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Re-Historicizing the Female Gothic

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of South Alabama
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

by
Natalie Schuler Evers
B.S., University of Mobile, 2018
December 2021

To the little girl growing inside of me. You are the best Little Wrench that has ever been thrown into my plans.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: THE GOTHIC: MALE AND FEMALE OR TERROR AND HORROR	12
CHAPTER 3: CHARLOTTE BRONTE	24
CHAPTER 4: EMILY BRONTE	36
CHAPTER 5: CHARLOTTE DACRE.....	49
CONCLUSION	62
REFERENCES	65
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	70

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Gothic Themes	23

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Timeline of the British Gothic Novel	11

ABSTRACT

Evers, Natalie Schuler, M.A., University of South Alabama, December 2021. Re-Historicizing the Female Gothic. Chair of Committee: Cristopher Hollingsworth, Ph.D.

When the Gothic genre emerged in the late eighteenth-century, it shocked and horrified its readers—even more so if the writer of the Gothic novel was revealed to be a woman. After fifty years or so, these novels and the outrage they sparked died down and they were slowly replaced by other works—traditionally written by white men—until the second-wave feminist movement and the rise of feminist criticism in the 1960s and 1970s. A pitfall that some feminist critics fell into is that in order to be recognized as a good female writer from the eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries, there had to be undertones of discomfort because that is what women in the 1960s and 1970s were experiencing. The problem with this thought is two-fold: it creates an anachronistic reading of eighteenth and nineteenth century texts, and it sets an unhealthy precedent that in order to be a good writer, your work must be subversive, *especially* if you are a woman. Without these critics, these women and their works may have been lost, but it is important that these authors and their works remain in context with their time period. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a re-historicizing of some of the Gothic novels written by women.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was bustling with educational and political reform. It was during this time that writing was also changing not only in content, but also in the gender of writers. Until this time, although there had been a few famous, successful female authors, their writing and publishing had been discouraged by society. To be a female author was considered a violation of gender roles: a woman should not be taking part in the frivolities of writing because it would take her focus away from tending to her household duties. As literature evolved throughout the eighteenth century, women began publishing more and more and while it was still frowned upon, it was accepted as long as women wrote about what they were familiar with—i.e., housework, children, romance, etc.—and they were discouraged from writing anything serious such as philosophy or theology (Armstrong 4). The poetry and novels that women were “allowed” to write fell into the genre that became known as Domestic literature. Domestic novels sought to encourage moral behavior, model polite exchanges, and often had romantic elements.¹ As the Domestic genre rose in popularity, so did another genre—a genre that had little purpose except to frighten and disturb: the Gothic.

¹ An example of a popular Domestic novelist of the time would be Jane Austen.

The first Gothic novel published was *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole in 1764, and he presented it as a recovered medieval text that he had translated. The novel tells the story of a family cursed to fall and it includes ghosts and a dilapidated castle. The novel intended to shock and disturb the readers, and critics were outraged by its content and discouraged readers from reading it altogether. The critics' responses prompted Walpole to publish a second edition in which he confessed he was the original author and it was a fictional work.

The Castle of Otranto set the foundation of an entire genre that thrived on spooking readers with stories of ghosts, hauntings, violence, and villains. Robert D. Hume in his article "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel" wrestles with what classifies a novel as a Gothic as opposed to either a Romantic novel or an offshoot of a Domestic novel. He observes that oftentimes critics try to reduce the Gothic genre to elements such as "haunted castles, supernatural occurrences (sometimes with natural explanations), secret panels and stairways" but that "the Gothic novel is more than a collection of ghost-story devices" (282). Hume deduces that in a Gothic novel "the reader is held in suspense with the characters, and increasingly there is an effort to shock, alarm, and otherwise rouse him" and that a Gothic novel is traditionally set somewhere far away or in a time long past and that "the action derives from a complex villain-hero" (284, 287). Andrew Smith takes Hume's ideas and elaborates further in his book, *Gothic Literature*, that especially with the Early Gothic novels (such as *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk*, *Zofloya*, and *The Old English Baron*), there are reoccurring tropes that appear "highly formulaic and reliant on particular settings, such as castles, monasteries, and ruins, and with characters such as aristocrats, monks, and nuns

who, superficially, appear to be interchangeable from novel to novel” (3). As the Gothic novel progressed, other reoccurring tropes developed including added elements such as non-traditional representations of gender roles, strange dreams, and heretical representations of religion (Smith 4). Since the Gothic genre was disturbing and counter-cultural, original readers and critics assumed it took a man to write a Gothic novel because women were to be dainty and innocent.

It was somewhat socially acceptable for a woman to write a Domestic novel (or Romance), but definitely not a Gothic novel (Armstrong 4). To make *The Castle of Otranto* more appealing to a wider audience, Clara Reeves “undertook to show how it ought to have been written” and wrote *The Champion of Virtue, a Gothic Tale* in 1777 and republished it as *The Old English Baron* in 1778 (Baker 179). The preface states:

This Story is the literary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto*, written upon the same plan, with a design to unite the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient Romance and modern Novel, at the same time it assumes a character and manner of its own, that differs from both; it is distinguished by the appellation of a Gothic Story, being a picture of Gothic times and manners. (Reeve v)

Reeve’s novel did not receive much publicity and since it was openly acknowledged to be an imitation of *The Castle of Otranto*, most critics agree that the first true Gothic novel written by a female was *The Mysteries of Udolpho* published by Ann Radcliffe in 1794.²

² Radcliffe also wrote an imitation of a Gothic novel she didn’t agree with. *The Italian* (1797) was published in reaction to Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796).

Radcliffe's novel received the reaction it intended: it shocked and horrified critics and readers, but she got away with the novel because the full name is actually *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance Interspersed with Some Pieces of Poetry*. Tacking on “*A Romance*” did not fully spare her from critics, but because her work only slightly pushed the boundaries of what was appropriate for a woman to write, it was accepted and she became a popular and influential writer who shaped not only female literature, but the Gothic genre itself.³ As the Gothic genre progressed, novels were divided into two subgenres invented by Ann Radcliffe: the terror and the horror. These distinctions and their importance will be discussed more in depth in the next section.

Following Ann Radcliffe, several women wrote Gothic novels but decided to do so under male pseudonyms in order to quell the outrage and ensure their books were judged on content and not solely on the gender of the author. Two of those women were sisters: Charlotte and Emily Brontë. These women published two of the most famous Gothic novels ever written, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, which were both published in 1847. Charlotte notes in “Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell”:

Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names, positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because—without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called “feminine”—we had a vague impression that

³ Ann Radcliffe published several novels before *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, but it was *The Mysteries of Udolpho* that made her famous.

authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery which is not true praise. (302)

Their collection of poems was not inappropriate to be written by women, but they knew women were not treated fairly by critics so they published as men. When it came time for them to later publish their novels, they continued to use the pseudonyms. It was only after the death of Emily and Anne that Charlotte revealed their true identities as women.

Another woman published a Gothic novel under a pseudonym but she decided that instead of using a male pseudonym, she would use a female pseudonym that was a literary allusion to another famous Gothic novel, Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk*. That woman was Charlotte Dacre and she published *Zofloya* under the pseudonym Rosa Matilda in 1806.⁴ Later in the nineteenth century, the Gothic novel and the women who wrote them fell to the wayside and were buried among the piles of more acceptable writing typically written by men. With the rise of second-wave feminism and feminist criticism in the 1960s, these women and their works were rediscovered.

It is important to clarify here what I mean by first-wave and second-wave feminist movements as well as what I mean by feminist criticism. First-wave feminism was primarily focused around legal issues such as the right to vote, the right to custody after a divorce, the right to own property, as well as the right to be equally educated.⁵ Despite the fact that the term "first-wave feminism" was not coined until Martha Lear's 1968 article "The Second-Wave Feminist: What Do These Women Want?" (Henry 58), the

⁴ Her pseudonym and its significance will be discussed at length later in the thesis.

⁵ Since this thesis focuses on British writers, the introduction will focus on the British feminist movement in particular.

first wave of the feminist movement is recognized to have started with Mary Wollstonecraft and her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published in 1792. In her manifesto, Wollstonecraft passionately argues for women to be equally educated with men. In her introduction, she sarcastically writes that she hopes women will forgive her if she talks to them “like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone” (7-8, emphasis original). Her book was widely read and eventually led to women being allowed in British universities in 1868 (Lambert). Two other important laws passed during the first-wave feminist movement were The Custody of Infants Act 1839 and The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919. The Custody of Infants Act 1839 allowed women to keep custody of their children after a divorce following a series of pamphlets written by Caroline Norton (Wroath 7), and The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 made it legal for married women to work outside of the home.

“Second-wave feminism” started during the 1960s and focused primarily on sexual and reproductive rights. Birth control pills were legalized and distributed in America in 1960 and it was made legal and available to married women in the United Kingdom beginning in 1961 (Bridge). Parliament passed the Abortion Act 1967 which legalized abortion up through the second trimester, and a few years later, in 1973, the Supreme Court legalized abortion in *Roe v. Wade* in America (Blackmun). Most historians agree that the second-wave feminist movement lasted through the 1980s and

turned into the third-wave feminist movement in the 1990s with the rise of pornography and the advancement of gay rights (Gerhard).⁶

The 1960s and 1970s saw a rise in what was called feminist criticism in which there was a call for a re-reading of literature—particularly, a re-reading of literature written by women. Annette Kolodny argues in her article from 1975, “Some Notes on Defining a ‘Feminist Literary Criticism’,” that among other things, the task of a feminist critic is “insisting that what may appear as impossibly freaky or neurotic at first reading is, in reality, the tentative process of discovering—in literary terms—what the world looks and feels like to that segment of the population which is taught the ‘only way . . . to control her future’ is to ‘choose her man’” (84-85). Though Kolodny defined what feminist criticism looks like in application in 1975, it had been in practice for years before. In 1972, Adrienne Rich, an established feminist poet, wrote a groundbreaking article titled “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” in which she called for a reform on the way critics read literature written by women. She stressed that “we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us” (19). Rich and other feminist critics believed that the women men wrote about were idealistic and these men set impossible standards that frustrated real women who cannot measure up to those standards. She contends that it is time for what she calls a “re-visioning”:

The act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural

⁶ Because this thesis is focused primarily around the second-wave of the feminist movement, I will not go further into describing the third-wave or debatable fourth-wave.

history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructive of male-dominated society. (18)

Rich's call for a re-visioning of works is important and she is correct that it needed to be done, but in the search for this re-visioning, Rich and other feminist critics fell into the mindset that in order for an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century woman to be recognized as a good writer, there had to be political undertones explicable and useful to the second-wave feminist project in their writings. The problem with a re-visioning of this sort is two-fold: it encourages an anachronistic reading of eighteenth and nineteenth century texts, and it sets an unhealthy precedent that in order to be a good writer, your work must be subversive, *especially* if you are a woman.

