

KATEDRA ANGLISTIKY A AMERIKANISTIKY
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

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**The Development and Changes of the Female
Gothic Genre from the Beginning to the
Present Day**

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Olomouc 2010

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V Olomouci dne

Poděkování

Děkuji vedoucí diplomové práce Mgr. Emě Jelínkové, Ph.D. za poskytnuté konzultace, cenné rady a připomínky.

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Introduction

Gothic literature originated in later eighteenth century with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. The book became immensely popular and was quickly imitated by other novelists, and the Gothic soon became a recognizable genre. It depicted horrifying or terrifying events in order to create great suspense, employing other appropriate devices like distant and exotic setting or strange mysterious characters. Other prominent writers of Gothic were, for example, Matthew Gregory Lewis or William Beckford. However, it is significant that many of the writers who had the principal influence on the development of the genre were women.

In its heyday, Anne Radcliffe became the best-selling author of the genre. She produced several novels that became Gothic classic. It is worth noting that she also contributed to the theory of the genre. In her essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry* she proposed the classification of the Gothic into horror and terror literature, which became the basis to define the Male and Female Gothic. The author of the most enduring work of the Gothic, Mary Shelley, wrote the novel that became an everlasting inspiration for the authors of literary and film horror, and one of the most popular nineteenth-century women writers Jane Austen created the most powerful parody of the genre.

The diffusion of the Gothic features among various genres caused the disintegration of the genre as the separate entity, but it helped to enrich various other genres of both artistic and popular literature.

Since its audience was predominantly female Gothic was acknowledged as the female genre, and it had a significant influence upon the literature expressing the confinement and subordination of women.

This work is trying to encapsulate the development of the Female Gothic genre from its beginnings to the present day, and outline its general tendencies by analysing some of the most important works of authors of nineteenth and twentieth century literature who employed the techniques of horror literature to express the restraints on female liberty and self-assertion.

1. Gothic origins, features and forms

1.0 In the work dealing with the particular genre, Female Gothic, we should give some definition of the term, therefore it would be reasonable to give a brief survey of the Gothic genre and then to define the Female Gothic as a branch or specific mutation of this genre. In the first chapter we are going to examine what the literary Gothic is, paying attention to its origins, features and forms.

1.1 The word 'Gothic' has a variety of meanings. It is used as a historical term, as an architectural term, as an artistic term and of course as a literary term. In the historical sense the term 'Gothic' is connected with the tribes coming from northern Europe like Goths, Visigoths, and Ostrogoths which raided Rome and ravaged the rest of Europe in the third, fourth and fifth century, thus this word also came to mean barbaric. Especially in the eighteenth century, in the era of Enlightenment, the word got a negative meaning being associated with the period of Middle Ages, which was in disfavour because it was regarded as chaotic, unenlightened and superstitious. As David Punter observes, 'Gothic' was perceived as the opposite term to 'classical':

Where the classical was well-ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted, where the classics offered a set of cultural models to be followed, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and uncivilised.¹

It is clear that anything that was connected with the Middle Ages or with distant past was seen as hideous and inappropriate, because it couldn't be examined and described properly.

However, in the middle of the eighteenth century the situation began to change. There was a strong need to revitalize English culture and art and the Gothic qualities seemed to be the suitable means to breathe life into it, because these qualities were connected with the old English history, which had been ignored in the previous decades. Thus the word 'Gothic' retained its meaning connected with the dark, the archaic and the pagan, but it began to signify a more positive value.

This change, of course, affected all areas of eighteenth-century culture. One of the most important is the Gothic revival in architecture. The taste for Gothic buildings resembling chiefly the ecclesiastical buildings from about twelfth to sixteenth century was restored. Many wealthy and influential people began to build their mansions in the Gothic style, and some of these buildings even imitated the Gothic ruins. The most famous examples were Horace's Walpole Strawberry Hill and William Beckford's Fonthill.

The aesthetic ideas coming from Middle Ages started to be popular in literature as well. These ideas connected with superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness found its way to literature as Fred Botting claims:

Characteristics like extravagance, superstition, fancy and wildness which were initially considered in negative terms became associated, in the course of eighteenth century, with a more expansive and imaginative potential for aesthetic production.²

Many literary scholars began to study old English texts, and proclaimed their importance in the revival of literature. There are several sources regarded as inspiration for the Gothic revival: old English poetry or poetry of northern Europe and old English ballads that were both introduced in collections such as *Northern Antiquities* (1770) or *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), English medieval poetry, predominantly the works of Chaucer, and the major works of Spenser and Elizabethans.

1.2 After we discussed the predecessors and sources of Gothic writing we should now go through the constitution of Gothic novel in more detail, and pay attention to the historical, economic and cultural conditions.

The eighteenth-century change in English social structure led to the change in the structure of reading public and its taste. The number of the potential readers increased due to the appearance of a trading middle class and the growth of urban centres. It is not surprising that the middle class readers developed a taste for uncomplicated type of fiction, books that were gripping and usually dealt with unreal incidents. In 1740s another important occasion occurred and that is the

introduction of circulating libraries, which enabled readers to borrow books for a small membership fee. This occasion brought about another extension of the reading public enabling also the lowest classes of the literate people, mostly domestic servants, to read books. But during the eighteenth century the price of books was generally prohibitive, and money was still a principal obstacle to obtain a book. The working class would not have been able to afford the books by such prominent Gothic writers as Matthew Gregory Lewis or Ann Radcliffe. Furthermore, the works written by these authors are of highly complex style with many allusions and full of erudite social argument. The people of the lower classes, therefore, would not have found much pleasure in reading these books.

Despite the shift in preferences in aesthetics of arts mentioned earlier, there was still a difference between official culture and actual taste. The prevailing tendencies in culture, and so in literature as well, were that of rationalism. The idea of fiction as something that was a mere product of imagination and wasn't constructed on the real base was unbearable. So the Gothic fiction and the novel itself could hardly find its place in the age of Enlightenment. However, there were efforts to distinguish between the writings that were the frank observations of the contemporary society that highlighted virtue and should elicit abhorrence at depictions of vice, these were usually called novels, and writings that were highly extravagant and fanciful with many supernatural entities and events and that usually were set in a distant past, these were usually called romances. While the former were generally considered as good and appropriate, the latter were unacceptable and even dangerous for the readers as Ioan Williams observes in the quotation of James Beattie's 'On Fable and Romance':

However Beattie's essay concludes on a cautionary and, by 1783, a conventional note, describing romances as 'a dangerous recreation' of which a few 'may be friendly to good taste and good morals' while the majority 'tend to corrupt the heart, and stimulate the passions'. 'A habit of reading them', Beattie goes on, 'breeds a dislike to history, and all the substantial parts of knowledge; withdraws the attention from nature, and truth; and fills the mind with extravagant thoughts and too often with criminal propensities'³

It was only later when both of these genres became fully accepted and appreciated.

We shouldn't forget another tendency in literature that was important for the development of Gothic novel and that is sentimentalism. Sentimental literature emphasizes the emotions of characters, observes their feelings carefully and concentrates on situations filled with pathos and anguish and at the same time it tries to induce a deep emotional response in the reader. Sentimentalism is naturally in opposition with rationalism. In the age that was dominated by a set of ideas which attempted to suppress everything based on emotions, it was natural that many people were turning to psychological debts believing that not every feelings and actions can be reduced to the account of motivation. Sentimentalism, which is predominantly the matter of tone, covers quite a lot of the Gothic writing in the late eighteenth century.

Another development in literature which definitely had an influence on Gothic writing is the emergence of so called Graveyard poetry. It was popular in the first half of the eighteenth century, and as objects and settings it focused on graves, churches, night, death and the supernatural things that are beyond human understanding. It was a form of religious poetry, and its primary concern was the restoration of faith and morality through the dark and gloomy images of death and decay serving as a warning to the godless. But at the same time it challenged the rationalistic approach because it took pleasure in the dark setting that figuratively was in the contradiction with the Enlightenment because it prevented strange events from being explained. Although the influence of the imagery of Graveyard poetry on Gothic writing is apparent, it is worth noting that this inspiration came indirectly, as Punter suggests, that the Graveyard poetry had an enormous influence on German writers of terror-fiction and through them the elements of terror retained in British literature to 1790s and beyond.⁴

As for the contemporary aesthetics, the key concept was the theory of the sublime. It originated with the classical critic Longinus for whom a literature of sublimity was the one that elevates itself above the ordinary, ravishes the reader with its grandeur and is free of regulations and fashion. The literature of sublimity should

lead the listeners not to persuasion but to ecstasy. Longinus thus encourages the poet to concentrate on the grand and the extreme instead of paying attention to the technical perfection. In his work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) Edmund Burke applies the theory of the sublime on the literature of terror identifying the feeling of terror with the grandeur:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the idea of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible subjects, 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.⁵

These words introduced a psychological dimension into the study of the literary elements that primarily seemed to be only a matter of popular taste. Many of the Burke's observations have relationship to the Gothic writing especially his emphasis on obscurity, vastness and magnificence as constitutive elements of the sublime.

1.3 After determining historical and cultural conditions we should now move to the definition of Gothic literature itself. Gothic fiction originated in the late eighteenth century and its most famous authors are: Horace Walpole, Mathew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, C. R. Maturin or Mary Shelley. In the introductory chapter to his *Literature of Terror* David Punter names these characteristic features of Gothic novel: "an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense."⁶

However, there are several more genres to which term Gothic may be applied, for example: the genre of paperback historical romance for which many of the previously mentioned features are characteristic, New American Gothic that deals with psychic and social decay and the most frequent motifs are violence, rape and breakdown, the horror fiction representing a clear connection to the early Gothic writers because the best-known horror writers use the same devices. And finally

there is a number of contemporary or near-contemporary writers who use the elements of Gothic in various types of fiction and are, therefore, in some way indebted to the Gothic tradition. In this work we are not going to discuss these various genres.

In the following paragraphs we are going to examine the characteristics of the early Gothic fiction in more detail. Between 1760s and 1820s Gothic literature was in its heyday. It was a very popular form of fiction, and although there was variety in plot and themes, the common typical features can still be traced.

There is a common atmosphere of the narrative, which is gloomy and mysterious and springs from the stock settings and figures. Fred Botting characterises the eighteenth century Gothic as:

Tortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits [...] Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats.⁷

This quotation observes many of the features which are characteristic of the early Gothic fiction. First, there is the complexity and framing of the narrative which originated in the novels that presented themselves as translations or publications of the found manuscripts. We will get to the framing and anonymity of the books later.

Next, Botting points to the presence of the supernatural in Gothic writing, which is one of the most essential features but one which was widely rejected by contemporary critics. The phenomenon of supernatural was one of the important components of the earlier literature but disappeared during the Augustan period because it was in contradiction with its strict rationality and order. The unearthly and inexplicable happenings simply did not have its place in contemporary literature. But with the revival of the old ballads later in the eighteenth century it crept in the emerging Gothic novels. However, there appear to be two modes of

dealing with the supernatural. The causes of the supernatural events are either clarified in the end or remain unexplained.

Next, the list of various figures and creatures typical for Gothic narrative is given. Although there are various supernatural beings involved in early gothic fiction, there is only a small number of stock characters we can describe. There is the frail and virtuous heroine, who becomes an object of a dreadful pursuit but who miraculously survives to the usually happy end; the heavy-handed tyrannical father; the villain, who is usually the most complex and interesting character, and who is frightening and attractive at the same time but is always up to his evil intents; and furthermore there is a cast of comic figures.

The Gothic landscape mentioned is probably the scenery connected with Burke's sublime. It is a landscape which exposes its grandeur and magnificence, usually mountains, most often the Alps. Its greatness and cragginess arouses in the reader the emotions of wonder and terror at the same time. But apart from the landscape there is another typical setting of early Gothic fiction and that is one of the castles, ruins, convents, monasteries or abbeys. Their structure also invokes ambiguous feelings because their architecture is majestic and tempting and it has an ancient touch (we have mentioned the renewing taste for Gothic buildings before), but its dark rooms, howling halls, steep turrets and often secret passageways can hide many perils. Other similar settings as churches, graveyards or caves are also common. It should not be omitted that Gothic narratives are usually set in the past. Therefore, it may seem that it doesn't concern contemporary reality, but, in fact, the uncertainties about the nature of power, law, society, family and sexuality are hidden behind seemingly trivial plots of pursuit and exploitation.

Taking into consideration the common characters, plots and settings we can see that early Gothic literature deals with the situations of terror. Its attempt is to arouse intense feelings in the readers. Thus many of the novels were sensationalist. That is why the Gothic was not well treated by contemporary critics and it was seen as pandering to the popular taste of its time.

However this supposition did not prove to be true because Gothic literature has been preserved up to the present time. Although the original genre of early Gothic

has of course disappeared, there are many features of Gothic literature scattered about the contemporary genres as we could see from the above mentioned enumeration of meanings of “Gothic” in contemporary literature. All of the features transformed themselves to fit the new trends in literature.

The mountainous Gothic landscape has been replaced by the city whose dark narrow streets resemble the labyrinth of original Gothic castles and forests. Gothic castles and mansions have sometimes changed into old houses that can easily represent the rotten family relationships. Hideous monks, fathers, stepfathers and other pursuers have been replaced by mad scientists, psychopaths, extraterrestrials and other monsters of contemporary times. Moreover, the twentieth century brought up the device in which the Gothic can truly assert itself and that is film and it is also often used in comics. The embodiments of Gothic genre are very diverse and sometimes can retain only the slightest connection to the original set of generic properties. But the connection between the Gothic and the popular genres should be perceived as a two-way relationship as Fred Botting claims:

Changing features, emphasis and meanings disclose Gothic writing as a mode that exceeds genre and categories, restricted neither to a literary school nor to a historical period. The diffusion of Gothic features across texts and historical periods distinguishes the Gothic as a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing.⁸

Much of nineteenth and twentieth century writing found its inspiration in the original Gothic works but the Gothic itself owes to the modern writing for its own preservation.

1.4 It is now clear that we can understand term “Gothic” in two ways. Firstly as a mode of writing which flourished in Great Britain between 1760s and 1820s, and secondly as the permanent tendency in writing which finds its inspiration in this specific genre. As our concern is to explore the development of Female Gothic from its beginnings to the present day, we should take into consideration both of the perspectives.

2. The originators of early Gothic fiction

2.0 The establishing of the Gothic as the genre of horror fiction took place in the second half of the eighteenth century but it was not until 1790s that the real heavy Gothic books appeared. The books by Mathew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe typify the core Gothic literature. In this chapter we are going to examine briefly three significant novels that preceded that by Lewis and Radcliffe: Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778) and Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783-1785). We are going to focus on the characteristics that influenced the consequent flowering of the Gothic writing.

2.1 *The Castle of Otranto* indicates the revival of the romance in the late eighteenth century. It represents the return of the tradition of prose literature that later was replaced by the novel. But Walpole in fact labels his book as a combination of both romance and novel. He tells a story set in the medieval Italy. What is significant of Walpole's work is his dealing with the supernatural in which fantasy predominates realism. There is an overflow of supernatural elements that are not explicated. The plot is highly complex containing machinations of a tyrannical baron and surprising revelations about paternity. Walpole's mode of using the supernatural is very bold. He uses the unearthly happenings as the source of excitement and as the device to call the norms of the Enlightenment into question.

Another important feature is the connection between the feudal baron and the antisocial power, embodied in the character of Manfred. The expansion of these figures in Gothic narratives signifies, as Punter suggests, a social anxiety that has a historical dimension because it comes from the past, from the memory of previous social and psychological order in particular.⁹

Reeve's *The Old English Baron* blends the supernatural with the historical. She subordinates her writing to the requirements of the time and creates a scary tale with a didactic purpose. Unlike Walpole, the ghostly appearances are reduced to a minimum. She sets her narrative into the past but fails in making it credible because her characters act like the contemporary people. The past is even the source of comfort, not anxiety, for Reeve. In this respect, it was Walpole's

treatment of the past and the supernatural that succeeded in inspiring the Gothic writing.

The feature which is shared by both the books is the anonymous publication as the framing of the narrative. In the preface for the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* Horace Walpole declares it to be a translation of a medieval Italian story from the time of the Crusades. This presentation together with the Gothic script attempts to give an air of truth to the narrative full of supernatural occurrences and set in the dark ages. Clara Reeve presents herself as the editor of the found manuscript as well. Both of them acknowledged their authorship in the second edition of these books. This device supports the plausibility of the narrative and helps to justify possible obscurity of the narrative and ineptitude in dealing with the supernatural. The publication of the book as an edition of a found manuscript or fragment became very favourite device of Gothic writing.

Last of the early Gothic writers, Sophia Lee, employs another method useful in the Gothic writing and that is the epistolary novel. In *The Recess* she combines the letters with the manuscript, which helps to portray the characters of the story. She also introduces new devices in combining the real and the imagined. Her novel tells the story about two imaginary daughters of Mary Queen of Scots but it employs the real figures and events from the Elizabethan age. In dealing with the fantasy and the past Lee's work is closer to Reeve's. It reduces the occurrence of the supernatural and it takes a form of the historical romance in which the true elements of history are put together in a fictional narrative. In fact, *The Recess* is probably more a historical novel than a Gothic one.

2.2 We can see that getting over with the history is a crucial theme of the early Gothic novels. The various authors of Gothic works handle with either real or imagined past events in different ways according to what their purpose is. Another important element in exploring the Gothic is dealing with the supernatural. It may either be clarified or remain secret. This distinction will become important in studying the Female Gothic.

3. Defining the genre: Ann Radcliffe and the Classic Female Gothic

3.0 We could see in the first chapter that it is not easy to define the Gothic and we are going to find out that defining the Female Gothic is not easy either. Since we have said that we are going to explore its development from its beginnings to the present day, we should go through the detailed study of the major works first and then give some definition. But to familiarize ourselves with the subject we should mention some important definitions and observations on the genre, especially on the form of classic Female Gothic. In second part of this chapter we are going to specify the features of the Female Gothic with respect to the classic Gothic novel in particular and to explore the works of the most important of the founders, Ann Radcliffe.

3.1 Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* defines the Female Gothic as:

The work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic. But what I mean—or anyone else—means by “the Gothic” is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear.¹⁰

Then she continues with determining the role and the effect of the fear in the Gothic. She differentiates the effect of the fear in Gothic from that in tragedy and says that it is not its function “to reach down into the depths of the soul and purge it with pity and terror, but to get to the body itself, its glands, muscles, epidermis, and circulatory system, quickly arousing and quickly allaying the physiological reactions to fear.”¹¹ Later in this chapter we are going to observe the distinction between producing the dread and its effects on the reader in Male and Female Gothic. In the quoted chapter Moers identifies the Female Gothic with representing the fears about sexuality and childbirth. Botting perceives Moers’s interpretation as an important changeover in the Gothic criticism:

A challenge to, or interrogation of, forms of fiction dominated by patriarchal assumptions, Gothic novels have been reassessed as part of a wider feminist critical movement that recovers suppressed or marginalized writing by

women and addresses issues of female experience, sexual oppression and difference.¹²

Gothic was identified as a feminine genre as early as 1790s. It was considered as a genre written by women, read by women, appearing mostly in women periodicals and concentrating on female characters, experiences and feminine spaces. Therefore, it was perceived as writing inferior to the predominantly male literature. Not until the second half of the twentieth century was the Female Gothic designated by feminist critics an important genre conveying the terrifying experience of women within the home. It is seen as a tradition of women writing, beginning with Ann Radcliffe, using the genre's device of confined castles, villainous dominating men and harassed heroines to express the sense of isolation and imprisonment felt by women in the world dominated by domestic ideology. It is an indisputable fact that this kind of literature is written and read mostly by women.

3.2 The second half of the eighteenth century saw the expanding of the reading public as a result of the cheaper printing processes and the emergence of circulating libraries. The success of a writer was more dependent on the reading public than on the literary critics. There was a growing number of the authors who were making their living by writing. A significant amount of the writers as well as readers of fiction constituted of female population.

One of the most popular of women writers of those times was Ann Radcliffe. It seems that her life was happy and uneventful. She was the wife of a lawyer, who became editor of a literary magazine and spent most of her life at their home in Bath. Many invented stories sprang up about her, but all of them were probably untrue. Radcliffe was a well-read woman, and the works that influenced her writing the most were sentimental novels, mostly that by Samuel Richardson and Abbé Prévost, and the Graveyard poetry. She also absorbed the style of the most distinguished English poets and her works are full of quotations and allusions mostly from Shakespeare and Milton. In her essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry*, which was published posthumously in 1826, she praises these two authors, and gives their works as an example of appropriate way of arousing the fear in the

readers. The influence of poetry reading is apparent in her works, and the poetic style of her narratives, especially the descriptions of nature, was esteemed even by the Romantic poets. During her life she published five novels: *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *The Italian* (1797). The last book *Gaston de Blondville* (1826) was published after her death and it differs from the others because it involved more in the 'real' history.

