter her potential as a novelist and possibly even annihilate her identity in its entirety given that Fleur invests a portion of herself into each of her novels, as Apostolou remarks: 'it is through her text [. . .] and for her text that she lives.'[505] On this subject, Fleur herself notes: 'not only was Sir Quentin exerting his influence to suppress my *Warrender Chase* but he was using, stealing, my myth. Without a mythology, a novel is nothing.' (*LWI* 106) Through this proximity of Fleur's death—textual though it may be—the Freudian uncanny obtains, solidifying Spark's novel as a work of postmodern Gothic.

Apostolou further compares the relationship between Fleur and Sir Quentin, with his desire to cause the annihilation of one's creator, metaphorical or otherwise, to an earlier discussed Gothic classic—*Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Fleur is equally as repulsed as she is drawn to the physical manifestation of her character Warrender Chase, similarly to the bind between mad scientist Victor Frankenstein and his monster.[506] It can thus be said that there is yet a component of the classic Gothic tales to this uncanny metafictional narrative. Even though Fleur and Sir Quentin are posed as narrative foils,[507] they are also more alike than either of the characters would be willing to admit. Although the reader is made to sympathise with Fleur on account of the struggle to reclaim her stolen text and Spark's very obvious—if somewhat biased—endorsement of her fiction-making pursuits,[508] Księżopolska in her essay draws attention to some of the more morally dubious aspects of the character, namely in highlighting the similarities in their methods of fulfilling their vision, as she points out: 'something seems to be amiss when Fleur

[504] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 27.

[505] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 26.

[506] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 17, 26–7.

[507] See Baldick, s. v. 'foil,' in *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 98.

[508] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 121.

unhesitatingly uses Sir Quentin's own methods to get an advantage over him.'[509] And like Sir Quentin, there is an air of eerie superiority to Fleur, made all the starker by how she treats her fellow characters within the novel she inhabits. Convinced that they are in essence merely characters that she had invented come to life, whilst nigh unwaveringly believing in her own authenticity—except for one brief moment of doubt: 'For a moment I felt like a grey figment, the "I" of a novel whose physical description the author had decided not to set forth.' (*LWI* 69)—Fleur does not stop to consider the ethics of her writing possibly affecting the reality, nor does she hesitate to simply reinvent the characters as she sees fit if they fail to fit into their designated moulds, as Księżopolska states:

> [. . .] once the actual people appear, they do not conform to their textual portraits, and this troubles Fleur. Did she get things wrong? Now she beings to rewrite the characters once more [. . .] making sure they conform to her vision.[510]

This attitude contrasts with Caroline's awareness of her own fictiveness because although Fleur is a character herself, she is also quite dismissive of the other characters' concerns—as noted by Księżopolska: 'Fleur does not believe [. . .] that invented characters hope, scheme, feel, suffer.'[511] Fleur's sentiments echo those of Spark herself who—having once again vested her author-insert with her own quirks and opinions—has on many occasions discouraged authors and readers alike from engaging with a text on an emotional level. It is then quite ironic that while questioning the emotional capacity of others, Fleur also appears to be the most emotionally suppressed character on the cast, as is the case with the majority of Sparkian protagonists, as Whittaker helpfully summarises in a chapter of *Faith and Fiction*: 'Throughout her work there is a sense of suppression, an air of controlled panic restrained through the use of rigorous, economic prose.'[512] The many confrontations with the other characters—particularly with Maisie

[509] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 81.

[510] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 83.

[511] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 90.

[512] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 12.

Young of the Autobiographical Association and Dottie, the inquiring wife of one of Fleur's former lovers—appear to be almost designed to try and prove Fleur's assumptions wrong, only for her to label their contrariness as paradoxes that lend these characters substance.[513] Her callous dismissal of the uneasiness of others appears less like that of a fellow character and more indicative—in Norman Page's words—of 'solipsistic or God-like sense of being responsible for the universe[;]'[514] while Księżopolska concludes that it is these very displays of heartless authorial abandon that put Fleur's malevolence, intended or not, on par with Sir Quentin's, opining that 'this conviction of her [. . .] self-evidence at the cost of unreality of all others is the source of the evil in her character.'[515] Ultimately, both Fleur and Sir Quentin are fiction-makers who resort to 'pumping something artificial into [the autobiographers'] lives' (*LWI* 86) in service of their plots; in case of Sir Quentin's machinations, this phrase takes a turn for the literal. It is in this way that the motif of Dexedrine-induced hallucinations that tie the two novels together thematically make a comeback. Obsessed with emulating the outcomes of Fleur's novel, Sir Quentin begins administering the drug to the members of the Association, altering their psyches, until even Fleur takes notice of their desolation:

> [. . .] I had come to feel that the members of Sir Quentin's group resembled more and more the bombed-out buildings that still messed up the London street-scene. These ruins were getting worse, month by month, and so were the Autobiographical people. (*LWI* 64)

Furthermore, Księżopolska raises the moral issue that if Sir Quentin is indeed a manifestation borne of Fleur's fiction then she has recklessly created within him a villain that she cannot rein in, but on the contrary can seemingly be controlled by, and as such she is responsible for his malice and he, her reproachable but nevertheless 'unwitting victim.'[516] In fact, Księżopolska also notes that Fleur's

[513] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 84.

[514] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 103.

[515] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 90.

[516] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 85.

emancipation as an author is at least in part designed to come through his death, similarly to how Caroline can only come into her own via seizing the narrative from The Typing Ghost and rewriting it in her own image. However, it should be noted that Fleur is not interested in moral absolution of any kind—she does not subscribe to the accepted notions of good and evil—merely capturing a sort of truth, echoing Spark's tenets through the following observation:

> I wasn't writing poetry and prose so that the reader would think me a nice person, but in order that my sets of words should convey ideas of truth and wonder, as indeed they did to myself as I was composing them. (*LWI* 58–9)

At the same time, Księżopolska questions Fleur's credibility as a narrator as well as the origin of her text. For although the uncanny echoes of her novel bleeding into reality lead Fleur to a rather irrational conviction that Sir Quentin and the members of the Autobiographical Association alike might just be her creations come to life, it could just as easily be vice versa, especially given the retrospective framing of the narrative. Fleur recounts the events of her youth from a position of a veteran novelist, however, the inherent unreliability of the first person narration aside, Fleur appears to be viewing these events exclusively through the lens of her novel and so is likely subject to the reality-altering powers that she believes her text possesses, or at the very least confirmation bias; in fact, Księżopolska notes that 'It seems Fleur herself is unable to say how much of her own life was put into her novel, and how much her novel was put into her life.'[517] To hear her speak it, she is not even sure which of the two characters whose origin is being disputed is real and which a fabrication: 'It was almost as if Sir Quentin was unreal and I had merely invented him, Warrender Chase being a man, a real man on whom I had partly based Sir Quentin.' (*LWI* 140) Other characters seemingly materialise from thin air, namely the curious trio of Fleur's publishers who, similarly to Mrs Hogg, only appear once the plot calls for their presence and promptly disappear after the fact, which is even lampshaded by Fleur herself: 'To me it seemed the Triad had come into being out of nothing and, when I should depart, to nothing they would return.' (*LWI* 166) The metafictional layer serves to further confuse the issue and

[517] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 86.

so it is no wonder that Księżopolska describes the novel's 'relationship with reality [. . .] tangled'[518]—Fleur is at once a reflection of her author-creator, Spark, as well as a character existing within a divine plot, yet she is also shaped by her own and Sir Quentin's literary machinations; the characters find themselves, as Apostolou writes: 'in a constant interchange of identities, where one text reflects the other, one story is inserted into the other, one author is written by another.'[519] To Whittaker, this layering of realities also serves as a 'revelation of how a writer's life and work are deeply interwoven.'[520] In other words, the reality in *Loitering*, as is the case in most of Spark's novels, is a simulacrum—whichever perspective is applied to the narrative at hand, it will inevitably fail to provide the full, unadulterated picture of the events, merely approximating fact, as explained by Fleur herself: 'I can only say that my life is like that, it turns into some other experience of fiction, recognizable only to myself.' (*LWI* 116); proving the truth of Whittaker's observation that within the context of Spark's writing 'reality lies not in the novel nor in the everyday world, but in the realm of God.'[521]

Interestingly, Spark's metafiction appears to be an apt successor to the Scottish Gothic of yore, recalling G. Gregory Smith's 'Two Moods' where he made a connection between the Scottish identity, so rife with contradictions, with the ambivalence of Scottish writing, in which the supernatural and the plausible are allowed to commingle, or as Smith would term it: 'the easy passing in Scottish literature between the natural and supernatural,'[522] thus defying the clearcut boundaries between the two concepts as present elsewhere. While in Spark's novels the true supernatural is diminished in importance, the boundaries between reality and unreality do remain blurred by virtue of the previously demonstrated metafictional layering that leaves the reader in doubt as to what within the novel is real and what imagined and whether it even truly matters. The only arguably consistent supernatural presence, as has already been pointed out in the previous

[518] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 88.

[519] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 27.

[520] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 18.

[521] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 11.

[522] See Smith, 'Two Moods,' 36.

section of this thesis, is that of the Sparkian narrator; the majority of Spark's oeuvre upholds the Catholic god as an omniscient force presiding over the narrative therein—a sort of a superior novelist, if you will—emulated by this narrator, who at times even asserts their presence via direct interference with the text in order to erode the last vestiges of the characters' illusion of control; and therein, Apostolou concludes, lies the true dread of the metafictional Gothic:

> [. . .] the power of the text is foregrounded; the subject realizes its inability to exert any control over its constructs, which have a life of their own and haunt their creators to the final fall.[523]

Although Spark's novels—rife as they are with characters attempting to impose their petty plots upon others—generally make it a point to punish those who would seek to elevate themselves above this approximation of the divine plan, she appears to exempt her novelist characters from this pattern: 'being an authoress is a crime that goes unpunished.' Księżopolska quips.[524] On the contrary, they are 'granted approval for pursuing [their] vocation.'[525] Perhaps it is so because as a fiction-maker herself, Spark cannot help it but feel a degree of sympathy for their urge to control fate, delusional though as it is;[526] in the characters of Caroline and Fleur, Spark reconciles the inherent inquisitiveness of her occupation, the nigh compulsive need for answers and control, with the ambivalence of the Catholic truth which is both unknowable yet definite. It might appear somewhat contradictory that the emancipation of Spark's writing women should stem from their submission to this shackling divine truth, but so did author's own, after all. And as previously noted, a great many of Spark's novels, but especially so *The Comforters* and *Loitering with Intent*, are simulacra—skewed mirrors of the author's own experiences turned to fiction, thrice removed from reality at least. According to Mark Lawson, Spark viewed writing as a Gothic process, asserting that: 'Spark believed that there was an unknowable, perhaps mystical, element to

[523] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, xvi.

[524] See Księżopolska, 'Daemonic Author,' 88.

[525] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 121.

[526] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 98.

the process by which thoughts became prose and experience plot.'[527] That is to say these postmodern fictionalised approximations of life are Gothic-adjacent, for they are both familiar, yet foreign and thus uncanny.

5.2 Spark's Gothic Set Pieces

Although the most striking examples of the uncanny found within Spark's oeuvre do typically derive from her postmodern stylistics, and metafiction in particular, there are yet elements of her fiction harking to the earlier days of the Gothic. From Spark's admiration of Mary Shelley and the Brontës whose biographies she penned, to the echoes of James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson's work in her own, it is indisputable that Spark has been influenced by the Gothic. As previously mentioned, many of Spark's novelist outings take the form of a detective story; a genre which has originated from the Gothic novel and as such is in some capacity Gothic-adjacent. However, her choice of genre is hardly the end of the Gothic influences within her work, as Gerard Carruthers outlines in 'The "Nouveau Frisson": Muriel Spark's Gothic Fiction' (2017)—his contribution to *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*:

> Gothic, supernatural, uncanny elements are used in Spark's fiction, most especially, to undermine and satirise the modern, material, town-based life of twentieth-century humanity and to signal an alternative immaterial, moral, spiritual reality [. . .][528]

Already in this brief summary, Carruthers suggests that the nature of the Gothic goes beyond mere assortment of stock elements and themes for Spark to appropriate and subvert at whim. There is more to the Gothic than damsels held hostage in haunted halls, passively awaiting their rescue from the clutches of violent men. An alternative understanding of the Gothic postulates that its characteristics are fluid, determined by social mores and taboos at a given time; that is to say that according to this decidedly broader definition, the literary

[527] See Lawson, introduction to *Loitering with Intent*, xv.

[528] Gerard Carruthers, 'The "Nouveau Frisson": Muriel Spark's Gothic Fiction,' in *Scottish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 168, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0500t.16.

