

## The Female Gothic



Romance fiction revolves around this double standard, alternately condoning and deprecating, pointing on the one hand to the [marital] throne on which the heroine will be installed at the end of her trials, and on the other to the grave where one false step might, however undeservedly, lead her.

E.J. Clery (1992)<sup>1</sup>

... every household conceals the dead body of its mistress.

Claudia Johnson (1995)<sup>2</sup>

In an arranged meeting with Isabella subsequent to the sudden and tragic death of his son, Conrad, in Walpole's *Otranto*, Manfred proposes that she forget Conrad and consider marrying him, as he is now in need of a male heir. In his description of Isabella's reaction, Walpole writes, '*Words cannot paint* the astonishment of Isabella.'<sup>3</sup> As Manfred pursues his suit, Isabella flees into the castle's eerie 'subterraneous passage[s]'<sup>4</sup> where, despite her tremendous terror, she resolves to make her way to the neighbouring convent. The reader is informed in no uncertain terms that, in this instance, '[h]er dread of Manfred ... outweighed every other terror'.<sup>5</sup> As Isabella attempts to negotiate the castle's murky catacombs, Walpole again resists representation and relates, '*Words cannot paint* the horror of the princess's situation.'<sup>6</sup> In that the Gothic was 'a new literary discourse of the unspeakable',<sup>7</sup> such

ineffable terrors constituted a suitable subject in Walpole's novella. Articulating the impact of such terrors was not only well within the Gothic's purview, it was one of its main objectives.

The branch of the Gothic, that sought to give voice to such terrors as Isabella's has come to be known as the Female Gothic and its principal creator was Ann Radcliffe. Her production of five Gothic romances from the late 1780s to the 1790s sparked a Gothic vogue that left an indelible mark on Female Gothic fiction to the present day. Indeed, as Richard S. Albright has said, 'the term "Radcliffean Gothic" is almost a tautology'.<sup>8</sup> The Gothic may have been viewed 'as an impassioned, and hence suspect, subliterate form',<sup>9</sup> largely because it was perceived as feminized and the majority of its producers and consumers were women, but Radcliffe established a standard and a new formula for Gothic fiction that garnered it immense respect, a larger, broader readership, and earned her such titles as 'the Shakespeare of Romance Writers',<sup>10</sup> 'Queen of the tremendous'<sup>11</sup> and 'the first poetess of romantic fiction'.<sup>12</sup> In doing so, according to Michel Foucault, Radcliffe became the founder of a discursive practice that had an impact well into the nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>13</sup> Probably with the astute advice of her legally trained husband, William, a newspaper proprietor who had been trained at Oxford's Inner Temple, she also made a noteworthy amount of money doing so. Her 'extraordinary contract' of £500 for *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794 'exactly doubled the previous highest copyright fee for novels known to us'.<sup>14</sup> She followed this up with £800 for *The Italian* in 1797.<sup>15</sup> Radcliffe presents 'a successful case study', therefore, 'of how women writers navigated a course between erudition and popular appeal to address the new inconsistently-educated mass audience'.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, the tremendous popularity of her novels inspired a slew of imitators, who have since been accused of plunging her work into disrepute.<sup>17</sup> Annette Cafarelli has called attention to the gender-based biases against Radcliffe, whereby the profusion and redundancy of her imitators drew her work into discredit, while their 'carloads' of imitators contributed to the reputations of various male writers.<sup>18</sup>

That women writers early on redirected the Gothic's lens to the figure of the persecuted heroine, who risks incarceration in

the domestic sphere, testifies to their canny abilities to seize an opportunity to register their concerns, both gender-based and otherwise. Due to its commercialized character, low cultural status and structural openness, the novel in general, and the Gothic novel more specifically, offered women writers a unique venue in which to engage in a variety of important cultural debates. As Gary Kelly has cogently argued, subsequent to its establishment as a distinct literary type in the 1790s,<sup>19</sup> the Gothic novel thus became a dialogical ‘field of struggle’ where ‘individual works ... often seem[ed] to be in dialogue and dispute with one another – not so much taking up successful devices of a predecessor as re-deploying those devices, or deploying different ones, to counter the predecessor’s cultural politics.’<sup>20</sup> In this fashion, the Female Gothic spoke back to the ‘mainstream’ Gothic from a specific, gender-aware perspective. Paternal/patriarchal authority and institutions came under intense scrutiny in the Female Gothic, as they had in the Gothic. James P. Carson’s claim that the Female Gothic ‘focuses intensely on a violation of just those ideals of sociability and rational intercourse that the Enlightenment prized and promoted’,<sup>21</sup> therefore, is equally applicable to the Gothic. The Female Gothic, however, often rendered the violation of such ideals in veiled, sexualized terms, in keeping with the nature of the threats experienced by women. As Annette Cafarelli rightly observes,

most of Ann Radcliffe’s terrors ... do not concern the supernatural. Rather, they are the specifically female terrors of physical assault: terrors, as has been often observed, that woman authors of sentimental and gothic novels do not explicitly chronicle, unlike novelists such as Samuel Richardson or Matthew ‘Monk’ Lewis who permit scenes of sexual assault and counsel the restitution of Lucretia.<sup>22</sup>

In the process of highlighting the intersection of gender and genre, the Female Gothic brought the Gothic to bear on women’s vexed experiences of love and romance, and the multifaceted ideology of femininity, particularly the constraining roles advocated for women and the institutions of marriage and

motherhood. As such, Radcliffe and her sister authors staged more than a purely aesthetic revolution, as Wylie Sypher has erroneously claimed.<sup>23</sup> Rather, they were at the forefront of what Gary Kelly has called a ‘middle-class cultural revolution’.<sup>24</sup>

Women writers of the Female Gothic hijacked the form for their own ends at an extremely noteworthy historical moment – namely, when the rising middle classes were in the process of ‘renovating’ both the domestic sphere and the institution of marriage. The domestic sphere was fast becoming a gendered site of consumption as opposed to production during this era,<sup>25</sup> and a middle-class patriarchy was attempting to put women, quite literally, in their place. Such a monumental alteration in women’s position in the domestic economy was nothing short of profound in its consequences, as it effectively divested them of any possibility of obtaining power in the marketplace. Women’s economic role, as Dorinda Outram has noted, was increasingly replaced by an emotional one during this era.<sup>26</sup> Drawing upon the Gothic genre, which explored the dark side of modernity,<sup>27</sup> the Female Gothic advanced a gender-aware commentary on modern institutions by way of a point-blank portrait of domestic relations. As Eugenia C. DeLamotte relates:

women’s Gothic shows women suffering from institutions they feel to be profoundly alien to them and their concerns. And those institutions were all too contemporaneous with the lives of the women who wrote and read Gothic literature in the 1790s and early 1800s: the patriarchal family, the patriarchal marriage, and a patriarchal class, legal, educational, and economic system.<sup>28</sup>