3.3 The previous chapter discussed the so-called predecessors of the Gothic novel. Let us mention the techniques and themes that inspired Radcliffe's writing. Her stories are placed in the past, as usually, and for majority of her novels she, like Walpole, chose southern European countries, Italy and France in particular, as the geographical setting. This feature is probably repeated because of the association of these countries with Catholicism, which represented superstition, arbitrary power and passionate extremes. As for the framing of the narrative, the effects of the presenting the novel as a found manuscript are apparent in the introduction for *The Italian*. A group of English tourists meets in the church at Naples a friar who offers them borrowing of the volume written by a student relating a mysterious story: "You will perceive from the work, that this student was very young, as to the arts of composition, but the facts are what you require, and from these he has not deviated."¹³ The friar apologizes for the possible imperfections of narrative and at the same time supports the veracity of the story. The physical settings of Radcliffe's novels are also typically Gothic, as we can see the heroines of her books being pursued around the map made of old castles, ruins, abbeys, convents, crypts and dark forests. In modelling her characters like virtuous heroines oppressed in the world governed by men, Radcliffe was inspired by Sophia Lee's work. But there are other features she inherited from early Female Gothic authors and these are: the explanation of the mysterious occurrences and the ending containing the moral conclusion. But in production and development of supernatural features Radcliffe's work differs from her predecessors. Her use of the supernatural was considered excessive. The repetition and prolonging of the scenes of terror which usually turn out to be only the figment of the character's imagination, but which probably aroused the

contemporary reader's senses considerably, is enormous. But finally all secrets are resolved, all villains are punished, all mistakenly suspected persons are exonerated, and the story usually ends with a happy marriage. This compromise of Radcliffe and other writers gave their novels a more acceptable face. Botting considers these conventional endings as oversimplifications pandering to the conventional eighteenth century values:

Involving readers, like the heroines, in the narrative, the use of suspense encourages imaginations to indulge in extravagant speculations. The rational explanations [...] undercut the supernatural and terrible expectations and bring readers and characters back to eighteenth-century conventions of realism, reason and morality by highlighting their excessive credulity.¹⁴

This is probably the reason why the majority of critics preferred the works of Matthew Lewis which were typical by frank representation of harsh deeds and unexplained gruesome apparitions.

3.4 We have already said that there is an evident connection between the Gothic and the literature of sentiment. The Gothic literature revels in the depiction of character's emotions. The heroes and heroines of Gothic fiction are usually very sensitive people whose sensitivity is tensed to the much higher degree during the course of the narrative. The main characters turn pale, petrify or faint even to the slightest impulses. It is the feature typical mainly of the Female Gothic heroines that much of the fear originates in their own minds. When in a danger, their body freezes and their mind is absorbed by a complete astonishment leaving them absolutely unable to react, like Ellena in *The Italian* on her meeting a supposed assassin, Spallatro:

It seemed that she was brought hither by ruffians to a lonely house on the sea-shore, inhabited by a man, who had 'villain' engraved in every line of his face, to be the victim of inexorable pride and an insatiable desire of revenge. After considering these circumstances, and the words, which has just told her, she was to go no further, conviction struck like lightning upon her heart; and believing she was brought hither to be assassinated, horror chilled all her frame, and her senses forsook her.¹⁵

But the overindulgence of heroines in fine feelings is also extreme and it is Radcliffe's message to warn against both of these excessive feelings as Botting suggests: "Like the extravagant and superstitious imaginings that are displayed throughout Radcliffe's works, excessive sensibility is shown in order to indicate its dangerous evocation of passions that corrupt the heart."¹⁶ Ann Radcliffe uses the technique of antithesis where the visions that raised the imagination and shook the senses of both ourselves and the characters are subsequently rationally explained and therefore rejected. Punter sees Radcliffe's technique as a kind of parental approach which we, as the wise readers, should also follow. That is to look at the mistakes of Radcliffe's heroines critically but with indulgence at the same time.¹⁷ Despite such supposed reader's attitude, the presence of ghostly visions, harsh deeds and heroine's oversensitivity remains an essential characteristic of the genre which often had been criticised and ridiculed. In 1818 Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a novel we are going to analyze as well, was published as a variation on common Female Gothic themes as well as its powerful parody.

3.5 It is certainly very important to remark that Ann Radcliffe was interested in literary theory. The already mentioned essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry* made some important observations about the Gothic literature. The most important is the distinction between the horror literature and the terror literature on the basis of the theory of the sublime.

First, she identifies the sense of the sublime, previously used by Longinus and Burke, with the obscurity and uncertainty of the threat which brings the deep and grand feelings opposed to sudden shock on beholding something dreadful.

'How happens it then,' said Mr S—, 'that objects of terror sometimes strike us very forcibly, when introduced into scenes of gaiety and splendour, as, for instance, in the Banquet scene in Macbeth?'

'They strike, then, chiefly by the force of contrast,' said W—; 'but the effect, though sudden and strong, is also transient; it is the thrill of horror and surprise, which they then communicate, rather than the deep and solemn feelings excited under more accordant circumstances, and left long upon the

mind [...] There [in the Banquet scene of Macbeth], though deep pity mingles with our surprise and horror, we experience a far less degree of interest, and that interest too of an inferior kind. The union of grandeur and obscurity, which Mr Burke describes as a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror, and which causes the sublime, is to be found only in Hamlet; or in scenes where circumstances of the same kind prevail.’¹⁸

The uncertainty arouses the imagination. We can only guess at the source of the danger which is either real or imagined. Radcliffe prefers this way of demonstrating the mysterious objects and figures as we can see in the excerpt from *The Italian*:

‘Do you not distinguish a figure standing yonder, in the gloom?’

Vivaldi looked onward, and perceived, indistinctly something as of human form, but motionless and silent. It stood at the dusky extremity of the avenue, near the stair-case. Its garments, if garments they were, were dark; but its whole figure was so faintly traced to the eye, that it was impossible to ascertain whether this was the monk.¹⁹

We can see that Radcliffe’s characters are often not sure what is hunting them, but to reveal the source of our fear is in fact to get rid of it. We can read this assertion already in Burke who claims that “to make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.”²⁰ And Radcliffe goes even further in suggesting that “to ascertain the object of our terror, is frequently to acquire the means of escaping it.”²¹ In contrast with this way of creating the dread Radcliffe places the above mentioned horrific scenes that strike us by contrast and let us mute and motionless in shock:

‘They must be men of very cold imaginations,’ said W–, ‘with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise. 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 [...] and where

lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?'²²

In the literature of horror, the object of the fear is a very concrete image of something terrible. The characters get into the first-hand contact with physical mortality. The death is encountered directly by, for example, touching of a cold corpse or seeing a decaying body and this experience causes shock and disgust.

Ann Radcliffe apparently promotes the literature of terror. But let us now recount the factors that motivated the outlined division. There is an important connection between Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). As we have said many times, the works of Radcliffe conformed to the contemporary values governed by clarity and rationality, and are connected with the cult of sentiment. This is especially true for *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Matthew Lewis satirises the sentimentality of Radcliffe's work, but at the same time admits the great influence, concerning the supernatural motifs, of *Udolpho* on creation of his *Monk*. But his book approximates more to harsher German horror fiction. A big scandal accompanied the publication of book full of passion and transgression featuring depictions of cruelty and lust, apparitions of ghostly and devilish figures and even the scene of rape in 1796. This was followed next year by a response from Radcliffe, who was shocked by its sensationalism and sexual explicitness. She somewhat revised her previous attitude and introduced a novel in which she reduced the imagined terrors in favour of more credible and realistic narrative.

Since the works of Radcliffe represent the attitude defined as terror and Lewis's work is much closer to so-called horror, the literature of terror have been identified as Female Gothic and the literature of horror as Male Gothic. Let us revise the differences between these two. The sense of the uncertain source of threat is in contrast with the concrete imagery eliciting fear, shock and disgust. The stimulated imagination challenges the mind to arrive at some possible explanation of ambiguous fear and anxiety whereas the elements of horror render the reader confused and incapable of reasoning. Resolution of the terror provides a means of escape when the impossibility to explain horror causes a sense of

obscure despair. We should emphasize the fact that in her essay Ann Radcliffe identifies the sense of the sublime with the literature of terror.

3.6 Connected with the sublime is another convention, the long and elaborate depictions of nature surrounding the scenes. The typical settings are craggy mountains with deep valleys, forests and lakes or the picturesque villages, and their condition usually coincides with the character's emotional state. The joy and happiness is thus connected with the bright and sunny day in the rural landscape and the feeling of terror with the dark stormy night in the mountains or forests. Ann Radcliffe's depictions concur with the eighteenth-century conceptions of the picturesque and the sublime and she is inspired by the works of travel writers and painters. The effect is enhanced by usage of quotations from the masters of imaginative genius and natural sublimity of the Gothic age. Occasionally we even can see a character reflecting the effects of the nature on people's mind, as in *The Romance of the Forest*:

‘The stillness and total seclusion of this scene,’ said Adeline, ‘those stupendous mountains, the gloomy grandeur of these woods, together with that monument of faded glory on which the hand of time is so emphatically impressed, diffuse a sacred enthusiasm over the mind, and awaken sensations truly sublime.’²³

Ann Radcliffe uses the nature description very effectively and skilfully, and the passages picturing the nature are considered to be of a very high poetic quality.

3.7 We have already mentioned, in the introductory chapter, the typical characters of Gothic fiction. There is a young and honest heroine sometimes accompanied by a virtuous young man who loves and helps her, and she is pursued by a mysterious villain. Let us now concentrate on the Radcliffe's heroines in more detail in relation to the Female Gothic.

In the course of the narrative, heroines are repeatedly chased or imprisoned by the malevolent aristocrats and monks. They are usually orphaned, often in search for mother or mother substitute or commanded by dominating and strict father figure. Lilia Melani calls Radcliffe's character the travelling heroine²⁴ because she

journeys across the countryside or more often through the subterranean corridors, vaults, locked rooms and other indoor spaces being followed by the villain. As for the moment of danger or crisis, the heroine is passive. She usually reacts by fainting, blushing or falling into silence which is in accordance with the supposed behaviour of contemporary lady, and this conception is of course derived from the ideal of sentimentalism. But this interpretation has recently been challenged by feminist critics who see heroine's silence or refusal as a means of passive resistance, and her repeated attempts to escape supposedly indicate a desire to subvert domestic ideology. The imagery of old solid castles, convents or dungeons is used to represent the middle-class houses which were gradually constraining the lives of their female inhabitants. It is the similar case with the above mentioned places the heroines journey during their flight. They usually are the inner spaces because women are restricted to that kind of places.

3.8 Through the examination of heroine's actions we get to the revolutionary ideas encompassed in the early Female Gothic. The eighteen-century female condition was already captured in Clara Reeve's *The Recess*, where the two heroines are compelled to hide themselves. But the seeming security of the domestic space shows to be a prison rather than a refuge. It is an enclosed space which women are restricted to in a world ruled by men. Punter sees the condition of Reeve's heroines as even more dangerous than that of Radcliffe's:

The world of *The Recess*, even more explicitly than the world of Radcliffe's novels, is one in which women are in constant danger, almost regardless of their rank and historical importance, a world in which men as protectors pass almost naturally from kindness to rape.²⁵

Considering this we can regard Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe as the founders of the literature which challenges the traditional role of woman in society. It is a genre which sets the model, later reused and modified many times, of a heroine enclosed in the master's house. This model has been preserved in various alterations to the present day, as Chris Baldick suggests, because of "the relative failure of modern societies to ensure for women the kind of economic, legal and personal security that are enjoyed as the post-absolutists rights of man."²⁶ In

today's society, when men and women are considered equal, there are still many restrictions and regulations prescribed by the so-called female ideal.

3.9 In this chapter we encapsulated Ann Radcliffe's contribution to the development of Gothic genre, and we outlined the set of paraphernalia she used to depict and question woman's supposed role in society which was later to become the main characteristic of the Female Gothic.

4. Parody as the Reestablishment of Female Gothic's Authority: Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Its 'Anti-heroine'

4.0 It has already been said that usually the Female Gothic is connected with the literature of terror, which is characterized by the obscure sources of the threat and their reasonable clarification. We have mentioned the possible feministic reading of the enclosed setting and the heroine's flight as well, but the social origin of the fear is never stated explicitly during the course of the narrative. There is neither the moment of the awakening nor the process of maturing concerning the heroine's character. The feeling of terror disappears with solving of the crimes. Austen's description of her protagonist Catherine Morland presents her as an 'anti-heroine' meaning that she is an opposite of the traditional heroines of fiction, this term should not be confused with the anti-hero of the theatre of the absurd, a protagonist who succumbs in the face of adversity. In *Northanger Abbey* (1818) we encounter a heroine who is responsible herself for much of her suffering. Being of a humble origin she is uneducated in reading the cunning people's thinking and actions and so preoccupied with plots of the Gothic novels that she is not able to interpret what is going on around her. Using typical Gothic paraphernalia Austen creates an effective parody of the genre highlighting the real dangers not only for women but for the whole society.

4.1 It is clear that *Northanger Abbey* is not a simple parody. The narrator keeps a considerable distance from the heroine, and is, therefore, able to comment on the story of her heroine, who has to undergo a series of trials, some of which are amusing and some quite harsh, to be able to marry her beloved man Henry Tilney, which is supposedly the only aim of her and her contemporaries. Creating of the parody relies on good knowledge of the original. Austen imitates and often wittily comments on typical Gothic heroines, spaces and events. In the very beginning she caricatures the image of Gothic heroines by forming their exact opposite:

No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against

her. Her father was a clergy man, without being neglected or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard – and he was never handsome. He had a considerable independence, besides two good livings – and he was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters. Her mother was a woman of useful plain sense with a good temper, and what is more remarkable, with a good constitution. She had three sons before Catherine was born; and instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as anybody might expect, she still lived on [...] ²⁷

Several of the Gothic conventions concerning the typical characters are reversed here as David Punter suggests. In Gothic fiction we usually encounter a heroine who is parentless or at least motherless with a heavy-handed father. Generally the clergymen are poor unless they happen to be one of the treacherous and malicious monks who reside the pages of Gothic novels too. English names are usually replaced by Italian or Spanish ones due to Southern European setting, and, probably, due to their tinge of mysteriousness. And finally, the Gothic heroine is usually a girl of very frail and sensitive nature and of divine beauty. But later in the first chapter we read that Catherine is rather plain and she frequently devotes herself to boys' plays²⁸.

However, at the age of seventeen, the opportunity to become a heroine arises. Catherine is invited to accompany Mr and Mrs Allen during their stay in Bath and, later, to spend some time with Tilneys in the real, at least supposedly, gothic abbey. During the course of the story the narrator follows Catherine and compares her experiences with these of the stock Gothic heroines. We can see that there are many discrepancies between what Catherine expects or wishes to happen and the real happenings, probably because Catherine's notion of reality is affected by reading so many Gothic novels. Austen also pokes fun at the readers whose expectations may be affected by this reading as well. For example, when first on a ball, Catherine is supposed to be showered by gentlemen's attention as a heroine, but she is not: "She was now seen by many young men who had not been near her before. Not one, however, started with rapturous wonder on beholding her, no whisper of eager inquiry ran round the room, nor was she once called a divinity by anybody."²⁹ Instead she has to content herself with two complimentary comments

on her beauty: “she felt more obliged to the two young men for this simple praise than a true quality heroine would have been for fifteen sonnets in celebration of her charms.”³⁰ Catherine’s story is definitely not heroic, and Austen highlights her position as the ‘anti-heroine’ in final part of the novel, where Catherine’s return to Fullerton is contrasted with a triumphal comeback which the real literary heroine would have made: “I bring back my heroine to her home in solitude and disgrace; and no sweet elation of spirits can lead me into minuteness. A heroine in a hack post-chaise, is such a blow upon sentiment, as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand.”³¹

Not only the main character of the Gothic is evoked, but several times Catherine’s experiences are depicted in the Gothic manner, for example examining the secrets of an ancient chest or a wooden cabinet. Catherine blushes when she reveals they do not hold a terrifying secret she expected. General Tilney is not a murderer even if she identifies him with Ann Radcliffe’s characters in her imagination:

And when she saw him in the evening, while she worked with her friend, slowly pacing the drawing room for an hour together in silent thoughtfulness, with downcast eyes and contracted brow, she felt secure from all possibility of wronging him. It was the air and attitude of a Montoni.³²

We are going to discuss General’s real Gothic nature later.

Catherine’s craving for visiting a real ancient gothic mansion is depicted by Austen as almost childish, for example: “Northanger Abbey! – These were thrilling words, and wound up Catherine’s feelings to the highest point of extasy,”³³ or “Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney – and castles and abbeys made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill.”³⁴ But her desire is never to be satisfied. After arriving at Northanger encountering a renovated and comfortable building she finds out that her watch for the steep towers was useless.

We can see that Catherine’s hopes are somewhat deflated every time. A discovery of artificiality of Gothic novels is a certain disappointment for her.

4.2 As we have said before, Austen is not simply ridiculing the gothic stereotypes. Gilbert and Gubar assert that: “Rather than rejecting the gothic conventions she burlesques, Austen is very clearly criticizing female gothic in order to reinvest it with authority.”³⁵ While she questions the reliability of Gothic dangers she suggests that life and Gothic fiction are not all that far apart. Considering all the misfortunes and disappointments that befell her, Austen’s protagonist discovers that there is no need to look for gothic terrors since there are enough terrors in the everyday life. Let us explore some of these threats and their depiction in the novel.

To realize some of the real dangers hidden within the walls of Northanger Abbey we have to study the historical context and conditions of the novel’s publication. Although the novel was first published in 1817, after Austen’s death, it was completed some thirteen years earlier and the main body of the novel was probably written between years 1794 and 1799. The delayed publication of the novel made some aspects of the work incomprehensible for majority of the readers. Austen even mentions the changes in society that had taken place since its beginning and completing in her ‘Advertisement’ to the novel.³⁶ Robert Hopkins explores the actual historical events of 1790s which may have influenced the formation of the novel, and depicts General Tilney as a real villain involved in secret political affairs and exploiting the poor people of England.³⁷

Though not easy to comprehend and often misinterpreted certain passages serve to define General’s character clearly. In Beechen Cliff episode the word ‘inclosure’ is mentioned³⁸ referring to the actual enclosures emerging in 1790s which caused the displacement of the rural people. This context together with the notion of poor crop and inflationary grain prices in 1795 shows General Tilney as conceited and callous man who doesn’t care for the hardship of the poor and boasts about the abundance of his property when showing Northanger to Catherine or when ridiculing the cottage at Woodston. Cottage became a symbol of advancement for the rural poor in the harsh years of 1790s.

Other symptoms of General’s evil nature are his secret night occupations and journeys. Catherine considers his nightly work suspicious and doesn’t believe the

explanation that he is reading pamphlets. In 1790s there were many spies whose work was to expose the secret activities of the reform movements including searching for seditious pamphlets and meetings, and, according to Hopkins, General Tilney seems to be one of them:

No Jane Austen critic has ever recognized that General Tilney's duties at night were as inquisitor surveying possibly seditious pamphlets either for the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property or, after 1793, for the Home Office. Self-evident as it may now seem, this interpretation solves certain puzzling problems of interpretation.³⁹

Hopkins further proves his theory⁴⁰ by quoting Henry Tilney's reproachful speech to Catherine where he talks about "neighbourhood of voluntary spies".⁴¹ He probably implies that his father is one of them, but he is not allowed to condemn his father because of Jane Austen's code of gentlemanly behaviour.

However, there are more elements in the work referring to actual historical events which inform us about the real dangers arising from the contemporary situation. One of them is the misunderstanding between Catherine and Eleanor on Beechen Cliff. While Catherine is talking about a scandal expected in London meaning the publication of a new book, Eleanor confuses it with a riot alluding to real riots, for example Gordon Riots of 1780.