Gothic is in its essence contrarian—ever standing in opposition to the mainstream and the popular—and as such, Timothy C. Baker states, 'virtually any text identified as transgressive might be identified as Gothic.'[529] Correspondingly, Carruthers in another of his articles on Spark titled 'Ghost Writing: The Work of Muriel Spark' (2017), describes mainstream Scottish literature of Spark's era as 'macho, realistic, often structurally nationalist'[530] and thus ill-suited for Spark's creative endeavours as a woman, Catholic and a self-proclaimed European. Through her nonconformity to these trends and unique postmodern stylistics, Spark has already aligned herself with the transgressive Gothic. Interestingly, Spark has made similarly dissenting choices outside of fiction, in her own life, which in turn have leaked into her literary exploits. In line with the contrarian understanding of the Gothic, Spark's turn to Catholicism as an Edinburgh native where Scotland's Calvinist past lingers in the air like genius loci, appears as one such subversive choice, given Spark's own presbyterian upbringing, her Jewish heritage, as well as the ever-increasing secularism of the twentieth century society. Indeed, Brian Cheyette in 'Writing against Conversion: Muriel Spark the Gentile Jewess' (2002), a chapter of McQuillan's publication, postulates Spark's conversion as a reaction 'against a predetermined Caledonian Scottishness,'[531] a personal rebellion against the cultural baggage of the nation she felt othered by.

Furthermore, the underlying conflict between Spark's Catholicism and the inherently determinist nature of the novel form vaguely recalls the religious undertones of the Gothic heyday, with the exception that it is not in Spark's interest to critique or proselytise her faith; in fact, she frequently mocks those who do, perhaps most prominently, Page says, Mrs Hogg, 'a Catholic with an urge to secure others for the faith.'[532] Cheyette writes that in spite of her conversion to Catholicism, Spark does not present her religious awakening as a cure-all, in fact,

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[529] See Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic*, 10.

[530] See Gerard Carruthers, 'Ghost Writing: The Work of Muriel Spark,' *The Bottle Imp* 22 (November 2017), https://www.thebottleimp.org.uk/2017/10/ghost-writing-work-muriel-spark.

[531] See Brian Cheyette, 'Writing against Conversion: Muriel Spark the Gentile Jewess,' in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 96.

[532] Page, *Muriel Spark*, 12.

for many of her characters, Catholicism is as likely to be the source of existential turmoil in light of the determinism of the divine—or the author's—will, as it is to be the fuel for their creativity:

> Conversion, as figured in Spark's fiction, is always a dual experience which not only opens up the possibilities of transforming experience through writing but also exposes the limitations of such essentially worldly transfigurations.[533]

The Catholic ambivalence as described in Cheyette's quote is a Gothic condition, splitting the convert's mind between the assurances of god-given purpose, yet at the cost of a total deprivation of personal agency. Although the presence of a divine creator is of itself supernatural, their will, as previously demonstrated, is made manifest metafictionally. Indeed, for all of Spark's listed Gothic influences, her novels show a conspicuous absence of the supernatural in the true Gothic sense, often supplanted by more modern kinds of hauntings; to name an example, in *Memento Mori* and *The Abbess of Crewe* these hauntings are mediated through the voyeuristic modern technologies, engendering an uncanny paranoia through the inherent human fear of being watched without consent.

Furthermore, disinterested as Spark is in dealing with the trappings of realism, she often reduces the politics of the faith and the secular world to mere a haunting presence,[534] with occasional—frequently comedic—appearances by ghastly revolutionaries, such as the pair of devoted Marxist nuns in *Symposium* painting a saintly fresco of Lenin and Marx and on the convent walls, the clueless fascism of Jean Brodie, or the grotesque men's rights protest march in *The Driver's Seat*, which prompts an outburst from Lise's erstwhile companion Mrs Fiedke:

> 'They are demanding equal rights with us,' says Mrs Fiedke. '[. . .] All I say is that if God had intended them to be as good as us he wouldn't have made them different from us to the naked eye. [. . .] With all due respects to Mr Fiedke, may he rest in peace, the male

[533] See Cheyette, 'Writing against Conversion,' 98.

[534] See McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 19–20.

> sex is getting out of hand. Of course, Mr Fiedke knew his place as a man, give him his due.' (*TDS* 71–2)

And though personally averse to feminism, opting instead for emancipating her heroines through their faith and creative endeavours rather than political activism, Spark nevertheless remains a female writer and as such is not exempt from the stifling influence of the ever-looming shadow of patriarchy.[535] While the notion that any and all literary works depicting the experiences of women are Gothic-adjacent might sound ludicrous at first, Spooner in 'Unsettling Feminism' recalls a view first posited by Gilbert and Gubar that patriarchy is in and of itself a system of incarceration that instead of trapping women physically—within castles, convents, households and other such Gothic locations—imprisons them within the societal norms and roles it forces them to perform; to these critics then the patriarchal society is an inherently Gothic institution.[536] To put it in more concise terms, I shall borrow a quote from a critic Anne Williams's article on the subject titled simply 'Wicked Women' (2016), in which she explicates the problematics of Gothic femininity:

> The patriarchal position of woman is inherently uncanny; she must submit to confinement within a narrow range of acceptable roles, their very narrowness a symptom of the fear she arouses.[537]

These patriarchal roles regularly manifest in Spark's fiction chiefly through the conflicts which pit against each other the women on the opposite sides of this so-called Madonna-whore Gothic spectrum, with the likes of Caroline and Fleur cast into the role of the beastly female Other to be contrasted with the more conservative, status quo-revering angels—or 'the English Rose' (*LWI* 15) as Spark names the type—with a typically Sparkian diabolical twist, as embodied by Mrs Hogg, Beryl Tims, Dottie and others. As suggested, Spark's heroines are

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[535] See McQuillan, 'Introduction,' 6.

[536] See Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism,' 132–3.

[537] See Anne Williams, 'Wicked Women,' in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 95, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bgzdfx.10.

othered by their social circles and admonished at length for their lack of conformity to these patriarchal norms:

> [. . .] [Beryl] looked at me in a shocked sort of way and said, 'But you could get married and have children, surely, and write poetry after the children had gone to bed.' I smiled at this. [. . .] I had made Beryl Tims furious. (*LWI* 17)

Mrs Hogg in particular recalls a Gothic double not unlike Mr Hyde or Gil-martin from the pens of Robert Louis Stevenson and James Hogg respectively, not least because her name is a direct reference to the latter author. With her noxious disposition and grotesque looks, Georgina Hogg appears to excite a similar revulsion within the rest of the cast of *The Comforters* as the aforementioned:

> He saw her presently, her unfortunate smile, her colossal bust arranged more peculiarly than he had ever seen it before [. . .] He took in her appearance without being fully aware of it, so anxious was he to speak his mind, give her warning, and be at peace.
> [. . .]
> She had stirred in him, as she always did, a brew of old troubles, until he could not see Georgina for her turbulent mythical dimensions, she being the consummation of a lifetime's error, she in whom he could drown and drown if he did not frighten her. (*TC* 126–7)

As with all doubles, Georgina Hogg presents as her rival, Caroline, amplified. Like Caroline she is a Catholic, however, where Caroline approaches her faith with a fright and scepticism that afford for healthy mindfulness, Mrs Hogg is a zealot with an elect attitude, convinced of her own moral superiority and sanctity; in her delusion, she believes, states Frank Baldanza, writing about Spark from a Gothic perspective, in 'Muriel Spark and the Occult' (1965), that 'the Virgin Mary is personally and miraculously active in her behalf.'[538] The many references to her endowed chest throughout the novel serve to emphasise this perverted

[538] See Frank Baldanza, 'Muriel Spark and the Occult,' *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1965): 193, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207258.

image of motherhood. Similarly to their predecessors, both characters spend the novel vying for control—over the narrative and each other, as Mrs Hogg tries to continually impose her dogma upon Caroline, until finally one must needs annihilate the other to regain selfhood. For Apostolou, these confrontations, too, serve a greater purpose within the narrative in consolidating the identities of the heroines, because to escape the constraints of their narrative—patriarchal or otherwise—they have got to embrace and 'experience their otherness'[539] as it is only through amalgamation that they can realise their potential. The madwomen, at last, emerge from their attics.

In accordance with the female Gothic tradition that the aforementioned conflicts hark back to, Spark, similarly to Radcliffe and other female writers of yore, rarely makes use of the kind of supernatural which cannot be explained as otherwise; in fact, James Campbell in an introduction to Spark's novel *The Bachelors* points out that Spark, in the true Scottish Gothic fashion, seeks to create a world where the two meld together to the point of indistinction; in his words: 'it was her ambition to make "the supernatural" world seem part of the natural one.'[540] In fact, Frank Baldanza claims, she has dedicated her career to, in his words, 'experimenting with a series of solutions to the aesthetic problem of accommodating both the supernatural and the naturalistic in her works,'[541] it is unsurprising then that there is a touch of the uncanny pervading her oeuvre, with each new work carrying within it an echo of the previous.

There are but a few exceptions to the Sparkian formula, her third novel *Memento Mori* being one such example. In it, a group of pensioners receive a mysterious phone-call stating quite simply: 'Remember you must die'[542]—an ominous reminder of mortality to some, a gentle reassurance to others. Though the content of the message remains the same, their voice varies from one recipient to another, obscuring the culprit's true identity until a retired police inspector Mortimer

[539] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 52.

[540] See James Campbell, introduction to *The Bachelors*, by Muriel Spark (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), xii.

[541] See Baldanza, 'Muriel Spark and the Occult,' 195.

[542] See Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori* (London: Virago, 2010), 2.

finally surmises, after considering all available evidence, that 'the offender is Death himself'[543]—thus indicating to the reader that the voice be interpreted as a case of unexplained supernatural. In so doing, Spark subverts the expectation instilled by the detective story form that the novel takes place in a rational world and that a man of Mortimer's former occupation would be inclined to uphold the rational ways of thinking rather than seeking more occult explanations; instead, literary scholar Bożena Kucała in an article on 'The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction' (2011), attempts to explain away Mortimer's thought process, speculating that it is actually those very same years of experience that allow him to identify occurrences to which mere human rationale, may no longer apply, to him, Kucała states: 'the natural, if examined without the prejudice of narrow rationality, contains manifestations of the supernatural.'[544] Interestingly enough, this uncanny reading is reinforced by the text itself, as those unable to reconcile the caller's message seem to be punished by suffering a violent death, whereas those who do are afforded a gentler sort of exit. As for Spark herself, Frank Baldanza notes that she appears less interested in solving the mystery of the caller's identity than crafting a mosaic of the characters' responses to this sinister notification; indeed, the novel ends with the riddle yet unresolved, denying the reader the anticipated catharsis.[545]

The Scottish approach to the Gothic persists in *The Hothouse by the East River*, marking Spark's single most explicitly supernatural venture, in which the very nature of reality and death come into question. The novel predominantly takes place in a hellishly overheated apartment in post-war New York, wherein the expatriate socialites Paul and Elsa Hazlett are living out their characteristically Sparkian strained marriage fraught with conflict and suspected infidelity; however, all is not as straightforward as it might look from this brief summary, for the characters are, as it turns out, dead and have been since 1944, killed in a German air raid. The very existence of these characters as actors within the

[543] Spark, *Memento Mori,* 144.

[544] See Bożena Kucała, 'The Natural and the Supernatural in Muriel Spark's Fiction,' *Studia Litteraria* 6, no. 1 (March 2011): 68, https://www.academia.edu/63440987/The_Natural_and_the_Supernatural_in_Muriel_Spark_s_Fiction.

[545] See Baldanza, 'Muriel Spark and the Occult,' 192.

novel's plot is therefore uncanny—they are merely echoes of their living selves and unrealised potential they held in life, existing in a liminal space between unreality, death and dream—neither alive nor fully dead—that many critics, including Norman Page, have come to understand as a purgatory of a sort. And so even in death, Page further notes, Sparkian characters remain fiction-makers, having conjured the lives they could have had after the war.[546] But there is a sense of uneasiness about their lives other than the marital struggles that Spark subjects them to; the characters appear stuck in a loop, forced to re-enact the same behaviours, recycle the same tired conversation topics—an uncanny repetition that the characters themselves seem aware of as well: 'He wants to go and prepare their drinks, and has been thinking, "This has happened before,"'[547] the narrator remarks near the beginning of the novel, suggesting that this is merely the latest iteration of many. But the first allusion to the uncanniness of their existence actually comes earlier than that, when attention is drawn to Elsa's peculiar shadow, ever cast in the wrong direction—an uncanny leitmotif that keeps repeating throughout the novel:

> [Paul] sees her shadow cast on the curtain, not on the floor where it should be according to the position of the setting sun from the window bay behind her [. . .] He sees her shadow, as he has seen it many times before, cast more unnaturally.[548]

The narrative positions Paul as the architect of this corner of the netherworld, doubling as the focal character of the narrative insofar as all events within the novel are portrayed from his perspective, not least the scenes that happen to not include him at all; in fact, Księżopolska observes in another of her essays on Spark's work titled 'Spectral Reality: Muriel Spark's *The Hothouse by the East River*' (2018), those scenes, too, are 'imagined, constructed by Paul.'[549]

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[546] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 86–8.