The Female Gothic castle/house, therefore, mirrors woman’s ‘ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection’ within these institutions.<sup>29</sup>

The seemingly exaggerated themes and threats of incarceration, violation and death often cryptically articulated in that genre are rendered more comprehensible when one considers that the domestic sphere was where most middle- and upper-class women of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries spent the majority of their lives. It was also the site where many died in

childbirth. These anxieties were further compounded by the fact that women of the era were both commodified and rendered *femmes couvertes* under established law. As the jurist William Blackstone explains the doctrine of coverture in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* in 1765,

The husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose total protection and cover, she performs everything.<sup>30</sup>

Providing further details in her description of this law, E. J. Clery writes,

Among the real consequences of this principle were the following: the husband took control of the whole of his wife's property, past, present and future; he had sole rights over their children; a married woman could not enter into any legal agreement or lawsuit on her own behalf; she could not bring proceedings against her husband in common law; and, since her 'very being' was suspended, she no longer held property in her own person, Locke's minimum condition for civil rights.<sup>31</sup>

As these descriptions make clear, women basically assumed the status of their husbands' property, an ironic development at a time when men were engaged in establishing their democratic rights. In stark contrast, women's autonomy and identity were being entirely denied, leaving them virtually at the mercy of their husbands. While companionate marriage, the new middle-class ideal of marriage, was based, in theory, on affection, mutual concerns and sympathy, therefore, the wife actually remained subordinate to her husband under the law. The romantic ideal treacherously disguised the existing reality, where women remained powerless handmaidens to men.

Apart from countless romance novels and novels of sensibility, conduct guides were essential in inculcating these middle-class ideals. These popular eighteenth-century productions sketched

out the nature of proper feminine behaviour and promoted marriage as a woman's foremost life-goal. In promoting these ideals, British conduct guides were heavily influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's depiction of Sophie, his model female in *Émile, or On Education* (1762), his semi-fictional work outlining his philosophy of the ideal education. Sophie is used to promote the message that women are naturally emotional, incapable of reason, and made to please and be governed by men. As Pam Morris's six-volume series devoted to conduct literature from 1770 to 1830 illustrates, numerous British conduct guides embraced the image of women as *naturally* domestic, maternal creatures, whose primary goal was to get married and bear children. While women were urged to guard against making the home 'a cloyster'<sup>32</sup> in such conduct guides as Richard Polwhele's *Discourses on Different Subjects* (1791), the underpinning idea persisted that they were, by nature, intended to remain in confinement.<sup>33</sup> As Alan Richardson has commented, the domestic ideology of the conduct guide and the domestic novel, which was a sub-set of this genre, 'simultaneously gave women a more credible public voice and excluded them from active participation in the public sphere, valorized women as guardians of education and devalued their bodies and desires as potentially dangerous strongholds of the irrational'.<sup>34</sup>

Not all women readers and writers concurred with the conduct guide assessment of female 'nature' or adhered to its suggested advice. One such woman was Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life* (1787) advanced certain conventional views on women's moral and domestic affairs, but upheld the idea of women's intellectual equality with men and promoted their greater access to education. Her subsequent work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), was nothing short of radical in terms of its critique of contemporary conduct guides. This anti-Rousseauesque manifesto and cornerstone of feminist thought considered the issue of mothers' roles in their daughters' educations and criticized their creation of 'monsters', in the form of artful, artificial minxes who were primed and prepped only for the marriage market. To her

credit, Wollstonecraft recognized the perverse and corrupt socio-political framework within which British mothers – and fathers – existed. Indeed, she maintained that such a society made monsters of both sexes, reducing them to the status of children in adult frames: women became ornamental, mindless lapdogs, while men – possessing too much power – became tyrants. In keeping with her Enlightenment project, Wollstonecraft called for a revolution by way of middle-class family values that would involve the development of women's reason, the tempering of their sensibility and the establishment of their rights as equal citizens with men under the law. She nonetheless tethered her argument for the rational education of young women to the nation's enhancement: better mothers, she reasoned, would raise better citizens. This view was in keeping with the prevalent representation of motherhood as a national duty promoted in female conduct guides.<sup>35</sup>

Contemporaneous with Wollstonecraft and in the face of such constraining ideals, Female Gothic writers like Ann Radcliffe focused their narrative lens on the persecuted heroine. Their oneirically suffused novels featuring female protagonists generated titillating conceptions of the conjunction between love and terror,<sup>36</sup> called women's limited roles and domestic ideals into question, and contested property-related issues. While representations of women in eighteenth-century fiction in general 'provided a vehicle for the debate concerning the relationship of property (the ownership of things) to propriety (the possession of one's own person)',<sup>37</sup> the Gothic took up such questions in a more dramatically intense manner. Indeed, as Ronald Paulson has noted, 'It was the women writers who picked up most poignantly the aspect of property in the gothic novel of Walpole'.<sup>38</sup> Their 'dark romances' explored and exposed the potentially nightmarish underbelly of the middle-class romance/marriage mantra, and articulated their authors' sometimes irreconcilable anxieties, fears and desires with regard to it. While the exact parameters and nature of the Female Gothic continue to be debated and expanded, in part because this extremely popular form continues to be adapted, certain general but valid observations may be made about the most popular and influential branch in the classic

Gothic era, which developed from Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). These Radcliffean Gothic narratives are cautionary, ritualistic, travel-adventure novels that involve the testing and emotional growth of a heroine on the verge of womanhood and marriage. These texts also function as thinly veiled, somewhat unconventional female conduct guides, in that they do not simply promote marriage as a woman's primary goal or delineate the parameters of proper female behaviour. Among other things, they frequently advocate a woman's rigorous and well-rounded education alongside her necessary awareness of monetary and estate matters. The Female Gothic also focuses its lens on premarital scenarios and advocates the tempering of marital expectations. The warning, in text after text, is that all marriages are not created equal. In promoting these ideas, among others, the Female Gothic offers an admonition to traditional novels of romance and sensibility, and redeploys and reconfigures established Gothic devices and themes.