What seems to be one of the greatest perils for women of Austen's times is their powerlessness and economic dependence on men. While men were free and could do what they want, women couldn't act for themselves, were dependent on men, and often considered only as their property. When on a ball, Catherine and Mrs. Allen do not dare, since there is "no gentleman to assist them,"⁴² to speak to anybody. When Catherine hunts for some horrible family secrets in the old cabinet, she finds only a laundry bill, which becomes a symbol of the real threat for her. Her only possibility to escape one confinement of her parents' house is to enter another confinement of her husband's house, where she will be haunted by the laundry bills for good. During the course of the book Catherine also becomes gradually disillusioned with her idea of an ideal match. Reflecting on Isabella's story she understands that marriage is much more a matter of money than she has

thought before and she finds herself “perhaps as portionless as Isabella,”⁴³ which suddenly appears to be a great obstacle to her happiness.

Catherine is often struck by the superiority and cruelty of behavior of certain men, specifically John Thorpe and General Tilney, but she is not able to defend herself. She is unsuccessful in persuading John Thorpe to stop the chaise when seeing Tilneys in the street: “‘Pray, pray stop Mr Thorpe. – I cannot go on. – I will not go on. – I must go back to Miss Tilney.’ But Mr Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises and drove on.”⁴⁴ Apart from being an unmerciful capitalist and a spy, General commits his most serious crime in driving Catherine out of Northanger Abbey and letting her at the mercy of fate. The most horrible night Catherine experiences due to General’s rudeness is contrasted with her previous silly fears:

Heavily past the night. Sleep, or repose that deserved the name of sleep, was out of the question. That room, in which her disturbed imagination had tormented her on her first arrival, was again the scene of agitated spirits and unquiet slumbers. Yet how different now the source of her inquietude from what it had been then – how mournfully superior in reality and substance! Her anxiety had foundation in fact, her fears in probability; and with a mind so occupied in the contemplation of actual and natural evil, the solitude of her situation, the darkness of her chamber, the antiquity of the building were felt and considered without the smallest emotion; and though the wind was high, and often produced strange and sudden noises throughout the house, she heard it all as she lay awake, hour after hour without curiosity or terror.⁴⁵

In the comparison between threat of improbable appearance of some local ghost or other secret and the real horror of being expelled from Tilney’s house and passing all the way home by herself we can fully perceive Catherine’s previous naivety. Although Catherine’s mistrust of General Tilney proves just, it is precisely this naivety and a lack of insight that prevent her from right interpretation of people’s actions. It is Catherine’s family which is responsible for her lack of judgment. Her mother seems exactly inexperienced as Catherine

herself. When parting Catherine's mother has no better advice for Catherine than to instruct her to dress warmly and to count the money she spends because she "knew so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspecting of danger to her daughter from their machinations."⁴⁶

Catherine's innocence and inexperience becomes her own enemy. She judges behaviour of the others according to what she herself would do or sometimes according to the stereotypes of a novel. She is not able to comprehend irony or hyperbole or participate in any game people around her play, because she is not used to it from her previous experience. Again, the background she comes from is responsible for her inexperience:

Her own family were plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind; her father at the utmost, being contented with a pun, and her mother with a proverb; they were not in the habit therefore of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next.⁴⁷

Thus Catherine is often puzzled about people saying one thing but meaning the complete opposite, and we see her wondering like: "she knew not how to reconcile two such different accounts of the same thing"⁴⁸ or "why he should say one thing so positively, and mean another all the while, was most unaccountable."⁴⁹ She is unable to account for the lies of Thorpes. John's assertion that he saw Tilneys leaving the town that proves to be untrue and Isabella's stated hatred of men that contrasts with her permanent coquetry are the most perplexing things for Catherine.

Catherine discovers the literary clichés which shapes her reasoning right after her suspicion of General Tilney murdering his wife fades out:

Among the Alps and Pyrenees, perhaps, there were no mixed characters. There, such as were not as spotless as an angel, might have the dispositions of a fiend. But in England it was not so; among the English, she believed, in

their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad.⁵⁰

She understands that she had judged people according to the stereotypes of popular literature. She has seen people either as utterly innocent or extremely villainous, and she has not realized that their behaviour is usually much more complex. But her awakening comes no sooner than she is bitterly scolded by Henry for her overindulged imagination:

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you [...] Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?⁵¹

Even if Henry is fond of reading Gothic novels himself, he is able to distinguish between fiction and reality and between unreal and foreign world of the Gothic with all its perils and stable and safe world of contemporary England. However, the contemporary world proves to be only seemingly safe and Henry's reasonable and practical approach to be unreliable as well. In the end he is shocked by his father's rude manners and he becomes determined to disobey.

4.3 Let us now explore Austen's hero, who also shows some characteristics of a villain, in more detail. Henry embodies an authority at which Catherine looks up despite his constant reproving, admonishing and mocking lectures. He makes use of every possibility to tease and educate her. He does not bully Catherine as John Thorpe frequently does, but he questions contemporary stereotypes of female behaviour and thinking, which is of course partly shaped by literary depictions. Therefore, he mockingly treats Catherine like a heroine asking her about what she is going to write about him in her journal. He rightly suspects her excessive fancy when he foretells her adventures in the abbey. He warns her of her naivety when she considers everybody as innocent as she is. But at times his lessons are quite severe and unjust, for example when he comments on Catherine's new interest in flowers: "A taste for flower is always desirable in your sex, as a means of getting

you out of doors, and tempting you to more frequent exercise than you would otherwise take.”⁵² or when he talks about female style of letters: “it appears to me that the usual style of letter-writing among women is faultless, except in three particulars [...] A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar.”⁵³ Henry’s fondness for Catherine is inarguable, but his desire to educate her also seems necessary. According to Austen’s depiction it looks like men do not like stupidity in women but look for some degree of ignorance in them, and Henry seems to be one of them. Sometimes he shows himself as a patronizing father figure who points out Catherine’s mistakes trying to mold her.

Austen herself reflects on the questionable qualities men seek in their future wives:

The advantages of natural folly in a beautiful girl have been already set forth by the capital pen of a sister author; and to her treatment of the subject I will only add in justice to men, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable and too well informed themselves to desire any thing more in woman than ignorance.⁵⁴

In this ironic comment Austen questions the prosperity of this kind of a match but admits that it frequently occurs.

What qualities Henry appreciates in Catherine remains obscure. His educating and scolding is counterbalanced by his gentle attention and generosity, and in the end his judgment is conquered by Catherine’s intuition. General is really guilty but not of a murder but of pride, cruelty and greed. Henry feels that he is bound to excuse for his father and to offer Catherine a satisfaction for her suffering. And his marriage proposal is this satisfaction.

4.4 We have already indicated how Gothic literature is judged in the novel, but we should now give a brief survey of how the literature by women is treated.

There is a famous passage in the novel which ridicules the arbiters of contemporary literary taste who denounce novels and particularly that written by women as trash. Let us look at some quotations:

I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding. Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried [...] our foes are almost as many as our readers⁵⁵

Austen declares that she will not join the group of writers who produce and condemn novels at the same time. Later in this paragraph she names several praised writers like Goldsmith, Milton, Pope or Sterne and classifies them, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, as male anthologist whose work is neither original nor literary.⁴⁶ Apparently she identifies the injured body with the community of female writers and readers and invites them not to be ashamed of the work of their sex. However, it is interesting that that Jane Austen has her protagonist admitting the inferiority of novels herself when she says to Henry: “But you never read novels, I dare say? [...] Because they are not clever enough for you – gentleman read better books.”⁵⁶ But he does not approve, and he acknowledges reading novels as his hobby and he claims that it is nothing to be ashamed of. And John Thorpe does not hide the recognition of Radcliffe’s novels too. Austen therefore not only defends women’s writing herself, but she let her male protagonists advocate her opinion as well.

4.5 While maintaining some of the conventions of the Female Gothic, especially concerning the depiction of supernatural happenings, Jane Austen wittily outlines what may happen when one does not use the novels for their right purpose. She admits novel’s possibility of affecting people’s thinking, but she

attributes it only to the childishness and ignorance of the reader. But Austen draws attention to more actual dangers which arise from the contemporary situation. First of them is a social and political unrest due to adverse effects of capitalism, not easily discernible in the novel because of the delayed publication, and embodied primarily in the character of General Tilney. And another is the social requirement to evaluate young women in economic terms. The demonstration of the oppression of women is also present in Henry's lessons on speaking, reading and thinking. But in the end he realizes his mistakes, and is willing to recompense. Austen points out the qualities of Gothic novels as well as their darker sides, but she warns that the real perils reside in society itself.

5. The Unbearable Lightness of Maternity: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Necessity of Female Principle

5.0 Although the mainstream notion of Frankenstein has become limited to the image of a mad scientist, probably due to the filmmakers in particular, Mary Shelley's book represents a serious work of art stretching from the canon of romantic literature to that of Gothic, and although it is a novel without a heroine or even without an important female victim, the more detailed analysis reveals that the story encompasses the parable of female condition.

The formation of the novel as well as the birth of Mary Shelley as a writer was conditioned by her family and personal relationships. She was born to a literary family. Her father, William Godwin, was a famous journalist and philosopher, and her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, who died when giving birth to Mary, was a popular writer and prominent feminist. When she was sixteen she eloped with a prominent romantic poet, Percy Shelley. She became pregnant but three of her four children died in infancy. All of these circumstances seem to play an important role in *Frankenstein* (1818), the book that is often interpreted as a story about sexuality and maternity or a fantasia of birth.

As mentioned above, *Frankenstein* exemplifies a mixture of Gothic and romantic tradition. We encounter a hero who tries to break through human limitations and is punished. This theme represents a connection to other romantic texts. The seeker after forbidden knowledge is a common romantic character. For example the myth of Prometheus, the giver of wisdom who received a terrible and eternal punishment, was rewritten several times, and by the subtitle of her novel, *The Modern Prometheus*, Shelley refers to this particular hero. But in *Frankenstein*, as Punter claims, the characteristics of the Promethean hero are divided between Frankenstein and the monster he creates. Frankenstein defies God but the monster bears part of the punishment. It seems that the monster himself is innocent, and he becomes evil only by circumstance. Frankenstein is disgusted by his creation purely on the grounds of physical appearance, and it is probably the monster's early experience of rejection that turns him into evil being.⁵⁷

This notion together with the structure of the novel signifies that the monster's story is of equal importance as Frankenstein's is. The narrative structure of the novel is quite complex. The book is overflowing with texts. There are several narrations which are incorporated in each other. Besides, it contains allusions to some of the important contemporary works, most importantly Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

In her introduction to *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley depicts her work as a product of her effort to invent such terrifying story that will win a competition which she together with Shelley, Byron and Polidori arranged. But as her work continued, the story developed into a novel which gives us a record of her life and therefore of the feelings of contemporary women. Under cover of the story about the scientist and his hideous creation she bequeathed a testimony of a woman tied by conventions of the nineteenth century society in a fantastic tale relating the horrors that could arise when men would try to replace women by their own inventions.

5.1 The absence of important female characters is quite striking in a book written by a prominent feminist. In *Frankenstein* we encounter only passive, submissive or helpless women. Caroline Beaufort is a loving and self-sacrificing wife and mother who dies when nursing her adoptive daughter Elizabeth Lavenza. Elizabeth inherits her caring nature, and cares for the whole family while patiently waiting for Victor's attention, and is killed on their wedding day. Maid Justine humbly bears the death sentence despite her innocence, and the female monster is destroyed by Victor Frankenstein even before it is brought to life because of his fear of being unable to control her actions. Both Caroline and Elizabeth are depicted according to the contemporary female ideal, the angel of the house:

The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home. Her sympathy was ours; her smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless and animate us. She was the living spirit of love to soften and attract; I might have become sullen in my study, rough through the ardour of my nature, but that she was there to subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness.⁵⁸

The perfect housewife should be hardworking and ever cheerful but submissive at the same time, not interfering in men's business.

However, we should note Shelley's interesting comparison of life condition for women in Christian or Western countries and Muslim countries in the reasoning of Safie, one of the minor female characters, who is the daughter of a Turkish merchant:

[Safie] sickened at the prospect of again returning to Asia and being immured within the walls of a harem, allowed only to occupy herself with infantile amusements, ill-suited to the temper of her soul, now accustomed to grand ideas and a noble emulation of virtue. The prospect of marrying a Christian and remaining in a country where women were allowed to take a rank in society was enchanting to her.⁵⁹

This comparison shows that in Shelley's time women in Western Europe experienced much greater degree of freedom and independence than women in other parts of the world.

Instead of telling us about the life of oppressed women, Shelley presents outstanding interwoven stories of three different men. Again we encounter the typical Gothic habit of presenting the work as a manuscript. The story of Frankenstein's life is written down by Robert Walton, the sea explorer, who meets Frankenstein on his way to the North Pole, and who sends the manuscript in a letter to his sister in England. Walton's own story of meeting Frankenstein and later the monster is whole written in these letters. Frankenstein's narration, for a change, includes the story of the monster told by the monster himself and it encompasses the life stories of the members of the family in whose cottage the monster resided. Thus complex narrative structure helps us to obtain the different points of view, most notably we are able to acquaint with the feelings and thoughts of both Victor and the monster.

5.2 When studying Mary Shelley's work we should take into consideration the circumstances which accompanied the creation of the novel, especially her early motherhood. The strange interconnection between birth and death involved in

Shelley's own birth and multiple labours she herself experienced plays an important role as well.

Frankenstein relates the tale of birth in which Victor Frankenstein is a parent and the monster is his child, but it is a Gothic fantasy not a realistic story. Frankenstein doesn't bring his child into the world in a natural way. The creation of the monster includes some unspecified secret device, but Frankenstein's work is depicted in terms which resemble the real childbirth. Frankenstein claims to be "oppressed by a slow fever" and "nervous to a most painful degree"⁶⁰ and several times he uses such ambiguous words as 'labour' or 'confinement' to describe his work.

The birth is also represented as a hideous thing since Victor has to frequent such places as charnel houses, dissecting rooms and slaughterhouses to obtain the material for his creation and he himself calls his laboratory "my workshop of filthy creation."⁶¹ Here we again encounter the strange fusion of birth and death since the creation of the new creature is dependent on deaths of other creatures whose bodies Victor exploits. Frankenstein realises that the achievement of his work would entail not only the promise of a human becoming the creator of his own race but also the possibility of reviving the dead: "I thought that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now find it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption."⁶² Here, as Ellen Moers suggests, Shelley may be expressing her wish to have her baby alive.⁶³

When the work is complete and the monster takes his first breath Frankenstein is horrified by the repulsive appearance of a being he himself created, and immediately flees his laboratory. This scene may represent the shock of the mother on seeing her newborn child. The contemporary literature was overflowed with the images of joy and happiness of mothers when first holding their baby. However the real experience was usually quite different. Seeing the viscid blood-red creature with wrinkled skin and usually misshapen head could be quite disappointing experience for the exhausted mother who looked forward to this blessed day. The similar experience is described in *Frankenstein*:

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? [...] I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.⁶⁴

Shelley further investigates the alienation of parent and child and she imagines the tragic consequences of deficient care of the parents or their complete absence. Frankenstein and his so-called offspring are separated and after several disappointments the monster gets bitter and vengeful. However, the creator refuses to take responsibility for wretchedness of the monster, and both die without reconciliation. In the end we are presented the feelings of the abandoned child in monster's speech to Walton:

You, who call Frankenstein your friend, seem to have a knowledge of my crimes and his misfortunes. But in the detail which he gave you of them he could sum up the hours and months of misery which I endured wasting in impotent passions. For while I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires. They were forever ardent and craving; still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned.⁶⁵

The fact that the monster becomes a miserable outcast because of the unfavourable circumstances that accompany his childhood supports the Rousseauistic theories about *tabula rasa*, the belief that people are born innocent and unspoiled and their character is only formed by society.

Ellen Moers points out the circumstances which probably influenced Shelley's depiction of child-parent relationship which were: her father's renouncement upon her elopement, the birth of an illegitimate child and adored memory of mother who died giving birth to her. Moers claims that "no outside influence need be sought to explain Mary Shelley's fantasy of the newborn as at once monstrous agent of destruction and piteous victim of parental abandonment."⁶⁶ Considering this we should take into account possible uncertainty of the readers whether they should hate or pity the monster who is abandoned by everyone but who becomes a

murdering machine. It further supports the idea that the novel has more than one protagonist and their being neither heroes nor villains but something between.

5.3 Since Frankenstein relates the story of a man who, by making the creature of his own, rebels against either the natural laws or the belief in divine creation, it is probable that his effort to achieve an autonomous creation involves the secret desire to exclude women from the process of reproduction and therefore to show his complete sovereignty over the fair sex. But because his action proves to be disastrous to himself and his whole family, the qualities usually ascribed to female sex are instead found essential for the survival of human race.

Elisabeth Bronfen in her *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992) pursues the psychological processes underlying the actions of Victor Frankenstein and the monster.⁶⁷ We are going to examine some of these processes to prove the theory of Frankenstein's secret attempt to reverse natural processes and eliminate the motherhood from the procreation.

By putting together the parts of dead bodies and giving them life with his secret invention Frankenstein achieves the motherless creation. By creating an artificial body of mature male individual he tries to eliminate maternity with all its aspects like wedding, childbearing or upbringing and education. But abandoning the creature at the very hour of its birth causes the total wretchedness of both the creature and his creator.

Bronfen asserts that the use of already buried bodies implies Frankenstein's desire to surpass the natural maternal birth and to defeat death:

His turn to 'mother earth,' to the vaults and charnel houses, is an attempt to reverse his own birth, a return to nature's 'womb' to get the material for a 'creation' that will outdo his own birth by his mother because his reanimated corpse will deny the mark of death cointroduced with birth. By possessing the dead material of mother earth he hopes to possess not only his mother's creative power but also to possess death.⁶⁸

Not only is his attempt unsuccessful but by using the dead bodies as spare parts Frankenstein demonstrates his inability to accomplish the creation of living body by himself.

Victor's failure seems inevitable since he tries to break through human limitations. Victor's masculine creation turns monstrous, and, therefore, it becomes the sign of reconfirmation "of the ethic value of maternal creation".⁶⁹ Instead of triumphing over the death he produces a series of deaths.

The circumstances that accompany Victor's work also indicate the need to eliminate the female or the maternal. His long absence from home and the postponement of his and Elizabeth's marriage implies his aversion to enter the marital bonds because the cycle of family life implies the ephemerality of human life. Bronfen regards Victor's preference of creation of his own 'offspring' to his bride as an act of self assurance.⁷⁰

Only after the successful completion of his work does he allow himself to return home to do his duty since his and Elizabeth's union was his mother's last wish. However, their marriage is further delayed by Victor's obligation to create a mate for his monster.

It is interesting that the terrible consequences of Victor's action are indicated in a vision closely following the completion of his deed. In his dream Victor beholds the destruction of his own bride:

Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.⁷¹

As Bronfen suggests, Victor's dream connects the subsequent scene of Elizabeth's death with the birth scene. The potential mother is killed after Victor's successful motherhood.⁷²

Similarly, other persons from Frankenstein's family who come across the icon of motherhood are killed. The image of Frankenstein's deceased mother prefigures the deaths of her relatives as the medallion passes from hand to hand. But the miniature also becomes a symbol of steadfastness of the female figure as a guardian and caring and gentle person. After seeing the picture of Victor's mother the monster begins to long for a feminine counterpart, even if she will be monstrous and deformed, because it is the only way to recompense his preceding life without a parent or companion.

Victor's attempt to make himself a successful creator of a sensible being and a conqueror of death fails because he is unable to face the consequences of his actions. His initial revulsion at the monster's appearance and the following abandonment begins a series of feverish deliriums. His desire to eliminate the maternal and to defeat death by avoiding the natural birth is doomed from the very beginning.

5.4 When reading *Frankenstein* we should note the numerous allusions to biblical characters and scenes. Gilbert and Gubar point out the indisputable influence of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) on Shelley's work. Milton's interpretation of the Old Testament supports the perception of women as inferior to men indicating that they should stay subservient and should not aspire to gain the knowledge usually reserved only to men. The image of Milton as a wise patriarch and all women as his obedient daughters was still vivid when Mary Shelley was working on *Frankenstein*. She decided to reinterpret Milton's story of Adam and Eve in her own way or as Gilbert and Gubar put it "to take the male culture myth of *Paradise Lost* at its full value – on its own terms, including all the analogies and parallels it implies – and rewrite it so as to clarify its meaning."⁷³ We are going to examine how Shelley expresses her anxieties about *Paradise Lost* and the portrait of women it comprises.