[547] See Muriel Spark, *The Hothouse by the East River* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), 6.

[548] Spark, *The Hothouse by the East River*, 3.

[549] See Irena Księżopolska, 'Spectral Reality: Muriel Spark's The Hothouse by the East River,' *Zeszyty Naukowe Uczelni Vistula* 58, no. 1 (2018): 23, https://www.academia.edu/36427684/SPECTRAL_REALITY_Muriel_Sparks_The_Hothouse_by_the_East_River.

Księżopolska then offers an elaboration on how this egocentric stylistic choice relates to the character of his late wife Elsa in particular:

> The discourse allows access only to Elsa that exists within Pauls's consciousness, and that remains both unknow and unknowing, uncanny, familiar and alien ad the same time.[550]

As the Polish academic further writes, Elsa—who even in life was wont to make enigmatic proclamations such as 'I am really a bit uncanny. I have supernatural communications.'[551]—endures a second kind of othering at Paul's behest, a death of her individuality as mediated by his gaze. This resurrected Elsa is more so a doppelgänger of his late wife—a monster to Paul's Doctor Frankenstein, similarly rejected by her maker:

> 'She's not real, Annie,' says Paul. 'Didn't I tell you? Haven't I been telling you for years? I dreamt her up. I called her back from the grave. She's dead and all that goes with her. Look at her shadow!' [552]

But even as Paul attempts to reframe Elsa as a beastly woman, an Other, and lord her infidelity over her—even in death—in order to assuage his own guilt, she remains rational and serene in spite of her uncanny predicament, if perhaps a touch eccentric in her own right. It is Paul, on the contrary, who comes across as deranged.[553] In a way, this novel is a tale of a Byronic mind spiralling deeper into madness under the weight of possibly having doomed an innocent man to die in prison for sake of his wounded pride. So obsessed is he with the unresolved secret of Elsa's would-be lover, a German Helmut Kiel, whom he had suspected of being an S.S. informant during the war, that this fixation outlasts even death itself. His soul, post-mortem, has manifested his wife so that he might solve it at last.

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[550] See Księżopolska, 'Spectral Reality,' 23.

[551] Spark, *The Hothouse by the East River*, 6.

[552] Spark, *The Hothouse by the East River*, 104.

[553] See Księżopolska, 'Spectral Reality,' 22.

But the reader, same as Paul, never receives a concrete answer to the mystery poisoning his mind, for Spark is not interested in its resolution but rather the slice of afterlife melodrama which accompanies it. Ever content to merely instil her trademark sense of uneasiness without further elaboration, she refuses to explain the inner workings of this infernal simulacrum of New York City, which appears to host persons both dead and alive—who go on aging and decaying while the dead retain their youth—or even characters previously unknown to Paul, and others purely hypothetical, like the children he and Elsa never had. If there are hidden meanings to be found in this uncanny allegory, then Spark denies the reader the tools needed to understand the work in full.[554] Instead, the novel ends not with an over-explanation of the supernatural occurrences throughout—in the manner of the Gothic women writers of old—or the catharsis Paul had sought, but an acceptance of death long overdue.[555]

Not only is the novel a departure from Spark's formula for the aforementioned reasons, but it also plays a subversive—or uncanny, if you will—role within her oeuvre at large, insofar as the narrative seems to lack the usual omniscience of a Sparkian narrator. The plot unfolds chronologically, with only an occasional analepsis providing a clarifying look into the characters' past but never betraying the twist ahead of the reveal as she is otherwise prone to.

Perhaps the most prevalent motif in Spark's works is that of death in its many iterations. Indeed, according to the Freudian theories that helped define the genre, the proximity of death—whether experienced or merely observed—or a threat of textual annihilation, as is the case in Spark's metafictional works, presents an essential component of a Gothic plot and by far the most reliable trigger of the uncanny; both aspects present in Timothy C. Baker's following summary:

> Gothic is particularly focused on the relation between death, language, and identity: characters are equally shaped by the image of death and its textual representation.[556]

[554] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 129.

[555] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 87.

[556] See Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic*, 22.

As has been pointed out in the previous chapters of this thesis, to Spark's creative women these encounters with death are a necessary condition on the path to the realisation of their creative potential. Apostolou goes so far as to equate the two, stating: 'The desire for death is a constant presence in Spark's work, a presence which works as the metonymy of the original desire for the construction of narratives.'[557] Thanatos acts as the driving force of many a Sparkian narrative, stirring the plot into action. While in *The Comforters* and *Loitering with Intent*, Caroline and Fleur's self-preservation instinct, Eros, eventually prevails in the face of their annihilation—textual or otherwise—there are yet novels where this does not necessarily obtain, Eros is diminished or twisted in a macabre fashion. In a number of Spark's works, death itself is the goal—as an act of self-expression and preservation; to reuse the example from *The Driver's Seat*—in a world populated by predators, Lise seeks the one who would assist her with the lethal exit that she desires but her religious convictions deny her. More than that, she intends to make a statement of it—to be seen and remembered in death as she had gone invisible in life.

In *The Public Image*, a novel published just two years earlier, both approaches to death coincide. Annabel Christopher is an actress and as such it is her vocation to surrender her individuality in service of fictions others craft for her. The cult of celebrity is inherently uncanny, David Punter claims, as this nigh religious obsession first materialised around the persona of Lord Byron;[558] a Sparkian scholar Willy Maley in an analysis of *Not to Disturb* describes the phenomenon as 'a vicarious interest in the sex lives and death of the rich and famous, a morbid fixation upon celebrity and publicity.'[559] Moreover, as indicated, it signifies death of one's authenticity in the public, as Apostolou explains: 'the media kill the viewed[—]by imprisoning them in the immobility of a representation and the viewers,'[560] and so each time Annabel steps in front of the camera is like a little

[557] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 52.

[558] See Punter, 'The Uncanny,' 135.

[559] See Willy Maley, 'Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in Not to Disturb,' in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 175.

[560] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 57.

death. The image Annabel is made to adopt is that of an othered 'English Lady-Tiger'[561]—a Jezebel hidden behind a statuesque façade of a conventional angel, even though, in private, she is much closer to the latter in temperament, passive and prudish, resigned to the typically Sparkian indifferent, asexual marriage.

Her husband Frederick, a fellow actor and would-be screenwriter, lives in resentment of his wife's success, his own aspirations deferred as Annabel's publicist reduces him to a mere accessory to her carefully cultivated public image. Frederick considers his wife to be a subpar actress undeserving of her accolades, but if there is any validity to his criticisms of her acting skills, which seem to entail merely 'playing herself in a series of poses for the camera,' (*TPI* 8) they are lost in the Freudian subtext of Frederick's jealousy. He is a man emasculated, or castrated, if you will; in a subversive twist on the gendered assumption that a victim of the gaze should always be a woman, it transpires that it is in fact him who chafes at the imposition of this public persona, like many wives before who have been condemned to a life of subservience to their husbands' career.

On the contrary, one would be mistaken to dismiss Annabel as a hapless captive of the gaze, as the narrator explicates early on that she is at least complicit, if not an active participant, in the creation of her image: 'Annabel was entirely aware of the image-making process in every phase.' (*TPI* 29)The novel even chooses to frame her lacklustre acting skill as an asset, in fact, for the strict separation of self from her career tethers her to reality, allowing her to see her roles—and her public image—for the lies that they are; whereas Frederick's method approach to the craft necessitates that he become the characters he plays, which eventually renders him unable to distinguish the illusion conjured for the cameras from real life,[562] as stated by the narrator: 'Frederick hardly knew what was going on.' (*TPI* 27)

Frederick's disdain for his wife's perceived artificiality is a projection on his part, colouring his devolvement with a tinge of balladic hypocrisy as he falls prey to the same annihilation of the sense of self that he had accused Annabel of. At last

[561] Muriel Spark, *The Public Image* (London: Virago, 2014), 6. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *TPI*.

[562] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 112–3.

Frederick chooses to communicate his dissatisfaction with the role he had been assigned through suicide, and so assert power over his life's narrative in death that had been otherwise denied to him. He is determined to be remembered a victim he had always believed himself to be, thus exposing his motives as similar to those of his successor—Lise; Apostolou elaborates on this topic as follows:

> Until now, others spoke for Frederick, but now, with his death, he speaks for himself for the first time; [. . .] death is the only action that he can do for himself, where he can be the only leading actor, creating for himself the major script.[563]

In addition, he weaponizes his death to wrench control from his frigid wife by leaving an incriminating suicide note full of falsities, as well as organising an orgiastic party to take place in their apartment at the time of his death—all to turn the public against their beloved icon. Spark may have gone on record to say: 'I don't know anything about Freud'[564] yet Frederick's tactic appears decidedly Freudian, his final act devised so as to tip the scales of the Madonna-whore dichotomy firmly towards the latter half. Where before Annabel's 'English Lady-Tiger' persona has been carefully tailored to merely suggest 'a foundry of smouldering sex [concealed] beneath all that expressionless reserve' (*TPI* 31), she is now 'the high priestess, in whose [honour] orgies are given.' [565]

In Frederick's death, Annabel is at once confronted with the image of death physical and textual alike. Like many of the Sparkian women before her, Annabel, too, possesses a capacity for creating fictions that is made manifest in the face of the threat of annihilation. For the first time in her career, she is spurred to take charge of her image, expertly counteracting Frederick's allegations of hedonism by styling herself a Madonna with a child in her arms—the ultimate image of purity.[566] Frederick thus suffers the same fate many an uninvited manipulator in Spark's fiction have before his turn—his plan to manipulate the media from

[563] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 64–5.

[564] See Spark, interview, McQuillan, 218.

[565] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 66.

[566] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 113–4.

beyond the grave fails, having underestimated the guile of his victim. Not only does Annabel manage to retain the public favour, but so effective is her intervention that she denies Frederick even the dignity of his chosen death, and the message it bore, reframing his suicide as a mere accident—a slip of a foot whilst pursued by his many admirers: 'The women drove him crazy. They were all chasing him.' (*TPI* 117) And so it transpires—with a touch of typically Sparkian balladic irony—that 'although Frederick may have been seeking to enhance his image through his death, the paradoxical outcome is a further enhancement of Annabel's image.'[567]

But there are yet other Gothic-adjacent themes and tropes to be found within Spark's oeuvre. To begin with, Spark situates her novels in the traditional Gothic locations: first in war-torn London, the capital of Victorian Gothic, and sublime Edinburgh, briefly New York, and then eventually in Italy—the staging grounds of many a classic Gothic novel. Edinburgh's Old Town in particular, is described by Spark as 'the reeking network of slums' and 'a misty region of crime and desperation'[568] in her most successful novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, invoking the principles of the Burkean sublime, whilst admitting the multiplicity of the city laying in the eye of the beholder:

> [. . .] many times throughout her life Sandy knew with a shock, when speaking to people whose childhood had been in Edinburgh, that there were other people's Edinburghs quite different from hers, and with which she held only the names of districts and streets and monuments in common. (*TPMJB* 33)

Other sublime settings featured in her works include opulent mansions and chateaus of the decadent elite; the beginning of *Loitering with Intent* finds its protagonist, Fleur, sitting on a grave. Norman Page notes Spark's preference for impersonal, oppressively modern, or otherwise sublime environments as an extension of her brutally sparse prose, citing her 'rejection of the pathetic fallacy

[567] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 67.

[568] See Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 32. Henceforth cited parenthetically as *TPMJB*.

and insistence on the indifference of the external world [as] one aspect of an all-pervading coldness, objectivity [. . .] and even heartlessness in the narrative tone and method'[569] utilised throughout her oeuvre. Accordingly, much of *The Driver's Seat* takes place in crowded, public spaces that accentuate Lise's isolation—a bustling airport, a bleak corporate office building where she works, as well as her sterile, minimalistic flat which recalls in its efficient design a prison or a mental institution:

> The room is meticulously neat. It is a one-room flat in an apartment house. [. . .] The lines of the room are pure; [. . .] the furniture is all fixed, adaptable to various uses, and stackable. Stacked into a panel are six folding chairs, [. . .] The writing desk extends to a dining table, and when the desk is not in use it, too, disappears into the pinewood wall, its bracket-lamp hingeing outward and upward to form a wall-lamp. The bed is by day a narrow seat with overhanging bookcases; by night it swivels out to accommodate the sleeper. [. . .] And in the bathroom as well, nothing need be seen, nothing need be left lying about. (*TDS* 13–4)

The nursing home in *Memento Mori* and the predicament of its residents recall the trappings of the Gothic heroines confined to convents. The setting of a convent itself is modernised in *The Abbess of Crewe*—by installing a surveillance system on its grounds, while the ongoing sexual relations between the nuns and the monks from the neighbouring Jesuit convent parody the frequently abused Gothic trope that the convents are secretly places of concupiscence.[570] In *The Driver's Seat*, Spark reuses the Gothic plot of kidnapping a reluctant love interest, albeit with a twist that the man in question is not actually a prospective lover but Lise's killer, with Lise being both the victim and the victimiser; and *Loitering with Intent* features a play on the found manuscript trope when Fleur's novel *Warrender Chase* is stolen by her rival. *The Comforters* spin a web of ridiculous rumours about Mervyn Hogarth who is suspected of involvement with a satanic cult of some sort and changing his appearance into that of a dog; while another character

[569] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 69.