The push from these feminist critics to re-read female authors is the reason many people recognize *Frankenstein* over *The Castle of Otranto* and the Brontë sisters over Matthew Gregory Lewis. Their fight for women to be placed in the canon and be taken as serious writers is partly why I can make this argument today. These feminist critics were writing in a time when the literary patriarchy was first starting to really be challenged, and they wanted proof that their fight for equality and sexual liberation (among other things) was not a new problem. So they searched literature written by women decades prior when not only the content was more heavily scrutinized, but their gender as well. The female British Gothic writers made excellent fodder: their writing was subversive by genre and obscure in plot, and they were writing at a time when women were not praised for being authors. The feminist critics' re-reading of the Gothic novel written by females

may be the reason we still know their names, but at what cost? Oftentimes these critics forfeited historical accuracy for an attractive and modern interpretation.

To emphasize the relevance of these women's works, feminist critics ascribed thoughts and ideals to Gothic female authors to show that the issues women faced were timeless. As feminist critic Catharine R. Stimpson points out in her article "Feminism and Feminist Criticism," feminist critics like herself have to show that years before the publication of *Jane Eyre* and years after, "Rochesters have bestrode the world more firmly and freely than Janes . . . and Janes have had to choose between polishing their boots or declining to do so—at the risk of a kick" (273). Thus, even though these Gothic female authors had not been alive for at least a century, their novels were applicable to the modern reader. The search for relevance in criticism is not unique to these feminist critics and it is an important facet of research, but the danger comes when the search for relevance is placed over historical accuracy.

The purpose of my thesis is to provide a re-historicizing of some Gothic novels written by females. I have chosen to focus on three authors and their works: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*. I have chosen to focus on these three women in particular for several reasons: first, I do not have time or space to focus on all of the female Gothic writers; second, some of the female Gothic writers were actually progressive (such as Mary Shelley whose mother was a first-wave feminist) and so the second-wave feminists' approaches to these works are largely accurate; and third, because these three women felt the need to obscure their identity and their pseudonyms played an important role in their reviews and criticism. I will first provide some context around the Gothic novel (particularly the gendering of the

Gothic novel) and suggest an alternative distinction. Then, the next three chapters will be devoted to these three writers and the evolution of criticism around their works. I will compare original criticism to criticism presented by second-wave feminist scholars and will show that although their scholarship was important to ensure these women made it into the canon, the anachronistic readings create a misunderstanding of not only the Gothic genre but also female writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

1764-- <i>Castle of Otranto</i> by Horace Walpole published--first Gothic novel
1771/1772-- Charlotte Dacre born
1777-- <i>The Old English Baron</i> by Clara Reeve published--first Gothic novel written by a female
1792-- <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> published by Mary Wollstonecraft--first “feminist manifesto”
1794-- <i>The Mysteries of Udolpho</i> by Ann Radcliffe published
1796-- <i>The Monk</i> by Matthew Gregory Lewis published
1806-- <i>Zofloya</i> by Charlotte Dacre published
1816-- <i>Frankenstein</i> published by Mary Shelley; Charlotte Brontë born
1818--Emily Brontë born
1820--George IV crowned king of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland
1825--Charlotte Dacre dies
1830--George the IV dies; William IV is crowned king
1837--William IV dies; Victoria is crowned queen
1847-- <i>Jane Eyre</i> by Charlotte Brontë published
1847-- <i>Wuthering Heights</i> by Emily Brontë published
1848--Emily Brontë dies
1855--Charlotte Brontë dies
1886-- <i>The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> published by Robert Louis Stevenson
1897-- <i>Dracula</i> published by Bram Stoker--this novel is typically considered to mark the end of the Gothic era.

Figure 1. Timeline of the British Gothic Novel.

CHAPTER II

THE GOTHIC: MALE AND FEMALE OR TERROR AND HORROR?

The distinction between the Male and Female Gothic was first formally introduced by Ellen Moers in 1974. Lauren Fitzgerald in her 1993 article "Gothic Properties: Radcliffe, Lewis and the Critics" notes that even though there was some sort of "gendering of the Gothic throughout the critical history of this genre," Moers "managed, almost single-handedly, to transvalue the disparagement implicit in the association of the Gothic with women into a kind of celebration of female authorship" (169). Moers' definition of what classifies a Gothic as a Female Gothic is straightforward: "What I mean by Female Gothic is easily defined: the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (90). Since Moers' landmark scholarship, the distinction between the Male and Female Gothic has evolved far beyond the gender of the author and developed into a distinct subgenre of the Gothic.

The problem arises, though, that when the most famous Gothic novels published between 1764 (*The Castle of Otranto*) and 1847 (*Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*) are laid side-by-side, there are no clear-cut distinctions between those authored by men and

those authored by women.⁷ If there was a division between the Male and Female Gothic besides the gender of the author, it should be apparent throughout the novels as a whole. However, none of the Female Gothic novels hold characteristics unique to them except for the gender of the novelist themselves. Therefore, I assert that the Female Gothic is not actually a subgenre, but merely a necessary distinction in order to recognize women in the Gothic canon, and that second-wave feminist critics created the gendered Gothics for the purpose of trying to make women who were over one hundred years older seem relevant to a modern age. I also assert that the actual genre divisions are between what Ann Radcliffe christened the “horror” Gothic novels and the “terror” Gothic novels.

In 1826, William Radcliffe published an unfinished essay written by his late wife, Ann Radcliffe, titled “On the Supernatural in Poetry” in which she breaks down the Gothic genre into two distinct categories: terror and horror. Her essay is formatted as a dialogue between two travelers named Mr. S— and Mr. W—. Mr. S— and Mr. W— talk about Shakespeare and other famous poets and how their scene descriptions cause reactions in readers. By the end, it is determined that a work that employs “terror” “is not distinctly pictured forth, but is seen in glimpses through obscuring shades, the great outlines only appearing, which excite the imagination to complete the rest” (Radcliffe 6). A work that employs “horror,” on the other hand, is the kind which takes less narrative strength and requires no imagination on the part of the readers. Mr. W— remarks: “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”

⁷ See Table 1 on page 23 which lays out the most popular British Gothic novels and examines their characteristics side-by-side.

(Radcliffe 6). In other words, “terror” is much like an Alfred Hitchcock movie—all of the goriest action takes place off stage and the clever use of lighting and camera angle (or in the case with novels, descriptions and dialogue) causes fright and shock in the reader’s imagination. Contrarily, “horror” operates more like a movie where all of the blood and gore takes place center-stage (fully described in great detail).

Oftentimes, critics use Radcliffe’s distinction between terror and horror to differentiate between the Male (horror) and the Female (terror) Gothic novels. Carol Margaret Davison contends in her article “The Victorian Gothic and Gender”:

While ‘terror Gothic’ was classified as feminine and tacitly associated with her own work in its aim to expand the soul by bringing it into contact with the terror-inducing sublime, ‘horror Gothic’ was deemed ‘masculine’ and associated with the more sensational works of Matthew G. Lewis.

(124)

The issue with Davison’s conclusion is that Radcliffe never associated terror with femininity and horror with masculinity; she simply asserted that terror was superior to horror, and it was acknowledged that her novels fit cleanly into the first category and Matthew Gregory Lewis’ work, whom she openly warred with, fit cleanly into the second. Michael Sadleir, in his work “The Northanger Novels: A Footnote to Jane Austen,” distinguishes the two types of Gothic as Radcliffian (terror) and Lewisian (horror) describing the followers of the former as being “like those who sit around a fire on a stormy night. Their sensitiveness to the beauty of the terrific depends less on the actual quality of terror than on the shuddersome but agreeable contrast between the

dangers of abroad and the cosy security of home” (Sadleir 14). The followers of Lewis are described by Sadleir as:

Into the firelit refuge of the Radcliffian novelist the follower of Lewis would fain intrude, haggard and with water streaming from his lank hair, shrieking perhaps, as would befit a demon of the storm; then, when he had struck the company to silent fear, he would wish to vanish again into the howling darkness. (14)

The distinction between Radcliffe’s terror Gothic and Lewis’ horror Gothic did not and was not meant to apply across all Gothics based solely on the author’s gender, but based on the novel’s content. The idea of a universal distinction based on gender was disproved even when “On the Supernatural in Poetry” was written since Charlotte Dacre’s horror Gothic *Zofloya* was published and widely circulated in 1806 (before “On the Supernatural in Poetry”). Thus, if the Gothic novel is indeed gendered, it is not gendered by our modern understanding of gendering.

If it is true that the Gothics are not gendered in the modern sense of the term, then this implies that the re-reading of the Gothic novel in the 1960s and 1970s by feminist critics was a double-edged sword: on one hand, the re-reading of the “female” Gothic offered these otherwise forgotten female novelists opportunity to be included in the canon. On the other hand, this powerful, interpretative strategy has consequences: this re-reading is anachronistic and reads unintended meaning into these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic novels written by females. This understanding of the anachronism of gendering the Gothics is important for the furtherance of Gothic studies because it keeps the genre in the context of its own time period. Although there were

some Gothic writers who were female who did have progressive ideas, such as Mary Shelley, she was the exception and not the norm. By forcing this reading on the entire genre it creates a misunderstanding of the genre and, in a way, ends up arguing an anti-feminist stance: women are only great writers if their writing contains subversive messages. Moers' distinction between the Gothics written by men and those written by women was not meant to create an entire subgenre, but call to attention what was important: that despite social discouragement, women dared to write Gothic novels.

In addition to defining the Female Gothic as a Gothic novel written by a female, Moers argued that Radcliffe set the foundation for the Female Gothic and that it would be a Female Gothic if it was a "novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine" (Moers 91). However, if this was Radcliffe's intent and if this was indeed one of the key requirements of being a Female Gothic, *Wuthering Heights* and *Zofloya* are not Female Gothics, but the argument could be made that *The Castle of Otranto* fits into that construct with Isabella being both the victim of Manfred and also often finding a way to free herself.

The general consensus among critics as to what makes a Female Gothic is a "narratives in which distressed female heroines are imprisoned in the domestic sphere and threatened with extortion, rape and forced marriage" (Ledoux 1). If this is the case, then *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Monk* are Female Gothics as well even though *The Castle of Otranto* was the first Gothic novel published and *The Monk* was the goriest Gothic and both were written by men. In *The Castle of Otranto*, key parts of the plot concern Manfred's desire to force Isabella into marrying him to produce another heir. There are mentions of rape in it as well. *The Monk* is focused around Ambrosio raping

Antonia. If a woman being threatened with rape or marriage was a necessary distinction, *Jane Eyre* would not be a Female Gothic. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane almost marries Rochester not knowing about his first wife being alive, but she was not forced to marry Rochester nor was she raped. It could be argued that the imprisonment of Bertha would make this a Female Gothic, but since Bertha is not an innocent maid like the other heroines, it would make it a hard case to argue. However, Fitzgerald articulates an alternative definition of the female gothic and, therefore, logic for bifurcating the Gothic.