All of the protagonists are depicted as loners craving for company. Their feelings are often depicted as the experience of Adam before God created Eve as companion for him. Victor is the only child since his parents adopt Elizabeth, who is presented to Victor as a gift by his mother, and he thus accepts her: "I, with

childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally and looked upon Elizabeth as mine – mine to protect, love and cherish.”⁷⁴ They become inseparable friends but Victor early recognizes the difference in their nature. We can note that Victor perceives Elizabeth to be inferior in curiosity or reason from the comparison of their characters: “Elizabeth was of a calmer and more concentrated disposition; but, with all my ardour, I was capable of a more intense application and was more deeply smitten with the thirst for knowledge”⁷⁵ or “While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their causes.”⁷⁶

It is probably due to this dissimilarity that Victor becomes dissatisfied with his given companion and decides to create a new one by himself.

Robert Walton is a social recluse. Being a person of a higher rank among the crew of sailors and in a foreign country he also longs for a friend. In a letter to his sister he expresses this need:

But I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate in my joy, if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavour to sustain me in dejection.⁷⁷

He finds a dear friend in Frankenstein, and he promises to help him complete his mission, but on the brink of death Frankenstein warns him against pursuing the ambition at all costs. Walton resolves to stop the journey to the North Pole, therefore he loses his friend as well as his objective.

The character whose fate most strikingly recalls the story of Adam is the monster. He himself compares his condition to Adam’s after reading *Paradise Lost*. The monster curses his creator for not giving him a single companion. Adam’s part is quickly replaced by Satan’s as the monster, after the initial revelations and amazement upon the variety of senses and feelings, becomes bitter and envious of the joys of life other creatures can experience and he contrives revenge. And

finally he seems to act the part of God when he gets the idea of making another creature and founding his own race somewhere in the wilds.

The other characters are also shifting the roles of Biblical characters. Aside from Frankenstein's obvious ambitions to take over the God's part there is also Walton's effort to discover parts of earth so far unseen. This desire also exceeds human limitations and his attempt is beginning to acquire a devilish dimension as he claims that "one man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race."⁷⁸ Thus Frankenstein and Walton represent two fallen angels who dare to oppose God's will. In the very end Frankenstein even identifies himself with a rebellious archangel "chained in an eternal hell"⁷⁹ and he recognizes his fall:

From my infancy I was imbued with high hopes and a lofty ambition; but how am I sunk! Oh! My friend, if you have known me as once I was, you would not recognize me in this state of degradation. Despondency rarely visited my heart; a high destiny seemed to bear me on, until I fell, never, never again to rise.⁸⁰

Gilbert and Gubar point out that none of the protagonists refers to the character of Eve when describing their feelings. They interpret this striking absence as possibility that despite the characters are constantly changing masks of other biblical figures, they are Eve in fact.⁸¹ Victor obtains the forbidden knowledge of the secret of life as Eve does when eating the apple. He claims that "to examine the cause of life, we must first have recourse to death,"⁸² and through examining vaults and charnel houses he symbolically discovers the curious interdependence of sex and death. Frankenstein dares to penetrate nature's mysteries as Eve gives in to the temptation to become wise and therefore superior. Doing this she unleashes Death and Sin upon the world as similarly Victor's hideous invention brings about a series of tragic events upon his life. Also the monster's short life on earth resembles that of Eve and the correspondence between their lives consists in many facts. The monster's body is created from the parts of the body of other beings similarly as Eve's body is created from Adam's rib. People are terrified by

the monstrousness and hideousness of the monster's body. This reminds us of common perception of female body as vile degraded and filthy. Eve's body is the mere imitation of Adam's body and one that is defective. Both Eve and the monster see their reflection in the pool. The monster is terrified by this sight:

At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification.⁸³

Although Eve is satisfied with what she sees, consequent vanity and pride that absorb her indicate her moral deformity.⁸⁴

Although there are no woman protagonists in *Frankenstein*, and even if the identification of Frankenstein and the monster with Milton's Eve is not stated explicitly, the book may be perceived as a secret expression of female condition. To be born female means to be inherently born fallen. Mary Shelley expresses impropriety and injustice of contemporary opinions about female nature and intellect. Their incorrectness lies in their being set beforehand. The inferiority of women is deeply rooted in society.

5.5 Even if *Frankenstein* was originally commenced as mere attempt to thoroughly frighten the readers⁸⁵, the story developed into an important parable about status of women in nineteenth century society. We have discussed Shelley's personal experiences which may have influenced her work and which support the interpretation of *Frankenstein* as a tale about difficulties of motherhood and upbringing. But there are other readings which emphasize the anxieties expressed in *Frankenstein*. The psychoanalytic reading focuses on Victor's secret desire to outdo the natural process of childbearing and thus devalue the status of women in society. And finally the observation of similarities with *Paradise Lost* presents *Frankenstein* as the new, rewritten story of Eve. Shelley points out that the traditional role of woman in society is much influenced by the story of the first woman, Eve, which shows her as inferior to Adam in origin, character and intellect.

6. Lost in the World of Doubles: Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and the Heroine Haunted by Her Own Psyche

6.0 Gilbert and Gubar define Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) as "an honest elegy for all those women who cannot find ways out and are robbed of their will to live."⁸⁶ This definition suggests that *Villette* represents another chain link connecting the works which focus on the women tied by conventions of patriarchal society. Charlotte Brontë, being instructed by masters of early feminist literature, Radcliffe, Austen and Shelley, created her own kind of Female Gothic which is, as the above definition hints, particularly gloomy and, at least seemingly, without happy ending. In fact, she leaves it to the reader to decide on the faith of her heroine Lucy Snowe, and she claims that this decision depends on readers' "sunny imaginations."⁸⁷ Even if she strongly hints that her hero is not to survive, the conclusion of Lucy's story seems quite positive and promising for women being in a similar situation as Brontë's heroine. Nevertheless, the main focus of the novel is not on plot but on exploration of Lucy's psychology. *Villette* appeared in the period when the Female Gothic was on the decline making way for the realistic literature and Brontë, as well as Lucy, had to come to grips with the residue of Gothic genre included in this work. So while the book is rich in nicely painted details of bright social life, it also explores, in detail, the individual's lone suffering, using the typical Gothic paraphernalia as foreign setting or anti-Catholic feeling but most importantly Gothic doubling and recurrent appearance of the most common Gothic spectre the ghostly nun. Lucy Snowe is a recognizable heroine because of her name. Within the Female Gothic canon she represents something quite new because, as it was said earlier, with novel becoming increasingly realistic and with the decline of romance, the focus shifts to psychological realism. Defining Lucy's status we can put her into the category of 'anti-heroines' because she lacks beauty as well as money and rank. Gilbert and Gubar define her as "a woman without – outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health."⁸⁸ However, Lucy Snowe abounds in intellect, which was the thing not much appreciated in women in Victorian England. *Villette* is the story of female deprivation. Lucy Snowe possesses a cold name and her manner is

equally cool, but it is only a shell in which she is forced to stay. Since she was not born under a lucky star she has to humbly accept what the life offers to her and to repress her real feelings, desires and ambitions. Brontë's novel is the exploration of the destructive effect of the forcibly buried life on the psyche of a woman in the patriarchal society. Another specific of this novel is Brontë's employment of the unreliable narrator, which is probably connected with the life condition of her heroine. Lucy often hides certain facts from the reader, certain knowledge or feelings she is aware of but she wants to suppress. Thus we may consider Charlotte Brontë as the forerunner of postmodern literature. In this chapter we are going to explore the various techniques, with focus on the Gothic means, she uses to get over the anxiety from the limits the nineteenth century society set upon women.

6.1 Since we were told that in *Villette* we encounter an unreliable narrator and that the focus of the narrative is not on the plot but on the psychology, it is not surprising that we do not get much information about Lucy's descent or childhood. We are told that her childhood might have been as carefree as that of any other girl:

I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass – the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion.⁸⁹

This quotation aptly captures the nature of education of women in nineteenth century. Women of higher rank of society were supposed to spend their life idle. The range of woman's responsibilities differed according to the profitability of her marriage. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, due to the industrial revolution, majority of woman's chores was performed by servants, and she was gradually robbed of any meaningful activity. Moreover, women were not provided with the proper schooling, as we can also observe in Lucy's description of Madame Beck's pensionnat, where more time is given to leisure or practice of housework than to study. Women were not supposed to use their brains as we can see in M. Paul's

rage for Lucy showing her intellect. Since they were denied both manual and intellectual work word “buried” is very suitable for describing their condition, and it is also the word critics often use to describe Lucy’s life.

Since the inheritance usually passed on the male line, that means that women were excluded from inheritance of family fortune, the unmarried women were dependent on generosity of male relatives or they had to earn their living. There were only a very few occupations women were allowed to perform and Lucy tries several of them. Kate Millett names and characterizes them: “paid companion, infant nurse, governess, schoolteacher. As they are arranged, each is but another name for servant.”⁹⁰ Gilbert and Gubar in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* also discuss governing and schoolteaching, and mark the lot of governess as especially difficult because apart from instructing children she was often obliged to do miscellaneous other housework and by this, even if she may come from the same class as her employer, she was degraded to the post of an ordinary maid.⁹¹ Lucy emerges in a similar situation in *Villette*. After the death of her employer Miss Marchmont, she is visiting another servant, and there she encounters the lady of the house in whom she recognizes her former schoolmate.

Different as were our social positions now, this child’s mother and I had been schoolfellows, when I was a girl of ten and she a young lady of sixteen; and I remembered her – good-looking, but dull – in a lower class than mine.⁹²

Mrs Leigh does not recognize her former schoolmate, but even if Lucy is conscious of her own decline in class, she recognizes her superiority in intellect over this woman, which means much more to her.

The above mentioned female occupations usually involved living-in and constant surveillance, as we can observe at Madame Beck’s boarding school. This entails total dependence on and complete subordination to one’s employer. Madame Beck’s police practices are especially impudent, and in Lucy’s resignation we can perceive a bitter but probably common acknowledgment of pointlessness to protest against such behaviour.

It is not surprising that Lucy feels a desire to liberate herself. The only possible means of liberation for women in a similar situation was, nevertheless, marriage, which could provide social and financial security. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “ill-paid, badly trained, and overworked, both governesses and schoolteachers often lived lives of quiet desperation, dreaming of matrimonial rescue.”⁹³ However, we do not notice such ambitions in Lucy. It is probably because she is an unreliable narrator, as we have mentioned in the introductory paragraph, but not only does Lucy hide certain facts from the reader, she hides them from herself as well. She does not acknowledge her affection for Dr John or M. Paul till the final chapters of the novel, and she suppresses other feelings in the very same way.

That the woeful situation of Lucy and her fellows was ignored by many people is represented by Paulina’s wonder at finding out that Lucy is a schoolteacher. She is surprised that her childhood companion has to work for a living and she expresses that it never crossed her mind that her acquaintances could find themselves in such situation.

‘Are you a teacher?’ cried she. Then, having paused on the idea, ‘Well I never knew what you were, nor ever thought of asking: for me you were always Lucy Snowe.’⁹⁴

Paulina simply does not realize that identity can be shaped by accidents of birth, the fact that many people who keep their position throughout their lives are not conscious of.

In comparison with Radcliffe’s heroines, Brontë’s protagonist is more realistic, less idealised. Even if the story is not set in England but in Labassecour which stands for Belgium, the majority of characters are English. Therefore the setting is more familiar. There is also a change in social status of the heroine. By an unspecified misfortune, her status is decreased and she is forced to accept an occupation. She does not possess an exquisite beauty or higher status so her identity is defined by her occupation to which she has to adapt.

6.2 In *Villette* reader often encounters an ideal match represented by a wealthy man and a beautiful but stupid woman. In sixth chapter, on the board of the Vivid, Lucy witnesses the exposition of various types of matches. She repels the union for money, which surely is the case of the Watsons.

The men were of low stature, plain, fat and vulgar; the oldest, plainest, greasiest, broadest, I soon found was the husband – the bridegroom I suppose, for she was very young – of the beautiful girl. Deep was my amazement at this discovery; and deeper still when I perceived that, instead of being desperately wretched in such a union, she was gay even to giddiness. ‘Her laughter,’ I reflected, ‘must be the mere frenzy of despair.’ [...] She must have been good-natured; but what had made her marry that individual, who was at least as much like an oil-barrel as a man?⁹⁵

Lucy, on the contrary, wonders at the stewardess’s scorn of her sister’s unprofitable marriage. Clearly, only feasible unions are businesslike. Therefore, Lucy’s relationship based on love, passion and understanding can’t survive.

Not only beauty and dullness but humility and virtue were required qualities of nineteenth century wives. Women, unlike men, were supposed conceal their passions. Gilbert and Gubar claim that “many medical men and laymen believed that a “good” – that is, a well-bred middle- or upper-class – woman was essentially passionless: if men were beasts ruled by sexual desire, their pure wives and daughters knew nothing of such matters.”⁹⁶ This quotation illustrates that not only was this belief unjust but also unscientific.

Men’s preference for such women is demonstrated by Dr John’s choices. For Lucy he is unconquerable, as Kate Millett suggests, “he will never acknowledge any woman who is not beautiful or rich, his only qualifications; he loved Fanshawe’s stupidity just as readily as Paulina Mary’s virtue.”⁹⁷ Dr Bretton chooses Paulina for a wife because she is cold. She seems innocent and without passions or sexual desires. But Paulina’s innocence, together with her often exposed ignorance and playfulness, is the sign of her immaturity. Her bodily tininess goes together with her childishness. Dr John’s affection for Paulina can be put in contrast with his scorn for the performance of famous actress Vashti.

While Lucy is impressed by her passion and feeling, Dr John stays essentially cool. Moreover, if sometimes Paulina is overcome by feeling, she has to hold her feelings back carefully. For example, when responding to Dr John's love letters she has to cool her feelings not to lose his admiration.

The reader becomes a witness to the double standard in the gallery scene. Lucy is rebuked by M. Paul for gazing at Rubens's portrait of Cleopatra, which pictures a voluptuous sex symbol reserved only for men's sight, and she is obliged to study the series of four gloomy pictures representing female humility and resignation.

In *Villette* we can again encounter the representation of matrimony as the father-daughter relationship, the idea which was mentioned in association with John Milton, when he was described as the wise father of all women. M. Paul displays paternal behaviour towards Lucy. At first their relationship is quite combative because they are equal. The resemblance between M. Paul and Lucy is indicated several times in the book. In one of their conversations M. Paul, who is a specialist in phrenology, expresses both their physical and mental likeness.

I was conscious of a rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike – there is affinity. Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine – that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star!⁹⁸

Even if in this particular situation M. Paul refers to Lucy's serenity and coolness, he is aware of her concealed capacity for passion, as he indicates previously in the book.

Petite chatte, doucerette, coquette! [...] vous avez l'air bien triste, soumise, rêveuse, mais vous ne l'êtes pas; c'est moi qui vous le dis: Sauvage! la flamme à l'âme, l'éclair aux yeux!⁹⁹

Despite his affection for Lucy he feels constant need to teach and guide her, similarly as Henry treats Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*. M. Paul is helpful when

Lucy exposes her imperfections but cruel when she displays talent and ambition surpassing the limits reserved for female sex. As Gilbert and Gubar claim, M. Paul wants Lucy to embrace the ideal of Milton's dutiful daughters, the notion of women as assisting to and being guided by their parental husbands.¹⁰⁰ Brontë also indicates father-daughter relationship between Dr Bretton and Paulina. After M. de Bassompierre's consent to the marriage Paulina plaits together the locks of her father's and Dr John's hair and puts them in a locket around her neck. In this symbolical gesture Paulina's father and husband merge, and Dr Bretton symbolically becomes her surrogate father. Paulina's need to take care of a man who is at the same time her instructor and protector is strongly suggested in the opening part of the book set at Bretton. Lucy finds Polly's behaviour strange and she ridicules her dependence on men, first her father and then young Graham Bretton.

Lucy Snowe is simply not an ordinary girl and she finally gains the appreciation of her exceptionality. But first she has to undergo a harsh trial of her personality. She is pursued by her employer Madame Beck, put off by her beloved Dr John, teased by her pupil Ginevra Fanshawe and reproved by her colleague M. Paul. But it is, as Kate Millett states, precisely M. Paul's "ridicule that forces her to achieve, pokes her into development, deprives her of the somnolence of ladyhood, its small ambitions, timidity and self-doubt."¹⁰¹ After his initial indignation Lucy wins his favour and M. Paul becomes her close friend and benefactor.

6.3 We have mentioned that Vilette represents an important exploration of a disturbed psyche. In particular we can examine the connection between Lucy's mental state and contemporary psychological theories influenced by patriarchal constructs that formed her cultural context.

The contemporary concepts of selfhood and insanity were, not surprisingly, quite chauvinistic. Women were perceived as more prone to insanity because of the instability of their reproductive system. Certain stages of female life were understood as especially unsteady. Puberty, pregnancy, childbirth or menopause were periods during which women were expected to be more vulnerable and susceptible to mental illness. Brontë's protagonist proves that the requirements

put upon women by such restricted psychological theories may cause serious damage.

Lucy adopts the method of self-surveillance. She guards the border between conscious and unconscious and she wants to repress her passions. Her breakdown is caused by social factors not biological, because her life is limited by her social and economical status and by traditional concepts of femaleness. The subject of Brontë's critique is the psychological damage caused by repressions.

Brontë's heroine is, in fact, not haunted by the outside threats. There are no villains making attempts on her life. She shows a remarkable coolness when confronted by the supernatural apparition. When encountering the ghostly nun for the second time Lucy has no scruples to pursue and interrogate her to find out the cause of the mystery. On the contrary, when she loses Dr John's letter during the first encounter with the spectre, she goes mad with search for the letter forgetting the nun completely.

Lo! When I reached the garret-door, all within was dark as a pit: the light was out. Happily, some one – Madame, I think, with her usual calm sense – had brought a lamp from the room; speedily therefore, as they came up, a ray pierced the opaque blackness. There stood the bougie quenched on the drawers; but where was the letter? And I looked for *that* now, and not for the nun.

‘My letter! my letter!’ I panted and plained, almost beside myself. I groped on the floor, wringing my hands wildly. Cruel, cruel doom! To have my bit of comfort preternaturally snatched from me, ere I had well tasted its virtue!

I don't know what the others were doing; I could not watch them: they asked me questions I did not answer; they ransacked all corners; they prattled about this and that, disarrangement of cloaks, a breach or crack in the sky-light – I know not what. ‘Something or somebody has been here,’ was sagely averred.

‘Oh! they have taken my letter!’ cried the grovelling, groping, monomaniac.¹⁰²

This excerpt proves that Lucy's fears are indeed more realistic and they are tied to her social role. She dreads being spied by her employer Madame Beck and being deprived of the proof of attention of her only possible suitor Dr John.

In *Villette*, fears and threats stem not from the outside but from the inside. They are psychological, not supernatural, and therefore more realistic. Being orphan and single in a foreign country and dependent on the goodwill of the headmistress, the things Lucy dreads the most are: homelessness and loneliness, being unloved and overlooked, revealing feelings and desires, losing control, disintegration of selfhood or identity and being tied by gender conventions.

When discussing the psychological state of the protagonist, we should mention Freud's theory of the Uncanny which has been very influential in interpreting Brontë's *Villette*. The uncanny effect arises when something in the mind has been suppressed for a long time and in a certain situation it comes to the surface. Therefore a seemingly unfamiliar image, situation or experience suddenly becomes familiar. To illustrate such experience we can refer to Lucy's first encounter with La Terrasse. After she collapses in the street, she wakes up in an unfamiliar house. As she oscillates between slumber and wakefulness, she observes the furniture, and, strangely, the objects surrounding her seem familiar. She is not able to account for the presence of the familiar things, forgotten long ago, in the unfamiliar environment of foreign house in a foreign country. She is startled to perceive such occurrence and she believes these objects to be some ghostly appearances of distant things and her being in a strange delirious state.

There are, however, many more situations with an uncanny quality in the novel. For instance, Lucy's repeated encounter with the Brettons and little Polly/Paulina, but also Lucy's repeated encounter with herself. When visiting a concert she notices a group of unknown people who suddenly become familiar.

I noted them all – the third person as well as the other two – and for the fraction of a moment, believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror, filling a compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party.

Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the 'giftie' of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret, it was not flattering, yet after all, I ought to be thankful: it might have been worse.¹⁰³

After this unusual experience Lucy often expresses the desire to see herself as other people see her.

Another frequent literary source of the Uncanny are doubles. The nineteenth century literature by women was overflowed by double images of female self-assertion and self-abnegation. Often the counterpart of the heroine is represented by a mad or villainous woman, of whom the most popular is certainly Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre*, and together they express the embodiment of traditional perception of women as being either totally innocent and virginal or evil and wicked.¹⁰⁴ In *Villette* we do not encounter one reflection but a whole gallery of images of Lucy's selves. The female characters represent the various elements of Lucy's psyche: her secret desires, repressed feelings or various personalities she may have become.