[570] See Milbank, 'Gothic Theology,' 362.

still makes demands for a classic female Gothic ending when interrogating Caroline on the subject of her novel:

> 'What is the novel to be about?'
> Caroline answered, 'Characters in a novel.'
> Edwin himself had said, 'Make it a straight old-fashioned story, no modern mystifications. End with the death of the villain and the marriage of the heroine.'
> Caroline laughed and said, 'Yes, it would end that way.' (*TC* 186)

Out of all of Spark's works, *Not to Disturb* is the one that most explicitly engages with the Gothic imagery. Many of the novel's uncanny affectations derive from its the metafictional aspects—the threadbare, dispassionate prose wherein Spark's author-insert is tasked with imposing some semblance of a plot upon the events taking place at Chateau Klopstock;[571] Lister, vested by Spark with divine omniscience allowing him to peer beyond the constraints of the present, foresees that a confrontation between the masters of the house and their shared lover can only end with all parties dead: 'They have placed themselves, unfortunately, within the realm of predestination.'[572] he declares with all the certainty of a Calvinist god. For the time until the doors of the library are opened again, the trio exists in a state of ambivalence, neither alive nor dead, like Schrödinger's cat.

Like a novelist, Lister spins a sensationalist narrative around the tragedy that he and the rest of the staff intend to record and sell to the press, like a precursor to the modern reality entertainment;[573] at the same time, Lister exercises the same absolute power over this improvised narrative and the actors involved that a novelist would, readily disposing of those that would deviate from his plan, aided by the author proper. For example, the utilisation of deus ex machina when a lightning bolt strikes down the two unwelcome arrivals who threaten the integrity of Lister's narrative:

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[571] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 119–20.

[572] Spark, *Not to Disturb*, 30.

[573] See Gutkin, 'Camp Metafiction,' 74.

> Meanwhile lightning, which strikes the clump of trees so that the two friends huddled there are killed instantly without pain, zig-zags across the lawns, illuminating the lily-pond and the sunken rose garden like a self-stricken flash-photographer, [. . .][574]

Willy Maley in 'Not to Deconstruct? Righting and Deference in *Not to Disturb*' (2002) describes the plot as 'a dark tale of class and revolution,'[575] in which the servants orchestrate the death of their masters in such a way that they become the inheritors of their estates. The usual Gothic hierarchy is upended as the servants take the centre stage, though their mores prove no less Gothic than those of their masters, thus rendering void any perceived political messaging, ever lying outside of Spark's interest; theirs, Maley says, is 'a revolution that merely repeats rather than uproots the worst features of the system that is to be overturned.'[576] This uncanny repetition notwithstanding, other Gothic motifs are interspersed throughout, yet oftentimes subverted all at once, as if Spark were relentlessly mocking the Gothic conventions—the Klopstocks pose as Swiss aristocracy and their conduct is appropriately decadent, but their names are decidedly not Swiss, bringing into question both their descent and status; their lakeside chateau appears a prototypical Gothic setting, overlooked by the jagged silhouettes of the Alps, but the narration soon reveals that the building is no true historical site, built only a little over a decade ago, its furnishings pre-owned or perhaps stolen.[577]

The sublime atmosphere is accentuated by the window shutters clattering as the autumn storm rages outside, and upstairs screams a madman—referred to derogatively as 'him in the attic'[578]—who just so happens to be the Klopstocks' sole heir. Even in this Spark manages to subvert the conventions—or perhaps not—as the violent, sex-crazed man clearly possessed of no intellectual faculties with which to manage the property that he stands to inherit, not to mention

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[574] Spark, *Not to Disturb*, 81.

[575] See Maley, 'Righting and Deference,' 171.

[576] See Maley, 'Righting and Deference,' 171.

[577] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 82–3.

[578] Spark, *Not to Disturb*, 14.

consent to a grotesque wedding ceremony hastily orchestrated by Lister upon learning of this fact:

> Lister places the pen in the giggler's hand and, raising the paper and the hard book to a convenient level, moves the limp and helplessly amused hand over the space provided until the name is traced, Gustav A. Klopstock.[579]

Unlike his feminine counterparts, Spark's madman is a wholly patriarchal creature—ridiculously so, in fact; degenerate and genuinely mad as he is, he is nevertheless able to lay claim to his inheritance, not bereft of his masculine rights even in spite of the severity of his condition. Spark also incorporates the incestual undertones typical of the Gothic—a pregnant housemaid Heloise conspicuously shares her surname with the lunatic she is being wedded to, and Lister keeps making romantic advances at his young aunt Eleanor, much to her discomfort. Even the very name of the novel is uncanny, Dan Gunn points out, recognising it as a play on the notorious 'Do Not Disturb' sign.[580] But to Ruth Whittaker, the most disturbing aspect of it seems to be the author's tacit approval—or rather the lack of explicit condemnation and due punishment—of Lister and his determinist plot, a rare case of a manipulator elevating his schemes to the divine level allowed to flourish.[581]

The Bachelors follows an embittered graphologist Ronald Bridges who is afflicted with equal parts pessimism and epilepsy:

> 'Oh, Ronald, you always see the worst side of everything, there's a diabolical side to your nature.'
> 'What do you mean, diabolical?'
> 'Well, possessed by a devil, that's the reason for your epilepsy.'[582]

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[579] Spark, *Not to Disturb*, 103.

[580] See Gunn, introduction to *Not to Disturb*, xvi.

[581] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 121.

[582] Muriel Spark, *The Bachelors* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2018), 116.

Ronald trudges through life with the weight of the stigma that his affliction was once believed to be a sign of demonic possession—a lingering sort of superstition that has kept him from being ordained a priest: 'A vocation to the priesthood is the will of God. Nothing can change God's will. You are an epileptic. No epileptic can be a priest.'[583] A touch of the typically Sparkian cruel irony comes with the reveal that while Roland is still ostracised for his condition and deemed unworthy of pursuing his religious vocation, others are treated with a quasi-religious reverence for it. Patrick Seton, a fraudulent psychic and a would-be murderer, exploits a drug designed to treat epilepsy—but which can nevertheless induce the same symptoms in the correct dose—to fake his mediumistic trances more convincingly as he preys on the credulity of a secret spiritualist society comprised of an array of delightfully grotesque, decadent characters. Not without reason does Patrick's name resemble that of the Prince of Lies.[584] He deceives, manipulates and blackmails those around him, secretly resenting them for falling for his schemes, and contemplates murder of his pregnant girlfriend Alice, a diabetic, by cutting her off from her insulin supply for refusing to get an abortion. But most of all, Patrick's exploitation of the superstitions about the supernatural furthers an interesting pattern within Spark's fiction—a conviction that evil is a sign of human fallibility, residing not in the realm of god, but the hearts of men.

Patrick, along with the slew of malicious manipulators that came both before and after—apart from an occasional zealot such as Mrs Hogg—well demonstrates that evil in Spark's fiction comes predominantly in a secular form, removed from religion and the realm of the supernatural alike.[585] The supernatural, if present at all, is not portrayed as a manifestation of evil either, it is simply a facet of her fictions. Curiously, Spark's portrayal of evil seems to correspond with that of the female authors of the Gothic heyday, whose textual worlds Andrew Smith describes as 'presided over by God, and any apparently "evil" acts are later revealed to be the consequence of a misguided view of the world.'[586] Schemers

[583] Spark, *The Bachelors*, 6.

[584] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 35.

[585] See Baldanza, 'Muriel Spark and the Occult,' 193.

[586] Smith, *Gothic Literature*, 28

like Radcliffe's Schedoni are not predisposed to villainy by god's decree—as there is no place nor purpose for evil within the divine plan—but succumb to it through the choices made out of greed and arrogance. This approach is also favoured by the Scottish writers, who frequently posit that humanity is its own devil, in fact; while others, like Robert Burns, choose to view Satan through a Miltonian lens—as a rebel figurehead defying the autocracy of the divine.[587]

Spark, by her own admission, has no interest in psychoanalysing the perpetrators nor moralising on account of her religion, but at the same time possesses a strange fascination with evil that might seem antithetical to her Catholicism.[588] Simply put, unlike many other Catholic writers who cling to their morals on and off page, Spark is content to observe her characters wreak havoc for the entertainment purposes alone, without the interference of her personal beliefs—a fact of which has been aptly summarised by a famous feminist critic Hélène Cixous in an essay titled 'Grimacing Catholicism: Muriel Spark's Macabre Farce' (2002), wherein she states that 'Spark underscores the irreparable duplicity of the universe, where ordinary things coexist with supernatural ones in hideous harmony.'[589]

What Cixous's statement describes is a world with no dividing lines between the natural and the supernatural—a concept that seems to closely resemble the Scottish ambivalence as delineated in the writings of G. Gregory Smith that were previously discussed in this thesis. Likewise, Spark's recurrent use of unsavoury characters with a supernatural aura to them could be attributed to the influence of Hogg and Stevenson—most obviously apparent, of course, in Mrs Hogg from Spark's very first novel who shares a name with the former. But there are yet other compelling ambivalent figures within her oeuvre that bear closer examination, to name but a few: Jean Brodie, Dougal Douglas, Margaret Murchie and her mad uncle Magnus, all of them Scots themselves, characters who shall be the focus of the following subchapter.

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[587] See Carruthers, 'The Devil in Scotland.'

[588] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 90.

[589] See Hélène Cixous, 'Grimacing Catholicism: Muriel Spark's Macabre Farce,' in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 205.

5.2.1 *Duality and Ambivalence*

The Scottish identity, as has been previously discussed in this thesis, is inherently ambivalent, bound up in sets of contrasts and contradictions that form the basis of the Caledonian antisyzygy as posited by G. Gregory Smith—an affliction arisen from the traumatic cultural erasure and othering suffered at the hands of the English, which have since complicated any and all attempts at reconstructing the Scottish national character. This task was made no less daunting for the writers; indeed, throughout history the Scots have used their literature to interrogate the nebulous idea of what constitutes Scottishness, from the poetry of Robert Burns to Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981) or Irvine Welsh's controversial *Trainspotting* (1993), this question had stood at the centre of Scottish fiction. Monica Germanà in a chapter of her book on *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing* (2010) examines this burning question from the perspective of Muriel Spark's writing—concretely those of her novels set in Scotland or otherwise inhabited by Scottish characters:

> When Spark returns to Scotland in her novels, it is with the intention of questioning the slippage between Scottish culture and the perception of Scottishness from the outsider's point of view: ultimately, Spark seems to suggest, Scotland is unknowable.[590]

It would then appear that the introspective Scottish literary exploits merely served to prove correct what Smith had already postulated in 1919—that the Scots are united through their discord, that there is no monolithic Scottish identity—if there indeed ever was—and that the binaries delineated a century ago in which the idea of Scottishness oscillates, still obtain. In other words, the Scottish identity is no more than a simulacrum—an approximation without a fixed antecedent, at once familiar yet far too abstruse and therefore uncanny.

This duality of course seeped into Scottish writing as well, most famous examples, as already mentioned, being James Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and Robert

[590] See Monica Germanà, 'Witches, Demon Lovers and Female Monsters,' in *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction since 1978* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 78, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r22fm.7.

Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* wherein the ambivalence manifests itself in the form of a double. To Freud, a double is a dissociated fragment of self, or an imitation of it, projected outward where the afflicted believes it can no longer threaten their exalted sense of selfhood, but—by way of irony— attains the power to annihilate the self altogether, like Dr Jekyll is eventually lost to his dark alter Mr Hyde, or how Robert Wrighim is driven to suicide by his. A double is then a herald of death—for oneself or others who encounter it;[591] or even a simulacrum of a sort—not quite human, but neither is it a complete non-entity, a mimicry of personhood. At the time of their release, these two novels surely contributed a great deal toward the mental health debate, with *Jekyll and Hyde* reading as an early account of dissociative identity disorder and *Justified Sinner*'s Wrighim showing symptoms resembling those of schizophrenia; Spark, however, is wholly disinterested in chiming in on this topic, preferring 'to explore theological, metaphysical or mythic'[592] dimensions of the novel form, even as the protagonists of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and *Symposium* deliberately invoke the Scottish duality, not least because the characters happen to be Scots themselves. Though they do not experience a similarly externalised personality split, channelled into a double as exhibited by Wrighim or Jekyll, they are as rife with contradictions and hypocrisies as any Scot and, indeed, possessed of a supernatural aura in some cases. It is then ironic that while Spark spent a large portion of her life trying to dissociate from her Scottish heritage, her fiction appears indubitably marked by it, bearing at its core the principles of the Scottish Gothic harking back to the days of Hogg, Stevenson and Scott, who have since become 'a ghostly presence at the heart of a Scottish literary tradition.'[593]

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie—the novel which ensured Spark's international notoriety—introduces an eponymous protagonist who is herself a simulacrum, based on one Miss Christina Kay, Spark's childhood teacher whom she describes as a 'character in search of an author,'[594] and while many of Miss Kay's qualities

[591] Germanà, 'Bodily Duplications and Schizoid Selves,' 99.

[592] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 15.

[593] Baker, *Contemporary Scottish Gothic*, 23.

[594] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 56.

and interests have been appropriated for the character of Jean Brodie—including her affinity for fascism—Spark also stresses that they are not one and the same. Miss Brodie, Spark claims, is merely a fulfilment of Miss Kay's potential.[595] In this, the relationship between Spark, Miss Kay and the character based on her persona, parallels that between Fleur Talbot, Sir Quentin Oliver and Warrender Chase from the previously analysed Spark's novel *Loitering with Intent*.

Brodie's own name is a reference to another Edinburgh native—Deacon William Brodie, a city official by day and a burglar by night, the man whose secret penchant for the thrill of robbery inspired Stevenson's famous tale of duality in the first place, and whom Miss Brodie proudly claims as an ancestor:

> I am a descendant, do not forget, of Willie Brodie, a man of substance, a cabinet maker and designer of gibbets, a member of the Town Council of Edinburgh and a keeper of two mistresses [. . .] Blood tells. [. . .] He died cheerfully on a gibbet of his own devising in seventeen-eighty-eight. However all this may be, it is the stuff I am made of [. . .] (*TPMJB* 88)

What is more, Phillip E. Ray asserts in an essay called 'Jean Brodie and Edinburgh: Personality and Place in [Muriel] Spark's The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie' (1978), it is thanks to Stevenson's fixation with Deacon Brodie that this ambivalent figure became remembered as an Edinburgh staple instead of fading into obscurity.[596] With a name as infamous as that of Brodie, one cannot help but draw parallels between Jean Brodie and her ancestor. Like him she is a figure of ambivalence, in many ways a double made flesh; like him she splits her affections between multiple suitors. Miss Brodie's transgressive femininity skirts along the Madonna-whore divide—as a childless spinster seemingly by choice rather than necessity, she defies the patriarchal ideals of female sexuality at which core lies motherhood.[597] She is described by Spark as a darkly alluring Jezebel with a

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[595] See Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 56–7.

[596] See Philip E. Ray, 'Jean Brodie and Edinburgh: Personality and Place in Murial Spark's The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,' *Studies in Scottish Literature* 13, no. 1 (1978): 28, http://scholarcommons. sc.edu/ssl/vol13/iss1/5.

[597] See Germanà, 'Witches, Demon Lovers and Female Monsters,' 65.

'Roman face' (*TPMJB* 101), set apart from the stereotypically pale Scottish woman, to whom both her male colleagues—the singing master Gordon Lowther and the disabled art teacher Teddy Lloyd—find themselves gravitating toward:

> Both were already a little in love with Miss Brodie, for they found in her the only sex-bestirred object in their daily environment, and although they did not realize it, both were already beginning to act as rivals for her attention. (*TPMJB* 48)

At the same time, Miss Brodie appears to be well-aware of her predicament as a woman existing within the society's gaze, always tempering her non-conformity in public so as not to invite outrage or tarnish her reputation irreparably. And so, despite enjoying the spoils of her sexual liberation, she is loath to begin an affair with a married Teddy Lloyd, choosing to instead share a bed with the bachelor Mr Lowther. Though she styles herself a progressivist, what she does is merely swap one rusted cage for another, painted one. Therein lies Miss Brodie's ambivalence; Apostolou's general observation about Spark's characters applies to Jean Brodie as well, in that she, too, is 'torn between a desire for freedom and the inevitability of imprisonment, seduced by disorder [. . .] but unable to withdraw altogether from structure,'[598] perhaps failing to notice her hypocrisy in enforcing the models of behaviour she herself claims to rebel against—the more she fights, the more she reveals herself to be as much a part of Edinburgh as it is a part of her.[599] Ray further elaborates on the relationship between the character and location in 'Jean Brodie and Edinburgh,' observing that the Scottish religious struggle lives within the character:

> Jean Brodie herself functions as a personification of certain attitudes common to the citizens of Edinburgh, attitudes that are basically religious or theological in nature. [. . .] Jean Brodie is the literal embodiment of the city's Calvinist spirit.[600]

[598] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 6.

[599] See Ray, 'Jean Brodie and Edinburgh,' 30.

[600] See Ray, 'Jean Brodie and Edinburgh,' 25.

Sandy Stranger, of the infamous Brodie set as Miss Brodie's pupils come to be known to the rest of the school, makes the following comparison between the two:

> [. . .] Miss Brodie looked beautiful and fragile, just as dark heavy Edinburgh itself could suddenly be changed into a floating city when the light was a special pearly white and fell upon one of the gracefully fashioned streets. (*TPMJB* 111)

In his essay 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' Gerard Carruthers ponders the trend to try and excise the Calvinist trauma pervading Scottish mentality.[601] Even as Jean Brodie enacts her private rebellion against the Edinburgh social mores, it would appear that instead of escaping it, she merely supplants one oppressive norm with another—not altogether different from Calvinism itself—by espousing the secular doctrine of fascism. Judy Suh draws parallels between fascism and Calvinism in her article on the subject, titled 'The Familiar Attractions of Fascism in Muriel Spark's "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie"' (2007), in which she explicates that, in actuality, fascism engenders the same patriarchal values that Brodie claims to reject, by appealing to women's sacrificial and masochistic tendencies.[602] Concretely, even as her, for the most part, contented spinsterhood represents to her students a demonstration of an alternative lifestyle outside the shackles of marriage,[603] she nevertheless endorses the passive models of femininity, idolising, among others, the Lady of Shalott, Cleopatra and Helen of Troy—women whose agency has been usurped by patriarchy, and who have spent their lives performing their femininity in service of male gaze; as Suh explains:

> [. . .] the historical and fictional models of women she repeatedly mentions are notable not for their autonomy but for their dramatic submission to a higher, seemingly pre-inscribed authority of fate.[604]

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[601] See Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 492.

[602] See Judy Suh, 'The Familiar Attractions of Fascism in Muriel Spark's "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie",' *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 95–9, http://www.jstor.org/stable/46193295.

[603] See Suh, 'The Attractions of Fascism,' 90.

[604] See Suh, 'The Attractions of Fascism,' 96.

Miss Brodie's submission to the prescribed gender norm becomes palpable in her relationship with Mr Lowther, through which she enacts her obsession with the matters of kitchen, preparing such bountiful feasts that the man she dotes upon so himself seems perplexed by it, and so are her students: 'they waited for Miss Brodie to dress the great ham like the heroine she was,' (*TPMJB* 94) even the narrator cannot help but mock her newfound taste for domesticity.

Returning to the notion of fascism as a secular religion, Suh identifies another similarity with Calvinism—the desperation for control over the human will, which closely mirrors the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, or as Suh describes it: an 'attempt to usurp human unpredictability in the quest to narrate beginnings and ends'.[605] Indeed, Suh's wording curiously echoes that of Sandy Stranger when pondering Miss Brodie's character: 'She thinks she is Providence, [. . .] she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end.' (*TPMJB* 120) Nowhere is her Calvinist attitude more apparent than in her relationship to her pupils—her 'crème de la crème' (*TPMJB* 8) as she calls them—in which she assumes the absolute authority of god and, Christ-like, grooms them to be her twelve disciples, one of whom she designates her future betrayer.[606] For each of her elect she invents a future that they are expected to conform to even should it lead to their doom. It is through the reveal of the tragic consequences of Miss Brodie's manipulation that the novel, in Gerard Carruthers's words, betrays its 'cruel, Gothic taste for suffering.'[607] For the notorious problem girl Joyce Emily, Miss Brodie's guidance proves fatal when the teacher convinces her to join the Spanish Civil War on the side of Franco; likewise, her ceaseless bullying of Mary Macgregor, a girl with an unspecified learning disability and therefore the most vulnerable link of the set, seems to have consigned poor Mary to a lifetime of victimhood, ending with her panicked death in a hotel fire. Somehow even this Miss Brodie reframes as an act of divine interference on her behalf rather than mere chance, speculating that to have earned this grievous fate Mary must have been the Judas of her set.

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[605] See Suh, 'The Attractions of Fascism,' 100–1.

[606] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 39–42.

[607] See Carruthers, 'Muriel Spark's Gothic Fiction,' 172.

As for her own sins, she is self-assured of her sanctity: 'She was not in any doubt,' the narrator remarks, 'that God was on her side whatever her course,' (*TPMJB* 85) thus partaking of the elect delusions akin to Hogg's Robert Wrighim, while simultaneously being something of a Gil-martin herself, abusing her authority as an educator to seduce her pupils into her influence under guise of sharing in her absolution. In so doing, Miss Brodie proves no less a tyrant than the conservative angel of a headmistress Miss Mackay, ultimately engendering not free thinking and self-determination, but a blind adherence to the order of her own making, as noted by one of her set:

> It occurred to Sandy [. . .] that the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need and in another way, marching along. (*TPMJB* 31)

Although, as customary in Spark's novels, Jean Brodie's brand of villainy is of a secular nature—a product of her divine aspirations—and might even appear mundane at first glance, Germanà recognises a more noxious, supernatural, or even 'demonic'[608] underlying aspect of the character. Norman Page goes further still in his comparison, writing that 'In her bid to secure for ever a girl's mind and soul, Miss Brodie recalls [. . .] the Satanic figure in James Hogg's novel.'[609] Indeed, her demonic qualities come to light towards the end of the novel when it is revealed that her would-be lover Teddy Lloyd cannot help but paint the girls of the Brodie set as otherwise than the likeness of Miss Brodie, as if by possession:

> Teddy Lloyd's passion for Jean Brodie was greatly in evidence in all the portraits he did of the various members of the Brodie set. He did them in a group during one summer term, wearing their panama hats each in a different way, each hat adorning, in a magical transfiguration, a different Jean Brodie under the forms of Rose, Sandy, Jenny, Mary, Monica and Eunice. (*TPMJB* 111)

[608] See Germanà, 'Witches, Demon Lovers and Female Monsters,' 78.

[609] See Page, *Muriel Spark*, 40.

At her core, Jean Brodie is no more than a narcissist driven by the self-preservation half of the Freudian Eros-Thanatos dichotomy, resolved to live through her girls like a controlling parent would, with each destiny foisted upon them intended as wish fulfilment through substitution, ever nudging the girls in their predestined directions so that she may claim their accomplishments as her own by proxy and thus feed her morbid sense of grandiosity. 'Give me a girl at an impressionable age and she is mine for life.' (*TPMJB* 9) Miss Brodie proclaims; in Teddy Lloyd's eyes, at least, this rings true as Jean Brodie visage comes to usurp each girl's individuality, even as life steers them further and further away from Miss Brodie's influence the paintings nevertheless codify them as extensions of her ego. Her narcissism has been aptly summarised by Frank Baldanza: '[Miss Brodie] confines her lessons exclusively to the cult of her own personality.'[610] Not even those long since deceased are safe from her possessive grasp, however, as Miss Brodie's dead sweetheart Hugh Carruthers is metaphorically dragged out of his grave to posthumously take on qualities of the men currently courting her; at once he is transfigured in Jean Brodie's memory from a mere soldier into a master of the arts, a singer and a painter (*TPMJB* 72). 'Like Frankenstein's monster, he is made from the body parts of others, living rather than dead,'[611] notes the critic Gerard Carruthers, while calling into question whether Hugh had ever truly existed as anything other than Miss Brodie's own invention.

Like her ancestor, Miss Brodie, too, finally meets her end 'on a gibbet of [her] own devising' (*TPMJB* 88), having groomed in Sandy her bitterest opponent. But as irony would have it, it is also Sandy who has been affected the most by her machinations: 'it is Sandy who manifests the mark of demonic enslavement,'[612] Carruthers confirms. While the other girls go on to live their lives untethered to her prophecies, Sandy dedicates hers to the opposition of Miss Brodie—first by carrying out the plot to plant one of the Brodie set girls into Teddy Lloyd's bed and becoming his lover although that role had been prescribed to another, then again by betraying Miss Brodie's political interests to Miss Mackay leading to her

[610] See Baldanza, 'Muriel Spark and the Occult,' 201.

