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Ourself Behind Ourself, Concealed: The Thematic Importance Of Doubling In Nineteenth And Early Twentieth-Century American Gothic Literature

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"OURSELF BEHIND OURSELF, CONCEALED": THE THEMATIC IMPORTANCE OF

DOUBLING IN NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN

GOTHIC LITERATURE

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by

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ABSTRACT

Without question, Gothic literature provides an impressively suitable venue for

the expression of societal anxieties and frustrations, especially those concerning power,

patriarchy, and the socially sanctioned roles of women (i.e. to be obediently passive

wives and nurturing mothers) and men (i.e. to be representatives of strength,

rationality, morality, and order). While it might seem as though supernatural entities or

outside forces are often to be feared in Gothic literature, the most sinister force is

usually that of the protagonist's unsettled mind. The shadowy haunted houses and

often isolated, gloomy, and claustrophobic spaces in which terrorized protagonists are

trapped frequently mirror the fragmented psyches which likewise imprison both

authors and their subjects. Gothic texts, therefore, present a fitting backdrop for the

display of the collective fears and unpleasant realities characteristic of nineteenth and

early twentieth-century America, and in doing so they provide an acceptable medium

for the discussion of topics previously ignored by respectable society. The purpose of

this dissertation will be to examine the various ways in which textual, authorial, and

character doubling by specific male and female authors of the American Gothic

tradition provide an outlet for the reflection of nineteenth and early twentieth-century

anxieties, paying special attention to those anxieties brought about by expectations of

feminity and masculinity and the resulting identity crises suffered as a consequence of

the repression of self in favor of convention.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents, Dick and Sally Todd, my sister, Ginger Weaver,

and to Chris Holsenbeck. Thank you all for believing in me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

AMERICAN ANXIETIES: TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE DOUBLE

> *Ourself behind ourself, concealed –*
> *Should startle most –*
> *Assassin hid in our Apartment*
> *Be Horror's least*.
> *Emily Dickinson, #670*

The psychic fragmentation commonly found within the Gothic tradition is not

only rooted in the psychological struggles of authors and their characters, but it is also

based on major historical and cultural changes which produce an anxiousness and guilt

that is likewise reflected in American literature produced during the nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries. Leslie A. Fiedler notes that, as a result of nation building, "in

the United States, certain special guilts [sic] awaited projection in the gothic form. A

dream of innocence had sent Europeans across the ocean to build a new society immune

to the compounded evil of the past from which no one in Europe could ever feel himself

free" (143). Consequently, Western (and therefore patriarchal) domination produces a

crisis of conscience and a thematic inheritance of sin and colonial anxiety which can

often be found to carry over into the plots of nineteenth and early twentieth-century

American Gothic texts. Fiedler further observes of the anxiety and guilt inherent in the

American Gothic tradition,

> The guilt which underlies the gothic and motivates its plots is the guilt of
>
> the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been
>
> striving to destroy; and the fear that possesses the gothic and motivates its
>
> tone is the fear that in destroying the old ego-ideals of Church and State,
>
> the West has opened a way for the inruption [sic] of darkness: for insanity
>
> and the disintegration of the self. (129)

In addition to the panic-inducing process of nation building and change,

mechanization and technological advances similarly create a certain amount of thematic

uneasiness in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Gothic literature, as well as a

distrust of progress and an awareness of the possible dangers of knowledge. Charles

Crow aptly notes the following with regard to this anxiety brought about by American

ingenuity and invention:

> If the dominant national story was about progress, and a part of this set of
>
> values was faith in science and technology to improve everyone's life,
>
> then the Gothic can expose anxiety about what the scientist might create,

and what threats might be posed by machines, if they escape our control.

(2)

Thus the identity crises and resulting psychic fragmentations suffered by Gothic authors and their characters can therefore be read as reflective of the identity crisis suffered by America itself as it struggles for stability and identification amid an atmosphere of constant change. As Fred Botting posits of the genre as both a consequence and reflection of these changes, "Gothic representations are a product of cultural anxieties about the nature of human identity, the stability of cultural formations, and processes of change" (280).

Jerrold E. Hogle observes the following with regard to the unique function of the Gothic tradition in expressing anxieties inherent in the great social and cultural adjustments occuring in America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

> [T]he logevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture since the eighteenth century. (4)

The Gothic thus affords a venue for the discussion of topics and fears that would otherwise be supressed by social conventions of respectability. As Crow observes, "American writers understood, quite early, that the Gothic offered a way to explore

areas otherwise denied them. {…} Gothic literature can tell the story of those who are rejected, oppressed, or who have failed" (2). This is particularly the case with regard to gender-specific anxieties concerning the roles men and women are expected to play within respectable society. For example, in response to demands of social convention, Gothic texts often "turn from society to nature or nightmare out of a desperate need to avoid the facts of wooing, marriage, and child-bearing" (Fiedler 25).