Fitzgerald theorizes that the themes of imprisonment, threatened rape, and forced marriage are not actually what define a Female Gothic. She refers to these themes as the “property plot” and claims that it is not specific to Gothics written by females. Fitzgerald explains, “[t]he property plot of Radcliffe’s and Lewis’ Gothics, put simply, involves the heroine’s ownership of something which the villain wants and to which, for a time at least, he stakes a claim” (167). Fitzgerald’s explanation of the property plot can be extended beyond Radcliffe and Lewis and to the Gothic novel in general since the concept of the property plot is seen in most Gothic novels. The following examples demonstrate the consistency of the property plot throughout classic Gothic novels: In Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, Manfred lusts after his former future daughter-in-law, Isabella, and imprisons her because he wants to solidify his claim to Otranto; in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Rochester wants to claim Jane through marriage even though he is already married to Bertha; in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff longs for Catherine even though she is married; and in Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*, Victoria longs for Henriquez and kidnaps his fiancée, Lilla, in hopes of having Henriquez all for herself. The property plot is a significant trope in the Gothic genre regardless of

the gender of the author or whether it falls into the subgenre of terror or horror, but some critics believe a distinction between the Male and the Female Gothic lies in scandal.

An important element of a Gothic novel is disturbing content, and some critics argue the distinction between the Male and the Female Gothic is seen in whether or not a novel contains scandalous subject matter. The problem is, there is no clear distinction between how the men and women discuss things such as violence, sex, or religion. However, if the distinction is expanded beyond the gender of the author and into the type of Gothic, the presentation of the content differs. If it is a terror Gothic, its subject matter tends to be tamer, whereas if it is a horror Gothic, it is vulgar and forward—specifically, in the depiction of violence and/or death. When describing violence, a terror Gothic acknowledges the violence or the death but does not describe it in close detail. For example, in *The Castle of Otranto*, at the beginning when Conrad is crushed by the helmet, it does not give a great amount of detail, only that he is crushed by the helmet: “But what a sight for a father’s eyes!—He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for a human being” (Walpole 18). The scene does mention that Conrad was “dashed to pieces” but compared to a horror Gothic, such as Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*, this is a mild description. In Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*, when Victoria tortures and kills Lilla, the scene is almost an entire chapter in length and describes the chase scene in great detail with descriptions of blood and gore (Dacre 217-224). Also in *The Castle of Otranto*, when the narrator talks about Manfred’s desire to have sex with Isabella, it mentions the possibility of raping her. In contrast, the narrator of *The Monk* graphically relates Antonia’s rape. The distinction between these two scenes is not that one discusses

rape and the other does not, it is how they discuss rape: a terror Gothic, like *The Castle of Otranto*, merely alludes to rape and a horror Gothic, like *The Monk*, explicitly describes rape. Critics, such as James Dunn in his article “Charlotte Dacre and the Feminization of Violence,” argue that one of the most significant tropes in a Female Gothic novel is not solely the content of the novel, but the distortion of gender roles.

One of the elements frequently seen in Gothic novels is a distortion of traditional gender roles. Victorian female characters were portrayed as feminine, gentle, and submissive,⁸ but most Gothic female characters, such as Victoria from *Zofloya*, exhibited characteristics that contradicted this view. Victoria is “proud, haughty, and self-sufficient—of a wild, ardent and irrepressible spirit indifferent to reproof, careless of censure—of an implacable, revengeful, and cruel nature, and bent upon gaining the ascendancy in whatever she engaged” (Dacre 40), but the distortion or disregard of traditional gender roles is not unique to Gothics written by females. Dunn represents a strain of critical thought that holds that the presence of strong-willed females or females who act outside of the realm of traditional gender roles indicates a desire to challenge and eradicate the patriarchy. Dunn notes that Victoria’s character is a “symbolic intent to destroy this false feminine ideal” (314). If critics like Dunn are correct in their assumption that the distortion of gender roles is used primarily to push for a re-defining of gender roles, then not only would there be a consistency across more of the Gothics written by females, but these women would be portrayed in a better light. In the case of

⁸ Coventry Patmore’s poem “The Angel in the House,” published in 1854, describes an ideal woman and includes lines such as: “Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman’s pleasure; down the gulf / Of his condoled necessities / She casts herself, she flings herself” (Canto IX lines 1-4).

Zofloya and *Wuthering Heights*, it is apparent from the text that neither Victoria's behavior nor Catherine's behavior was condoned by any character in the novel (with the exception of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* who works as the antagonist). In the case of *Jane Eyre* with the gender role distortions seen in Bertha, nothing about her as a character indicates that her behavior was to be considered exemplary. The only women who were of good character and praised were those who followed gender roles and, more often than not, were also the women who needed to be saved.

The narrators in the Gothics—written by either men or women—praise the female character who is in danger. Their temperament sets them apart from the villain whether that villain is male, like in the cases of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Castle of Otranto*, or female like *The Monk* (Matilda) and *Zofloya*. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the narrator describes Emily as having “uncommon delicacy of mind, warm affections, and ready benevolence, . . . softness to her manner, which added grace to beauty, and rendered her a very interesting object to persons of a congenial disposition” (Radcliffe 5). Antonia in *The Monk* is often referred to as beautiful but “totally ignorant” of the world around her (Lewis 43). Isabella and Matilda in *The Castle of Otranto* are both described as beautiful virgins and are praised for their care of Hippolita (Walpole 19). Lilla is described in detail in *Zofloya* as being

Pure, innocent, free even from the smallest taint of a corrupt thought, was her mind; delicate, symmetrical, and of fairy-like beauty, her person so small, yet of so just proportion; sweet, expressing a seraphic serenity of soul. Seemed her angelic countenance, slightly suffused with the palest hue of the virgin rose. Long flaxen hair floated over her shoulders: she

might have personified (were the idea allowable) innocence in the days of her childhood. (Dacre 144)

These women are praised for their beauty, their innocence, and their virtue. The women who bend traditional gender roles are not spoken well of and thus it does not indicate that the perversion of gender roles was something to be modeled. When a scene from a Gothic novel is isolated from its historical context and isolated from its context with the rest of the novel, it results in a misreading that separates the novel from its distinction as a terror or horror Gothic which will be demonstrated later in the thesis.

While the distinction between the Gothic (or the Male Gothic) and the Female Gothic was necessary to keep female writers in the canon, the distinction does not appear consistently across the Gothic novels written by females enough to create an actual subgenre. However, this re-re-reading, as it is, of the Gothic goes against the grain and, in many ways, could be mistaken as disrespectful or ungrateful for the work of feminist critics. As Ledoux put it so thoughtfully when she encountered the same issue,

It seemed ungrateful to question a literary category that made my scholarship and that of many of my peers even possible. Yet, I have wanted to write this article for some time, because categorizing a work as part of the Female Gothic seems to create more problems for analysis than it solves. (2)

As I have researched and read, I have come to the same conclusions Ledoux has: though I am grateful for the work the Feminist critics have done to ensure these female Gothic writers stay canonized, the insistence that the Female Gothic is its own subgenre because of content creates more problems and discrepancies. It is important for readers and critics

to keep in mind the differences between terror Gothics and horror Gothics to help more accurately distinguish Gothic novels as opposed to reducing these works to the gender of their author.

Table 1. Gothic Themes.

Novel Title and Year of Publication	Gender of Author	Castle/ House	Damsel in Distress	Horror	Supernatural Occurrences	Gender Role Perversion	Strange Dreams	Controversial Views of Religion	Nature as Sublime
<i>The Castle of Otranto</i> (1764)	Male	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>The Old English Baron</i> (1778)	Female	✓			✓				✓
<i>Vathek</i> * (1786)	Male	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Mysteries of Udolpho</i> (1794)	Female	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>The Monk</i> (1796)	Male	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Zofloya</i> (1806)	Female	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Frankenstein</i> (1818)	Female	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Jane Eyre</i> (1847)	Female	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
<i>Wuthering Heights</i> (1847)	Female	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Vathek* is not a novel popular among today's readers, but it was popular when it was published and is helpful in providing another example of a Gothic written by a man and a horror Gothic.

CHAPTER III

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

“False ideas will naturally arise when we only judge an author from his works.” —Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë is the most well-known of the Brontë sisters, which is probably because there is more writing—published and personal—that remained after she died. Charlotte was born in 1816,⁹ and she was the oldest of the three famous Brontë sisters. She also outlived all of her siblings and was the only one who married, but died from complications while pregnant in March of 1855. She was the epitome of a Victorian woman; Charlotte was pious and reserved, caring and gentle. She sought the best in others and had a passion for writing. Her first published work was a collection of poetry she published with her sisters called “Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell” which was published in 1846, and she released her first of four novels the following year: *Jane Eyre*.¹⁰

Jane Eyre was originally published as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* under the pseudonym Currer Bell in 1847. *Jane Eyre* is a terror Gothic that tells the story of a woman, Jane Eyre, who was orphaned and lived with her abusive aunt and cousins until

⁹ For convenience, I will refer to Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë each by her first name.

¹⁰ It should be noted that several of Charlotte’s novels *could* fit in the genre of Gothic, but because of time and space I will focus on the one with the most criticism and popularity which is *Jane Eyre*.

she was sent to a boarding school, Lowood. There, she excelled despite hardships with instructors, sickness, and friends, and after she graduated, she stayed on as a teacher and eventually became a governess at Thornfield Hall for a young girl named Adèle. Adèle is in the care of a curious man named Rochester who may or may not be her father and is not incredibly kind. Rochester finds Jane amusing and frequently requests her company. Over time, strange things such as fires and attacks occur at Thornfield and Jane is told they are the fault of the housekeeper, Grace. Jane becomes accustomed to her new life and falls in love with Rochester despite his manipulation which includes flaunting a beautiful woman, Blanche Ingram, and openly comparing her to Jane. When Jane is convinced Rochester will marry Blanche, Rochester confesses it was all a ruse and that he actually loves Jane. They go to a church to get married and at the church it is revealed that all of the strange occurrences at the house are not Grace's fault, but Rochester's mentally unstable wife, Bertha, who lives locked in the attic. Jane is outraged by Rochester's lies and runs away and finds solace with a group of siblings. After a time, Jane receives word that she inherited money from a relative and is wealthy. She visits her dying aunt and makes amends with her and her cousins. She also learns that Rochester's wife set Thornfield Hall on fire before throwing herself off the roof to her death. Rochester was injured in the fire and was blind and struggled to get around on his own. Heartbroken by the news and still longing for Rochester, Jane rushes to him and they get married and live happily ever after.