*The gendered Gothic and the contested Castle*

As Alison Milbank has noted, 'Gothic writing has been conceived of in gendered terms' since at least the early nineteenth century,<sup>39</sup> when Ann Radcliffe, in her posthumously published essay, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1802; 1826), distinguished between two main types of Gothic – *terror Gothic*, which she tacitly associates with her own work, and *horror Gothic*, which she associates with the much more sensational work of Matthew Lewis. While the former was characterized as 'feminine' and intended to expand the soul by bringing it into contact with sublime objects of terror, the latter was said to be more 'masculine' in its nature, as it focused on encounters with gruesomely detailed mortality. In Radcliffe's words, '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.'<sup>40</sup>

It should be noted that nowhere does Radcliffe ever make use of the term 'Female Gothic'. More in-depth theorizing about the



nature and meaning of the gendered aspects of this genre has occurred only in recent years. Ellen Moers coined the term 'Female Gothic' in a 1974 article in the *New York Review of Books*, in reference to a mode of literature that emerged in the eighteenth century that taps women's fears about sexuality and childbirth.<sup>41</sup> Such feminist-based, gender-aware literary theorizing was then occurring in relation to other genres. Just as theorists of the Female *Bildungsroman* (novel of development), for example, demonstrated how gender was a vital component in that genre as the ideal of success was gender-contingent, and men and women were impeded and judged in different ways by their societies,<sup>42</sup> theorists of the Female Gothic called attention to the fact that women's generally repressed fears and desires – Gothic's twin fascinations – differed quite dramatically from those of their male counterparts. Debate around the category 'Female Gothic' in recent years has been explosive, with critics undermining it as essentialist and prone to universalizing women's experience.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the most useful and uncontroversial definition of this classification would be limited to its narrative focus – namely, on a female, as opposed to a male, protagonist. Despite the contentious nature of his claim about the sex of Female Gothic writers,<sup>44</sup> Gary Kelly's descriptive definition exemplifies such an approach. He defines the Female Gothic as

a species of Gothic fiction from the decades just before and after 1800, written by women, featuring female protagonists in certain situations, with appropriate settings, descriptions and plots, using distinctive kinds of narrations, and with distinctively feminine and feminist interests and tendencies, specific to that time, but of continuing interest to women and feminists now.<sup>45</sup>

Female Gothic fiction provides ample and fascinating evidence relating to women's notably different personal and socio-political preoccupations. Foremost among the Gothic's redeployed ingredients is the Gothic castle or ruined architectural site. While this hugely symbolic locale remains, in part, an arena for engagement with cosmic/providential forces in conjunction with the protagonist's familial past, it is also often employed in relation to secular

forces. A ‘metaphor for woman’s “dematerialisation” before the law’,<sup>46</sup> the castle becomes ‘a site of patriarchal coercion’ in the Female Gothic.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, canny Female Gothic writers combine the ideas of secular and supernatural power to pump up the volume of terror in relation to their socio-political critiques. Encounters with the supernatural in the patriarchally ruled castle assume new and more terrifying meaning as they are deployed for political ends. As Eugenia C. DeLamotte explains in her incisive study of this genre, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, ‘The “fear of power” embodied in Gothic romance is a fear not only of supernatural powers but also of social forces so vast and impersonal that they seem to have supernatural strength.’<sup>48</sup> Contrary to the views of Clara McIntyre, therefore, Radcliffe’s castles were not mere narrative window-dressing.<sup>49</sup>

According to Sybil Korff Vincent, the Female Gothic ‘expresses conflicts within the female regarding her own sexuality and identity, and uses a highly stylized form and elaborate detail to effect psychic catharsis’.<sup>50</sup> The most significant component in this cathartic process is the stylized space in which it occurs – the domestic sphere, a symbolically loaded, psychically resonant<sup>51</sup> site associated with familial inheritance. Eva Figes has noted that the house, ‘such a central image in women’s novels, takes on a new dimension’ in Gothic fiction:

In the clear light of the courtship novel it represents security and status. The house of the bridegroom, into which the heroine will move after marriage, is always of prime importance ... But in the Gothic novel the house changes from being a symbol of male privilege and protection conferred on the fortunate female of his choice, to an image of male power in its sinister aspect, threatening and oppressive.<sup>52</sup>

Kate Ellis concurs, claiming that ‘it is the failed home that appears ... [in the Female Gothic’s] pages, the place from which some (usually “fallen” men) are locked out, and others (usually “innocent” women) are locked in’.<sup>53</sup> Especially in its capacity as a ‘night-time house’, this locale ‘admits all we can imagine into it

of the dark, frightening, and unknown'.<sup>54</sup> The popular Enlightenment conception of the haunted house assumes an especially powerful signification in this branch of the dark romance, which focuses, as Eugenia C. DeLamotte so provocatively states, on 'women who just can't seem to get out of the house'.<sup>55</sup>

Notably, the familiar domestic sphere is usually displaced in the Female Gothic to unfamiliar territory, both nationally and architecturally, for the purposes of incorporating an entertaining, titillating taste of the exotic and engendering both terror and an institutional critique. Borrowing from the repertoire of the picaresque novelist, the Female Gothic novelist incorporated aspects of the travel narrative into the Gothic by sending her heroine travelling. This was a notable inclusion given the barriers to female travel at the time, particularly the requirement of having a protective male companion. While the Female Gothic heroine usually satisfies this requirement, the act of travelling nonetheless ushered in a sense of female agency and the potential for adventure. As Ellen Moers notes, 'In Mrs Radcliffe's hands, the Gothic novel became a feminine substitute for the picaresque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction.'<sup>56</sup> The travel narrative was not only one of the most popular genres of the Enlightenment era – the second most widely read type of book after the novel<sup>57</sup> – it was a quintessential Enlightenment production that satisfied both the imagination and the 'scientific' drive for knowledge. These narratives promoted modernization and provided knowledge of the world, while feeding the imagination with a sense of the unknown. Notably, geographical movement in the Gothic is often figured as historical movement, a type of time travelling, because it involves the suggestion of travelling back into Britain's unenlightened, primitive, Catholic past, as displaced on to other national and historical contexts. Deteriorating castles, abbeys and manor houses in foreign, usually Roman Catholic, countries, abound alongside medieval and Reformation settings in the literature of the classic Gothic era. The persecuted maiden is transported to, and virtually imprisoned in, a foreign, 'ancestral' location by the text's other principal player – the enterprising, unyielding, ruthless, attractive and

usually foreign Gothic hero-villain – where she experiences terrors, both real and imagined, inflicted by various terrorists.