Probably the most important double image of Lucy is Polly/Paulina. Since she is Lucy's childhood companion who appears again in the book when they are both grown-up, she is the most powerful image of the self Lucy may have become. Lucy is not that lucky, she has neither money nor social status, neither father nor admirer ready to take care of her. Often there is a resemblance in their behaviour. For instance in receiving letters with great excitement and locking them up. But while Lucy has to bury her letters under ground to suppress her desire for romantic love and male protection, Paulina makes a similar gesture in plaiting together the hairs of her father and her bridegroom and locking them up in an amulet around her neck to keep the care and attention of them both. But, as we have said earlier, many qualities that Paulina has and that make her a suitable bride for Dr Bretton stem from her immaturity.

In this sense Lucy represents an anomaly. She is a fully grown-up, passionate woman. She longs for a sexual love of a beautiful man but cannot have it because she is too clever and adult. She possesses a strong self-respect and unscrupulous

and self-dependent intellect, the qualities more expected in a male. That is why she is addressed by Ginevra Fanshawe as 'Diogenes' or 'Timon', two men known for being too reasonable and ascetic. By parading herself in front of her Ginevra attempts to defeat Lucy with her beauty and charm, but nevertheless Lucy's intellect and sarcasm always win. Ginevra represents Lucy's attraction to freedom and excess.

The association between Lucy and Madame Beck is also discernible from her first appearance in the book. Lucy is magically led to Madame Beck's the night she arrives at Villette, without intending it. Madame's first appearance in the book is ghostlike, and even if Lucy finds out that she is not a ghost, her entering Madame Beck's boarding school begins a series of internal suffering accompanied by external spectral apparitions. Madame Beck passes through the house soundlessly and is ready to spy out anything. For Lucy she is an embodiment of competence and ambition, but she is at the same time terrified by Madame's unscrupulousness. Madame Beck spies for the forbidden activities under the roof of her pensionnat, and thus she becomes an effective collaborator in consolidating patriarchal ideologies. She proves the fact that women's liberation is difficult since they adopt the destructive principles of male-dominated society. Madame Beck is, therefore, both Lucy's alter ego and her rival and Lucy finally manages to stand up to her.

Another woman Lucy admires for her brilliant competence and management is Mrs Bretton. Because of Lucy's motherlessness and Mrs Bretton's affection for her she is a kind of surrogate mother to her, although she is excessively fond of her son Graham/Dr John. She dotes on him and wants a wife for him who would care for him equally. Mrs Bretton expresses her tender love for Graham in a letter to Lucy. Thus Mrs. Bretton's jealousy might become an obstacle for Lucy in winning Graham.

At the beginning of the novel, after short excursion to her childhood, Lucy cares for Miss Marchmont, an old disabled spinster, whose meaning of life was her lover who died long ago, and she buried her own self with him. Her self-imposed withdrawal from society is a cause of her solitariness. Lucy begins to resemble

Miss Marchmont because she is willing to accept the same lot. And in the final chapter of first volume we can encounter the last nightmarish vision of Lucy's self. A cretin Lucy takes care of and who becomes Lucy's only companion for the solitary holidays during which Lucy's mental illness culminates.

Lucy is born to the world without proper female models. She observes, as Kate Millet calls them: "the adoring mother, the efficient prison matron, the merciless flirt, the baby goddess,"¹⁰⁵ and she is not willing to accept any of these roles.

The split between the two extremes of female prototype and the inability to embrace any of them is exemplified by the two pictures in the gallery. Lucy detests both unrestrained sensuality embodied by Cleopatra and self-sacrificing submission depicted by *La vie d'une femme*.

6.4 Apart from the Gothic doubling there are other typical gothic devices. The most powerful is probably the spectre of the dead nun. The nun who appears to Lucy several times is a suitable metaphor for Lucy Snowe herself because, due to the forced repressions, her true self, or selves, is buried.

Lucy encounters the nun in the garden after the twilight or in the gloomy garret. Despite the simple and ridiculous explication of the apparition, the nun always appears in a Gothic manner.

Something in that vast solitary garret sounded strangely. Most surely and certainly I heard, as it seemed, a stealthy foot on that floor: a sort of gliding out from the direction of the black recess haunted by the malefactor cloaks. I turned: my light was dim; the room was long – but, as I live! I saw in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black or white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white.

Say, what you will, reader – tell me I was nervous, or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that letter; declare that I dreamed: this I vow – I saw there – in that room – on that night – an image like – a NUN.¹⁰⁶

Since this spectre is not real we should give a symbolical explanation for it. As Lucy encounters the nun in situations connected with Dr John (when reading his

letter, when burying his letters and when wandering around the spot of their burial) it may be connected with her repressed feelings for him. But Gilbert and Gubar admit another interpretation of this symbol. Women have frequently been acknowledged as the source of sin. When they accepted their guilt and felt a need to repent they entered the convent. But sometimes women became aware of their minority and invisibility and their bitter lot. In *Villette*, the nun is not only the symbol of Lucy's effort to accept confinement but also the representation of only acceptable role for single women, the obligation to take veil. But as this particular nun embodies the protest against male injustice, she haunts Lucy as the warning against austere life. She is the symbol of Lucy's puzzlement. How can she, as a single woman, escape the nun's fate?¹⁰⁷

The fraudulence of the spectre is proved by Brontë's clarification of the mystery. Although she depicts the apparitions very seriously, she pictures Lucy's last encounter with the nun quite mockingly. She tears up the nun, which is in fact the pillow dressed in nun's garments, while imagining that she is fighting with various Gothic monsters, and then after putting the pieces under her pillow she falls into deep sleep. And finding out the next morning that the ghost was in fact Guinevra's suitor in disguise the nun proves to be neither the gothic horror nor the figment of Lucy's exerted mind but a side effect of secret love affair which escaped Madame Beck's trained eye.

The Gothic frame of the novel is reinforced by some aspects of the typical gothic setting. Lucy accepts a job at Madame Beck's boarding school which once used to be a convent and still it partially maintains its atmosphere thanks to dormitories made from formerly nuns' cells and especially Madame Beck's careful supervision. Lucy's physical isolation is complemented by her psychological and emotional isolation. Lucy is homeless and solitary from the very beginning. Having neither home nor friends and her social position being tied by gender conventions she seems to be a prisoner in the Gothic world.

And finally, the novel's setting on the continent expresses the critique of rigours of Catholic Church. It doesn't convey the testimony of horrible deeds of their representatives, but it focuses on Lucy's agitated feelings connected with the

pressure she believes it imposes on women. Lucy herself feels a strong repulsion against Catholicism because it embodies the masculine domination. She scorns the existence of Catholic convents as patriarchal institutions that imprison women. In chapter 38 Brontë meditates upon divine justice and she claims that “his will be done, as done it surely will be, whether we humble ourselves to resignation or not.”¹⁰⁸. She probably expresses the feeling that a woman may fulfil her obligation to God without succumbing to the ridiculous requirement imposed upon her by male-dominated church. According to Lucy’s sense both the Art and the Church represent and maintain the false myths of male supremacy. Both are old-fashioned and ceremonious and they are the instruments to retain this unequal distribution of power.

6.5 The specific narrative technique and the development of Brontë’s narrator Lucy Snowe should not be omitted. The novel begins with a passive and secretive protagonist who only rarely turns our attention to herself and instead focuses on close observation of other characters: her godmother Mrs Bretton, Graham and Polly. Moreover, Lucy initially does not see the inner qualities of things and people, she remains a secret observer. She is an unreliable narrator who hides many facts from the reader and often her story focuses on lives of other people, especially women. By employing such unusual technique she strives to undermine the conventional male narrative. Lucy’s narration is unconventional in the same way as she is an unconventional woman because she does not fit the traditional image of female. As Lucy manages to reinforce her vigour and self-confidence she also gradually becomes the centre of the narrative. While the stories of minor characters take a back seat, the story of Lucy’s newly emerging love achieves the greatest importance. During the course of the story Lucy pays little attention to the faults of other protagonists’ characters. She overlooks their faults patiently, forbearance is her bread and butter. But gradually she gives way to her discontent. Lucy’s caricature of human justice brings the parable of her condition referring to the unfairness of the world to which she was born, full of lucky people who do not care for the unhappy. After Paulina’s and Graham’s engagement Lucy depicts the group of eternally fortunate people from which she is excluded.

I do believe there are some human beings so born, so reared, so guided from a soft cradle to a calm and late grave, that no excessive suffering penetrates their lot, and no tempestuous blackness overcasts their journey. And often, these are not pampered, selfish beings, but natures elect, harmonious and benign; men and women mild with charity, kind agents of God's kind attributes.¹⁰⁹

She strives not to envy Paulina and not to blame Dr John for arousing false hopes in her. She concludes that he did not recognize the pain he had caused and therefore she has a right to enjoy the bliss of marital life with Paulina as he had enjoyed the care of his mother. Lucy also pictures obviously malevolent characters with apparent sympathy, the fact which may seem incomprehensible for the reader. Not until the few final chapters the antagonists are acknowledged in confrontation between her and Madame Beck and the very last remark of Lucy's desperate unluckiness: "Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her nineteenth year before she died. Farewell."¹¹⁰

6.6 In the very last remark of *Villette* Charlotte Brontë hints that some people live really desperate lives while the others bask in the fortune's favour. For her novel Brontë chose the part of that unlucky group that comprises of single women who are given only slight opportunity to improve their lives. There is no doubt that she drew on her own experience. Even if Lucy's story as a whole may seem particularly gloomy, Brontë asserts that she leaves it on the readers whether they choose the happy or the bad ending. But is there a choice of really bad ending?

Whether Lucy Snowe's romance was allowed to continue depends on the reader, but the fact is that Lucy achieved her own independence. Unlike Radcliffe's or Austen's heroines, she manages to escape the ancestral mansion and avoids the convent without being married. M. Paul does not become her master and protector, he is only a provider. He helps her to stand on her own two feet and then she has to take care of herself which she, according to her account, manages perfectly. Even if the idea of woman's acquisition of independence was very

unlikely in Brontës time, she expressed her hope that maybe, sometime in the future, they will achieve it.

7. The Woman Who Knew Too Much: Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and the Progress of the Unnamed Heroine

7.0 More than eighty years after the publication of *Villette* another novel concerning the personal development of a heroine restricted by the principles of patriarchal society and including the wide range of Gothic features appeared. It was Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), which under the guise of a romance presents a story about search for identity and self-assertion of the heroine who is oppressed by her reserved and domineering husband and haunted by powerful ghostlike figure of his deceased wife. The historical moment and setting of the novel are uncertain, but drawing on cultural historical facts present in the novel and according to du Maurier's biography we can assume that we are situated in Cornwall of the first half of the twentieth century. The majestic and vital building of Manderley was probably based on the deserted estate of Menabilly which du Maurier later inhabited and, as Ann Wilmore suggests, the story may be influenced by the warm relationship to her father and rather complicated to her mother or affected by du Maurier's own jealousy of his husband's former fiancée.¹¹¹ Even if *Rebecca* is most often compared to *Jane Eyre*, one of canonical texts of Female Gothic, it is also closely connected with the novels we have previously discussed. Like *Jane Eyre* the narrator starts a romantic relationship with an older man who is attractive but harsh and brooding at the same time, she is afflicted by a mysteriously perturbing presence of a first wife, and finally, together with her beloved, has to bear the sacrifice of the burnt down house. We are going to examine the gothic features of this outstanding novel focusing chiefly on those related to novels by Radcliffe, Austen, Shelley and Brontë.

7.1 The narrator of the book, whose name is never mentioned, has some characteristics of a typical Gothic heroine. She is a young woman with fair skin and fair hair, and she is quite frail and bashful. Being an orphan she has to take care of herself. In the beginning of the story she works as a companion to the wealthy and conceited woman Mrs Van Hopper. This job does not satisfy her, but during the first conversation with her future husband Maxim de Winter she says that it seems acceptable because of the money she gets. Maxim, on the other hand, shows his contempt for an idea of being paid for a companionship and says it

reminds him of “the Eastern slave market.”¹¹² However, when he makes his proposal he tells the narrator that after their marriage her life will not change much.

Instead of being companion to Mrs Van Hopper you become mine, and your duties will be almost exactly the same. I also like new library books and flowers in the drawing room, and bezique after dinner.¹¹³

Later we can see that Maxim’s forecast proves true. As Mrs de Winter she does not have much interesting work to do. Her only duty is to entertain her husband and his relatives or acquaintances during visits or long walks. Therefore, she, like majority of her forerunners, has only two choices: tedious and degrading work or marriage. In this case, these two states seem practically the same. Either as Mrs Van Hopper’s companion or Maxim’s wife she is under constant surveillance. The former, as a usurping matron, tries to deprive her of any trait of personal life as we can see in her accusation of trying to monopolize the conversation with Maxim and narrator’s subsequent careful concealing of their meetings. The latter searches for any knowledge inappropriate for his wife flying into a rage when he suspects she may have learned anything harmful. Moreover she is under the surveillance of the local aristocracy and the servants, especially Mrs Danvers who reminds us of Madame Beck from Brontë’s *Villette*. However, much of the supervision comes from the narrator’s own head. She constantly compares herself with Maxim’s first wife Rebecca and finds herself inferior, and subsequently she imagines the terrific gossip that probably must arise about her.

Similarly to early Gothic heroines, the narrator’s expectations are influenced by reading fiction, especially romances. She compares herself with stock romantic heroines and finds her experiences much different. Thus she becomes the modern Catherine Morland, but being more diffident and self-critical than Catherine she is not that bewildered by these differences.

I thought of all those heroines of fiction who looked pretty when they cried, and what a contrast I must make with blotched and swollen face and red rims to my eyes. It was a dismal finish to my morning, and the day that stretched ahead of me was long.¹¹⁴

She bears the disappointment from the comparison with romantic heroines as humbly as the comparison with Rebecca. But sometimes she is astonished by Maxim's practical reserved behaviour which seems quite offensive even from the very beginning before they are married.

This sudden talk of marriage bewildered me, even shocked me I think. It was as though the king asked one. It did not ring true. And he went on eating his marmalade as though everything were natural. In books men knelt to women and it would be moonlight. Not at breakfast, not like this.¹¹⁵

In moments like these, the reader must be sure that *Rebecca* has nothing to do with romantic fiction. Since the narrator marries Maxim in the beginning of the story we can hardly expect a story about courtship. Like many other Gothic novels the narration has a certain frame. The narrator tells her story from a distance of several years, similarly to Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, and we can perceive that her relationship with Maxim as well as her own self underwent a complex and rather difficult development. The struggle to keep their relationship left a shadow on their souls, but the narrator seems wiser and happier now.

Happiness is not a possession to be prized, it is a quality of thought, a state of mind. Of course we have our moments of depression; but there are other moments too, when time, unmeasured by the clock, runs on into eternity and, catching his smile, I know we are together, we march in unison, no clash of thought or of opinion makes a barrier between us.¹¹⁶

Thus *Rebecca* is not a story about heroine's search for love, it seems that despite Maxim's coolness and reserve she had it from the very beginning. It is more about struggle for maturity, respect and happiness.

7.2 Even if she never appears materially, Rebecca holds the power over her mansion and is a phantom equally terrifying as other ghost or spectres haunting the houses. The frequent comparison to *Jane Eyre* suggests the parallel with Bertha Mason. They are very similar even if Bertha was only imprisoned in the attic by Rochester, while Rebecca was killed by Maxim. However, after the discovery of her body in the middle of the book, Rebecca begins to threaten them

materially, therefore the discovery of her ship reminds a terrific return from the dead.

Rebecca follows the nineteenth century tradition of expressing the suppressed or not yet revealed part of heroine's self by an evil doppelganger. The narrator and Rebecca are two opposite extremes, the former good and innocent, the latter evil and wild. While the narrator presents herself as plain, shy and unnoticeable girl, Rebecca is depicted by the accounts of her former acquaintances as the beautiful, confident and sophisticated woman, outgoing and much admired by the others. While the narrator is diffident and naive, Rebecca apparently was knowing and clever or rather cunning, and she overtly displayed her sexuality and power. While Rebecca's maid Mrs Danvers admired her knowledge and courage, Maxim was afraid of it. The dissimilarity between the narrator and Rebecca is apparent from the difference between their attributes. Rebecca's personality is connected with the heady and intensive scent of azaleas and the blood-red and overwhelming tendrils of rhododendrons, whereas the narrator's flowers, planted in the garden under her bedroom, are roses whose smell is plain and delicate. The windows of Rebecca's bedroom, on the contrary, overlook the wild rustling sea. The interior of their bedrooms is also different. While Rebecca's is ancient, vast and majestic, certainly remarkable, narrator's is modest and elegant, freshly furnished. The difference between their appearance and behaviour is also indicated in the book. A handicapped local called Ben hints at the impression each of them leaves on the others. He tells the narrator that she has got angel's eyes, but says that Rebecca "gave you the feeling of a snake."¹¹⁷ By killing his first wife and marrying her exact opposite Maxim attempted to defeat the side of women's psyche traditionally perceived as evil and to maintain the dutiful an innocent one. However, Rebecca presents a woman who is definitely not undesirable for men. She is the femme fatale. Horner and Zlosnik refer to Rebecca's fatality being connected with her vampire-like characteristics. As sexually aware and dominant woman she is attractive and repellent at once but feeding on men like a vampire she has to be killed. She has several traditional vampire characteristics: pallor, plentiful hair and voracious sexual appetite, and like vampire she is killed thrice: annihilated by cancer, shot and drowned. As mentioned earlier, she partly rises

from the dead and she foretells her return in giving her boat name 'Je Reviens' (I will return).¹¹⁸

The narrator is at first utterly afraid of Rebecca, her possible alter-ego. She is reluctant to ask any questions about her and she dreads any remark about her and her death, but she cannot stop thinking about her and uttering or hearing her name is the menace and relief at the same time. The presence of doubles in Gothic literature, and in fiction in general, is connected with the suppressed aspects of our psyche. The exploration of unexpected emergences of the unknown sides of ourselves is connected Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. The self is supposed to be created by accepting certain qualities as ourselves while rejecting others as not ourselves. Abjection is the psychic experience of sudden slippage outside the borders of our ego, which allows us to behold and experience the repressed sides of ourselves, and which brings an uncanny effect of horror. The theory of abject is naturally connected with Freud's theory of the Uncanny because it involves the rediscovery of things suppressed for a long time. Thus the presence of doubles is connected with the repudiated desires or identities which we put aside as not belonging to ourselves, but which may come out and haunt us. The figure of Rebecca may be considered as one of these suppressed spectres. The narrator struggles in vain with her continual presence. One of the symbols of Rebecca's everlasting presence is the constant emergence of her handwriting, signature and monogram whose peculiar form is the mark of Rebecca's outstanding personality. The narrator's depiction of her first encounter with her handwriting indicates the strength of Rebecca's personality.

'Max – from Rebecca. 17 May', written in a curious slanting hand. A little blob of ink marred the white page opposite, as though the writer in her impatience, had shaken her pen to make the ink flow freely. And then as it bubbled through the nib, it came a little thick, so that the name Rebecca stood out black and strong, the tall and sloping R dwarfing the other letters.¹¹⁹

Later she attempts to delete Rebecca's presence by destroying the page of the book. Tearing it into pieces is not enough. She has to burn it down.

Even now the ink stood up on the fragments thick and black, the writing was not destroyed. I took a box of matches and set fire to the fragments. The flame had a lovely light, staining the paper, curling the edges, making the slanting writing impossible to distinguish. The fragments fluttered to grey ashes. The letter R was last to go, it twisted in the flame, it curled outwards for a moment, becoming larger than ever. Then it crumpled too; the flame destroyed it. It was not ashes even, it was feathery dust.¹²⁰

But when the narrator arrives at her husband's manor Manderley, she finds the horrible writing everywhere: on pigeonholes in the morning-room, on Rebecca's handkerchief, on a nightdress case Mrs Danvers secretly preserves. Horner and Zlosnik suggest that the narrator's attempt to defeat Rebecca by burning her handwriting is a prognostic of the final destruction of her home Manderley in fire, and that her writing "leaves and indelible trace on Manderley which can only be erased by the destruction of the house itself yet that same writing returns in the text which is *Rebecca* the novel."¹²¹ By deciding to write a story about Rebecca, the narrator unwittingly admits her strong influence on her. It seems that even if she fears her, she secretly admires her and she wants to be more like her, a self-confident woman possessing adult sexual knowledge, but Maxim apparently wants her to be Rebecca's opposite.