Although it was called an autobiography, as Alexandra Mullen in "Charlotte Brontë: Insurrection and Resurrection" notes, "The novel's plot has lurid or unbelievable elements—the mad wife in the attic and the plain-jane governess enchanting her master"

(434). Mullen further remarks that “the external facts of Jane Eyre's life only overlap with Charlotte Brontë's in three instances: they both were sent to a stern boarding school affected by a deadly epidemic; they both worked as a governess; [and] they both taught in a small school” (434). There is one other similarity between Jane Eyre and Charlotte Brontë that Mullen overlooked: Charlotte also fell in love with her version of Rochester, but because he was married, she did not act on her feelings and instead quit her job and returned home. It is highly implausible that the real-life equivalent of Bertha was trapped in an attic trying to kill everyone, but the similarities are still there. The best fiction has non-fictional elements and Charlotte drew on what she knew to better create Jane. While early critics understood that the best fiction has non-fictional elements and focused primarily on the content as well as the writing style, contemporary critics tend to focus on the “autobiography” aspect of *Jane Eyre* and attribute the details from the novel to Charlotte Brontë herself, or dismiss Jane’s religious tendencies as feminist actions.

Much of the original criticism of the novel circulated around the person of Jane. She did not fit the stereotypes of what would have made an appropriate woman and she expressed thoughts and feelings that Victorian women thought best to repress.¹¹ She was not a woman from a high social rank, but when she compares herself to a proper woman of a higher social rank, Blanche Ingram, she finds herself better than Blanche. Jane says:

[Blanche] was too inferior to excite the feeling. . . She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed

¹¹ See again Patmore’s “The Angel in the House.”

spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her.

(Brontë 150)

These faults that Jane finds in Blanche are faults she believes only she notices, but the way she describes Blanche coupled with Jane's overall diction, started the debate as to whether or not Currer Bell was actually a man.

Elizabeth Rigby, a popular novel critic of the day, reviewed *Jane Eyre* and was disgusted as well as convinced that there was no way the novel was written by a woman. Although this would appear to be the type of argument that would be welcomed by Charlotte Brontë—since she constantly asked to be viewed as a man so her work would be judged fairly—this review attacked Charlotte's femininity and really hurt her feelings. Rigby wrote:

Without entering into the question whether the power of the writing be above her, or the vulgarity below her, there are, we believe, minutiae of circumstantial evidence which at once acquit the feminine hand. No woman—a lady friend, whom we are always happy to consult, assures us—makes mistakes in her own métier—no woman trusses game and garnishes dessert-dishes with the same hands, or talks of so doing in the same breath. Above all, no woman attires another in such fancy dresses as Jane's ladies assume—Miss Ingram coming down, irresistible, 'in a

morning robe of sky-blue crape, a gauze azure scarf twisted in her hair!!” No lady, we understand, when suddenly roused in the night, would think of hurrying on ‘a frock.’ They have garments more convenient for such occasions, and more becoming too. This evidence seems incontrovertible. Even granting that these incongruities were purposely assumed, for the sake of disguising the female pen, there is nothing gained; for if we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex. (78)

By attempting to prove that Currer Bell was not a woman because of the inconsistencies of character and fashion *faux pas*, Rigby attacked Brontë’s femininity unapologetically and it began a feud that continued after Charlotte Brontë’s death.¹²

George Henry Lewes, another well-known critic of the time and would later be the partner of George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans),¹³ felt the exact opposite of Rigby: he encouraged all of his readers to get a copy of *Jane Eyre* and he was convinced that the author was a female. Brontë says in a letter to G. H. Lewes:

I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed “Currer Bell” to be a man: they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming

¹² When Charlotte Brontë died, Rigby wrote a terrible description of her in the paper and spread rumors about the Brontë family. Charlotte’s best friend was so upset by this that she reached out to Elizabeth Gaskell and asked her to write an authorized biography. This is how *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*—perhaps the most famous biography of Charlotte Brontë—was written.

¹³ George Eliot herself remarked to a friend that she liked *Jane Eyre* well enough but that “I wish the characters talked a little less like the heroes and heroines of police reports” (Gary 522).

to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me. (Holloway 68)

Brontë had much respect for G.H. Lewes, but this sentiment addressed to Lewes is something Charlotte Brontë repeated to many reviewers. She knew that as a woman her work would be judged more severely because writing was considered a man's occupation. Soon after Charlotte revealed that the Bells were actually women, she died, and *Jane Eyre* became a distant memory until the 1960s.

Scholarship and criticism on *Jane Eyre* lulled after about 1880 (Charlotte Brontë died in 1855) and picked up for brief time in the 1920s, but then was not widely mentioned again until the rise of feminist criticism in the 1960s. Between the years of 1960 and 1980, *Jane Eyre* is the topic of over 700 articles or book chapters and is most often associated with topics such as introspection, sexuality, and the patriarchy. The most famous criticism on *Jane Eyre* during this time was published in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, a collection of essays on popular nineteenth-century female authors written by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in 1979.

The Madwoman in the Attic takes a combination of critical approaches, such as feminism and psychoanalysis, to classic works written by women. Gilbert and Gubar oftentimes commit the intentional fallacy where they conflate the character's thoughts and opinions with the author's. These types of readings provide valuable insights into the workings of these novels, but sometimes these critics end up reading anachronistically progressive thoughts and ideals onto these characters, and by extension, onto these authors. Sandra M. Gilbert argues in a chapter of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: *Jane Eyre*," that Charlotte Brontë, when writing for the

characters, uses the word “equal” not only morally but politically, “for Charlotte Brontë appears here to have imagined a world in which the prince and Cinderella are democratically equal” (354). Moreover, Gilbert alleges “it is clear that the secrets Rochester is concealing or disguising throughout much of the book are themselves in Jane’s—and Charlotte Brontë’s—view, secrets of inequality” (354). Gilbert is right that the novel focuses on equality and Jane’s search for equality. Jane is told from the time she is small that she will not be considered equal to her cousins (Brontë 8); then she is told she must work extra hard to be considered equal to her classmates at Lowood (Brontë 58); and Rochester offers her her first glimpse of that longed-for equality: “I was your equal at eighteen—quite your equal” (Brontë 118). However, the equality Gilbert is projecting onto Brontë and Jane Eyre is not the equality Brontë and Jane Eyre are referring to. Gilbert, as quoted above, is referring to political equality—equal in status as male and female, but Jane Eyre is looking for a sense of equality where equality means belonging and kinship where money does not matter. She had no equal standing with her cousins who treated her as sub-human and she was intellectually behind her classmates at the beginning of her time at Lowood. When she met Rochester, when they are speaking of him being equal to her when he was her age, he is referring to his memory and wit. This misrepresentation offered by Gilbert changes how readers interpret Jane herself: her quest for finding belonging becomes a quest for finding political standing.

Gilbert saw the strange relationship between Rochester and Jane and instead of recognizing it as a distortion of social norms, believed that Rochester’s injuries were “a punishment for his early profligacy and a sign that Charlotte Brontë (as well as Jane herself), fearing male sexual power, can only imagine marriage as a union with a

diminished Samson” (368). Gilbert goes on to say that Charlotte Brontë’s “indecisive endings . . . suggest that she herself was unable clearly to envision viable solutions to the problem of patriarchal oppression” (369). There is no evidence that the opinion of the ending presented by Gilbert was Charlotte Brontë’s personal opinion nor intention—Gilbert was unintentionally conflating the author with the character and creating an anachronistically progressive reading of the text. Gilbert also misinterprets Gothic tropes as political statements when she comments on Jane’s “refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society—her rebellious feminism” and says that the addition of “the gloomy mansion is . . . just another gothic trapping introduced by Charlotte Brontë to make her novel saleable” (338, 347). The problem is, “the gloomy mansion” is not just the only Gothic trope in *Jane Eyre*: there are so many Gothic tropes in *Jane Eyre* that make it undeniably a Gothic novel.¹⁴ The interpretation of Gothic tropes as merely a last-minute addition to make the novel more attractive was not limited to Gilbert: it was a common interpretation of second-wave feminist critics, namely and perhaps most influentially, Adrienne Rich.

Adrienne Rich in her article “The Temptations of a Motherless Woman” states that *Jane Eyre* is Charlotte Brontë’s “feminist manifesto” (468) because she includes the phrase “Anyone may blame me who likes” and then as an aside, the narrator explains that women feel the full spectrum of emotions just like men do even though, most of the time, they are better at keeping those feelings to themselves (Brontë 94-95). Rich uses this “feminist manifesto” to explain why Jane resisted Rochester’s affections:

¹⁴ See table on page 23.

it is not Rochester's sensuality that brings her up short, but his tendency to make her his object, his creature, he wants to dress her up, lavish jewels on her, remake her in another image. She strenuously resists being romanticized as a beauty or a houri; she will, she tells him, be no part of his harem. (471)

However, it is not that Rochester wants to dress Jane up or "remake her in another image," but that she did not find herself equal with Rochester in social rank which is the reason she thinks Rochester would marry Blanche: "because [Blanche's] rank and connections suited him" (Brontë 163). Rochester was content to make Jane his mistress, but because of her faith, Jane would not give in to his desires. It is Jane's faith and her morals that keep her from "being a part of his harem" —not her refusal to be dressed up.

Jane recalls as she struggles with whether or not to leave Thornfield after learning about Bertha: "I wrestled with my own resolution: I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering I saw laid out for me; and Conscience, turned tyrant, held Passion by the throat..." and then hears Scripture quoted to her when she begs for help in doing what she knows is right but does not want to do: "No; you shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall yourself pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim, and you the priest to transfix it" (Brontë 262). When Rochester tells Jane it would be wicked to leave him, she replies that "it would be wicked to obey you" (Brontë 279). He tries to manipulate her into staying and being his mistress by saying, "Then you condemn me to live wretched and die accursed?" to which she replies, "I advise you to live sinless and die tranquil" (Brontë 279). Her leaving him is not because she does not want to be dressed up or even

because she feels like she deserves better (as Gilbert claims), but because she knows it would be a sin to have sexual relations with a man who is married. It is Jane's faith and her desire to remain pure before God that causes her to leave Rochester, not her feminism. Jane leaving Thornfield often divides feminist critics: some say she left because she deserved better [such as Gilbert (Gilbert 358)] and others say she left because she did not want to be dressed up [such as Rich (Rich 471)], but they all acknowledge Rochester's abusive tendencies.