*Female Gothic terrorists – from ‘Father knows best’ to ‘Mommy dearest’*

According to Frances L. Restuccia, ‘the gothic aspect of a woman’s life is all in its normality’.<sup>58</sup> While the Gothic is a literature of trauma, the Female Gothic is doubly so, for it fixes its narrative lens on so-called ‘normal’ feminine development, which, as Michelle Massé has perceptively and provocatively illustrated, is a form of culturally induced trauma whose repetition is staged in the Gothic.<sup>59</sup> In Massé’s view, the trauma in the Female Gothic is a result of ‘the prohibition of female autonomy’.<sup>60</sup> The protagonist is ‘[c]ulturally prohibited from speaking of passion, [and] unable to move toward the object of desire’. Disallowed expression as a desiring subject, the female protagonist remains, in Massé’s words, a ‘perennially passive victim’.<sup>61</sup> Massé’s views on the Female Gothic protagonist’s role as passive victim are hugely contentious, as they fail to recognize any developing agency, autonomy or sense of identity in the heroines of these works. Nevertheless, her ideas about trauma furnish a useful foundation from which to theorize the role of the protagonist’s most significant relationships. Trauma in the Female Gothic, from the eighteenth century to the present day, involves indirect or direct encounters between the daughter, on the cusp of womanhood, and various terrorists who are located at the crossroads of dread and desire, the past and the future.

Much ink has been expended on the two primary terrorists in the Female Gothic’s haunted house – the Gothic hero-villain, who lends expression to all that a woman fears and sometimes desires in a possible husband, and the figure of the mother, whose social status and physicality generate the paradoxical response in the daughter of identification and rejection. The Gothic hero-villain and the mother may be said to do the same work as both police the daughter’s behaviour according to patriarchal prescriptions. While the mother tends to police indirectly, the hero-villain does so more directly. Despite their different *modus operandi*,

both threaten the protagonist's identity and autonomy. It would be more accurate to say, however, that in the Female Gothic the mother's role is rendered diffuse, as the ghosts of *foremothers* past – most spectral, but some in the flesh – haunt and police the heroine. In a momentously transitional era obsessed with the question of healthy and abusive authority and with redefining women's roles, the mother's role was painstakingly and repeatedly delineated. Likewise, representations of the Gothic hero-villain in the Female Gothic extend the Gothic's theme of good and bad authority, while paying special attention to the issue of the good and bad husband.

Numerous analysts of the Female Gothic have suggested that fear of the mother lurks at its core. Feminist critics in the 1980s brought Adrienne Rich's idea of matrophobia<sup>62</sup> to bear on the Female Gothic. In Tamar Heller's 1992 monograph on that sub-genre and the works of Wilkie Collins, for example, matrophobia is defined as 'the daughter's fear of becoming as powerless and oppressed as the mother'.<sup>63</sup> Given the frequent representation of the mother in modern and contemporary Female Gothic as a much more physically threatening and even abject figure, Juliann E. Fleenor provides a more apt definition of the nature of matrophobia for that sub-genre in its later stages. Fleenor identifies 'the conflict at the heart of the Female Gothic, [as] the conflict with the all-powerful, devouring mother'.<sup>64</sup> Regardless of the era of the text's production, however, the mother embodies and emblemizes the past in the Female Gothic and, more specifically, the daughter's past. This association is logical, given her biological role as the site of the daughter's origins, but it also incorporates the idea of the mother's legacy to the daughter in terms of certain culturally defined roles and behaviours. Thus may the past, in the form of a legacy, be carried forth into the future. The mother-daughter dyad is, therefore, a complex, symbolically sedimented dynamic that speaks volumes about the effects of patriarchy on women's lives and relationships.

The Female Gothic protagonist's trajectory may be best characterized as an initiation ritual into patriarchal society during an era of critical class transition. Her explorations, frequently at night, of the apparently haunted Castle's maze-like interior involves

confrontation with mysteries whose ultimate unravelling signifies a process – both traumatic and symbolic – of self-discovery and development. According to Claire Kahane, ‘the heroine’s active exploration of the Gothic house in which she is trapped is also an exploration of her relation to the maternal body that she shares, with all its connotations of power over and vulnerability to forces within and without’.<sup>65</sup> This exploration also involves confrontation with external patriarchal forces about which the protagonist feels decidedly ambivalent.

Anxiety about boundaries of the self, what DeLamotte maintains constitutes the origin of Gothic terror,<sup>66</sup> is granted expression during this process. The fear that self-identity and autonomy are threatened, or that heretofore repressed, possibly dangerous aspects of the self and others may be allowed expression, underpins the action. The theme of transformation, a common Gothic motif, where as DeLamotte says, ‘[w]hat was x becomes y, the line dividing them dissolving’,<sup>67</sup> is a principal dynamic: the self is threatened by and/or revealed to be Other, and the Other is often revealed to be an aspect of the self. Repressed anxieties are explored and exposed, and semiotic boundaries blurred – the house may be revealed to be a prison and the husband a prison-master. The ‘more intangible prison of female propriety’<sup>68</sup> that may be said to have tyrannized women’s lives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries thus assumes a physical reality. The narrative’s subversive nature ‘appears uppermost, in its dark and prisonlike images of feminine experience within domesticity’,<sup>69</sup> thus lending intense resonance to Wollstonecraft’s unsettling question in the opening chapter of her radical yet unfinished novel from 1798, *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, ‘Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?’<sup>70</sup>

### *The road to Radcliffe*

Although the Gothic nature of Sophia Lee’s historical Gothic novel, *The Recess* (1783–5), has been disputed,<sup>71</sup> there is no denying its influence on the Female Gothic branch of Gothic

fiction. As Lee shifts her narrative lens to the figure of the female protagonist and employs Gothic machinery to portray and comment on the bleakness of the female condition, Lee fashions key properties for the Radcliffean Female Gothic, an intriguing connection given that Radcliffe may have been Lee's student at the school that she and her sister Harriet ran in Bath. *The Recess* is presented as a historically factual account, as derived from an obsolete manuscript. By way of a complex narrative structure – Matilda's narrative constitutes the first and final segments with Ellinor's narrative sandwiched in the middle – *The Recess* recounts the story of twin daughters, Matilda and Ellinor, born of the secret marriage between the Duke of Norfolk and Mary Queen of Scots. In typical Female Gothic fashion, Mary functions as a type of absent, distant spectre of a mother with whom the daughters yearn to be reunited, but who is only glimpsed at a distance just prior to her execution.

The pre-eminent Gothic element in the story is the recess where the girls are raised in secret by a foster-mother, Mrs Marlow. A former convent recently destroyed during the English Reformation, the recess is possessed of subterranean vaults and ancestral portraits. It is a decidedly ambivalent space, according to Jane Spencer, that represents 'woman's destiny of confinement and hidden female powers'.<sup>72</sup> In true Gothic fashion, it commences as a site of safety and independence but subsequently becomes a place where the twins are menaced by predatory men, and where both are later imprisoned, separately. In the sisters' tragic endings, involving madness and misery, *The Recess* serves as an indictment of women's treatment and options in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British patriarchal society and of the illusory ideal of romantic love, which functions only to seduce them into destructive unions. According to David Punter, 'The world of *The Recess*, even more explicitly than the world of Radcliffe's novels, is one in which women are in constant danger.'<sup>73</sup>

Ann Radcliffe's own engagement with the Female Gothic was developed over the course of five novels and, unlike *The Recess*, avoided historical accuracy<sup>74</sup> and first-person narration. Images of long-term female confinement and persecution abound.