[611] See Carruthers, 'Muriel Spark's Gothic Fiction,' 174.

[612] See Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 500.

dismissal, by her conversion to Catholicism only because Miss Brodie had shunned it so, and, finally, by authoring a psychological study based heavily on her experiences with the teacher. In her righteous crusade against Miss Brodie, Sandy becomes the sole remaining bastion of her influence, unable to excise the memory of the woman even long after her death, for she has shaped her identity around resistance. And so the novel closes, in a Gothic fashion, on a scene of Sandy—now Sister Helena of the Transfiguration—in her cell as she 'clutches the bars of the grille' (*TPMJB* 120), trapped in a prison of her own making, with Miss Jean Brodie's name on her lips, still possessed by her spirit.

The presence of the supernatural is made more palpable in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and *Symposium*, which cast as their protagonists uncanny figures of the Celtic breed, taking inspiration from the Scottish Border ballads. Dougal Douglas and Margaret Murchie share more than just an alliterative name, there is a certain otherworldliness to them that people cannot help but be attracted to, yet at the same time unsettled by. 'The wild attire, the look *not of this earth*, are essential traits of supernatural agents,'[613] wrote Ann Radcliffe in her essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry,' and indeed, her words can still be said to apply almost two hundred years later, as Spark exploits the visual language of folklore and the Gothic alike to suggest Margaret and Dougal's otherness in perhaps the simplest way possible—by bestowing upon both a pallid complexion and stark, red hair oft associated with witchcraft. While the Edinburgh-based Jean Brodie was visually othered from her peers through her atypically Mediterranean visage, the Celtic-looking Margaret and Dougal are similarly set apart in their respective London social circles, their appearance betraying them as the intrusive Other. Margaret in particular is pronounced 'a Scot of gothic splendour, attractive, striking, odd and discomfiting, a Scot of the Scott kind[,]'[614] in Alan Freeman's essay titled 'A Bit of the Other: *Symposium*, Futility and Scotland' (2002), featured in McQuillan's publication. Garbed in her medieval-style green dress with flowing trumpet

[613] See Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural of Poetry,' 147. Emphasis in the original.

[614] See Alan Freeman, 'A Bit of the Other: Symposium, Futility and Scotland,' in *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 134.

sleeves and surrounded by autumn foliage (*S* 22), Margaret is a vision of pre-Raphaelite beauty as if emergent from the paintings herself, as Spark writes:

> Margaret would have been a Titian-haired-beauty had it not been for her protruding teeth. She had a melodious voice which made the sentiments she expressed all the more mellifluous. (*S* 20)

Sweet-natured and charitable, she subscribes to a Spark-invented philosophy of 'Les Autres,' purportedly focused on prioritising of the needs of others over those of the self (*S* 23–4). Even so Margaret's goodness is perceived as unnatural, with her mother-in-law, a media magnate Hilda Damien, questioning her honesty: 'That goody-goody type of girl, how could she be real?' (*S* 39) Her eerie, witch-like appearance both entices and lends itself to prejudice, triggering a similar 'sensation of oddness' (*S* 34) reserved for a Gothic double. 'A female Jekyll and Hyde,' (*S* 144) she is called; Freeman further writes: 'the hosts and their guests construe Margaret according to her Scottishness, in all its traditional alterity'[615]—she is consigned to be perceived as a nefarious Other because nobody believes that she could be good. Naturally, this suspicion extends to her family also, even as Hilda Damien's expectations of their otherness remains unfulfilled: 'Hilda said, [. . .] that they weren't so odd. In fact they were too much all right.' (*S* 65)

Of course, no character born of the devious mind of Muriel Spark is quite an innocent. In fact, Hilda's suspicions that Margaret had orchestrated the meeting with her son are not unfounded; indeed, Margaret and William's first meeting, Germanà recognises, is a farcical recreation of Eve offering Adam the forbidden fruit, taking place—in a typical show of Sparkian humour—in an aisle of a supermarket chain.[616] But to suggest that she has bewitched William would be to ascribe her agency she does not possess. Margaret does attempt to perform her wicked femininity—'to seduce, to horrify and to destroy'[617] as Anne Williams enumerates the tenets of the female Other—in order to secure for herself an eligible millionaire to be later widowed by, but as her first target proves wholly

[615] See Freeman, 'Symposium, Futility and Scotland,' 134.

[616] See Germanà, 'Witches, Demon Lovers and Female Monsters,' 81.

[617] See Williams, 'Wicked Women,' 95.

immune to her charms, it is more plausible that William's infatuation might just be a product of chance rather than a testament to some such supernatural ability, even though she possesses a pair of vampiric teeth to go with the allegations.

Dougal's appeal is no less unconventional, attracting prejudice and curiosity in equal measure—hump-backed and with two horn-like protruding cysts hidden amidst the crown of his red curls, yet, despite his alterity, possessed of a strange, virile magnetism, and stranger still shapeshifting abilities:

> Dougal [. . .] leaned forward and put all his energy into his own appearance; he dwelt with a dark glow on Mr Druce, he raised his right shoulder, which was already highly crooked by nature, and leaned on his elbow with a becoming twist of the body. (*TBPR* 15)
>
> Dougal changed his shape and became a professor. He leaned one elbow over the back of his chair and reflected kindly upon Mr Druce. (*TBPR* 16)

This curious ability—combined with the 'Scottish grotesqueness'[618] of his appearance—engender within the residents of Peckham a suspicion that Dougal could be 'a diabolical agent, if not in fact the Devil' (*TBPR* 81) himself. More specifically, Dougal's ambivalent characterisation evokes an iconic Scottish character possessed of a similar ability to transform—Gil-martin from James Hogg's famous novel—as the following quote demonstrates:

> 'My countenance changes with my studies and sensations,' said he. 'It is a natural peculiarity in me, over which I have not full control. If I contemplate a man's features seriously, mine own gradually assume the very same appearance and character.[619]

Unlike Margaret who only embraces her otherness in an attempt to reclaim her identity after it has been so perverted in the eyes of others, Dougal—who claims to have come to Peckham to conduct a psychological study—reinforces the

[618] Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 494.

[619] See Hogg, *Justified Sinner*, 101–2.

rumours of his supernatural identity through various quirks derived from folklore, such as his hesitance to cross running water and attending a bar of a conspicuous name 'Morning Star' (*TBPR* 24), likewise by admitting to his 'fey' lineage (*TBPR* 67) and creating his own double of sorts—by a simple reversal of his first and last names so that he may lead a double life working for rival companies,[620] or the outright verbal assertion: 'I'm only supposed to be one of the wicked spirits that wander through the world for the ruin of souls.' (*TBPR* 77) But also, through performing his otherness visually, as shown in the following quote:

> Dougal posed like an angel on a grave which had only an insignificant headstone. He posed like an angel-devil, with his hump shoulder and gleaming smile, and his fingers of each hand widespread against the sky. (*TBPR* 30)

In addition, both Dougal and Margaret appear to possess an occult gift to sow scandal, discord and death in the static, conservative London communities they come to infiltrate, whether they personally will it or not. *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* opens sometime after Dougal had been chased out of the neighbourhood like a witch during a pogrom, with the scornful remark: 'It wouldn't have happened if Dougal Douglas hadn't come here,' (*TBPR* 7) interspersed throughout the first chapter; only gradually revealing the extent of Dougal's wicked influence. Although a Scottish author William Boyd contests the existence of Dougal's supernatural abilities in his introduction to *Ballad*,[621] I do not share his sentiment that a supernatural interpretation of Dougal's character contradicts in any way Spark's theme of ordinary evil lurking right beneath the prim facades of the residents of Peckham. In fact, the speculative, balladic framing of the novel alludes to the possibility that the boundaries between the imaginary and the real have become effaced, and that there exists ambivalence within this textual world, which allows for a devilish fellow of Dougal's ilk to stalk the earth.

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[620] See Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 494.

[621] See William Boyd, introduction to *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, by Muriel Spark (London: Penguin Books, 1999), ix.

To Ruth Whittaker, Peckham represents a 'spiritual wasteland'[622] absent of the presence of god, wherein the sole reminder of divinity is the Bible-quoting homeless soothsayer who spits on Dougal as he passes, as if aware of his true nature (*TBPR* 132); while Carruthers describes it as 'a location where the imagination is in danger of collapse.'[623] Dougal's arrival in Peckham thus serves to restore a mystical force to the industrialised, secular community where ignobility and materialism have all but supplanted morality, and despoil them of their mundane sense of order like an ancestral Highland spirit come with vengeance. Though Apostolou asserts that Dougal 'personifies the evil force that sings the song of the Sirens,'[624] luring the residents of Peckham into temptation and their subsequent doom; in truth he is no eviller than a megaphone, merely amplifying the moral bankruptcy already present within, as Carruthers explains in 'Fully to Savour Her Position':

> The devil cannot simply create evil out of nothing [. . .] Rather, he must be allowed in through the keyhole of freely chosen human badness, but can then exacerbate the situation of moral turpitude to which he has gained admittance.[625]

Much like Gil-martin, Carruthers elaborates further, Dougal derives his power from Scottish folklore, and as such, may only latch onto those vices and depravities that have existed prior to his intrusion, not beget altogether new ones; and much like Hogg's Robert Wrighim, the residents of Peckham each have an air of elect hypocrisy about them,[626] from the petty absenteeism at Meadows, Meade & Grindley, Dixie's materialism manifesting as compulsively fanatical saving of money, which alienates her fiancé Humphrey Place, who then abandons her at the altar; or the control freak Mr Druce whose behaviour escalates under Dougal's influence, resulting in a grotesque murder of his secretary with whom he had been

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[622] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 59.

[623] See Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 495.

[624] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 3.

[625] See Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 495.

[626] See Carruthers, 'Muriel Spark's Gothic Fiction,' 171.

maintaining a tepid extramarital affair. In other words, the evil found in Peckham is Peckham's own. Dougal is a mere catalyst who, much like Spark herself, amplifies the characters' existing dark potential, or as he describes his gift: 'The ability to drive devils out of people.' (*TBPR* 102) This would make him, Carruthers posits, 'as much an agent of God as of the Devil.'[627]

The 'powers of exorcism' (*TBPR* 102) that Dougal possesses are uncanny, for they allow him to bring into light that which was intended to stay hidden, recalling one of the strategies enumerated in Sigmund Freud's famous essay on the subject.[628] Despite its residents' prejudiced assumptions, Dougal's purpose in Peckham is not to propagate evil but to reveal its heretofore insidious presence, to expose their 'guilty wee consciences' (*TBPR* 127) to themselves and each other, so that they may recognise the extent of their moral corruption, forcing them, as Apostolou would say, to 'experience their otherness.'[629] Thus, the duality of Dougal's gifts presents, to once again quote Alison Milbank, 'an opening to the possibility of self-knowledge, and a way forward'[630]—meaning that their potential is at once destructive and destabilising, but conciliatory as well. However, in the aftermath of Dougal's departure no drastic changes seem to occur in Peckham: 'No one is able to use Dougal's disruption advantageously,' Whittaker notes.[631] The wedding between Dixie and Humphrey Place does happen after all, in spite of Dougal's interference and the ensuing hysterics; even the narrator comments on the fact, with palpable cynicism:

> But in any case, within a few weeks, everyone forgot the details. The affair is a legend referred to from time to time in the pubs when the conversation takes a matrimonial turn. (*TBPR* 14)

The novel ends on a speculative note once again, with the narrator proposing a humorous scenario that shortly after leaving Peckham, Dougal embarked on a

[627] See Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 496.

[628] See Freud, 'The Uncanny,' 394.

[629] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 52.

[630] See Milbank, 'Calvinist and Covenanter Gothic,' 101.