Rochester spends the entirety of Jane's stay at Thornfield trying to manipulate her and playing with her as if she were his toy. When she leaves, all of the feminist critics agree it was a moment of triumph, but few critics acknowledge how the story ends: she comes back to Rochester. Jane hears of the fire, Bertha's death, and Rochester's injuries, and instead of staying away from the man who deceived her, she pays double to get to him "before dark this day" (Brontë 380). When she gets to him, his biggest concern is whether or not she has been with another man—"were there only ladies in the house where you have been?" (Brontë 388)—and peppers her with questions about her cousin John. He then relays that recently he has found God and wants to marry Jane to which she replies, "if ever I did a good deed in my life—if ever I thought a good thought—if ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer—if ever I wished a righteous wish, —I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth" (Brontë 394). From here, the story has a "happy ending" in which "Reader, I married him" is the opening line to the last chapter, and they go on to have children and live happily ever after (Brontë 397). Feminist critics have a hard time justifying Jane's return and keeping their narrative of Jane as a modern feminist intact. The closest to successfully doing so is

Rich who concludes that the marriage between Rochester and Jane is “not patriarchal marriage in the sense of a marriage that stunts and diminishes the woman; but a continuation of this woman’s creation of herself” (475). Rich’s conclusion negates her argument of Rochester’s manipulation and abuse which also negates her feministic reading of Jane: if Jane left Rochester because she wanted to escape his lies and abuse, how is her return and subsequent marriage to Rochester not patriarchal and a stunt of Jane’s creation of herself? The problem is, Jane is not a modern feminist; she is a fictional character in a Gothic novel who was born in the eighteen-hundreds and longed to be obedient to God above herself and men. Thus, feminist critics secularize Jane so as to rename and possess her symbolic power. Jane wanted equality, yes, but not political equality; she knows and acknowledges that all creatures are “equal before God’s feet” (Brontë 223), but while she searches for someone equal in wit and faith, she does not search for someone equal in power.

The character of Rochester, when held in opposition to Jane, is complex in critical depictions. Before 1960 or whenever the critic is male, Rochester tends to be toned down; his roughness, manipulation, and deceit are dismissed as him wanting to prove his love to Jane or that his actions are a result of his passion. Richard Chase wrote a piece to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the publication of *Jane Eyre* and he “accuses Jane of cowardice” for leaving Rochester and said that she misunderstood and could not “endure the intensity of his passion” (Shapiro 681). An exception to this depiction of Rochester is Eric Solomon who wrote in his article “*Jane Eyre*: Fire and Water,” “Jane manages to evade Rochester’s authoritarian claims for her body and soul by her quiet aggressiveness” (215). Solomon argues that Jane returns to Rochester under the guise of

servitude but as a conqueror since it was he who was hurt and not Jane (216). However, he negates this feministic reading with his assertion that Jane could have avoided being alone and had avoided causing Rochester pain had she just stayed with him all along (215). Feminist critics are not as forgiving of Rochester as the men or the pre-feminist critics are. Gilbert, for example, describes Rochester as imperious and rude (790), deceitful and a seducer (not in a good way) (791), claims that he exploits Jane, and “treats her like a plaything” (793). Adrienne Rich remarks that Rochester is “arrogant enough to lie to [Jane] three times” (471) and that he is manipulative and “plays on every chord of her love, her pity and sympathy, [and] her vulnerability” (472).

The re-evaluation of Rochester’s character with the rise of second-wave feminism highlights one of the more positive aspects of feminist criticism: it is willing to challenge the superiority and unquestionability of men. Up until the feminist critics, Rochester’s behavior was rationalized, but when the second-wave feminist critics evaluated his behavior, they were willing to call his behavior what it was: wrong and abusive. When a re-reading of *Jane Eyre*, like those presented by Gilbert and Rich, goes beyond analyzing text and what is on the page and moves to analyzing intentions and feelings of fictional characters without addressing the constraints that come with the difference in time periods, a misreading occurs that costs the novel some of its originality and historical coherence. Therefore, it is necessary that these feminist critics re-read *Jane Eyre*, and the modern readers are so thankful they did, but we must remember to keep it in context with its time period. The anachronistic progressivism forced into the text creates a mis-reading that does not line up with who Charlotte Brontë was as a writer and a person or what *Jane Eyre* is as a Gothic novel.

CHAPTER IV
EMILY BRONTË

“Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone.”—Charlotte Brontë of Emily Brontë

Emily Jane Brontë, born in 1818, was the second-youngest of the Brontë children. Of all the Brontë children, Emily stood out among them as peculiar—she was strong-willed, not particularly interested in religion, showed no interest in marriage or children, and preferred the company of animals to humans.¹⁵ She had her own way of doing things and did not like to be fussed about. It is said that in 1843, Emily was bitten by what she feared to be a rabid dog and instead of telling anyone, not wanting to worry them, she simply stuck an iron on it to cauterize the wound and did not mention the incident until the wound had healed several weeks later. As part of the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte wrote “A Biographical Notice of the Authors” in which she revealed Emily’s identity and described Emily at length:

In Emily’s nature the extremes of vigour and simplicity seemed to meet. Under an unsophisticated culture, inartificial tastes, and an unpretending outside, lay a secret power and fire that might have informed the brain and

¹⁵ For convenience, I will refer to Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë each by her first name.

kindled the veins of a hero: but she had no worldly wisdom; her powers unadapted to the practical business of life; she would fail to defend her most manifest rights, to consult her most legitimate advantage. An interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world. Her will was not very flexible, and it generally opposed her interest. Her temper was magnanimous, but warm and sudden; her spirit altogether unbending. (“Biographical Notice” 305)

Many friends of the family found her attributes concerning and threatening to the memory of Charlotte, so much of Elizabeth Gaskell’s biography of Charlotte paints Emily as being the opposite of Charlotte in hopes of keeping her memory pure. As Emily Rena-Dozier notes in “Gothic Criticisms: *Wuthering Heights* and Nineteenth-Century Literary History”:

. . . in order [for Gaskell] to both convincingly accomplish this division between Brontë the woman and Bell the author and to insist on Charlotte Brontë’s domestic virtues above all else, Gaskell had to emphasize the wildness and freedom of Emily Brontë in order to show off the quiet, meek enclosure of Charlotte Brontë. (763)

However, it was not only biographers who felt the need to change how Emily was perceived; Charlotte herself edited many of her sister’s writings to make them more palatable to a general audience (Davies 13, 53).

Emily did not hold traditional values or possess expected traits of Victorian women; she did not care for the company of many friends or suitors, and she was not liked as a houseguest [she was considered “hard, unsympathetic, and abrupt in manner”

(Shorter 258)]. Despite being a talented writer, her surviving letters were not exciting like those by either of her sisters. She even remarked in a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey: “I will get [Anne] to write you a proper letter, a feat that I have never performed” (Shorter 265). She felt responsible for the well-being of her family—even though two of her siblings were older—and wrote to Ellen Nussey asking her to bring Charlotte home from out of the country. She said, “perhaps you might be able to bring [Charlotte] back with you, otherwise she might vegetate there till the age of Methusaleh for mere lack of courage to face the voyage” (Shorter 265). She gave up her dream of living abroad to go home and take care of her brother and father and the house they lived in since her family was wary of strangers. Although Emily always had a strong affinity for writing, the only two works that were published before her death were her collection of poems written with her sisters and *Wuthering Heights* which was published almost exactly one year before her death.

Emily Brontë released *Wuthering Heights* under the name Ellis Bell, but its publication was overshadowed by her sister’s novel, *Jane Eyre*, which was published the same year. *Wuthering Heights*, a terror Gothic, is set in 1801 when a man named Mr. Lockwood rents a house called Thrushcross Grange. Upon arriving at the main house, Wuthering Heights, he meets his landlord, Heathcliff, as well as the manor’s other occupants who are all distant, cold, and unfriendly. A storm traps Lockwood at Wuthering Heights and the housekeeper puts him in a room filled with old books with the name “Catherine Earnshaw” written in them. During the night, the storm intensifies and Lockwood has a nightmare where he encounters a ghost of a young woman named Catherine Linton asking to be let in. He makes so much noise that he wakes Heathcliff,

who is convinced that it was not a dream and begs Catherine to come in. In the morning, Lockwood returns to Thrushcross Grange and gets his housekeeper, Nelly, to tell him the story of the family at Wuthering Heights.

Most of the novel is a frame tale in which Nelly talks about the history of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Nelly divulges that she grew up with the Earnshaw family, the family who lives at Wuthering Heights, and that originally there were two children, Catherine and Hindley, but that one night, Mr. Earnshaw returned with an orphan he found and named Heathcliff. Heathcliff and Catherine are mischievous and they frequently caused trouble. Hindley abuses Heathcliff out of jealousy until he goes off to university and returns three years later when his father dies. When Hindley returns, he has a wife and he is the master of Wuthering Heights and says Heathcliff can stay but only as a servant and not an actual member of the family. Soon after this, Catherine and Heathcliff go to spy on the Lintons, the family that lives at Thrushcross Grange, and Catherine is attacked by their dog. The family hears the ruckus and takes Catherine in to nurse her back to health but they send Heathcliff home alone. When Catherine comes by a few weeks later for a visit, she is cleaned up and ladylike—completely different from her usual attire and behavior. The Linton children, Edgar and Isabella, make fun of Heathcliff and he locks himself in his room. Shortly after, Hindley's wife dies after giving birth to a son named Hareton. Two years later, Catherine and Edgar Linton get engaged and Catherine confides in Nelly that she is actually in love with Heathcliff but because he is poor, she cannot marry him. Heathcliff overhears some of the conversation between Catherine and Nelly and runs away.

Three years later, Edgar and Catherine are married and Heathcliff unexpectedly returns as a wealthy young man. Desperate for revenge, Heathcliff marries Isabella so that he is in line to inherit Thrushcross Grange. During this time, Catherine gets pregnant and becomes ill and Heathcliff sneaks in to see her before she dies. Shortly after, Catherine gives birth to Cathy and then Catherine dies. Heathcliff begs Catherine not to leave him and says that she can haunt him or drive him mad but begs her not to leave him alone.

Six months later, Hindley dies and Heathcliff inherits Wuthering Heights. Isabella regrets marrying Heathcliff and he is abusive to her. She gets pregnant and one night she sneaks off to London and has her son. Nelly and Edgar raise Cathy with no knowledge of Wuthering Heights even though it is only a few miles away, and twelve years later, Isabella dies and her son, Linton, comes to live with Edgar and Cathy. Heathcliff hears of his son being with Edgar and demands he live with Heathcliff instead. Linton is not a healthy boy and is close to death, and Edgar is also declining so Heathcliff persuades Linton to get Cathy to fall in love with Linton so that Heathcliff can take possession of Thrushcross Grange when Edgar dies. Heathcliff traps Cathy and Nelly in Wuthering Heights and forces Cathy to marry Linton. She marries Linton and Edgar dies which leaves Cathy trapped at Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff sends Nelly back to Thrushcross Grange and, shortly after, Linton dies. Now, Lockwood is caught up in the story of Wuthering Heights, Thrushcross Grange, and the Earnshaw/Linton family drama. Lockwood, disgusted with the story, leaves Thrushcross Grange.

Several months later, Lockwood returns to visit Nelly to discover that Heathcliff had mentally declined to the point that he thought he saw Catherine's ghost everywhere

and constantly conversed with her. One night, after a cold walk outside, Heathcliff died. Cathy falls in love with Hareton and Nelly says that townspeople believe they see Heathcliff and Catherine's ghosts together wandering the moors. The story ends with Lockwood visiting the graves of Heathcliff and Catherine.