7.3 Owing to the confrontations with her mysterious double the heroine finally attains her own strong personality. Starting as a girl without status, knowledge or confidence, she gradually moves up. The vast hollow house of Manderley becomes the symbol of her self. She fears her own servants, she wanders hopelessly along the corridors, and she allows Mrs Danvers to run the house according to her predecessor's orders. But she fails also in dealing with her own husband. She does not know how to communicate with Maxim, who gets angry with her often, and she has to call a truce being unable to rival him in an argument. But following heroine's frame narration we can perceive that she finally managed to equal her husband.

I suppose it is his dependence upon me that has made me bold at last. At any rate I have lost my diffidence, my timidity, my shyness with strangers. I am

very different from that self who drove to Manderley for the first time, hopeful and eager, handicapped by a rather desperate gaucherie and filled with an intense desire to please.¹²²

Looking back from a distance the narrator emphasizes that maturity is more a process than a state. Often she suggests that we can never preserve the presence, never mind how hard we try, because we have to develop: ‘we smile, we choose our lunch, we speak of this and that, but – I say to myself – I am not she who left him five minutes ago. She stayed behind. I am another woman, older, more mature...’¹²³

The narrator’s insignificance is emphasized by her namelessness. Wilmore suggests that du Maurier’s technique of never mentioning the name of her heroine proved “to be a very effective way of making the character appear to be a lesser person than Rebecca, so that she is less confident, less capable, less attractive to Maxim, not even a significant enough person to be named.”¹²⁴ The absence of narrator’s name highly contrasts with the frequent occurrence of the name of her double. When she thinks about Rebecca her name sometimes occurs in almost every sentence.

Narrator’s initial naivety and submissiveness is intensified by Maxim’s mockery which the narrator can’t deal with. He never misses any chance to tease her, even during his proposal.

‘My suggestion doesn’t seem to have gone too well,’ he said. ‘I’m sorry. I rather thought you loved me. A fine blow to my conceit.’

‘I do love you,’ I said. ‘I love you dreadfully. You’ve made me very unhappy and I’ve been crying all night because I thought I should never see you again.’

When I said this I remember he laughed, and stretched his hand to me across the breakfast table. ‘Bless you for that,’ he said; ‘one day, when you reach that exalted age of thirty-six which you told me was your ambition, I’ll remind you of this moment. And you won’t believe me. It’s a pity you have to grow up.’

I was ashamed already, and angry with him for laughing. So women did not make those confessions to men. I had a lot to learn.¹²⁵

In this dialogue Maxim hints at her previously mentioned wish to be a woman of thirty-six with a black dress and string of pearls. By expressing this wish she displays that she is not yet aware that maturity is more about experience than age or appearance. But she nevertheless admits her inexperience by pointing out that there is a lot for her to learn.

Narrator's ignorance and innocence is also demonstrated by the costumes her surroundings suggest her for a fancy dress ball. Horner and Zlosnik assume that the innocence of these figures represent the idealized femininity through which the narrator should structure her adult female sexuality. Maxim suggests Alice in Wonderland which is the most childish figure of the three, Lady Crowan thinks about German shepherdess, which is the pastorally pure figure, and Frank votes for Joan of Arc, the symbol of virginal integrity.¹²⁶

But it is the figure of Rebecca, who plays the main role in the narrator's transformation. When she arrives at Manderley Rebecca appears to be still governing it. She is still present: in all things she used, in the morning-room which she furnished all by herself, and her bedroom which Mrs Danvers preserved as a morbid shrine to her mistress. The narrator is inwardly unable to accept that she is now the mistress of Manderley, not Rebecca. She wanders around the morning-room which Rebecca used to sit in every morning, and she feels like an intruder, and when the telephone rings, and Mrs de Winter is called for, she stupidly announces that Mrs de Winter deceased a year ago, utterly unaware that she herself is now addressed by this title.

The heroine's silent walking in Rebecca's shadow is suddenly interrupted by the limit point in a form of Maxim's confession of Rebecca's murder. It is now for heroine to decide what to do. She chooses to stand by her husband instead of admitting his guilt and leaving him at the mercy of the law, and at the same time she refuses her defeat by Rebecca. In this act she opens the door to her own devilish self. She begins a fight in which she is willing to use Rebecca's own weapons. In one single day she grows older by several years, and she is now a fit

companion to Maxim willing to support him at any prize. He seems even weaker than her now and she has to persuade him and her own self that Rebecca has not won yet.

I was now free to be with Maxim, to touch him and hold him, and love him. I would never be a child again. It would not be I, I, I any longer; it would be we, it would be us. [...] Our happiness had not come too late. I was not young anymore. I was not shy. I was not afraid. I would fight for Maxim. I would lie and perjure and swear, I would blaspheme and pray. Rebecca had not won. Rebecca had lost.¹²⁷

The termination of narrator's childlike behaviour is also marked by her and Maxim's relationship suddenly turning sexual and passionate, and her abrupt acquisition of authority to run the house.

Despite her fear of Rebecca the narrator identifies with her in the end. In a terrifying dream depicted on the final pages of the novel the narrator mysteriously becomes Rebecca.

I was writing letters in the morning-room. I was sending out invitations. I wrote them all myself with a thick black pen. But when I looked down to see what I had written it was not my small square handwriting at all, it was long, and slanting, with curious pointed strokes. I pushed the cards away from the blotter and hid them. I got up and went to the looking-glass. A face stared back at me that was not my own. It was very pale, very lovely, framed in a cloud of dark hair. The eyes narrowed and smiled. The lips parted. The face in the glass stared back at me and laughed. And I saw then that she was sitting on a chair before the dressing-table in her bedroom, and Maxim was brushing her hair. He held her hair in his hands, and as he brushed it he wound it slowly into a thick rope. It twisted like a snake, and he took hold of it with both hands and smiled at Rebecca and put it round his neck.¹²⁸

One of Rebecca's attributes, the snake, that is traditionally a symbol of the forbidden knowledge, becomes also the narrator's attribute in this final vision of

identification. The heroine accepts the darker and more cunning part of herself in the end.

But she had already appeared as Rebecca once before. When dressing up like one of Maxim's ancestors Caroline de Winter she copied the costume Rebecca wore a year ago. Maxim and his relatives are horrified by this appalling deed. But she did it unwittingly being manipulated by Rebecca's devoted servant Mrs Danvers. Her mistress being dead Mrs Danvers becomes the earthly executor of her will, and she herself has a ghastly form. Her face resembles a skull, she is always dressed in black, and she permanently follows the heroine with a fixed icy look. She hints that Rebecca's ghost haunts Manderley, wanders the hallways and can observe everything and everyone, and she warns the narrator that she surely is dissatisfied with what she sees. After accomplishing her plan with the costume, Mrs Danvers even seems to release the ghost to scare the narrator, who, after leaving the hall dishonoured, is suddenly bewildered by the creaking floor and strange howling wind coming from the sea. Mrs Danvers brings her mistress to life by the continual references to late Mrs de Winter and comparing her with the present one. She recalls difference between her and Rebecca, but often arouses the sense of identification at the same time. When visiting Rebecca's bedroom the narrator is forced by Mrs Danvers to touch Rebecca's garments and hold them against her body. She attempts to humiliate the narrator by comparison of her and Rebecca's proportions and appearance. She finds Rebecca superior in beauty, style and manners. It is no wonder that after such thorough scrutiny of Rebecca's tastes and habits the narrator begins to imagine what it is like to be in Rebecca's shoes. Soon after the visit of Rebecca's bedroom she unleashes her fantasy, when dining with Maxim, and she experiences her first uncanny feeling of identification with the other woman. The strange unfamiliar expression on her face astonishes Maxim, who becomes very angry.

During Mrs Danvers's humiliating inquiries the narrator is so distressed by her own inferiority that she is nearly forced to commit suicide and thus let Rebecca have the things that belongs to her: her husband and more importantly her house. Mrs Danvers attempts to push her out of the window persuading her that it is Rebecca who is the real mistress of Manderley and Maxim's true love, and that

she should lay in the crypt instead of Rebecca. Fortunately they are interrupted by the signal rockets that signify the discovery of Rebecca's drowned ship and at the same time mark the narrator's transformation, which happens in the evening of the very same day after Maxim's confession.

7.4 The male protagonist of du Maurier's novel is constructed as a typical Gothic hero-villain. Despite being the heroine's beloved Maxim is a threatening paternal figure, who educates and scolds. There are certain traits that give us a clue to identify him with a typical Gothic villain. He is the master of a famous ancient manor, whose wife died under mysterious circumstances, and who courts a girl who may have been his daughter. On their first meeting the narrator pictures her hero as strange mysterious man from the medieval times.

Could one but rob him of his English tweeds, and put him in black, with lace at his throat and wrists, he would stare down at us in our new world from a long distant past – a past where men walked cloaked at night, and stood in the shadow of old doorways, a past of narrow stairways and dim dungeons, a past of whispers in the dark, of shimmering rapier blades, of silent exquisite courtesy.¹²⁹

Such description may remind us of the heroes and sceneries of Ann Radcliffe and her contemporaries. It is certainly not an accidental similarity. By referring to cloaked figures, dark and narrow passages and other early gothic stuff du Maurier acknowledges her predecessors and inspirers while indicating that the expectations of her heroine, especially the romantic ones, are influenced by reading these authors.

Even if her hero is a contemporary English gentleman, the narrator observes the air of mysteriousness surrounding him. She notices a frequent occurrence of contemplative expression on his face, and she refers to the line between his brows which forms during such moments, which can be the mark of some terrible secret hidden under the elegant and casual appearance.

The story about a strict husband who keeps a terrible secret from his young wife is known from the tale about Bluebeard. Bluebeard's wife does not resist the

temptation of her curiosity and she opens a forbidden room, where she discovers the murdered bodies of Bluebeard's former wives. Her misdemeanour is immediately discovered by Bluebeard and she hardly escapes his punishment. Horner and Zlosnik claims that the Bluebeard tale is a typical underpinning narrative of Gothic tales. It is a parable about a harsh attempt to reinforce the patriarchal law and to keep the women under surveillance. Bluebeard wants to control the curiosity of his wives, and by declaring his commands he makes the murder possible, even necessary. His preceding prohibition justifies his crime.¹³⁰

In du Maurier's interpretation of Bluebeard the heroine discovers her husband's terrible secret too, but she is not punished, in fact she receives the secret from her husband's own mouth. The one who is murdered because of her transgression is Rebecca. And Maxim is punished too, at least partially, for his cruelty. He has no heir and he loses Manderley.

Rebecca represents the real female transgressive figure that is punished for her behaviour. When Maxim confesses his murder he refers to her moral deformity. She was punished for her adultery and perversity. The abnormality of her sexual behaviour is later proved by Mrs Danvers's testimony.

Lovemaking was a game with her, only a game. She told me so. She did it because it made her laugh, I tell you. She laughed at you like she did at the rest. I've known her come back and sit upstairs in her bed and rock with laughter at the lot of you.¹³¹

We have already discussed Rebecca's multiple death. Before she was shot and drowned by Maxim she was already aware of her cancer. The cancer is the sign of her inner corruptness. During the investigation her doctor reveals that she also had a malformed uterus. This is also a sign of punishment for a bad woman. The discovery of Rebecca's illness is a partial vindication for Maxim's crime. However, the justice of Rebecca's punishment and the reinforcement of male power are sealed by Frank Crawley's and Colonel Julyan's silent approval of the murder.

It seems that after the failure with the first wife Maxim fishes for an utterly different woman, innocent and obedient girl who is easy to control. He demonstrates his attitude even during their first dates.

‘I wish I was a woman of about thirty-six dressed in black satin with a string of pearls.’

‘You would not be in this car with me if you were,’ he said; ‘and stop biting those nails, they are ugly enough already.’ [...]

‘But I would like to know why you ask me to come out in the car day after day. You are being kind, that’s obvious, but why do you choose me for your charity?’ [...]

‘I ask you,’ he said gravely, ‘because you are not dressed in black satin, with a string of pearls, nor are you thirty six.’¹³²

We can see that he does not scruple to teach and scold the narrator. After their arrival at Manderley their relationship begins to resemble that of father and daughter more. The narrator complains of being treated like a child, and she sometimes even compares their relationship to that between her and their dog: “He pats me now and again, when he remembers, and I’m pleased, I get closer to him for a moment. He likes me in the way I like Jasper.”¹³³ Even if she wishes them to be equal companions, she finds out that she is happy when she can break free from his influence, and she is quite bewildered by her own feelings.

Now that Maxim was safe in London, and I had eaten my biscuits, I felt very well and curiously happy. I was aware of a sense of freedom, as though I had no responsibilities at all. It was rather like a Saturday when one was a child. No lessons and no prep. [...] I was rather shocked at myself. I could not understand it at all. I had not wanted him to go.¹³⁴

We can see that she identifies her feelings with that of a child escaping from the parental surveillance and being able to frolic freely. During Maxim’s absence she plays the part of Bluebeard’s wife when she makes her way to the ‘forbidden place’ excusing her own curiosity by the dog’s disobedience: “He cared nothing

for me of course. He loped off, deliberately disobedient. ‘What a nuisance he is,’ I said aloud, and I scrambled up the rocks after him, pretending to myself I did not want to go to the other beach.”¹³⁵ The narrator is allowed to explore the boat-house on the beach which should conceal the secrets of Maxim’s ex-wife, but she does not discover anything. Instead, she is exposed to Ben’s seemingly meaningless prattle about ‘the other one’ which she cannot or does not want to understand.

Not only does she have the feelings of a child she often acts like one. She runs to hide when Maxim’s sister comes to pay a visit because she feels too shy to confront her. But when her silly behaviour is revealed she has to face the consequences. After breaking a china cupid in the morning-room she hides the pieces and does not tell anyone. After her misdemeanour is revealed she is scolded by Maxim in front of the servants.

Despite her occasional excursions to secret places the narrator is still not allowed to gain the forbidden knowledge Rebecca had. Horner and Zlosnik point out the imbalance between the narrators’ freedom to explore the material part of Manderley and the restrictions preventing her from discovering its inner secrets.

Nothing on the Manderley estate is physically barred to the narrator: the West Wing is hers to discover and even Rebecca’s boat-house, which she expects to find locked, is open to view. At the same time, however, less tangible but more powerful barriers are put in the narrator’s pathway to knowledge. Maxim, his judgement determined by culturally endorsed myths, associates sexual experience in women with evil.¹³⁶

Maxim strives to prevent her from learning about Rebecca’s uninhibited sexual behaviour. Therefore he gets very angry when he suspects somebody might have told her or when she hints at the difference between her and Rebecca telling him that he had married her because she was “dull and quiet and inexperienced, so that there would never be any gossip”¹³⁷ about her. He gets even more annoyed when he witnesses the sudden change of expression on her face caused by the identification with Rebecca, which was already mentioned. He confesses that he had married her because of the innocent appearance that was utterly different from

the expression she displayed a moment ago unwittingly confirming her preceding allegation, and he admits that he intends to keep her out of the wrong “sort of knowledge”¹³⁸ using his typical remarks emphasizing his paternal position.

‘Listen, my sweet. When you were a little girl, were you ever forbidden to read certain books, and did your father put those books under lock and key?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘Well, then. A husband is not so very different from a father after all. There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have. It’s better kept under lock and key. So, that’s that. And now eat up your peaches, and don’t ask me any more questions, or I shall put you in the corner.’¹³⁹

The parable about the temptation to gain knowledge from the books that are locked under the key or the sense of peering through the key hole often appears in *Rebecca*. Unlike Maxim, Mrs Danvers is strangely willing to provide any information about Rebecca, inviting the narrator to visit Rebecca’s rooms, showing her Rebecca’s belongings and revealing her secret adulterous adventures. In this situation the narrator likens her feelings to the uneasiness she felt when her childhood companion tempted her to look at the ‘locked up book’ of her parents.

Nevertheless, all Maxim’s attempts to keep his new wife ignorant are in vain, because finally, after the discovery of Rebecca’s body, he is forced to tell her all about them and therefore can’t prevent her from the secrets of sexually mature female. The marriage helps the narrator to mature, but, strangely, it is Rebecca not Maxim who has the main influence.

7.5 It is not only Maxim, the hero-villain, who reminds us of the early Gothic works. It is also the setting of Manderley and the magnificence of the nature surrounding it reminding us of Burke’s sublime that contributes to the Gothic character of du Maurier’s novel. As in typical Gothic novels the weather mirrors the characters’ mood or the overall atmosphere. The sunny days the narrator spends in peace and quiet without any impending danger from Rebecca, Mrs Danvers or Maxim contrast with the heavy rain accompanying Maxim’s outbursts of anger, the mist surrounding the window’s of the West Wing when the narrator

considers the suicidal jump or the suffocating heat before the storm that matches with the oppressive nervousness from revealing Rebecca's murder.

Manderley also reminds of the typical Gothic mansion. It is vast and hollowed with narrow crooked corridors in which the narrator loses her way easily. The drive leading to Manderley is more like a path from some fairy tale. Seemingly never-ending, narrowing with every passed curve, surrounded by a thick forest, it makes the arrival at Manderley equally suffocating as the stay itself. Sticking to the old rules of the patriarchal society the manor represents a menace to women. Conversely, Rebecca's adulterous behaviour is a menace threatening the lineage and the traditions of the house. Rebecca declaring that she is pregnant with someone else's child forces Maxim to kill her, and she continues to threaten the house even after her death. Her strongest attributes: the wild sea, the expansive rhododendrons, the smothering scents of azaleas, all threatens to annihilate the ancestral mansion of de Winters. The wild and ungovernable area of Manderley is a symbol of illegitimacy and social disruption and its fall marks the end of both licentiousness and adultery represented by Rebecca and patriarchal and feudal practices represented by Maxim.

The narrator's stay at Manderley has an uncanny effect. She is a stranger in her own house, a guest or an interloper who does not actually belong there. Despite being its mistress she often gets lost and she is unable to deal with the servants. The thin line between unfamiliar and familiar is represented by the postcard of Manderley. Meeting its owner in the beginning of the story, she remembers the picture of the house she bought as a little girl, and she tries to recollect how does it look like. Often in the book the postcard of Manderley is recollected again and its notion transformed according to the experience the narrator has gained there.

7.6 Despite having the label of paperback romance *Rebecca* has retained its popularity and became the Gothic classic. It draws upon the work of her predecessors. The reader encounters the frail, naive and vulnerable heroine known from the early Female Gothic. Having neither money and status nor beauty and charm she is in a difficult position concerning the opportunity to get married. Unlike Lucy Snowe she is offered an unexpected chance to marry profitably. She

accepts the offer, and despite the suffering she has to endure in the house haunted by her husband's ex-wife she finally makes the most of it. But she reminds us of Brontë's heroine because she suffers the constant surveillance and humiliation, both at her work as a companion and during the stay at her husband's manor. Like Catherine Morland she possesses an overactive imagination influenced by reading novels. Her expectations are deflated and the disappointment intensified by lecturing and scolding of her husband Maxim who, like Henry Tilney, comes from the family of Gothic hero-villains. Du Maurier enriches her narrative by incorporating the innovated Bluebeard tale. The narrator's curiosity leads to discovering all the terrible secrets about her husband's former wife. The natural curiosity in women is the subject of the Bluebeard tale, but this theme is discussed in other tales about women like Lot's wife or Pandora and reaches out even to Eve and her unbearable desire to eat the apple and gain the forbidden knowledge, which was recaptured by Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The Bluebeard tale is going to be discussed in the following chapter about Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber."

Du Maurier's heroine finally achieves desired happiness and self-respect but her husband's first marriage leaves a shadow over his soul. The oppressive husband has to bear his guilt and punishment.

8. Bluebeard's Gallery of Female Suffering: Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and the Liberation That Comes at the Last Moment

8.0 In the following chapter we are going to discuss another variation on the Bluebeard tale, Angela Carter's story or novelette "The Bloody Chamber" published in the collection of short fiction *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Fairy tales have always been considered the women's fiction. Told by women and enjoyed especially by girls and young children they were regarded as an inferior entertainment, one that boys, usually occupied by some higher sort of amusement, rarely indulged in. But for girls the fairy tales represented an important source of ideals, as Marina Warner suggests, they "offered gratifications that were already, at the age of eleven, considered feminine: dreams of love as well as the sweets of quick and capital revenge."¹⁴⁰ Angela Carter herself believed that folk tales represented the way in which women coped with the harsh conditions of their lives, but in respect of literature and culture they nevertheless meant only an inconsequential gossip.