[631] See Whittaker, *Faith and Fiction*, 59.

mission to protect the spiritualism of the tribal Africa from the onslaught of the doubting modern secularism; or later still, that he joined a Catholic monastery from which he was expelled soon thereafter, for his exorcist powers began to affect his fellow monks in extravagant ways. (*TBPR* 142)

In the end, it is irrelevant whether Dougal's abilities originate from the devil or god, or if indeed they are even truly supernatural and not the work of clever psychological manipulation on his part, for whatever power is afforded him has been conferred on him by the author. Indeed, Spark herself never attempts to disprove either position within her text, for she thrives on ambiguity. Coincidentally, the one indisputably supernatural power of Dougal's is that of fiction-making. Similarly to Lister from *Not to Disturb*, Dougal appears to have been vested with foresight of the omniscient narrator, proclaiming 'I've got second sight.' (*TBPR* 30), and alluding to Merle Coverdale's eventual death ahead of time, by asking her which of the two cemeteries she would prefer; his allegiance to the Father of Lies is made even more apparent when his fictitious alterations made to the autobiography of a retired actress Maria Cheeseman seemingly begin to override her own memories:

> 'And Doug dear [. . .] how did you know I started life in a shoe factory? I mean to say, *I* didn't tell you that. How did you know?'
> 'I didn't know, Cheese,' Dougal said.
> 'You must have known. You've got all the details right, [. . .] It all came back to me as I read it. It's uncanny. (*TBPR* 89)

Ambiguity continues to reign supreme in *Symposium* as well. While Margaret may well possess the gift—or rather a curse—of 'the evil eye' (*S* 109), which leaves a trail of death in her wake, her mere vicinity potentially lethal; she appears unable to wield her gift to her advantage, the passings happen at random, and frequently to those that Margaret would never think to wish death upon in the first place. Though female, Margaret is at once the fulfilment and a simultaneous subversion of a Byronic figure, condemned by her 'capacity for being near the scene of tragedy' (*S* 108) to forever be tormented by an unfounded sense of guilt, much to her frustration: 'I'm tired of being made to feel guilty for no reason. I would like to feel guilty for a real case of guilt.' (*S* 122)

Her very existence is ridden with ambivalence, for she is held suspect unjustly and without evidence, but nevertheless inexplicably connected to the crimes at hand. In an interview with Robert Hosmer, Spark described Margaret as a 'kind of carrier, just as some people carry a disease although they don't necessarily suffer from it themselves, but they carry it.'[632] Her point of view is reflected in the novel itself, in the proclamation made by Margaret when at last she decides to become the agent of her supposed power:

> 'I'm tired of being the passive carrier of disaster. I feel frustrated. I almost think it's time for me to take my life and destiny in my own hands, and actively make disasters come about. I would like to do something like that.' (*S* 110)

But though she is predestined by circumstance and her visage to be perceived a witch—and claimed by her mad uncle Magnus as his own brood: 'Perhaps she inherited something wild from me.' (*S* 61) he muses—she lacks the guile and tenacity necessary to accomplish her goal. Nor does she possess a witch's temper; the signs of 'female deviancy' as Germanà terms it, such as 'madness, hysteria, rebellion'[633] she comes to adopt only after the fact, whereupon her failure to kill her wealthy mother-in-law Hilda with her gift, she is reduced to a hysterical outburst: '"Not it can't be," Margaret shrieks. "Not till Sunday."' (*S* 146) Only then is her outward angel-persona truly annihilated, ejected along with the cries of frustration with her lot in life. And so it transpires that Margaret's attempt to seize the narrative for her own ends fails, for, Freeman writes, 'no matter how hard she herself believes in her capacity to do evil, Margaret cannot alter her destiny. She is condemned to coincidence,'[634] as a higher authority—that of the implied novelist—reasserts its hold over the plot, intercepting her plans. The universe's final insult, the proof of the novel's determinist framework, and, as Apostolou notes, 'her final marginalization.'[635]

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[632] Spark, interview, Hosmer, 155.

[633] See Germanà, 'Witches, Demon Lovers and Female Monsters,' 66.

[634] See Freeman, 'Symposium, Futility and Scotland,' 136.

[635] See Apostolou, *Seduction and Death*, 3.

However, it is equally—if not more—likely that Margaret may just be a victim of the antics of her uncle Magnus, her personal Gil-martin and perhaps even her personal Mr Hyde, a violent male double to contrast her own mellow disposition. It is Magnus who appears to be the true uncanny actor of the novel, physically imposing yet with a dandyish fashion sense, he embodies the quintessential grotesque Gothic caricature. A scholar Tomás Monterrey in his essay on 'Old and New Elements in Muriel Spark's *Symposium*' (1992) suggests that 'Magnus is possessed by a supernatural force, that of the novelist[,]'[636] as evidenced by his appreciation for Scottish folklore and in particular the ballads, which he quotes with a priest-like reverence like they are verses from the Bible. He is even possessed of the same insight of a fiction-maker as Dougal or Lister, though he himself laments this talent: 'Out of my misfortune, out of my affliction I prognosticate and foreshadow.' (*S* 60–1)

Though deemed clinically insane and dangerous, Magnus is nevertheless allowed to become Margaret's mentor—and that in spite of her parents' suspicions that he might be sexually grooming her (*S* 107)—and act as the Murchie family advisor based on the folklore superstition that his insanity is a sign of divine wisdom. Even Margaret admits to being made uneasy in her uncle's presence: 'Do you think I enjoy coming here?' (*S* 123) Of his mental state Spark writes:

> Magnus was beyond cure, but modern medicine had done a great deal to mitigate his condition. He had a mad look. He was large, and ate voraciously. There had been a time when he was too violent to have at home, but thanks to the pills they gave him he was violent no more. He had always had periods of comparative lucidity, hours and hours of clarity, even days of it. Then, at any moment, he might go off on his ravings. (*S* 48–9)

Uncle Magnus's duality cannot be denied, especially if interpreting his madness within a Gothic framework, nor the fact that he seems to have his own secret plans for Margaret, which neither he nor Spark ever cares to disclose. Monica Germanà concedes the possibility that it could be Magnus who is behind at least some of

[636] See Tomás Monterrey, 'Old and New Elements in Muriel Spark's Symposium,' *Studies in Scottish Literature* 27, no. 1 (1992): 183, http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol27/iss1/15.

the long slew of murders and fatal accidents that have been ascribed to Margaret's power;[637] however, there is little reason to assume that he should be exempt from suspicion regarding either of the unexplained deaths, for he, too, can be implicated in the crimes. The mysteriously vanished teacher of Margaret's youth he had met whilst visiting his niece at school; of the two homicides, one victim had been throttled by a pair of large hands not unlike his own, and the other by a patient escaped from the same psychiatric institution he is confined to; 'Do you know anything of hypnotism?' (S 82) Magnus asks, alluding to the latter. He even foretold the suicide of one Margaret's prospective millionaire husbands with a concerning accuracy:

> 'He'll blow his brains out,' predicted Magnus. 'One day when things get too hot for him he'll take a gun and blow out his brains, rest assured, my dear. He is no man for you. (*S* 115)
>
> 'Did you see in the paper about little Werther Stanhope, that he shot himself?' said Magnus. (*S* 121)

Only Margaret's childhood best friend's drowning appears to have been an honest to goodness accident, or rather there is no evidence to disprove it. Monterrey makes an interesting connection between Margaret's purported supernatural abilities, the moon, and Magnus's duality, or—to use an outdated but nonetheless fitting term for his particular brand of mental illness—lunacy.[638] Curiously, one of the ballads Magnus recites to Margaret does reference lycanthropy: 'O was it a wer-wolf in the wood,' (*S* 108) perhaps leaving clues to his true nature, or merely misleading the audience into making a cliché assumption. Regardless of whether committed by his own hand or by proxy, the deaths serve to isolate Margaret from anyone outside the Murchie family, almost as if somebody had been obsessively eliminating the contenders for Margaret's affection. After all, it is Magnus who appears to have some incestual Gothic fascination with Margaret, going as far as seeking out her presence in secret when she was but a child, and who inspires in her the revulsion reminiscent of the Gothic double. Spark herself never provides

[637] See Germanà, 'Witches, Demon Lovers and Female Monsters,' 78.

[638] See Monterrey, 'Muriel Spark's Symposium,' 183.

clarification, contented to merely set the wheels of imagination a-spin without affording any sort of catharsis. Towards the end of the novel, a character asks: 'What were precisely the crimes of Mr Hyde? One is never really told.' (S 144), and so, too, do the crimes of Margaret and Magnus remain ambiguous.

To conclude, ambivalence is one of the constants found in Muriel Spark's fiction. Early on in her career, she attempted to translate the ambivalent experience of her conversion to Catholicism into novel form, most prominently in her debut *The Comforters*, in which this ambivalence is mediated metafictionally; but later, 'a well of Gothic elements is drawn upon throughout her oeuvre to inform her rich fictional recipe of horror and ordinariness,'[639] Gerard Carruthers observes. Thereon, the ambivalence of her work derives from the simultaneous mundanity of her textual worlds and the paradoxical abundance of quasi-supernatural Gothic elements found therein. While *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* merely references Scotland's prominent Gothic figures and the uncanny genius loci of Edinburgh, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and *Symposium* are purposefully written in the Gothic mode, effacing the boundary between the real and the imaginary whilst mocking both. In *Ballad* especially, Spark demonstrates her mastery by 'managing a hybrid form, the contemporary English tendency toward domestic realism and the notion of the Scottish supernatural tradition.'[640] But despite Spark's frequent dabbling with the matters of the supernatural, the true uncanny force within her novels is always the implied author—her own insert, be it the novel's narrator or one of the characters—who, mimicking the absolute authority of the Calvinist god, ensures that everyone shall submit to her determinist schemes or face dire consequences.

[639] See Carruthers, 'Muriel Spark's Gothic Fiction,' 179.

[640] Carruthers, 'Fully to Savour Her Position,' 496.

Conclusion

When first I conceived of this thesis, I had not considered what a colossal undertaking it would be. To talk of Gothic literature, particularly that produced by Scottish authors, is to be spurred to examine centuries of human anxiety as expressed through writing—by all means, no small feat. To do that, I had to retrace the steps from the very inception of the genre to present, only to discover that the Gothic is a rather nebulous concept—it appears to leak into everything whilst no longer possessing a set form of its own, having long since dissolved into a mode: ranging from a set of recognisable stock situations, motifs, archetypes or themes, to narrative strategies—aesthetic markers that can inform any genre but their original use can nevertheless be traced back to the Gothic.

The first split of the Gothic occurred shortly after its inception, dividing the genre into male and female traditions—or horror and terror. The first violent and exploitative, with emphasis on the horror elements; the other tradition more conciliatory, largely displacing the supernatural elements for the terrors of female existence within the era. In so doing, the female Gothic tradition paved the way for the feminist movement and otherwise politically charged narratives to come.

That is not to say that the Gothic outside of women's writings was wholly apolitical, however; oftentimes situating the plot in exotic, faraway locations served as a way of veiling the critical comments aimed at Britain whilst avoiding the dangers open criticism would have posed to the author's reputation, life or both. If Britain figured in these early Gothic works at all, it was represented through its northernmost regions, and Scotland in particular. Eventually, though, the Gothic chose London for the capital of terror, its gloomy, gas-lit streets providing a perfect setting for a number of important works of anglophone literature—Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* among others. Along with the geographical changes came a greater complexity of the characters and a marked focus on the character psychology. It was also around this time that the Gothic begun its metamorphosis into a literary mode, spawning new genres such as horror fiction and the detective story, for example, with perhaps the most famous proponent of both being the American author Edgar Allan Poe.

Moreover, as the uncanny—the principle upon which the Gothic operates—arises when the line between familiarity and the unknown becomes blurred, the new societal developments and the dissipation of old taboos, would eventually render certain motifs and themes used to induce this sensation ineffective, to be replaced by new ones. For example, the frightening implications of the misuse of such scientific discoveries as electricity were explored at length in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, yet such an idea would not engender the same terror today.

In Scotland, the matter was complicated further by a local peculiarity, the so-called Caledonian antisyzygy, which has led to the development of a set of Gothic markers unique to Scottish writing, with the authors such as James Hogg, Robert Louis Stevenson and Walter Scott employing the Gothic mode to examine Scotland's folklore and its history of Calvinism, as well as the collective national trauma and cultural erasure that the Scots have suffered in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellions. The double, or doppelgänger, as employed in James Hogg's *The Private Confessions and Memoirs of a Justified Sinner* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* would come to symbolise the ambivalence of Scottish culture, with the question of identity always at the forefront of Scottish writing, even in present day.

From 20th century onward, the rapid progress and almost universal access to education left many a reader immune to the unnerving encounters with monsters or ghastly revenants, rooted in the superstitions of yore; likewise, the prevalence of secularism led to the obsolescence of the Anti-Catholic narratives and religious discourse typical of the nascent Gothic. However, the experimentation with language and form brought about by the new generation of writers offered a way of inducing the uncanny through means other than a set of outdated aesthetic markers. The idea of postmodern Gothic was born of a suggestion that the Gothic was in its essence a contrarian literary movement combatting the staleness of the Age of Enlightenment literati, similarly to how postmodernism stands in opposition to the mainstream, realistic modes of expression. My research has led me to a realisation that the narrative games that the postmodern authors engage in, serve to unsettle the reader like the exploitation of the societal taboos once unsettled the audience of the Gothic at the time of the genre's inception.