Radcliffe's first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), is notably like *The Castle of Otranto* in its peasant hero's discovery of his true, aristocratic identity. Set during the Middle Ages, *Castles* involves the tale of two warring Scottish clans. Like Walpole's Theodore, Alleyn, a peasant captured during a clan attack on Dunbayne castle, discovers that he is a nobleman. He also discovers two women imprisoned in the castle's subterranean passages, who turn out to be his mother and sister. The evil Malcolm Dunbayne had killed his own brother (Alleyn's father), stolen his lands and imprisoned his wife and daughter. After his defeat, a double wedding concludes the narrative, whereby each hero marries the other's sister.

Ann Radcliffe showcased virtue imperilled in subsequent works. In *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), the heroine, Julia, is persecuted by her own father, the Marquis Mazzini, who tries to force her to marry an undesirable suitor. After a lengthy pursuit, towards the narrative's end Julia discovers her mother, believed dead for fifteen years, imprisoned by the Marquis in a cavern beneath Mazzini castle. Radcliffe's next novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), garnered her the title of respectable author and, particularly in its focus on the make-up of sensibility and virtue, was a practice-run for her masterpiece, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. It tells the story of Adeline, a beautiful but mysterious girl who, under unusual circumstances, ends up living with a former gambler, Pierre de la Motte, and his family in a ruined abbey. The theme of good and bad paternal authority is highlighted as Adeline is mistreated by a jealous Madame de la Motte and persecuted by her villainous uncle, the Marquis de Montalt, who enlists La Motte to help him gain possession of her. Thus does La Motte come to inhabit an ambivalent middle ground between protective and persecuting surrogate father.

Adeline's horrifying dreams, featuring a murdered man in the abbey, are reminiscent of the powerful dream sequences in *The Old English Baron*. Her subsequent discovery of a manuscript chronicling the dying man's experiences during his incarceration ultimately lead to Adeline's discovery of her true identity. When the Marquis turns homicidal, she takes refuge with a benevolent minister who is revealed to be the father of her beloved



Theodore. She also learns that she is the niece of the Marquis de Montalt, who, for the sake of avarice, murdered his own brother. After damning revelations are made, the Marquis commits suicide, and Adeline inherits her rightful estates and marries Theodore.

Unlike Lee, who condemns the seductive, illusory power of romance and its deleterious effects on women's lives, Radcliffe's more positive romances struck a tremendous chord with the readership of her day. More recent feminist critics, however, have criticized her standpoint with regard to patriarchal authority. In Jane Spencer's assessment, for example, Radcliffe criticizes the status quo of male authority but fails, ultimately, to challenge it.<sup>75</sup> It may be difficult, from our historically distant vantage-point, to recognize the proto-feminist/middle-class 'revolution' that drives Radcliffe's fiction, but it exists in the form of men of sensibility who respect and admire intrepid, intelligent and outspoken women of feeling who resist tyranny and are eager to gain self-knowledge, and who hold out for companionate marriage. Radcliffe, a 'blameless married woman'<sup>76</sup> who 'was minutely attentive to her domestic duties',<sup>77</sup> according to conservative critics, nonetheless boldly imagines an ideal, Wollstonecraftian world where women and men are equal citizens under the law and women handle their own financial affairs. A detailed examination of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, a novel Samuel Taylor Coleridge called 'the most interesting novel in the English language',<sup>78</sup> supports the case.

*Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794)*

In its sensible, intelligent heroine, sublime scenery, and use of what has come to be known as the 'explained supernatural', *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is signature Radcliffe. In its amplification of scenes of mystery, terror and suspense, *Mysteries* takes the Female Gothic up a few notches. Set against a backdrop of religious wars in sixteenth-century France, the novel chronicles the adventures of Emily St Aubert, a vessel of sensibility, following the successive deaths of her parents when she is left almost penniless and forced

to leave her idyllic rural home and beloved, potential future husband, Valancourt. She accompanies her newly married aunt, Madame Cheron, to the Castle Udolpho, her new home in the Apennines, well beyond the borders of Emily's native France. In the construction of *Emily St Aubert*, Ann Radcliffe takes Wollstonecraft's progressive educational advice to heart. Up until the death of her mother, Emily's father ensures that his daughter's reason is developed and that she eschews the 'sin' of excessive sensibility. The Gothic is, however, ever critical of cloistered, untested virtue, and so Emily's theoretical education is, subsequent to the deaths of her parents, subjected to some fairly severe practical tests.

Her aunt's new husband, Count Montoni, Emily's surrogate father, assumes increasingly terrifying and tyrannical proportions as he abuses his paternal power and repeatedly threatens the young woman with disinheritance and a loveless, arranged marriage to one of his band of criminal outlaws. In order to position Montoni in opposition to such genteel, feminized men of sensibility as Valancourt and Emily's father, Radcliffe fashions him as a more ruthless Gothic villain, blind to nature's sublimity. She excises any trace of heroism from Montoni, rendering him unidimensionally hard-hearted, monomaniacal and enterprising. He is a primary player in the novel's exploration of fears and anxieties about sexuality and marriage, especially plaguing questions about male loyalty and true love within that institution. Emily's nagging concerns about Valancourt are magnified to excess in Montoni and suggested in the haunting memory of her father grieving over a miniature portrait of a mysterious woman.<sup>79</sup>

Key to Emily's ultimate marital success, however, is her own propriety, her self-possession, that, most importantly in a woman's case, includes her sexual restraint. It was a woman's propriety that rendered her desirable in the middle-class marriage market. The trauma Emily experiences over the course of her trials is a result of cultural proscriptions against a desiring female subject. According to Massé, female desire is the central preoccupation of the Female Gothic. Threats of incarceration, sexual violation and even death dog Emily's every step, starting with her aunt's threat to incarcerate her in a convent.<sup>80</sup> Female corpses – always

somehow connected to the sinister-but-attractive Montoni, who has truck, significantly, with Venetian inquisitors<sup>81</sup> – thereafter litter the narrative landscape. Indeed, as Claudia Johnson has noted about *Mysteries* and the Female Gothic in general, ‘every household conceals the dead body of its mistress’.<sup>82</sup> In Emily’s case, unearthing their tragic, mysterious, repressed histories is key to her journey towards self-knowledge. These and other mysteries are solved after a variety of adventures in Montoni’s decaying, prison-like castle<sup>83</sup> – an unchristian,<sup>84</sup> vice-ridden<sup>85</sup> locale to which Emily feels her fate connected as if ‘by some invisible means’.<sup>86</sup> As in Walpole’s *Otranto*, the contested castle plays a prominent role, almost becoming a character in its own right.