If friends and family only suspected Emily was peculiar before the publication of *Wuthering Heights*, it was confirmed after its publication. In fact, Charlotte wrote the preface for the 1850 publication of *Wuthering Heights* and apologized for its content including noting that many readers

will suffer greatly from the introduction of words printed with all their letters, which it has become the custom to represent by the initial and final letter only—a blank line filling in the interval . . . the practice of hinting by single letters those expletives with which profane and violent persons are wont to garnish their discourse, strikes me as a proceeding which, however well meant, is weak and futile. I cannot tell what good it does—what feeling it spares—what horror it conceals. (*Wuthering Heights* 25, footnote)

By “words printed with all their letters” she is referring to Emily’s insistence on fully spelling out the swear words in the text. Charlotte was not the only one made uncomfortable by the content of *Wuthering Heights*, though.

Assuming Ellis Bell was a man, the reviews primarily attacked the content and writing style. An anonymous review in *The Examiner* published in January 1848 noted that *Wuthering Heights* “is not without evidences of considerable power,” but added that “as a whole, it is wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable; and the people who make up

the drama, which is tragic enough in its consequences, are savages ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer.” The critic spends the rest of the review critiquing the writing style:

We hope that [Ellis Bell] will produce a second [novel],—giving himself more time in its composition than in the present case, developing his incidents more carefully, eschewing exaggeration and obscurity, and looking steadily at human life, under all its moods, for those pictures of the passions that he may desire to sketch for our public benefit . . . We detest the affectation and effeminate frippery which is but too frequent in the modern novel . . .

Note that it calls out specifically their detesting of “the affectation and effeminate frippery” which indicates the rumors and suspicions that Ellis Bell might actually be a woman were not widely circulated at this time, but the traces of femininity in the writing style did not go unnoticed by some. As for what those traces of femininity are, though, the critic does not elaborate. The reviewer associated this style as being a result of an amateur male and therefore treated *Wuthering Heights* with respect even though they found it to be “wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable.”

The January 1848 edition of *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* stated:

In *Wuthering Heights* the reader is shocked, disgusted, almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity, and the most diabolical hate and vengeance, and anon come passages of powerful testimony to the supreme power of love—even over demons in the human form. The women in the book are of

a strange fiendish-angelic nature, tantalizing, and terrible, and the men are indescribable out of the book itself.

Yet in spite of the strong words, the author encourages his readers who “love novelty” to buy the book because “we can promise them that they have never read anything like it before.” These opinions of the characters and content matter were not unique to this critic, and many of the critics did recommend the book to the readers. But, like many other critics, Douglas Jerrold was more confused by the novel’s immorality:

What may be the moral which the author wishes the reader to deduce from his work, it is difficult to say; and we refrain from assigning any, because to speak honestly, we have discovered none but mere glimpses of hidden morals or secondary meanings. There seems to us great power in this book but a purposeless power . . .

Most of the original reviews of *Wuthering Heights* were tame, but much of the tameness, I argue, comes from a combination of thinking the author was male and not fully understanding the text itself. Thus, critics did not want to bash something they did not understand only to have it turned against them by someone who did understand.

Wuthering Heights stayed in the public eye as the less-successful novel of the Bells; but when Charlotte published the second edition in 1850, which revealed the Bells’ true identities and gender, there was a second round of reviews for *Wuthering Heights*. These reviews were not as harsh as the first round (probably because they saw no need to rehash the same things) but they did focus more on Emily being a woman. For example, *The Examiner* released another review of *Wuthering Heights* after the publication of the 1850 edition. In the second review, *The Examiner* stated that they would have

approached *Wuthering Heights* the same regardless of whether or a man had written or a woman and then added: “For ourselves we have nothing to add to it—neither praise to retract, nor censure to explain. We have only most unfeignedly to deplore the blight which fell prematurely on sure rich intellectual promise, and to regret that natures so rare and noble should so early have passed away” (342).

G. H. Lewes, who was Charlotte’s professional penpal, wrote in the *Leader* following the publication of the second editions:

Curious enough it is to read *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Anne’s book), and remember that the writers were two retiring, solitary, consumptive girls! Books, coarse even for men, coarse in language and coarse in conceptions, the coarseness apparently of violent and uncultivated men—turn out to be the productions of two girls living almost alone, filling their loneliness with quiet studies, and writing these books from a sense of duty, hating the pictures they drew, yet drawing them with austere conscientiousness! (343)

Lewes goes on to praise the works and praise the strength of Curren for re-publishing the works. I argue that praise and tameness of the second reviews also had to do less with the fact the critics were impressed Emily was a woman and more to do with the desire to not speak ill of the dead. Emily’s odd personality and the strange content of *Wuthering Heights* coupled with her famous sisters brought her to the attention of second-wave feminist critics in the 1970s but left her out of much of the criticism in between.

Unlike Charlotte, Emily did not leave much personal writing behind. Scholars and historians are unsure if the lack of paper trail is because the letters, papers, and remaining

literature were purposefully destroyed or simply misplaced throughout time. Because of the lack of paper trail, as Carol Ohmann in her article “Emily Brontë in the Hands of Male Critics” states, “for a modern or near-modern reader, [Emily] *became* at her death her admirers, or her detractors. Where she had been silent, they spoke, and including her sister Charlotte, made of her what they would” (906, emphasis original). Ohmann also notes that after Ellis Bell’s identity is revealed, the reviews of the novel go from focusing on the originality of the piece to indicating that it was no longer in the “central line of literature” (908). Ohmann observes, “Emily Brontë the novelist was reduced to Emily Brontë the person, whose fiction in turn is seen to be limited by the experiential limitation of the life” (908). After being revealed (or confirmed) to be a woman, Emily was judged based on her gender and elements of the text were associated with being personal details or opinions. Since little was known about her outside of her literature, her literature was read as a kind of simulacrum of a biography that did not exist. The biography mindset seems not to have shifted and many of the feminist critics read the novel as Emily’s own personal opinions as opposed to a work of Gothic fiction, and this interpretation is seen primarily in how scholars interpret the behavior of the Catherines.¹⁶

The Catherines are the characters in *Wuthering Heights* that feminist critics often associate with Emily Brontë. The aberration from traditional gender roles is a well-known trope of Gothic literature, and although *Wuthering Heights* shows many of those tropes—such as the old manor, the strange dreams, and supernatural appearances—feminist critics attribute some of these strange characteristics and feelings to Emily

¹⁶ When referring to both mother and daughter, I will refer to them as “the Catherines,” but when referring to the mother singularly I will use Catherine and the daughter will be Cathy.

herself. Since the Catherines did not conform to traditional gender roles, they were considered grotesque at the time of the writing but somewhat accepted in today's society. Critics use the character traits of the Catherines to assert that Emily Brontë was forward-thinking as opposed to employing traditional tropes of terror Gothics.

Sandra M. Gilbert in her essay "Looking Oppositely: Emily Brontë's Bible of Hell" published in the 1979 collection *The Madwoman in the Attic*, claims that Emily Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights* because she was searching for "her own female origins" and thus "*Wuthering Heights* is one of the few authentic instances of novelistic myth-making in the functional sense of problem solving" (256). Elizabeth Hardwick in her book *Seduction and Betrayal: Women in Literature* also equates Emily Brontë with the Catherines and deduces:

Wuthering Heights is a virgin's story. The peculiarity of it lies in the harshness of the characters. Cathy is as hard, careless, and destructive as Heathcliff. She too has a sadistic nature. The love the two feel for each other is a longing for an impossible completion. Consolations do not appear; nothing in the domestic or even in the sexual life seems to the point in this book. Emily Brontë appears in every way indifferent to the need for love and companionship that tortured the lives of her sisters. We do not, in her biography, even look for a lover as we do with Emily Dickinson because it is impossible to join her with a man, with a secret, aching passion for a young curate or a schoolmaster. (10)

Hardwick's conclusions are not a fair assessment of Emily Brontë since the content of her novel—especially the depictions of love—are not the same as her sisters'. As Virginia Woolf noticed in her 1916 essay, "*Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*,"

When Charlotte wrote [*Jane Eyre*] she said with eloquence and splendour and passion "I love", "I hate", "I suffer". Her experience, though more intense, is on a level with our own. But there is no "I" in *Wuthering Heights* . . . There is love, but it is not the love of men and women. Emily was inspired by some more general conception . . . The impulse which urged her to create was not her own suffering or her own injuries.

Although Woolf equates Charlotte with the narrator of *Jane Eyre*, she makes an important observation of the distinction between the sisters' writing: the level of which they write of love and of feelings is different because the voice of the narrator is different. With *Jane Eyre*, there is the benefit of the first-person narrator, but not so with *Wuthering Heights*. Thus, readers are kept at a distance from the thoughts and feelings of the characters who experience love or some kind of betrayal—especially between Catherine and Heathcliff.

Beth Newman in her article "'The Situation of the Looker-On': Gender, Narration, and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*" argues that the odd relationships between the male and female characters, particularly between Catherine and Heathcliff, has to do with the fear of a female's gaze and recalls Freud's idea that Medusa represents castration. Newman further argues that this Medusa-castration-gaze is what causes the men, namely Lockwood and Heathcliff, to fear these women. Newman claims that the men fearing the women was Emily Brontë's intention and that she "punishes Lockwood's fetishizing gaze

with frustrated desire” and keeps Catherine from marrying him (Newman 1039).

Newman responds directly to Sandra M. Gilbert’s opinion that Catherine is not wanting “to destroy ‘culture’—a project that would justify masculine fears of the woman as dangerous and thus in need of suppression and constant surveillance” (1039). Instead, she argues that Catherine “seeks to undermine the specular economy of patriarchal culture, to resist the way that economy seeks to deny women the status of subject” (1039).

Newman’s observation is partially accurate: Catherine is distorting gender roles for herself even though she is not trying to destroy the culture, but *Wuthering Heights* is not a Domestic novel, it is a Gothic, and therefore the distortion of traditional gender roles is a recurring trope. Thus, Catherine defying traditional gender roles is not necessarily a political statement about the patriarchal society, but a common trope seen in Gothic novels.

Since Emily was not a traditional Victorian woman and did not personally see the need to adhere to social norms, feminist critics assume Emily intended for *Wuthering Heights* to be seen as a progressive novel that challenges the existing patriarchal society. However, as her sister, Charlotte, indicated, it was not that Emily was progressive or political, just that she did not take part in worldly discussions and preferred the company of her family and animals. Her imagination produced a story that has baffled critics for centuries and has become a staple of the Gothic genre, and it should be valued for what it is as opposed to what it anachronistically could be interpreted as. To ascribe these progressive views and beliefs to Emily Brontë does a disservice to her legacy and a disservice to her imaginative abilities.