Muriel Spark combined in her oeuvre both approaches to the Gothic. She shared the postmodernist distaste for realism and didactically charged narratives, finding them to be inefficacious, and wrote predominantly within the detective story format, which derives from the Gothic. Many of her early novels, such as *The Comforters*, *The Bachelors*, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, or *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* feature characters who possess a similar supernatural aura as Gothic doubles—thus invoking the Gothic mode; while Spark also employs such postmodern embellishments as metafiction, analepses and prolepses, often used to reveal crucial plot points ahead of the time in order to break the reader's immersion and shift their suspense from passive anticipation of a resolution, to the active interrogation of events as they unfold, and so trigger a sense of the uncanny in the minds of her audience through linguistic means. The metafictional aspect of *The Comforters* culminates in almost a dialogue between the character and the narrator. The *Driver's Seat* and *Not to Disturb* are the two novels in which Spark escalates the postmodern features to an extreme, incorporating—next to the interruptions of chronology—intertextuality, a play with verbal tenses, shifting of genres, and in the latter case, effacing the boundaries between character and narrator. By contrast, the novel *The Hothouse by the East River* appears to be Spark's single most directly supernatural work, set in the purgatory itself.

What is common to all of Spark's works, however, is that they frequently draw upon her own lived experiences, though twisted beyond recognition. Indeed, it is not in Spark's intention to accurately portray these persons or events, and they are often exaggerated for aesthetic and humorous purposes. This amalgamation of fiction and fact is known to the postmodernists as simulacrum, described as an approximation or an imperfect copy of something that has existed, but its reproduction no longer fully resembles. A simulacrum is therefore both familiar yet unknowable and thus uncanny. Spark's textual worlds populated with these simulacra, presided over by another simulacrum—a fictionalised version of herself emulating god—are therefore uncanny as well. And so even though I would hesitate to pronounce Muriel Spark a Gothic writer in the traditional sense, based on her engagement with the aesthetic markers derived from the Gothic alone; I believe that together with the postmodern aspects of her work which are evocative of the uncanny, she might well be considered one.

Resumé

Když mi prvně přišlo na mysl téma této diplomové práce, netušila jsem ještě, o jak náročný úkol se bude jednat. Zabývat se gotickou literaturou, zejména díly napsanými skotskými autory, znamená ponořit se do staletí lidské strachu a útrap vyjádřených skrze literární tvorbu. Jedním z prvních zjištění, která jsem učinila ohledně literární gotiky byl fakt, že se již dávno nejedná o ucelený žánr, nýbrž o modus – jakýsi estetický aspekt díla, který může být evokován za pomocí různých motivů, témat, archetypů či narativních strategií. Tento modus lze aplikovat na jakýkoliv žánr, avšak původní užití jednotlivých znaků spadajících pod tento gotický modus lze často dohledat do dob, kdy se gotika stále považovala za samostatný žánr.

První rozdělení gotiky přichází již krátce po jejím vzniku, kdy se žánr rozdvojuje na tvorbu autorů mužů, kteří se rozhodli soustředit se spíše na hororové prvky, jakými je například nadpřirozeno či extrémní násilí; a autorky, jejichž tvorba se více zabývala každodenními hrůzami tehdejších žen, a přispěla tak k pozdějšímu nástupu feministické a jinak politicky podbarvené literární tvorby.

To však neznamená, že mimo tvorbu žen by byla gotika zcela apolitická. Gotičtí autoři často zasazovali svá díla do zámořských lokací, aby mohli využít dislokace ke kritice britských politických, náboženských a jiných aparátů, aniž by se svými názory vystavili nebezpečí. Pokud Británie figurovala v raných gotických dílech, pak to byly většinou regiony na samém severu Anglie, či Skotsko. S postupem času si však gotika zvolila za své působiště zachmuřený Londýn, do kterého je zasazeno několik klíčových děl anglofonní literatury, například *Obraz Doriana Graye* od Oscara Wildea nebo *Drákula* Brama Stokera. Tyto geografické změny s sebou přinesly též širší zaměření na psychologii postav vycházející z jejich nově nabyté komplexnosti. Avšak v této době gotika též započala svou přeměnu ze žánru na modus a začala tak pronikat i do dalších žánrů, včetně těch nově vzniknuvších jako byl horror či detektivní fikce, jejichž průkopníkem byl americký autor Edgar Allan Poe.

Protože literární gotika funguje na freudovském principu, který ve čtenáři vyvolává takzvaný „tísnivý“ pocit vznikající v momentě, kdy se stírají hranice

mezi něčím povědomým a neznámým, je potřeba obnovovat motivy a témata, který tento pocit způsobují, neboť jejich efektivita je silně ovlivněna společenskými tabu, jakož i celkovým vývojem společnosti. Například Mary Shelleyová se ve svém *Frankensteinovi* zčásti věnuje obavám ze zneužití vědeckého objevu elektřiny pro neetické účely, avšak v současnosti toto téma nevzbuzuje stejný strach jako v době, kdy byla kniha prvně vydána.

Ve Skotsku situaci dále komplikuje dvojaký charakter skotské kultury a národa jako takového – takzvaná „kaledonská antisyzyga" vedla k rozvoji gotických prvků unikátních právě pro Skotsko. Autoři jako James Hogg, Robert Louis Stevenson a Walter Scott skrze svá díla hledali podstatu skotského národa za pomocí jeho mýtů a folklóru, dědictví kalvinistického hnutí a jeho vlivu na národní mentalitu, a v neposlední řadě též kolektivní trauma a kulturní genocidu, kterou si Skoti prošli po neúspěších jakobitských povstání. Motiv dvojníka neboli „doppelgängera", tak jak je ho užito ve *Vyznání ospravedlněného hříšníka* z pera Jamese Hogga anebo v *Podivném případu doktora Jekylla a pana Hydea* od Roberta Louise Stevensona symbolizuje právě onu vnitřní rozpolcenost Skotů, která je dodnes jedním z hlavních témat jejich literární tvorby.

Nástup dvacátého století a s tím spojený pokrok společnosti a obecný přístup ke vzdělávání znamenal, že mnoho motivů a témat pramenících ze starých pověr – jichž bylo dříve užíváno k navození onoho tísnivého pocitu, například setkání tváří v tvář s monstrem anebo oživlým nebožtíkem – pozbylo na významu. Taktéž z protikatolického diskursu typického pro původní gotiku se vlivem sekularizace stal přežitek. Avšak experimentování nové generace spisovatelů s jazykem a formou nabídlo nové způsoby, jak znovu vyvolat tísnivé pocity spojené s gotikou bez pomoci již zastaralých prvků. Postmoderní gotika pracuje s názorem, že podstata gotiky spočívá v její opozici vůči mainstreamovým estetickým hnutím a nikoliv ve zmíněných prvcích – v současnosti se jedná konkrétně o opozici vůči literárnímu realismu, kdežto v době svého vzniku šlo o opozici proti sterilní osvícenecké literatuře. Můj výzkum mě dovedl k myšlence, že narativní hrátky postmodernistů dokáží ve čtenáři vzbudit pocit tísně stejně efektivně jako tomu kdysi bylo u výše zmíněných motivů a témat spadajících pod gotický modus.

Muriel Sparkové se ve své tvorbě podařilo skloubit oba přístupy. Stejně jako postmodernisté neměla v oblibě realistické a didakticky míněné příběhy, neboť se dle jejího názoru často míjí účinkem. Sama psala povětšinou ve stylu detektivní fikce, která vznikla právě vlivem gotiky. Mnoho z raných děl Sparkové obsahuje prvky evokující gotiku, například v románech *Utěšitelé, Staří Mládenci, Balada z předměstí*, či *Nejlepší léta slečny Brodieové* vystupují postavy, které svojí nadpřirozenou, antipatickou aurou připomínají gotické dvojníky skotských autorů. Sparková však zároveň používá k navození tísnivých pocitů i postmoderních technik jako je metafikce, analepse a prolepse, jejichž pomocí narušuje časovou souslednost děje a tím dopředu odhaluje důležité příběhové zvraty, aby tak mohla obrátit čtenářovu pozornost nikoli k eventuálnímu rozuzlení děje, nýbrž k více zajímavé otázce: „Proč?“ Tím zároveň vyvolává ve čtenáři gotický pocit tísně. V *Utěšitelích* hraje prim právě stránka metafiktivní, skrze kterou je zprostředkováno něco jako dialog mezi hlavní postavou a vypravěčem, potažmo autorem. Novely *Místo za volantem* a *Nerušit, prosím* jsou poté kulminací již zmíněných postmoderních prvků, a lze v nich vedle narušování chronologie nalézt též intertextualitu, náhlé posuny v žánru, a v případě *Nerušit, prosím* též splynutí hlavní postavy a vypravěče. Naproti tomu *Skleník u East River* se zdá být jediným dílem, ve kterém Sparková zcela upřednostňuje nadpřirozeno, neboť se děj odehrává v samotném očistci.

Co však mají všechna díla Sparkové společného je to, že mnohdy čerpají z jejího života, ač jsou použité události a osobnosti často pozměněny k nepoznání. Sparková ve svém díle totiž používá nadsázku pro estetické a humorné účely, a tak nejeví zájem držet se při jejich zobrazování skutečnosti. Tomuto spojení faktu a fikce se v postmodernismu říká simulakrum – takzvaná napodobenina určité věci, osoby či skutečnosti, která se jí však dávno nepodobá. Dalo by se tedy říci, že simulakrum je jak povědomé, tak neznámé, a tudíž vzbuzuje onen pocit tísně. Textuální světy Muriel Sparkové, které se těmito simulakry hemží, a na které dohlíží jako bůh simulakrum jí samotné, jsou tedy taktéž tísnivé. Domnívám se tedy, že ačkoliv by nebylo na místě prohlašovat Sparkovou za gotickou autorku pouze na základě jejího používání prvků spadajících pod gotický modus, v kombinaci s postmoderními aspekty jejího díla, které vyvolávají onen tísnivý pocit pro gotiku tak typický, by se za ni považovat dala.

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Abbreviations Used

Ballad, TBPR	*The Ballad of Peckham Rye*
Blackwood's	*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*
Faith and Fiction	*The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*
'House of Usher'	'The Fall of the House of Usher'
Jekyll and Hyde	*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*
Justified Sinner	*The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*
Loitering, LWI	*Loitering with Intent*
Metafiction	*Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*
Otranto	*The Castle of Otranto*
Philosophical Inquiry	*A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*
S	*Symposium*
Seduction and Death	*Seduction and Death in Muriel Spark's Fiction*
TC	*The Comforters*
TDS	*The Driver's Seat*
TPI	*The Public Image*
TPMJB	*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Annotation

Author: Bc. Nikola Petrusová

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Title of thesis: Her Dark Intentions: Aspects of the Gothic in the Novels of Muriel Spark

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

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Key words: Muriel Spark, Scotland, Scottish literature, Gothic literature, Sigmund Freud, the uncanny, the supernatural, James Hogg, Robert Louis Stevenson, Calvinism, Caledonian Antisyzygy, ambivalence, dualism, double, devil, postmodernism, simulacrum, metafiction

Abstract: This thesis is concerned with uncovering the aspects of the Gothic in the novels of Muriel Spark. The thesis shall first outline the main characteristics of the Gothic genre in its inception and throughout its history, and also identify the peculiarities of the Gothic as appearing in the novels of prominent Scottish writers such as James Hogg or Robert Louis Stevenson. The thesis examines Muriel Spark's use of the Gothic mode and provides analyses of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and *Symposium* in an attempt to discern whether they bear Gothic characteristics. In connection to Muriel Spark, the thesis also discusses postmodernism as a form of the Gothic, with a special focus on the postmodern and metafictional aspects of *The Comforters*, *The Driver's Seat* and *Loitering with Intent*.

Anotace

Jméno autora: Nikola Petrusová

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Klíčová slova: Muriel Sparková, Skotsko, skotská literatura, gotická literatura, Sigmund Freud, tísnivé, nadpřirozeno, James Hogg, Robert Louis Stevenson, kalvinismus, kaledonská antisyzyga, ambivalence, dualismus, dvojník, ďábel, postmodernismus, simulakrum, metafikce

Abstrakt: Tato magisterská práce se zabývá hledáním prvků literární gotiky v díle Muriel Sparkové. Práce nejprve definuje termín literární gotika a rozebírá její prvky krátce po vzniku žánru a jeho další vývoj v průběhu historie, identifikuje též zvláštní prvky, jimiž se žánr vyznačuje v dílech skotských autorů jako jsou James Hogg nebo Robert Louis Stevenson. Práce dále zkoumá, jak ve svém díle Muriel Sparková používá gotický modus a analyzuje romány *Nejlepší léta slečny Jean Brodieové*, *Balada z předměstí* a *Večírek* s cílem zjistit, lze-li tyto texty považovat za příklady literární gotiky. V souvislosti s autorkou se práce též zaměřuje na postmodernismus jakožto odnož literární gotiky a prezentuje analýzy románů *Utěšitelé*, *Místo za volantem* a *Svévolné lelkování* s důrazem na postmoderní a metafiktivní prvky.