When writing *The Bloody Chamber* Carter used her wide knowledge of classic fairy tales and oral folk tales, however she refused the retelling or rewriting label. She asserted that her intention was to extract the latent content from the existing fairy tales and use it as the basis for the new ones. The stories in the collection vary in both length and style, and they also differ in their dependence on the original. "The Bloody Chamber" closely follows the plot line of Bluebeard.

The tale about Bluebeard was first collected by French writer Charles Perrault in his *Histoires Ou Contes du Temps Passé (Stories or Tales of Past Times)* (1697). He drew inspiration from oral tales and ballads, and he created his own version which is probably the most common version nowadays. Perrault's version stresses the patriarchal content of the story, which is the punishment of a disobedient wife. As Teri Windling claims, Perrault portrays his female protagonist "quite unsympathetically as a woman who marries solely from greed, and who calls Bluebeard's wrath upon her with her act of disobedience."¹⁴¹ However, the series of Bluebeard's horrible deeds is terminated by her wife's brothers, who save their sister at the last moment from being murdered by him. But until the moment of

discovery of his wife's misdemeanour the Bluebeard is presented as "a well-mannered, even generous man who makes only one demand of his wife, marrying again and again as woman after woman betrays this trust."¹⁴² However, there are some remarks considering the aversion of girls to marry Bluebeard that hint at his mysterious past, like: "adding to their disgust and aversion was the fact that he already had been married to several wives, and nobody knew what had become of them,"¹⁴³ that make you feel quite chilly. Perrault's story has two morals. The first one appeals to the young wives not to give themselves to the attractions of curiosity saying that "in spite of its appeal, [curiosity] often leads to deep regret."¹⁴⁴ While the second one lightens the story by asserting that today's men would not treat their wives in that way. Thus it remains quite ambiguous who is to blame for misbehaviour.

Windling points out the difference between Perrault's version of the fairy tale and other similar folk tales about murdering husband or lovers. She claims that, unlike Perrault's protagonist, the heroines of these tales are usually self-confident and courageous girls, clever enough to outwit their pursuers. It is, nevertheless, Perrault's story that survived for the next generations.¹⁴⁵

There is also the feministic reading of Bluebeard, which is connected with the arranged marriage. In Perrault's time the arranged marriages were quite common. A young girl could easily be married to a stranger many years older than her, who may turn out to be a drunkard, a lecher or a brute. Moreover, the death in childbirth was also quite frequent, so the young girl's husband may have been married several times before. And we have already seen, in *Rebecca*, what a shadow the previous wife can cast on the new marriage.

In *The Bloody Chamber* Angela Carter uses mythology, existing fairy tales and the Gothic style to destabilize the established view on romantic relationships. She criticizes the society and its rooted myths about the gender roles. Each story presents a different problem in gender relations and sexuality. Carter notes the effect that accompanied the transformation of oral tales into the written form. She points out that the written interpretations of the tales, such as the fairy tales by Perrault, were affected by the values and traditions of contemporary culture, thus

the fairy tales that traditionally had been the domain of women, were virtually transformed into male ones. Mary Kaiser suggests that:

Carter shows an acute awareness of the changes that result from an oral to written transposition and calls attention to them by heightening the intertextuality of her narratives, making them into allegories that explore how sexual behavior and gender roles are not universal, but are, like other forms of social interaction, culturally determined.¹⁴⁶

“The Bloody Chamber”, which is the first and also the longest story of the collection, fits best in the Female Gothic canon. Adding to Perrault’s story a rich detail of Bluebeard’s wealth and perversity Carter creates a powerful story about economic and sexual superiority of men under which her unnamed protagonist suffers with heroic calm despite being a naive teenage bride. In the last chapter we are going to examine how Angela Carter contributed to the development of Female Gothic genre with the revision of fairy tale characterized by the baroque sense for detail and abundance of perverse sexuality.

8.1 In “The Bloody Chamber” we can find the direct connections with Carter’s predecessors especially with du Maurier. Becky McLaughlin points out the affinity between Carter’s story and the stock Gothic literature and film giving Hitchcock’s adaptation of *Rebecca* as an example.¹⁴⁷ Investigation of the details in the plot outline of “The Bloody Chamber” confirms the validity of this comparison. The story goes like this: a young woman marries an older man, who is virtually a stranger to her and has a mysterious past. In du Maurier it is an elegant British gentleman Maxim de Winter, in Carter an unnamed French Marquis. They arrive at his luxurious manor, represented by Manderley on the one side and by the castle on the coast on the other. There the heroine is introduced to the staff that includes a hostile housekeeper. The meeting with the housekeeper is indeed much similar to the meeting with Mrs Danvers except for the colour of their clothes: “She had a bland, pale, impassive, dislikeable face beneath the impeccably starched white linen head-dress of the region. Her greeting, correct but lifeless, chilled me.”¹⁴⁸ The heroine’s treatment of the stuff is also strikingly similar to that of du Maurier’s heroine:

A maid knocked on the door and entered before I spoke [...] She eyed my serge skirt superciliously; did madame plan to dress for dinner? She made a moue of disdain when I laughed to hear that, she was the far more lady than I. [...] I knew by her bereft intonation I had left them down again but I did not care.¹⁴⁹

She is not able to manage the household and the servants scorn her. While her husband is occupied by business, the young bride has nothing to do. She begins to search for his past. The Marquis's past unlike Maxim's includes three former wives whose lives the heroine investigates in old social magazines and Marquis's private correspondence, and she can't avoid comparing her to themselves. She finds them much superior and she can't understand why: "he had invited me to join this gallery of beautiful women, I, the poor widow's child with my mouse-coloured hair that still bore the kinks of the plaits from which it had so recently been freed."¹⁵⁰ The description of his last wife and her supposed fate resemble that of Rebecca:

Dead just three short months before I met him, a boating accident, at his home, in Brittany. They never found her body but I rummaged through the back copies of society magazines my old nanny kept in a trunk under her bed and tracked down her photograph. The sharp muzzle of a pretty, witty, naughty monkey; such potent and bizarre charm, of a dark, bright, wild yet worldly thing.¹⁵¹

But she is to find, like du Maurier's heroine, that the circumstances of her death were quite different. She goes to investigate the forbidden room, where she finds the horrible truth. She is forced to identify herself with her predecessors. She knows that the same fate awaits her because the others, never mind how beautiful, rich or experienced they were, didn't manage to escape either.

Although written in 1970s the setting of the story goes back, to earlier times than du Maurier's story. Mary Kaiser points out the importance of the epoch Carter chose for her story. She moves the tale from the mythic timelessness to a specific cultural moment. She sets the Bluebeard story in the world of decadent turn-of-the-century French culture. The Marquis presents himself as a connoisseur of art

and posses an exclusive collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century pornography. He declares his taste for symbolist painters and poets. Kaiser notes that the fin de siècle setting is crucial to Carter's interpretation of the story since "she sees the bride's fate as possible only at the moment in history when images of female victimization and of female aggression converged."¹⁵² We may suppose that the sadomasochistic basis of much of decadent culture, which created the image of woman as dangerously passive and easily victimized creature, may have signified a real threat for women. Other elements of the fashion like the white Poiret dress or the ruby choker help to illustrate the image of fin de siècle France, and at the same time reflect the image of innocence, vulnerability and victimization that the Marquis desire to create.¹⁵³

Kaiser further suggests that the protagonist becomes only an instrument for the Marquis to create his filthy, terribly realistic work of art, when she asserts that "the bride becomes a vehicle for Bluebeard's attempt to realize the decadent image of the dependent, virginal child-woman, ripe for tragedy."¹⁵⁴ However we should note that she also becomes an obstacle for him since she should have been only one of the numerous precious pieces on his exhibition. He pronounces that the wedding ring would serve him "for a dozen more fiancées"¹⁵⁵ few moments before he is shot dead by his fourth wife's mother.

We can see how carefully did he arranged his torture chamber. Totally unlike Bluebeard's closet covered with blood and chopped arms, the room is decorated with lilies, scented by incense and lit by long white candles with the wheel, the catafalque and the Iron Maiden displayed in the centre. He shows his carefulness and ceremoniousness not only in the arrangement of the chamber but during the whole course of courtship and the short marriage. The protagonist has to, even if unwillingly, become his partner in this horrible theatre. He waits with epicurean patience for the expected responses and sometimes welcomes their realization with childish glee:

He had loved to surprise me in my abstracted solitude at the piano. He would tell them not to announce him, then soundlessly open the door and softly creep up behind me with his bouquet of hot-house flowers or his box

of marrons glacés, lay his offering upon the keys and clasp his hands over my eyes as I was lost in a Debussy prelude.¹⁵⁶

Kaiser calls the Marquis “a producer of theatrical effects,”¹⁵⁷ which seems to be a suitable title. He postpones the wedding night to the moment they reach the stage of his bedroom with mirrors, lilies and his great ancestral bed. He enjoys the suspense of the ceremony of handing over the keys. He even finds a moment to mimic grief at his wife’s disobedience. And the very last act of ceremony is the decapitation of his bride on which he gave to the servants “a day’s holiday, to celebrate our wedding.”¹⁵⁸ During all the crucial moments the heroine has to dress up in the white Poiret dress and wear the ruby choker. They are the symbols of her temptation and curiosity. She is tempted to enter the marriage with the Marquis because of their luxury. She wears them when she is given the key that will become the symbol of her curiosity, and finally she wears them to her own execution.

The art and the fashion of the era bear the symbolism of the female condition. But unlike *Villette*, where the two paintings represent the double standard of perspective on women, the one of a humble wife reserved for women, the other of a voluptuous vamp reserved for men, in “The Bloody Chamber” these two merge into the image of victimized suffering sexual object. Moreover the way in which the Marquis punishes his wives for their transgressions may remind us of the witch trials or the deeds of the Inquisition discussed for example in Radcliffe’s *The Italian*. Since the female condition has always been defined by the culture whose strongest attributes are art and religion, the rejection of the art’s and ecclesiastical ceremoniousness is also present in “The Bloody Chamber” although not explicitly expressed by the narrator as in *Villette* by Lucy Snowe.

8.2 In “The Bloody Chamber” we should note the transformation of the male protagonist. He is not the mysteriously attractive hero-villain of the previous tales, who despite of his reproving remains the loving protector. In several moments of the story he seems to have the Miltonic paternal qualities, for example in the library he invites his bride to sit on his knee and hands over his keys while instructing her which key belongs to which lock. However the supposed child’s

play becomes more like cat and mouse, and in this play the master is certain. The heroine is attracted to him not because of his charm or kindness but because of his wealth, which is clear from her response to her mother's inquiry whether she is sure she loves him. She replies she is sure she wants to marry him. However, she acknowledges the heavy disquieting feeling that overcomes her during his presence from the very beginning. The repeatedly mentioned masculine odour of leather and spices becomes quite suffocating. His robust figure with its heavy white flesh and dull voice foreshadows the tragedy, whose coming the heroine perceives even before they reach his castle:

‘Soon,’ he said in his resonant voice that was like the tolling of a bell and I felt, all at once, a sharp premonition of dread that lasted only as long as the match flared and I could see his white, broad face as if it were hovering, disembodied, above the sheets, illuminated from below like a grotesque carnival head. Then the flame died, the cigar glowed and filled the compartment with a remembered fragrance that made me think of my father, how he would hug me in a warm fug of Havana, when I was a little girl, before he kissed me and left me and died.¹⁵⁹

But even if in this moment her sense of discomposure is interrupted by the sudden recollection of her deceased father, the Marquis is definitely not the father substitute. He may play, he may soothe, but the reader recognizing the Bluebeard tale is sure that a terrible punishment awaits her.

Apart from the smell of leather and spices the Marquis's strongest attribute is lily. The lily is an ambiguous symbol. Its form represents vitality because of the lush bright petals, but it is at the same time a flower of sorrow because it is a funeral flower. The narrator compares her bridegroom to the lily being aware of both these aspects. First the lily is connected with his heavy vital composure and the temptation he arouses in her:

Even when he asked me to marry him, and I said: ‘Yes,’ still he did not lose that heavy fleshy composure of his. I know it must seem a curious analogy, a man with a flower, but sometimes he seemed to me like lily. Yes. A lily. Possessed of that strange, ominous calm of a sentient vegetable, like one of

those cobra-headed, funeral lilies whose white sheaths are curled out of a flesh as thick and tensely yielding to the touch as vellum.¹⁶⁰

Later the image of the lily is reassessed. She admits that the lilies will always remind her of him not because of their vigour but because of their capacity to stain you. Finally the gaze at the lilies in the vase shows an omen of the heroine's horrible discovery: "the tall jar of lilies beside the bed, how the thick glass distorted their fat stems so they looked like arms, dismembered arms, drifting drowned in greenish water."¹⁶¹

It is suggested that the Marquis's smooth white complexion is really only a mask. He is described by the narrator as having an almost waxen face without wrinkles signifying his age. He probably has survived for centuries feeding on the blood of young virgins like a vampire. He may be, indeed, the same Marquis who was riding through the forests centuries ago hunting for young maidens. Jean-Yves, the piano-tuner, relates the story about this monster to the narrator and she thinks for herself: "But, in these more democratic times, my husband must travel as far as Paris to do his hunting in the salons."¹⁶²

But there are signs, apart from the three dead wives, which should have warned the girl: the wedding ring with a huge opal which brings the bad luck, the black silk dress he gave her mother for the wedding which resemble the mourning, the way he gloats over the bloodstained sheets and chiefly the sadomasochism he not only admires on the paintings but practices himself. On their wedding night glimpsing them in the mirror she recollects the etching by Rops he showed her during one of the rare moments they were allowed to be alone, portraying an old man eyeing the teenage girl dressed only in her boots and gloves. However, their wedding night is further postponed. As McLaughlin claims, not until he finds his wife looking at a pornographic book is the Marquis able to perform the sexual act. Only when her curiosity allows her to investigate the possibilities of prurience he becomes attracted to her. He wants to reprove her curiosity in the same way as it is depicted on the picture.¹⁶³

Talking about Bluebeard Windling points out his devilish ancestry and his exceptional wealth and status that make him invincible:

Like the devil in the Italian tale “Silvernose,” the Bluebeard is marked by a physical disfigurement – the beard that “made him so frightfully ugly that all the women and girls run away from him.” Like Mr. Fox, his wealth and his charm serve to overcome the natural suspicions aroused by his mysterious past and the rumours of the missing wives. Like the false suitors, he seduces his victims with courtly manners, presents, and flattery, all the while tenderly preparing the grave that will soon receive them.¹⁶⁴

Not only the heroine but all the surroundings is deceived, maybe even bought off, by Marquis’s wealth. After the narrator is shaken up by the discovery of the remains of his former wives she immediately begins to make plans for escape and search for help but she gains a suspicion that all the people from the surrounding area are in fact collaborators. The idea of the local people being loyal to their tyrannical master signifies keeping of the feudal conventions and the feudal and patriarchal tradition support each other.

The difference between the status of the girl and the Marquis is emphasized by the difference in their property. She a poor student of music, he a powerful wealthy man who can have everything. She gradually receives the status by accepting his gifts: the opal ring, the Poiret dress and the ruby choker. Most of all the things the choker becomes the symbol of her condition. She has to retain it although it gradually becomes more and more uncomfortable. Moreover the ruby choker is the cruel symbol of the narrator’s inevitable fate as she remarks in the beginning of the story that it reminds of “an extraordinarily precious slit throat.”¹⁶⁵ Thus she is marked for death from the very beginning and is not available as a possession for anyone but himself.

Kaiser examines Carter’s stories and gives the short vignette “The Snow Child” as an example of the situation in which the woman’s status is defined by the possessions given to her by a man. Here the Countess’s costly furs and boots magically flies off to the naked girl as the Count changes his preferences and comes back to her after he tires of the other girl. The fact that the Count remains always clothed and bestows the status on women by giving them clothes suggest that women are denied the cultural status until they are given it by a man.¹⁶⁶

Similarly in “The Bloody Chamber” the bride is forced to wear her costly dress and jewels for her own execution, where she is finally deprived of them and therefore she is symbolically deprived of her status. The Marquis tears her white dress with a sword and orders her to give him back the opal ring. Even in this fatal moment she feels a great relief. After removing the wedding ring she no longer belongs to the Marquis.

In “The Bloody Chamber” the traditional hero-villain is transformed into the sadistic murderous possessor and for the heroine the marriage means the sadomasochistic suffering and loss of identity.

8.3 Like the other heroines we have discussed, the narrator of “The Bloody Chamber” undergoes certain development, which enables her to begin a free life in the end. She discovers her own power and moreover she gains her husband’s enormous wealth.

In the beginning she is portrayed as the majority of Radcliffe’s heroines. Like beautiful and admired creature that is naive, inexperienced and vulnerable, yet she is eager to discover the secrets of marriage. Thus although she cannot wait to see the Marquis’s castle and especially his ancestral bed, she feels certain anxiety from leaving her mother knowing that the love and security of her childhood years are slipping away: “And, in the midst of my bridal triumph, I felt a pang of loss as if, when he put the gold band on my finger, I had, in some way, ceased to be her child in becoming his wife.”¹⁶⁷ In her solitary idleness when her husband is occupied by business she, as any other Gothic heroine would do, searches for a cheap romantic novel in his library. Nevertheless, the books in Marquis’s library bear such titles as: “*The Initiation, The Key of Mysteries, The Secret of Pandora’s Box*,”¹⁶⁸ that do not seem to interest her. She is not yet aware of her curiosity. However the library contains other forbidden knowledge in the volumes of violent pornography, which she dares to open and thus starts the series of chilling revelations.

The Marquis’s lust is aroused by her curiosity and she is deflowered. Although it is an unpleasant experience for her since she imagines, probably thanks to the multitude of mirrors in Marquis’s bedroom, a dozen husband impaling a dozen

brides, her temptation intensifies. After the Marquis leaves for a business trip she is left alone in their large marriage bed with the strange mixture of feelings: curiosity, excitement and disgust. It does not take a long time before she decides to investigate his secret chamber. Although the opinion on the bloody chamber's symbolism is not unified, it definitely contains the secret which concerns women but which men prefer them not to discover. Commonly the bloody chamber is perceived as a metaphor for womb, thus the device of female martyrdom connected with loss of virginity, childbirth or period. It may otherwise contain the secret of infidelity or lust. Nevertheless, it is sure that the heroine gains the knowledge that was forbidden to her by the Marquis. It is suggested that the heroine truly loses her innocence not during the wedding night but after the discovery of the chamber. The Marquis mocks the custom of hanging the bloody sheets out of the window to prove the bride's virginity. The sheets are changed by the maid and the pain forgotten soon. However the symbolism of the bloodstain as the loss of innocence is strongly suggested in the story. The narrator stains the key in the puddle of blood and it cannot be washed off, and later the stain, which acquires the shape of a heart, is transferred to her forehead as the Marquis presses the key to it. Therefore she is marked by the red mark of curiosity and desire forever, like a witch.

The curiosity that leads the heroine to transgress her husband's prohibition connects her with her disobedient ancestors like Eve or Pandora. She is tempted to gain the forbidden knowledge and she is punished. Also the Marquis reminds of the God of Genesis as depicted by Milton. He drives his protégé to the act of disobedience to be able to punish her. All his actions are designed as a big set-up. He gives her the key, tells her where the room is and that there is nothing that should interest her, and then immediately returns to check up whether she caught into the trap. Moreover, the heroine feels like being under his surveillance during her action: "The light caught the fire opal on my hand so that it flashed, once, with a baleful light, as if to tell me the eye of God – his eye – was upon me"¹⁶⁹ Here, she even identifies the Marquis's power and surveillance with God's omnipotence. And later she is identified with Eve in the conversation with Jean-Yves:

‘Who can say what I deserve or no?’ I said. ‘I’ve done nothing; but that may be sufficient reason for condemning me.’

‘You disobeyed him,’ he said. ‘That is sufficient reason for him to punish you.’

‘I only did what he knew I would.’

‘Like Eve,’ he said.¹⁷⁰

The narrator, nevertheless, manages to escape her punishment and although she remains marked for the rest of her life the acquisition of forbidden knowledge serves her well as the acquisition of knowledge served the mankind to get the free will in Milton.