News of the death of the wife of Montoni’s servant, who was killed when some of the battlements of the north tower of the castle descended upon her,<sup>87</sup> coincides with Emily’s arrival at the castle, thus setting the stage for what is to come. In a truly unsettling manner, a series of dead women follow. First in line is Signora Laurentini, whose dead body, Emily fears, is actually located behind the castle’s mysterious black veil, a memento mori she discovers during one of her discreet ‘tours’ of the castle. While this is not actually the case, what matters is that Emily thinks it is Signora Laurentini’s body. Imagined terrors, as Radcliffe illustrates repeatedly, relay a person’s psychological state and preoccupations. As Jane Spencer has astutely observed, ‘The focus in the Gothic novel is on the heroine’s mind: it is not only what happens to her that concerns us, but how she reacts to it.’<sup>88</sup> Emily’s imagined vision of Signora Laurentini behind the black veil conveys the message that bad marriages may be fatal for women. The over-indulged Laurentini’s actual criminal passions and acts, however, convey the message that ‘fallen’ women who act as desiring subjects, as opposed to morally upright objects of desire, are better off dead. After an encounter with an apparently dead Signora Laurentini, Emily confronts the actual fate of her innocent aunt, the poisoned Marchioness de Villeroi, whose tragic betrayal and murder by her own husband, egged on by Laurentini, a female Iago, Emily uncovers only towards the novel’s end. Finally, Emily must deal with the demise of Madame Cheron/Montoni, her imprudent aunt who is grotesquely abused, incarcerated and

ultimately killed while under Montoni's care. Although the narrative may seem ambivalent toward this figure, as Claudia Johnson has argued, by both burlesquing and legitimizing her complaints about her husband, the latter, Gothic response ultimately takes precedence.<sup>89</sup>

These numerous foremothers function, in effect, as *memento mori* figures, dreadful reminders that transgressing the laws of patriarchy is often fatal to oneself and others. Attempts at intervention, once a woman has made an unwise choice, are futile, as Emily learns in the case of Madame Cheron. Emily's paramount lesson is that women's failure to uphold propriety and make sound judgements essentially places them beyond the social pale. As the fate of these women may be repeated by Emily on her Gothic Grand Tour, she grasps the lesson that the sins of foremothers past may be visited on their figurative daughters.

In Emily's traumatic initiation ritual, anxieties relating to the joint patriarchal institutions of marriage and motherhood are granted expression and thereafter demystified, defused and domesticated. Perhaps no incident better conveys Emily's fears of confinement in this carceral Gothic narrative than her discovery that her bedchamber in the Castle Udolpho offers her no security from potential intruders. Within it, she is entirely vulnerable yet confined, as it is double-bolted on the outside.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps no object better conveys the idea of marriage as a figurative death for women than the black veil, which Emily believes conceals a horrifying female figure. This haunting, multivalent symbol expresses the novel's central theme of revelation and yokes together what were long considered to be the two most important rites of passage in a woman's life – marriage and death. Perhaps most disturbingly, the black veil signifies the two options available to women in romance fiction. According to Emma Clery:

Romance fiction revolves around this double standard, alternately condoning and deprecating, pointing on the one hand to the [marital] throne on which the heroine will be installed at the end of her trials, and on the other to the grave where one false step might, however undeservedly, lead her.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, the black veil establishes an equation thereafter popularly employed by nineteenth-century women writers critical of non-companionate marriage – namely, marriage *equals* death.<sup>92</sup>

Despite the aforementioned traumas, dreadful objects and signifying corpses, there are at least two critics who deny the real threats confronting Emily. Frederick Frank, for example, makes the audacious statement that Radcliffe's heroines are 'hedonist hysterics who secretly cherish the grim opportunities afforded by the terror of the castle's interior and the thrill of cryptic confinement'.<sup>93</sup> While Emily must learn to control her sometimes overheated imagination, she never displays any hysteria. Further to this, any suggestion that the morally upright Emily is a hedonist is actually utterly absurd and skews Emily's role in relation to Signora Laurentini, whose passions and hedonism result in her tragic downfall. Finally, Frank fails to provide any evidence that Emily enjoys being under Montoni's power and experiencing his terrorist machinations. Nowhere does Emily ever articulate, even slightly, any sense of what Frank refers to as a 'thrill of cryptic confinement'.<sup>94</sup> If Emily experiences any ambivalence towards Montoni, it may involve his physical appearance. As described from Emily's perspective during their initial encounter, he is 'uncommonly handsome'. Emily recognizes, however, a certain 'haughtiness of command' in him<sup>95</sup> and responds with 'admiration, but not the admiration that leads to esteem; for it was mixed with a degree of fear she knew not exactly wherefore'.<sup>96</sup> Despite her recognition, therefore, of Montoni's physical attractiveness, Emily is instinctively attuned to his immoral nature.

Robert Kiely similarly downplays the nature of the threats facing Emily. Arguing that she 'half-creates her own Udolpho',<sup>97</sup> Kiely continues

... the preservation of her chastity is not the central issue of the novel simply because the reader is never for a moment allowed to believe that Emily could be raped ... On the superficial narrative level, the mystery of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is not whether Emily will or will not be raped, murdered, or morally destroyed, but whether she will manage to extricate herself from uncomfortable situations of an increasingly bizarre and complicated nature.<sup>98</sup>

While it is true that one of the novel's principal goals is to explore the nature of and difference between real and imaginary terrors – and Emily is certainly at times a victim of the latter – the threat of rape is repeatedly suggested and represented, among other manners, in the form of real men who gain access to Emily's room. *Mysteries* has been labelled a Gothic *Clarissa* and, like most novels of sensibility, the female protagonist's chastity is the central issue, which was reflective of the social reality for women of Emily's class background.