CHAPTER V

CHARLOTTE DACRE

“I know that there is not in the world a more subtle poison than that which is extracted from and administered by books.” —Charlotte Dacre

Not much is known about Charlotte Dacre besides that the last name “Dacre” is also a pseudonym. From what can be pieced together, she was born in either 1771 or 1772 as Charlotte King, and she later married Nicholas Byrne after having three children with him. She originally published her works under the pseudonym Rosa Matilda, which separates her from many of the female Gothic writers who originally published as men. It was clear to the original audience that this was a pseudonym because Rosa Matilda is a clear reference to the seductive and demonic character Rosario/Matilda from Matthew Gregory Lewis’ horror Gothic, *The Monk*, which was published in 1796. In addition to representing herself as a woman, the content of her Gothic novel, *Zofloya*, infuriated and disgusted critics.

Zofloya is a horror Gothic novel with a third-person omniscient narrator that tells the story of the de Loredani family, particularly the daughter Victoria, and how she fell into the hands of the satanic Zofloya. Victoria is the beautiful and vain daughter of a Marchese who is devoted to his wife and two children. The Marchese and his wife refused to punish their children and thus they grew up spoiled and selfish. The wife,

Laurina, falls in love with Count Ardolph, a visitor, and runs off with him. The father later sees the Count in the street and attacks the Count and is stabbed. On his deathbed, the Marchese begs his daughter to change her ways, but Victoria does not change her ways and begins a downward spiral of deceit, hate, and violence. Victoria marries a man named Berenza and she later falls in love with his engaged brother, Henriquez. Henriquez is engaged to the pure, innocent Lilla, and Henriquez has a servant named Zofloya. When Victoria cannot convince Henriquez to have an affair with her, she decides it is because she is married to his brother, and her solution is to kill Berenza with the help of Zofloya. When Berenza's death makes Henriquez suspicious and more distant, Victoria plots with Zofloya to kidnap and kill Lilla so that Henriquez will have no excuse not to marry Victoria. When Lilla goes missing, Henriquez still refuses to marry Victoria and so she stabs him to death. Then, Victoria tries to kill Lilla, but Lilla escapes and runs up a mountain. Victoria tries to push her off a cliff, but Lilla wants to know what it feels like to die like her beloved did, so Victoria stabs Lilla repeatedly until she dies. In the end, it is revealed that Zofloya is actually Satan and he throws Victoria off a cliff.

Dacre's writing style alone sets *Zofloya* apart from other Gothic novels with female authors because early critics considered it too masculine and grotesque to qualify as a more-appropriate terror Gothic. Because the pseudonym was an obvious nod to *The Monk's* character, critics were not sure if the pseudonym was a male wanting to ride off Lewis' success or if the writer truly was a woman. *The Annual Review* in 1806 said of Dacre's writing style:

[t]here is a voluptuousness of the language and allusion, pervading
[*Zofloya*], which we should have hoped, that the delicacy of the female

pen would have refused to trace; and there is an exhibition of wantonness of harlotry, which we should have hoped, that the delicacy of a female mind, would have been shocked to imagine. (*The Annual Review*" 262)

Another early review of the novel asked Dacre to "leave the profession of romance writing to females who possess more delicacy of mind, more facility of style and purity of sentiments, than she, in the present work, has exhibited" (*Monthly Literary Recreations*" 262). This writing style that lacked "the delicacy of the female pen," coupled with Dacre being female, have made *Zofloya* prime fodder for feminist critics who claim that Dacre intended for *Zofloya* to be read as a progressive text advocating for women's rights instead of accepting it for what it is: a horror Gothic novel.

Modern critics disagree about the extent to which the novel can be read as a feminist text. Adriana Craciun argues that Dacre was a secret feminist who was cleverly fighting for women's independence from traditional gender roles in *Zofloya*. Craciun believes that Dacre's word choices, specifically in the scene where Victoria submits to *Zofloya*, "highlights the subjecting (not liberatory) function of heterosexuality and its central institution, marriage" and that "the story of Victoria's downfall is thus also the story of the loss of social identity, mobility and independence that a woman suffers in marrying her lover, who then becomes her legal master" (Craciun 15). Carol Margaret Davison, in her book *Gothic Literature 1764-1824*, disagrees with Craciun claiming: "Dacre does not, contrary to Craciun's claim, forge a feminist critique of marriage as a compact with the devil" (154). If Dacre is the narrator, as these critics imply, and if she was trying to emphasize the restrictive nature of marriage, it seems like she would defend

the women when they leave or murder their husbands. Instead, the narrator portrays the women as being evil for leaving the husbands.

Towards the beginning of the novel when describing Victoria's mom, Laurina, the narrator notes that "time had not yet perfected [her] character" and that the only reason she had remained faithful to her husband was because "no temptations crossed her path—it required, then, no effort to be virtuous" (Dacre 39). The narrator adds when Laurina begins to fall for Count Ardolph that "so gradual, so unsuspected, are the first approaches of a guilty passion to the heart" and that by even listening to Count Ardolph declare his love, "she had advanced *one step* in the path of vice, and to recede required an energy and resolution almost incompatible with the weakness of which she had been already guilty!" (Dacre 45, emphasis original). The indication that "time had not yet perfected" Laurina's loyalty as well as words such as "guilty" and "vice" do not indicate that the narrator finds marriage restrictive, but finds affairs despicable. The narrator was not the only one who found affairs and promiscuity despicable—so did the original critics.

One of the scenes that shocked most early reviewers was Berenza's avoidance of marriage to Victoria. One reviewer was astounded that "before marrying [Victoria], [Berenza] makes her his mistress; and that the delicate and feminine mind of the author calls honourable love" ("*Monthly Literary Recreations*" 261). At first glance, it could appear that by calling the affair "love," Dacre was implying that an affair could be held as sacramentally as a marriage, but the narrator emphasizes that Victoria does not love Berenza and remarks, "the heart of Berenza had acquired a *real* passion, while that of Victoria was susceptible only of novel and seducing sensations—of anticipations of future pleasure. Berenza *loved*—Victoria was only roused and *flattered*" (Dacre 60

emphasis added). The review indicated that the refusal of marriage was abysmal and shocking—which is the purpose of the Gothic genre. Although Gothic novels can contain political messages, most of the Gothic genre is centered around the grotesque and sometimes the best way to evoke a reaction in readers is to portray women in a negative light even if the author is a woman. Catherine Spooner notes that despite the fact that some of the most popular gothic novels were written by females,

there is also much within the Gothic fiction that is troubling to feminists, in particular a sado-masochistic dynamic that appears to enjoy the spectacle of violence against women and the reaffirmation of cultural stereotypes projecting women as either victims, monsters or *femmes fatales*. (129)

These troubling characteristics that Spooner notices are exactly those portrayed in Dacre's *Zofloya*. Although these components could indicate a feminist standpoint, the common tropes of the Gothic coupled with how little is known about Dacre herself makes that unlikely or at least unverifiable. Moreover, the fact that *Zofloya* was fashioned as a reworking of *The Monk* should emphasize the importance of the genre to the work.

A review featured in the July 1806 edition of *Monthly Literary Recreations* acknowledge *Zofloya*'s Gothic intention despite their distaste of it:

...there has seldom appeared a romance so void of merit, so destitute of delicacy, displaying such disgusting depravity of morals, as the present. It is a humble, very humble, imitation of the *Monk*, possessing in an eminent degree all the defects of that wild performance, but entirely destitute of all

its beauties. ...the greatest number of the characters are so depraved, as to excite no other sentiment but disgust. (261)

The lack of originality mentioned in the review speaks less of Dacre's unoriginality or objectionable style and more of her chosen genre: *Zofloya* was a horror Gothic modeled after Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* and therefore it was not so much originality that Dacre was aiming for so much as a reworking. The original critics blamed her scandalous content on the similarities with *The Monk*, but feminist critics saw the scandalous content and claimed the content had purely political motives.

Several critics, in particular James A. Dunn, claim that in one of the most violent scenes in *Zofloya*, when Victoria kills Lilla, is Dacre's way of breaking the views of traditional femininity. Dunn, and Dacre, set Victoria in juxtaposition with Lilla. Lilla is described by Dacre's narrator as:

Pure, innocent, free even from the smallest taint of a corrupt thought, was her mind; delicate, symmetrical, and of fairy-like beauty, her person so small, yet of so just proportion; sweet, expressing a seraphic serenity of soul. Seemed her angelic countenance, slightly suffused with the palest hue of the virgin rose. Long flaxen hair floated over her shoulders: she might have personified (were the idea allowable) innocence in the days of her childhood. (Dacre 144)

This already places Lilla's personality in direct contrast with Victoria's who is known from the beginning as being dissolute, disloyal, and disobedient. The narrator is not the only one in the novel who openly compares the women—Henriquez does as well. The narrator says of Henriquez's thoughts towards the two women:

Though [Henriquez] treated [Victoria] with friendship and respect as the wife of his brother, he did no more: first, because he was absorbed in Lilla; and, secondly, because being so completely, both in mind and in person, the reverse of that pure and delicate being, he not only failed to view them as two creatures of the same class, but almost thought of Victoria with a tincture of dislike, from the very circumstance of her being so opposite to his lovely mistress. (Dacre 147)

Henriquez does not like Victoria because she is the opposite in demeanor of Lilla. Dunn further describes Lilla as being “hardly more than a child, an unformed wisp of girlish virtue: the novel generally treats her as seen but not heard...the picture of placid passivity compared with Victoria’s expressions of boundless rage and desire” (313), but Dunn misinterprets Victoria’s masculine change when describing Lilla’s death scene. He says that:

Victoria’s rage is less at Lilla herself than at Henriquez for prizing feminine emptiness. Hence the scene of attack resonates with a symbolic intent to destroy this false feminine ideal. Victoria here ritually enacts male penetration by stabbing Lilla repeatedly...In a mythic sense, the scene clearly reveals the destiny of feminine passivity in the scheme of masculine eroticism. (314)

Dunn’s interpretation does not take into account the rest of Lilla’s death scene or the fact that *Zofloya* is a horror Gothic modeled after *The Monk*. Lilla tells Victoria she is afraid of death and that “if [she] must die—be it then the same death as my Henriquez suffered, —plunge thy stiletto in my heart” (Dacre 219).