We should note that apart from the knowledge of her own sexuality the narrator also gains the knowledge of her hidden self or selves. Like the Perrault’s heroine she is enchanted by the luxury the marriage with Bluebeard offers. The girl from Perrault’s tale is invited to Bluebeard’s house for a week of hunting, fishing, dancing and feasting and everything succeeds “so well that the youngest daughter began to think that the man's beard was not so very blue after all, and that he was a mighty civil gentleman.”¹⁷¹ In “The Bloody Chamber” the Marquis manages to captivate the girl by the invitation to opera:

He was rich as Croesus. The night before our wedding [...] he took my mother and me, curious coincidence, to see *Tristan*. And, do you know, my heart swelled and ached so during the Liebestod that I thought I must truly love him. Yes. I did. On his arm, all eyes were upon me. The whispering crowd in the foyer parted like the Red Sea to let us through. My skin crisped at his touch.¹⁷²

The narrator admits that she was seduced by Marquis’s wealth and power. But by allowing him to buy her off with expensive gifts she becomes his possession. Everyone in the opera gazes at her like if she was a huge precious stone. She recollects that it was also in the opera when she first recognized her capacity for corruption:

When I saw him looking at me with lust, I dropped my eyes but, in glancing away from him, I caught sight of myself in the mirror. And I saw myself, suddenly, as he saw me, my pale face, the muscles in my neck stuck out like thin wire. I saw how much that cruel necklace became me. And for the first time in my innocent and confined life, I sensed in myself a potentiality for corruption that took my breath away.¹⁷³

In the mirrors in the opera and in Marquis's bedroom the heroine chances to see her evil double. It is an uncanny experience of seeing one's self which is unfamiliar because it has been hidden. The heroine is astonished by discovering her new self, although she is not entirely repelled by the image she can see in the mirror. She enjoys being admired. He recognizes that the Marquis longs for her and she likes it. Later she hears the Marquis's description of herself: "Your thin white face, with its promise of debauchery only a connoisseur could detect."¹⁷⁴ She gains the perspective Lucy Snowe always wanted to have: to see herself as the others see her, and she is profoundly disturbed. In the eyes of her husband she is an exceptionally pretty prostitute. The young bride's lack of knowledge is fatal to her. Her excessive innocence becomes her own threat. The sense of shame she acknowledges in the very end of her narration comes not from her disobedience but from her own susceptibility to corruption.

But the heroine is eventually given the second chance. It seems that there is no rescuer for her since her husband turns out to be a sadistic murderer and her newly discovered admirer is powerless because he is blind. Her rescuer is the person she has always admired as strong, victorious and adventurous, her own mother. This seems to be quite startling and comic ending, the narrator's white haired mother galloping on a horse, her skin tucked up around her waist, carrying a gun. But the mother's violent haste becomes the counterpart of her daughter's decorative passivity. It is notable that the instrument of heroine's rescue becomes "the antique service revolver that my mother, grown magnificently eccentric in hardship, kept always in her reticule, in case – how I teased her – she was surprised by footpads on her way home from the grocer's shop."¹⁷⁵ Now, the narrator's mockery seems ironic since she finds out that sometimes it is really necessary to defend yourself. The mother is experienced, wise and brave, and by

rescuing her daughter from the clutches of the beastly Marquis she gives her the chance to become like her. Earlier in the story the narrator acknowledged her mother's brave spirit to be leading her and encouraging her to confront her faith with dignity. Carter associates the heroism with the maternal, protective, life-giving source.

In "The Bloody Chamber" the marriage becomes suspect. After the first failure the heroine sets up her own music school and she continues to live with her mother and the blind piano tuner Jean-Yves. However, she does not mention that she had married him. He is a person who can propose very little concerning money or social status but perhaps it is what she prefers after all. She chooses her life partner on the basis of love and she takes care of herself. Perhaps, she is in fact grateful that he can't see the mark of transgression on her forehead: "I am glad he cannot see it – not for fear of revulsion, since I know he sees me clearly with his heart – but because it spares my shame."¹⁷⁶ She is happy that he is not able to eye her with "sheer carnal avarice"¹⁷⁷ as the Marquis did.

8.4 It is sure that what Angela Carter intended and what she managed in writing *The Bloody Chamber* is not the simple rewriting of the known fairy tales. As Mary Kaiser suggests, she "deconstructs the underlying assumptions of the "official" fairy tale: that fairy tales are universal, timeless myths, that fairy tales are meant exclusively for an audience of children, and that fairy tales present an idealized, fantastic world unrelated to the contingencies of real life."¹⁷⁸ While following the plotline of Charles Perrault's classic fairy tale about Bluebeard, she highlights the patriarchal content of the story and creates a cautionary tale with a new moral for women. They should not allow to be manipulated and rob of their identity by men.

By giving the story the new setting and richly described realistic detail she creates a powerful horror story about male domination and cruelty and female subordination and suffering. She maintains some of the conventions of Female Gothic while making certain innovations. Her Marquis is not a hero-villain but a cruel murderer. He is more like the villains and pursuers from Radcliffe's novels. Yet his crimes are not the part of scheming to gain wealth or status, he is

enormously rich and powerful monster that enjoys torture and murders for pleasure. While in Brontë the marriage was the only possible refuge for single women, in Carter it is their doom. The bride becomes an object, a puppet that has to obey its master. But there is also the possibility for improvement. The vulnerable inexperienced heroine makes a mistake. She allows the Marquis to be her master and possessor. Fortunately she is saved by her mother and she is given a chance to start her own life and she avails herself of this opportunity. In another story from Carter's collection "The Lady of the House of Love," there is a woman who tries to break the habit, to change the convention and liberate herself and she asks herself a question: "Can a bird sing only the song it knows or can it learn a new song?"¹⁷⁹ The heroine of "The Bloody Chamber" proved that it is possible. She ceased to be the canary in her husband's cage and she set up her own music school.

Conclusion

The first two chapters of this work focus on the exploration of the conditions that led to the constitution of the Gothic genre and on the general overview of the Gothic devices to give the basis for investigating how the genre developed and diverged during the course of two centuries.

The third chapter focuses on distinction between Female and Male Gothic on the basis of Radcliffe's classification. We list the distinguishing features of classic Female Gothic, and on analysis of some of Radcliffe's work we give the examples illustrating these features.

The fourth chapter depicts Austen's *Northanger Abbey* not as a simple parody of the genre mimicking and exaggerating the typical features. By pointing out the trivialities incorporated in Gothic novels and warning of the real dangers for both women and the whole society, Austen gives the genre the new dimension and indicates the direction in which the Female Gothic should develop in the future.

On the list of the interpreted works, *Frankenstein* is a kind of digression. But the analysis proves that even without the female protagonist it is possible to create a powerful warning against suppressing or even replacing the female principle. Shelley highlights the natural abilities and qualities given to women.

The sixth chapter represents the interpretation of Brontë's *Villette* as the examination of female mind tied by conventions of patriarchal society. She sees the traditions accepted by society not only as the restraint on women's freedom but as a danger threatening their mental health.

The exploration of du Maurier's *Rebecca* in the seventh chapter shows that even the popular literature may significantly contribute to the development of certain literary genre.

Last chapter focusing on Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" represents an exploration of the short story which breaks the taboo by frank exploration of human sexuality. Carter builds on the myth created by patriarchal society that describes women's effort to express their sexuality as dangerous.

The study shows that there are many parallels between these works which are often separated by many decades and that the characters and the setting of the works still keep some features of the original genre.

There are many significant features that are common for the discussed works. Let us name at least few of them.

There is a heroine who is passive, naïve or inexperienced. Initially, she finds her refuge in marriage, but the institution of marriage gradually becomes suspect and dangerous, and the heroine is forced to take care of herself and create her own identity independent of man. There is a hero-villain who is nice and attractive but teasing and reprovng or sometimes cruel. However, the marriage to him is frequently the only choice for the destitute heroine. The presence of doubles is typical for Female Gothic. They are the representation of the feelings or qualities the heroine has to suppress. Some of the works express the necessity of the female and the maternal as spirited, liberating, life-giving source. And finally the most important uniting feature of the examined works is depiction of the society that, by maintaining the old patriarchal conventions, prevents women from acting freely and independently and from finding and establishing their own identity.

Summary

Tato práce se zabývá vývojem žánru ženská gotika od jeho počátků v devadesátých letech osmnáctého století do současnosti. Zkoumá společenské a kulturní podmínky, které ovlivnily vznik tohoto žánru, a na analýze nejvýznamnějších děl, které se k němu řadí, se snaží postihnout nejdůležitější rysy a ilustrovat proměny, kterými žánr v průběhu dvou století prošel.

První kapitola se zabývá vznikem gotického žánru obecně. Koncem osmnáctého století došlo k obnovení zájmu o středověkou kulturu. Nejen v literatuře ale i v architektuře se začal projevovat vliv gotické kultury. Mnozí zámožní lidé stavěli svá sídla v gotickém stylu. Některé stavby byly dokonce imitací zřícenin gotických hradů, jako například Strawberry Hill Horace Walpola. Středověké estetické hodnoty se však začaly projevovat zejména v literatuře. Nejvýznamnějším rysem gotické literatury je přítomnost nadpřirozených úkazů, jež je spojena s pověrčivostí, nevědomostí, neorganizovaností a přepjatou fantazií, které charakterizují středověké myšlení. Tyto rysy ostře kontrastují s ideály Osvícenství, pro které byl charakteristický důraz na jasnost, logiku a přesnost. Jelikož osvícenské ideály byly koncem osmnáctého století na ústupu, staly se prvky středověké kultury důležitým zdrojem oživení britské literatury a kultury, protože představovaly spojení se starou anglickou historií, která byla v předchozí době opomíjena. Mnozí badatelé se obrátili ke studiu starších anglických textů a zdůrazňovali jejich význam pro obrození literatury.

Hlavním inspiračním zdrojem gotické literatury byla poezie básníků tzv. hřbitovní školy, která byla populární v první polovině osmnáctého století. Tato poezie využívala pochmurného prostředí nočních kostelů a hřbitovů, obrazů smrti a rozkladu a přítomnosti nadpřirozených prvků jako prostředku k obnovení víry a morálky. Dalším vlivným inspiračním zdrojem byla sentimentální literatura, která se soustřeďuje na podrobné vykreslení pocitů postav a patetických situací a zároveň se snaží vyvolat silnou emociální reakci u čtenáře. Sentimentalismus byl logicky v opozici s osvícenskou literaturou, která kladla důraz na rozum.

Podstatný vliv na vznik gotického žánru měly také estetické teorie Edmunda Burka, který, v návaznosti na starořímského teoretika Longina, považoval pocit

hrůzy a děsu vyvolaný například četbou literatury nebo pohledem na obraz za zdroj úžasu, tedy nejsilnějšího pocitu jakého je lidská mysl schopna.

Gotická literatura je charakteristická přítomností nadpřirozených sil, bytostí nebo úkazů, zasazením do archaického nebo exotického prostředí, výskytem typických často až otřepaných postav a využitím a snahou o zdokonalení technik k dosažení literárního napětí.

Děj gotického románu se často odehrává ve středověké minulosti a je zasazen do prostředí některého z jihoevropských států, nejčastěji Itálie nebo Španělska, a antagonisty jsou často představitelé katolické církve nebo aristokracie. To pravděpodobně souvisí s kritikou katolictví, které v Británii představovalo zdroj pověrčivosti a neomezené moci. Gotická literatura se také často soustředila na zobrazení děsivých praktik inkvizice.

Jihoevropské prostředí je také zdrojem pro vyjádření pocitu úžasu, jak ho proklamoval Edmund Burke. Hory, pohoří, skály, soutěsky a rozbouřené moře vyvolávají pocit ohromení. Prostedí, v kterém se postavy vyskytují, se zpravidla shoduje s jejich vnitřním rozpoložením. Chvilé pronásledování, hrůzy a zděšení se odehrávají za bouřlivé noci v odlehlých místech hor a lesů, zatímco chvíle radosti štěstí a lásky jsou doplněny slunným počasím a malebným prostředím venkova.

Důležitým prvkem gotického prostředí jsou kromě jihoevropské přírody také hrady, zříceniny, kláštery nebo opatství. Tyto budovy jsou také zdrojem nádhery a pocitu děsu a hrůzy zároveň. Jejich architektura je překrásná a velkolepá a má starobylý nádech, ale tmavé pokoje, dlouhé prázdné chodby, vysoké věže, někdy i tajné chodby nebo kobky skrývají mnohá nebezpečí.

Přestože je děj gotických románů zasazen do minulosti, upozorňuje často nepřímo na nebezpečí v současném světě. Nejistoty a možné hrozby v uspořádání moci a práva ve společnosti jsou skryty za zdánlivě jednoduchou zápletkou pronásledování a zneužívání.

Druhá kapitola v krátkosti představuje tři významná díla rané gotické literatury: *Otrantský zámek* Horace Walpola, *Starého anglického barona* Clary Reeveové a *V ústraní* Sophie Leeové. Upozorňuje na důležité rysy, které ovlivnily další vývoj

gotického románu, a které se staly základem pro rozlišení ženského a mužského pojetí gotické literatury. Významným prvkem, který spojuje romány Walpola a Reeveové je zejména první anonymní vydání. Román je prezentován jako edice nebo překlad nalezeného rukopisu. Tato poznámka k vydání měla pomoci autorovi nebo autorce omluvit možné nejasnosti a krkolomné dějové zvraty v průběhu vyprávění, a zároveň měla podpořit věrohodnost nadpřirozených událostí obsažených v románu. Přestože v dalších edicích románu Walpole a Reeveová svoje autorství přiznali, stal se rámeček, který prezentuje vyprávění jako starobylý nalezený manuskript, prostředkem často využívaným dalšími autory gotické literatury. Horace Walpole bývá tradičně považován za zakladatel gotické literatury. V líčení nadpřirozených událostí v *Otrantském zámku* převládá fantazie nad realitou. Kniha oplývá nadpřirozenými jevy, událostmi a bytostmi, jejichž existence není nijak logicky vysvětlena. *Starý anglický baron* a *V ústraní* jsou v tomto ohledu knihami poněkud konzervativnějšími. Postavy a jejich jednání a chování jsou bližší soudobým společenským konvencím, a nadpřirozené úkazy jsou v závěru logicky vysvětleny. Román Reeveové navíc obsahuje vymyšlenou zápletku, která stojí na pozadí skutečných historických událostí.

Třetí kapitola práce přibližuje beletristické i literárně teoretické dílo Ann Radcliffové, která byla průkopnicí ženské gotické literatury. Ve svojí eseji *On the Supernatural in Poetry* nastiňuje rozdělení gotické literatury na literature of horror a literature of terror, které se později stalo základem pro odlišování mužské a ženské gotické literatury. Mužská gotická literatura (literature of horror) je charakteristická přímým zobrazením konkrétního zdroje hrůzy, které je doplněno vyjádřením pocitu znechucení a beznaděje. Postava je konfrontována děsivou skutečností, kterou si nedokáže vysvětlit, například spatřením mrtvého těla. Taková situace se stává zdrojem pocitu beznaděje. Naproti tomu v ženské gotické literatuře (literature of horror) je hrozba většinou částečně ukryta. Hrdinky a hrdinové jsou vyděšeni zdánlivou přítomností nadpřirozených sil, reprezentované například tajemnými zvuky nebo temnou postavou. Neurčitost a nejistota této hrozby nabádá k logickému vysvětlení podivných událostí a zjevení, k němuž zpravidla na koci vyprávění dochází.

Na díle Radcliffové jsme sledovali typické rysy tradiční ženské gotické literatury.

Hlavní postavou ženského gotického románu je mladá hrdinka, obvykle sirotek nebo nemající matku, pronásledovaná mnichem nebo šlechticem, někdy celou skupinou padouchů nebo banditů. Po rozluštění složité zápletky a po potrestání všech záporných postav končí román obvykle svatbou hrdinky a jejího ctitele, který se jí snažil chránit a podporovat během jejího strastiplného dobrodružství.

Mužský protagonista v klasickém ženském gotickém románu je zpravidla na půli cesty mezi padouchem a hrdinou. Přestože představuje hrozbu pro hrdinku, je zároveň tajemně přitažlivý. Je potenciálním milencem i vrahem.

Strádání hrdinek klasické ženské gotiky začala pozdější feministická kritika spojovat s nepřímým vyjádřením útlaku a ohrožení žen v patriarchální společnosti. Fakt, že jsou tyto hrdinky uvězněny a pronásledovány zpravidla v uzavřených prostorech jako jsou hrady, panství, jeskyně nebo podzemní chodby, naznačuje jejich svázanost s domácím prostředím, a pasivita ve chvílích ohrožení a opakované pokusy uprchnout naznačují neschopnost nebo nemožnost vymanit se z fádnic a podřadných rolí, které toto prostředí nabízí.

Čtvrtá kapitola je rozbořením knihy, která se pomocí parodie na ženský gotický román snaží upozornit na skutečná nebezpečí ve společnosti. *Northangerské opatství* Jane Austenové je zřejmě nejznámější a nejvydřenější parodií gotické literatury. Austenová využívá hrdinku, která je, co se týče původu, vzhledu a chování, naprostým opakem hrdinek Radcliffové, ale jako typické gotické hrdinky je Cathrine Morlandová mladá a naivní, a proto ve společnosti ovládané muži naprosto bezbranná. Catherine se ocitá ve spárech krutého a intrikujícího Generála, otce svého nastávajícího a milovaného Henryho Tilneyho. Přestože příběh končí šťastnou svatbou Catherine a Henryho, v průběhu románu se ukáže, že, i když je v manželství institucí, v níž je muž autoritou, kterou je žena povinna následovat a podrobit se jí, představuje zároveň jediné východisko pro hrdinku v nepříznivé životní situaci.

Pátá kapitola nabízí pohled na *Frankensteina* Mary Shelleyové jako na podobenství o nemožnosti odstranění tradičních ženských rolí ze společnosti nebo z lidského života vůbec. Na příběhu šíleného vědce, který si hraje na boha a sestrojí bytost podobnou člověku, prezentuje Shelleyová nevyhnutelnost a

nezničitelnost ženského pečujícího pudu. Frankenstein, zděšen svým strašlivým výtvořem, opustí svého uměle vytvořeného potomka, a ten se stane nevyhnutelným zdrojem jeho vlastní záhuby.

Šestá kapitola sleduje příběh hrdinky, která je doslova spoutána konvencemi soudobé společnosti. Pochmurný a asketický život Lucy Snowové, hlavní postavy románu *Villette* od Charlotte Brontëové, je determinován dobovým ženským ideálem. Lucy Snowová jako adeptka nevhodná pro sňatek přijímá podřadnou roli učitelky v dívčím penzionátu se stravující pokorou. Ženské postavy, které Lucy obklopují, jsou projekcí jejich nadějí a tužeb, které jsou pohřbeny hluboko v jejím nevědomí. Lucy se však nakonec podaří vymanit se z předepsané role.

Sedmá kapitola interpretuje populární román Daphne du Maurierové *Rebecca* jako příběh obyčejné dívky, která se bez jakýchkoliv předpokladů, vlastně náhodou, stává hrdinkou, sebevědomou paní domu a rovnocennou partnerkou svého zámožného manžela. Dříve však musí absolvovat strastiplné tažení proti duchovi jeho exmanželky, která byla až příliš odvážná a svobodomyšlná.

Osmá kapitola se soustřeďuje na analýzu povídky Angely Carterové “Krvavá komnata” ze stejnojmenné sbírky, která je sebevědomou feministickou variací na pohádku o Modrovousovi, který krutě trestal své manželky za porušení zákazu. Hrdinka Carterové se podobá hrdinkám Radcliffové. Naivní sedmnáctiletá nevěsta se málem stává obětí vražedného rituálu svého sadistického manžela, je však na poslední chvíli zachráněna svou vlastní matkou, která se tak stává představitelkou ideálu ženské odvahy a nezávislosti.

Práce upozorňuje na shodné znaky a paralely mezi jednotlivými zkoumanými díly, přičemž se soustřeďuje především na proměnu a vývoj ženských i mužských protagonistů v průběhu zhruba dvousetleté existence žánru a na způsob zobrazení společnosti založené na patriarchálních konvencích jako limitujícího faktoru, který ovlivňuje hledání ženské svobody a identity.

Abstract

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Title: The Development and Changes of the Female Gothic Genre from the Beginning to the Present Day

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Number of Graphemes: 175 194

Number of Works Cited: 42

Keywords: Gothic, Female Gothic, literature of terror, feminism, heroine, identity, sexuality, doubles, fairy tales, Anne Radcliffe, Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, Daphne du Maurier, Angela Carter

This work examines the development of the Female Gothic genre from its beginning to the present day. The first part of the work focuses on illustrating the social and cultural conditions under which the Gothic originated, the sources of inspiration and the works of literary theory that influenced its formation and the specific features that differentiate the Female Gothic from the Male Gothic. The second part focuses on analysis of the most important works of the Female Gothic to describe how the genre has changed during the course of two centuries and to define the most common features of the genre.

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