Emily's marital anxieties are somewhat allayed once she comprehends that their source lies in impropriety, a crime of which she is not guilty; however, the impact of these traumas remains, serving to ensure Emily's continued conformity. The ghosts of foremothers past ultimately function to police and enforce against women's transgressions within patriarchy. In comparison with these ghosts, Emily's biological mother fails to compete. Indeed, while her mother's death constitutes Emily's first major trauma and 'fall' into experience, it is the father's financial ruin and death that serves as the novel's ur-trauma. This makes *Udolpho* radically unlike *Frankenstein*, therefore, where the mother's death functions as the ur-trauma and prime mover of all subsequent narrative action. The erasure of the biological mother in *Mysteries*, however, is in symbolic keeping with the dominant role played by the law of the father in that novel. The same is true of Adeline's situation in *The Romance of the Forest*. The quest she undertakes is for her father, and while she does obtain a portrait of her long dead mother from a relative, this is something, as Jane Spencer correctly states, of an afterthought.<sup>99</sup> Emily's developmental trajectory from her mother's death to her assumption of the role of mother is a vexed negotiation whereby the desires and dreads relating to that role are mapped onto a haunted domestic sphere. Thus, the mother–daughter conflict in the Radcliffean Female Gothic is indirect and marked by displacement.

At the novel's end, the unfallen Emily has been transformed into an older, more practical woman who has held steadfast to Valancourt's memory, gained self-assertiveness and become apprised of her financial affairs. This last development is essential. According to the feminist critic Ellen Moers, Radcliffe's novel is

not primarily about love. Instead, the issue of property is paramount.<sup>100</sup> In *Women Writing About Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790–1820*, Edward Copeland concurs, arguing that ‘Gothic terror in women’s fiction is unremittingly economic’.<sup>101</sup> The ‘active source of terror for women’, in Copeland’s words, is ‘the economy as it is represented by unpredictable, feckless, improvident, destructive, and tyrannical males’.<sup>102</sup> The heartless, enterprising Montoni serves as its fitting embodiment. Ironically, however, when Count Morano refers to Emily as an object sold by Montoni, she points out Morano’s hypocrisy: he is no better, because he too would have purchased her.<sup>103</sup> Emily rejects objectification. Like the female protagonists in the Minerva Press Gothic that was greatly influenced by Radcliffe, Radcliffe’s protagonists realize that the ‘key to a woman’s survival is the possession of a spendable income’.<sup>104</sup> Emily becomes especially aware of this fact after she becomes her aunt’s heir. Her determination to resist the tyrannical Montoni’s wily and concerted attempts to force her to resign her estates is grounded in this awareness, her love for Valancourt, and her hope for their future married lives.<sup>105</sup> Emily even seems to enjoy their legal debates, gaining Montoni’s admiration in the process. In response to his characterization of Emily as an uncommonly intelligent woman, hugely unlike her urban sisters who are well-schooled in artifice, she bluntly asserts her legal rights, saying, ‘I am not so ignorant, Signor, of the laws on this subject as to be misled by the assertion of any person. The law, in the present instance, gives me the estates in question, and my own hand shall never betray my right.’ Despite the fact that Emily consciously chooses to resist ‘for Valancourt’s sake’,<sup>106</sup> she is notably courageous as she matches wits with the cruel and opportunistic Montoni,<sup>107</sup> staunchly informing him that ‘the strength of my mind is equal to the justice of my cause; and that I can endure with fortitude, when it is in resistance of oppression’.<sup>108</sup> Subsequent to her return to her beloved La Vallée, Emily certainly relishes ‘the day devoted entirely to [her estate] business’.<sup>109</sup> Her virtuous treatment of her tenants stands in stark contrast to Montoni’s utter carelessness for those in his employ. It is key, however, that money be put in its place in relation to virtue. She notably marvels at, and is disgusted

by, the newly found attention she receives as an heiress. She thinks,

there is some magic in wealth, which can thus make persons pay their court to it, when it does not even benefit themselves. How strange it is, that a fool or a knave, with riches, should be treated with more respect by the world, than a good man, or a wise man in poverty!<sup>110</sup>

These views are granted their greatest endorsement by a deeply repentant Sister Agnes (formerly Signora Laurentini) who asks the rhetorical question, ‘What are riches – grandeur – health itself, to the luxury of a pure conscience, the health of the soul, – and what the sufferings of poverty, disappointment, despair – to the anguish of an afflicted one?’<sup>111</sup>

In a genre that frequently offers the reminder that Enlightenment Reason involves a perverse, emotional repression that has dramatic and grotesque ramifications, Emily charts a course laid out by her father before his death,<sup>112</sup> between excessive reason – the paramount characteristic of the heartless Gothic villain – and excessive sensibility, a characteristic frequently attributed to young women of Emily’s era, especially those who vampirically consumed countless romances. Emily’s tendency towards fancy must, in short, be reined in. Thus, while it is imperative that she put her familial past into perspective, learn to accept death as a natural phase of life, celebrate nature and renew her faith in God, purported supernatural sightings must be rationally explained as the product of an overstrained sensibility and overheated imagination and, finally, laid to rest. Radcliffe’s famous invention of the ‘explained supernatural’, therefore, is an Enlightenment offshoot. A crucial distinction is drawn between Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards death that is displaced on to the working classes and middle/upper classes respectively, and expressed in various forms of memento mori in *Mysteries*. Radcliffe suggests that Catholicism is a superstitious religion ruled by fear and the contemplation of horrifying images of physical death. Protestantism, on the other hand, is a faith marked by a more peaceful and accepting attitude towards death. The latter attitude is best exemplified in the death of



Emily's father, who says that he returns 'in peace' to 'the bosom of ... [his] Father',<sup>113</sup> a viewpoint derived, in part, from the mid-eighteenth-century tradition of graveyard poetry, whose foremost message was that '[f]ears of mortality and associated superstitions are unwarranted if one has faith'.<sup>114</sup>

In the final analysis, the Female Gothic seems to be driven by Milton's theory, expressed in *Areopagitica*, that trial 'by what is contrary' purifies us.<sup>115</sup> In keeping with the traditional closure in the novel of sensibility, Emily's virtue, in the form of her unshaken faith and fortitude, is rewarded by way of an inheritance and companionate marriage. Valancourt is also proven to be worthy of Emily and rewarded at the novel's end. Although he succumbs to gambling while in the treacherously seductive city of Paris, he is ultimately redeemed, as he games for benevolent purposes – namely, to aid Theresa, Monsieur Bonnac and others in financial distress. His virtue is rewarded by way of companionate marriage and his brother's estates. Radcliffe has been called 'a bride of romanticism',<sup>116</sup> and while her appeal to reason was not, as Robert Spector notes, what made her popular,<sup>117</sup> she was, nevertheless, 'wise enough to maintain an adulterous union with the rationalists'.<sup>118</sup> It is crucial to note in this regard that Radcliffe's husband owned and edited the Whig newspaper, the *English Chronicle*, which openly welcomed the French Revolution in this new Age of Reason, and that 'her own family had links with the same Dissenting culture that included [Joseph] Priestley and [Richard] Price'.<sup>119</sup> Radcliffe does not appear to be the staunch conservative described by J. M. S. Tompkins.<sup>120</sup> Emily is, like her creator, a Romantic rationalist, an intriguing combination of practical, money-minded Roxana figure and heroine of sensibility. Her final union with Valancourt is figured as both practical and emotionally fulfilling, the type of equal, loving partnership advocated by Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. With it, Radcliffe hit upon a winning formula that brought her unforeseen levels of critical and commercial success. As Donald K. Adams rightly comments, 'the history of popular fiction throughout the 1790s is largely a chronicle of novelists striving to shape their romances in Ann Radcliffe's successful mold.'<sup>121</sup> Sadly, most of them plunged her work into disrepute.<sup>122</sup>

*Minerva Press productions*

*Otranto* Ghosts have propagated their species with unequalled fecundity. The spawn is in every novel shop.