Lilla's death scene mirrors the death of Antonia in *The Monk*. If the same scene is taken and read not through the distinction between the Male and Female Gothic with authorial intent, but terror Gothic and horror Gothic, it is obvious that the blood and violence in the scene is calling on Lewis' *The Monk*. If the scene is calling on Lewis' *The Monk*, it is also calling on Radcliffe's definition of horror. Toward the end of *The Monk* when Ambrosio chases Antonia through the crypt, she tries to escape and he stabs her to death:

Antonia still resisted, and [Ambrosio] now enforced her silence by means the most horrible and inhuman. He still grasped Matilda's dagger: without allowing himself a moment's reflection, he raised it, and plunged it twice in the bosom of Antonia! She shrieked, and sank upon the ground. (Lewis 326)

Lilla's death scene in *Zofloya* echoes Matilda's death scene in *The Monk*: "Raising her dagger high, [Victoria] sought then to plunge it in the fair bosom of the beautiful orphan" (Dacre 220). Although this time Victoria misses and stabs Lilla's hand, the language of the scene is almost identical to the language in *The Monk*. The similarity continues when Victoria actually murders Lilla: "Victoria . . . seized by her streaming tresses the fragile Lilla, and held her back. —With her poignard she stabbed her in the bosom, in the shoulder, and other parts:—the expiring Lilla sank upon her knees" (Dacre 220). When Lilla's death scene is read in context with *Zofloya*'s genre and is read alongside *The Monk*, the scene makes more sense.

When critics read Dacre as the narrator and insist the death scene has underlying political meanings, it distorts the scene. Victoria ultimately stabs Lilla repeatedly and throws her over a cliff. Dunn reads Dacre herself into Lilla's death scene by claiming:

Dacre seems uninterested in lamenting feminine victimization, indicated rather that such *should* be the destiny of female passivity. It is Victoria's capacity to leap to the "other side" of gender behaviors that signals alternative destinies available to women. With remarkable semantic dexterity, Dacre deploys Victoria as a sign simultaneously enacting and criticizing the gender inequities she scorns. (314)

Although this reading could make sense if the scene stood on its own, this reading is entirely out of context with what the reader knows about Lilla's traditional femininity and Victoria's lack thereof.

The narrator remarks that because Laurina failed to train Victoria, Victoria "had no conception of that *refined* species of virtue which consists in self-denial; the proud triumph of mind over the weakness of the heart, she had never been unconscious of . . ." (Dacre 143 emphasis original). The criticism aimed towards not only Victoria's lack of mature female behavior, but also Laurina's refusal to teach proper behavior does not give the appearance that Dacre was discouraging traditional femininity—she was encouraging it. If anything, Dacre used Victoria as a warning. When Victoria first meets Lilla, she is jealous of her femininity and how her more "feminine" character traits—such as her obedience to her father and her innocence—manage to captivate Henriquez even though he has to wait a year to marry her (Dacre 141-142). Victoria, on the other hand, immediately offers herself to Henriquez yet he "remained wholly insensible to the most

open insinuations” (Dacre 144), and when she directly confesses her feelings towards him, he refuses her. Thus, it is more likely that when Victoria kills Lilla, Dacre is aiming for horror over protest of traditional feminine characteristics since Lilla’s death scene mirrors Antonia’s in *The Monk*. Dunn uses Lilla and Victoria’s bodies being thrown off a cliff as evidence of Dacre’s distaste towards “female passivity” (Dunn 314), but these two examples contradict themselves. Lilla’s death serves as spectacle (it is violent and undeserved) whereas Victoria’s death, even though she is also thrown off a cliff as well, looks like justice: what Victoria inflicted on Lilla eventually happened to Victoria as well. Victoria’s death had nothing to do with her lack of femininity or female role and everything to do with her reaping the consequences of her actions. This stance is further proven by how Dacre describes Lilla while Victoria plots her death as well as in the death scene itself.

As Victoria lies in bed before murdering Lilla, the narrator remarks that Victoria’s hatred “nerved anew her heart, to inflict upon the innocent girl, all that malice or that vengeance could invent” (201). The next day when Zofloya and Victoria bring Lilla to the cliff, Lilla’s body is described with various words representing innocence: “paler than the white rose tint,” “snow-white arms,” “sculptured alabaster” (203). When Henriquez realizes Lilla is gone, the narrator remarks that “the lovely Innocent, naked, chained, and solitary, was far, far beyond the possibility of replying” (207). This description of Lilla seems almost Biblical—describing Jesus as he is depicted before his crucifixion.

This Biblical allusion is carried further when the narrator notes that even “in this pitiable situation, she still lived and still cherished faint hope in her spotless bosom” and later describes Lilla’s eyes as “heavenly blue” (207, 218). The word “spotless” is used in

the Bible to describe the necessary state of the sacrificial lamb. She cannot walk on her own, so Victoria drags her “over the rugged ground, and up the irregular ascent, while her delicate feet, naked and defenceless to the pointed rock, left their blood red traces at every step!” (Dacre 219). Once again, imagery of Jesus being led to his crucifixion reinforces the idea that Lilla is punished for no crime she committed, her character remained pure even while chained, and she does not cry out even while being dragged bleeding to her death. To make this scene even more grotesque, Dacre added the ridiculous chase which ends with Victoria trying to shake Lilla from a tree to her death. It was added for spectacle to emphasize Victoria’s ruthlessness, and this ruthlessness reaches its apex with the stabbing of Lilla. Lilla’s death is not a symbol of the necessary disposal of “feminine passivity” (Dunn 314) nor is Lilla’s stabbing a representation of penetration, but Lilla’s desire to die as her lover and Victoria’s desire to torture.

Lilla’s death scene is the most violent and drawn-out scene in the entire novel. Every minute detail that leads up to the death and the detailed descriptions of the wounds inflicted upon Lilla by Victoria do not support an idea of feminist power, but of horror and shock and echoes *The Monk*. Lilla’s death serves as the climax of the novel and begins the downfall of Victoria. Moreover, if Victoria’s actions serve to challenge female gender roles, why are most of the women, with the major exception being Lilla, portrayed as monstrous in comparison with the men?

From the beginning of the novel, it is made apparent by the narrator that the majority of the females in the novel are not virtuous—especially those of the de Loredani household. The narrator says that “time had not yet perfected the character of Laurina” (Dacre 39), and she is described as being loyal to her husband only because the right

tempter had not come along yet. Her daughter, Victoria, is far from being a virtuous woman, and is described at fifteen as being “proud, haughty, and self-sufficient—of a wild, ardent, and irrepressible spirit, indifferent to reproof, careless of censure—of an implacable, revengeful, and cruel nature, and bent upon gaining the ascendancy in whatever she engaged” (Dacre 40). The negative description of these ladies is juxtaposed against the character of the men of the household.

Laurina’s husband, the Marchese, is described as a man “whose ardent love appeared to suffer no diminution; no temptation” (Dacre 39) and because of the Marchese’s love, Laurina did not have any trouble being temporarily loyal. The son, Leonardo, is described as being controlled by his emotions and being “unable to resist, in any shape, the first impulses of his heart” (Dacre 40). Leonardo’s inability to resist his impulses is not the only negative thing said of Leonardo’s character; however, after listing the negative aspects of Leonardo, the narrator adds: “it could not be denied that in [Leonardo’s] ill-regulated character were some bright tints” (Dacre 40). The positive descriptions of the Marchese and Leonardo are in direct opposition to the only kind positive qualities said of Laurina and Victoria—the women are only praised for their beauty. This emphasizes that Laurina and Victoria’s goodness is merely superficial whereas the Marchese and Leonardo’s goodness is embedded within them and the same can be said of Henriquez later in the novel. If this novel was actually solely and primarily advocating for female equality and the demise of the patriarchy, the women would be portrayed as capable and the men would be portrayed as wicked or useless.

Dacre was a brilliant writer whose works contain intricate details that create vivid imagery and evoke feelings of shock and disgust like horror Gothic novels are intended to

do. Dacre was clearly not ashamed that she was a woman writing a novel even though its subject matter was uncharacteristic for a female of the time. However, just because she published as a female does not necessarily imply she was making political claims. When critics conflate the author with the narrator, it causes problematic readings that distort the plot, the genre, and the author herself. From what is known about *Zofloya* and Dacre, we know that *Zofloya* was published as an imitation of *The Monk* and historians do not know much about Dacre. In cases such as these, when readers and critics are presented with works that are obscure or strange and we know little about the author, it is necessary then to read the work in context with its genre and time period. Thus, it is the truest to Dacre's memory as well as to the Gothic genre to interpret the perversion of gender roles and the display of monstrous, evil females as Dacre employing tropes associated with horror Gothics.

CONCLUSION

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of political change in the Western world: women's suffrage was once again a hot topic as women were fighting for their sexual and reproductive rights (Bridge). As social and political situations were changing, so were the approaches to literature. Women saw the need for women to be represented in the common literary canon (which, at that time, primarily consisted of white men) to show that "The Greats" of literature were not only men. The recovery and re-introduction of works written by females showed that great women had been around the whole time and that women wanting their voices to be heard was not unique to the twentieth century. One of the best ways to represent the cause and show the longevity of the issue was to read progressive meanings into older texts written by women to show the issues were universal.

Thankfully, some of the women recovered and re-introduced were the female Gothic writers: Mary Shelley, Ann Radcliffe, the Brontës, Charlotte Dacre, and several others. Although some of these female writers never completely disappeared from the literary world, their prominence and importance had been minimized or overlooked with age. Feminist critics re-read these works from over a century ago and discovered they had brilliant ideas that often outshined the works of their male counterparts. Some of these women, like Shelley, were progressive for their time and did fight for sociopolitical

equality. Many others just wanted their writing to be judged and read by the same standard as the men's works without expecting or wanting equality in politics. This re-reading resulted in the creation of their own subgenre which was named after them: the Female Gothic.

The re-reading of the Gothics written by females led to misinterpretations for many of these authors, such as the three I presented in this thesis, and it distorted the way the Gothic genre was perceived and interpreted by modern audiences. Yes, these women had voices and it is fair to assume they wanted to be heard and respected just as much as the men already were. Unfortunately, their works were read out of context by many feminist critics, and tropes that had been associated for a century with the Gothic genre as a whole were interpreted as their secret subversive push for female rights.

There was obviously an issue with gender equality since many of these women felt the need to publish under a different name in order to be taken seriously, as Charlotte Brontë noted, but this issue was not meant to be extended beyond the literary realm. Charlotte Brontë fought critics' suspicions of political motivation for years and defended her and her sister's works as works of literary fiction sprung from the imagination and a burning desire to write and share that writing. Charlotte Dacre's work was much more subversive since it was a horror Gothic heavily influenced by Matthew Gregory Lewis' controversial novel *The Monk*, but there is not enough known about Dacre herself to be able to confidently and accurately make the claim that her work had political motivations. What is available indicates that she wanted to create a work that obviously fit into a genre meant to shock and disgust.

Although Dacre's novel is not as popular as some of the other Gothic novels, the reason we have it still in print today is because feminist critics, such as Adriana Craciun, pushed for it to be back in the literary canon. As modern readers and scholars, we owe second-wave feminist critics much, but we must remember the importance of maintaining readings and interpretations that hold true to the work itself, the author herself, and the original time period. The Gothic is a genre that still confuses, shocks, disgusts, and entertains many readers, and the timelessness of these works and the added fact that some of these works were written by women should be enough to justify their greatness.

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