T. J. Mathias (1797)<sup>123</sup>

The Gothic's efflorescence in the 1790s coincided with the great age of the circulating libraries. Starting in the 1770s with a single library in Leadenhall Street, London, the publisher William Lane established libraries in the fashionable resorts in the provinces, Scotland and Ireland and became the leading distributor of handsomely bound yet relatively inexpensive double- and triple-decker volume Gothics.<sup>124</sup> By 1810, he had also established libraries as far afield as New York, Jamaica and India. Rather significantly, between 1795 and 1810, in keeping with the national production of Gothic novels,<sup>125</sup> a third of Lane's annual publication output consisted of Gothic titles, and the output was noteworthy: the Minerva Press catalogue included 10,000 titles in 1790 and nearly 17,000 titles in 1802.

In his essay on Radcliffe, Sir Walter Scott noted how her second novel, *A Sicilian Romance*, 'attracted much notice among the novel-readers of the day, as far excelling the ordinary meagreness of stale and uninteresting incident with which they were at that time regaled from the Leadenhall press'.<sup>126</sup> On the heels of Radcliffe's tremendous success, Minerva plots essentially became variations on the theme of those established by Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. Indeed, as Frederick Frank notes, 'Chapbookers, bluebookers, and periodical Gothicists preferred not to sign their work to avoid justifiable charges of plagiarism'.<sup>127</sup> While most Minerva Press authors copied Radcliffe's more sentimental Gothic rather than Lewis's more sensationalistic fiction, their plots grew increasingly sensational after 1810, in order to retain their well-worn readers' interest. Generally speaking, as Peter Garside notes, the Minerva Press 'was *reactive* rather than an originator of trends, and as such its history is especially useful as a barometer of taste'.<sup>128</sup>

Given its incredible output and the tremendous expansion of the Gothic into the bluebook and chapbook markets – 'mainly

plagiarized abridgements, reductions, and condensations of the leading Gothic authors' that inundated the bookstalls and cheap printing shops in the 1790s<sup>129</sup> – the Minerva Press was hugely influential in shaping public taste and reading habits from the 1790s into the 1810s. Lane ostensibly aimed to uphold public mores, claiming in his Prospectus in the *Morning Advertiser* (8 February 1794) that the Minerva Press was 'open to such subjects as tend to public good – the pages shall never be stained with what will injure the mind or corrupt the heart – they shall neither be the instrument of private damnation or Public Inquiry'.<sup>130</sup> Despite Lane's assertions, the Minerva Press was frequently singled out and openly criticized for corrupting the public taste. Many even became hostile towards circulating libraries, considering them a 'compact of sensationalism, sentimentality, and salaciousness'<sup>131</sup> due to their wide dissemination of Minerva Press-style publications, which critics described as containing 'an element of voluptuous lovemaking'.<sup>132</sup> This was certainly true of such Lewis-influenced works as Mary-Anne Radcliffe's *Manfroné; or, The One-Handed Monk* (1809), a novel of lurid sexual violence and dreaded hallucinatory terrors involving an irrepressibly violent father-figure. Notably, this novel was not representative of the mainstay of Minerva Press publications in the 1790s.

As the example of Regina Maria Roche illustrates, most Minerva Press productions were tame, sentimental rehashes of Radcliffe's Female Gothic romances. They contained little of what Montague Summers has nicely called 'Gothic sauce'.<sup>133</sup> Michael Sadleir rightly characterizes this deeply religious woman and minor luminary as 'an out-and-out sensibility writer, but with a Gothic accent'.<sup>134</sup> Roche produced some sixteen novels featuring long-suffering heroines of sensibility, her most famous of which were *The Children of the Abbey* (1796) and *Clermont* (1798), the latter being recommended by Isabella Thorpe to Catherine Morland as one of the seven 'horrid novels' in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1798; 1818). One of the Minerva Press's most popular publications that remained in print until the end of the nineteenth century, *Children* chronicles its protagonist's remarkable trials over the course of four volumes in various Gothic-infused locales in the British Isles. With the exception of

its protagonist's discovery of the imprisoned, guilty but contrite Lady Dunreath, however, *Children* contains no Gothic-style episodes. It nevertheless eclipsed *Mysteries* in terms of sales, while advancing Radcliffe's foremost moral agenda of extolling the danger of uncontrolled passions and justifying the ways of Providence to man. Perhaps no greater signature element of Radcliffean Gothic exists than the latter justification. Adapted from Samuel Richardson's 'virtue rewarded' theme in *Pamela*, this had been the explicitly articulated mantra of Female Gothic fiction since Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, which concludes with the moral, 'We learn, also, that those who do only THAT WHICH IS RIGHT, endure nothing in misfortune but a trial of their virtue, and from trials well endured derive the surest claim to the protection of heaven.'<sup>135</sup> Likewise, at the close of *Mysteries*, Radcliffe apostrophizes, 'O! useful may it be to have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!'<sup>136</sup> Regina Maria Roche's *Children* also concludes with Lord Mortimer and Amanda's declaration that they have been amply rewarded for their sufferings, and Amanda's statement that she has lived 'to justify the ways of Providence to men, and prove that, however calamity may oppress the virtuous, they or their descendants should at last flourish'.<sup>137</sup> The romances of Francis Lathom (for example *The Castle of Ollada* (1795), *The Midnight Bell, A German Story* (1798), *Astonishment!!! A Romance of a Century Ago* (1802), *Italian Mysteries; or More Secrets Than One. A Romance* (1820)), Louisa Stanhope (for example *Montbrasil Abbey; Or, Maternal Trials. A Tale* (1806), *Madelina: A Tale Founded on Facts* (1814); *Treachery; or, the Grave of Antoinette. A Romance Interspersed With Poetry* (1815); *The Nun of Santa Maria Di Tindaro. A Tale* (1818)) and countless others adhered to the Radcliffean Gothic recipe between the 1790s and the 1820s, extending Radcliffe's powerful influence into the nineteenth century.<sup>138</sup>