Hogle observes of the specific method by which both male and female Gothic authors use their art covertly to exorcise the demons of anxiety and guilt haunting them:

> [M]any of the lead characters in Gothic fictions {…} deal with the tangled contradictions fundamental to their existence by throwing them off onto ghostly or monstrous counterparts that then seem "uncanny" in their unfamiliar familiarity while also conveying overtones of the archaic and the alien in their grotesque mixture of elements viewed as incompatible by established standards of normality. (7)

Doubling is thus a method by which the Gothic author accomplishes this purging of repressed impulses and thoughts. In projecting their doubts and fears into an "other," writers of the male and female Gothic are thereby allowed an outlet for the expression of ideas that would otherwise be repressed because of their taboo nature. For example, "the Gothic can expose what man may know about, and never acknowledge: the hatred

that can exist alongside of love, the reality of child abuse, even incest" (Crow 2). The

following chapters will examine the various ways in which textual, authorial, and

character doubling in particular provide an effective outlet for both male and female

writers of the American Gothic genre to reflect these anxieties and identity crises which

are brought about by pressure to meet social mores and cultural norms of conventional

nineteenth and early twentieth-century American life.

CHAPTER TWO

DOUBLE TROUBLE: DOPPELGÄNGERS, GHOSTS, AND SPLIT PERSONALITIES

Various types of doubling are employed in the works of nineteenth and early

twentieth-century American men and women to convey the thematic undercurrent of

anxiety which is central to the Gothic genre. One such example is the trope of character

doubling, which is often discussed using terms such as *doppelgänger*, *alter ego*, *split*

personality, *mirror image*, *shadow*, or *twin*. Use of these variations of self allows authors

the freedom to explore subjects that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable, such as

issues of identity, sexuality, gender boundaries, and the roles men and women were

expected to play within conventional nineteenth and early twentieth-century society.

The duality of self inherent in the Gothic character double is reflected in the

German word *Doppelgänger*, of which the actual translation is "double-goer."

Doppelgänger narratives involve a protagonist's encounter with a ghostly other which

often results from a splitting of self because of intense psychological distress. In many

instances, this double figure is akin to the proverbial angel or devil perched on its

subject's shoulder, directing him or her to act in either an overtly moral or immoral fashion, and the inevitable struggle which ensues reflects both a crisis of conscience and consciousness within the Gothic protagonist. Whether moralistic or monstrous, the alternate identity must be confronted by the living person it haunts, resulting in either a literal or symbolic death of the self. This inevitable conflict between self and other is not only indicative of the binary opposition and boundary confusion fundamental to the Gothic tradition, but it is also reflective of anxieties created by the struggle to deny one's true nature in order to meet society's expectations.

Emily Dickinson's "Poem #670: One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted" evokes the anxiety that is so often a product of Gothic interiorization and that leads to the projection of the self into a haunting other or double: "Ourself behind ourself, concealed – / Should startle most – / Assassin hid in our Apartment / Be Horror's least" (13-16). What is to be feared, therefore, is anxiety itself and its ravaging effects on the mind, body, and soul. Dickinson's "Poem #512: The Soul has Bandaged moments" is likewise indicative of the devastating effect of repression, which in this case results in a "Goblin" (Dickinson 7) double that is the personification of "ghastly Fright" (Dickinson 3) and therefore a projection of a fragmented psyche. In the chapters to follow, specific examples of doubling both within and between characters will be presented in order to reveal and further analyze the Gothic mind in crisis.

A classic example of the doppelgänger narrative is Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson," in which a man's fragmenting psyche results in the projection of his conscience into what he perceives to be an actual person.   As the title reveals, however, (Will—I—am—Will's—Son) Wilson's pursuer is a part of himself, the creation of his own consciousness, and therefore in reality inextricable from himself. A final confrontation between the moralizing double and Wilson results in the forced recognition of the spectral other as himself and therefore the unavoidable death by Wilson's own hand of both Wilson and his projected doppelganger.

This particular type of double does not always appear, however, in full corporeal form. While Wilson's split self represents his projected superego and appears to him in the form of a twin, protagonist Andrew Culwin in Edith Wharton's "The Eyes" is haunted by a pair of eyes serving as a vampiristic projection of his hungry ego. Culwin likewise experiences a moment of confrontation with this second self, but the recognition results in the loss of his newest victim rather than the loss of his life. Wharton's story in effect doubles that of Poe's; however, the former tale presents a psychic projection associated with the overtly moral side of the protagonist's fragmenting conciousness, whereas the latter presents a projection associated with the overtly immoral side of the protagonist's psyche.

The doppelganger motif can also be found in Henry James's tales "The Jolly Corner" and "The Private Life." Spencer Brydon, the central character in "The Jolly

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Corner," obsessively stalks his alternate self in order to confront the man he might have been, had he made other choices in life. Brydon's double is an incarnation of the impulses and desires he must suppress in order meet society's expectations of masculinity and gentility. He therefore denies this second self, choosing instead to conform to social convention in order to assimilate successfully, thereby avoiding any difference or otherness at the cost of his true nature.

"The Private Life" likewise employs doubling, but in this case the doubles exist as two independently functioning men, one appearing solely in the public realm and the other in private. The only way accomplished novelist Clare Vawdrey can remain successful is by relegating his private life to his intelligent author self, while the intellectually disappointing but socially pleasant double controls his private life. As a foil to the two-dimensional Vawdrey, Lord Mellifont is not even a one-dimensional character, since he exists solely in public and manifests only when an audience is present to receive him.

In some instances, doubling exists within a character without the presence of a doppelgänger. For example, in Jack London's "When the World Was Young," protagonist James G. Ward likewise struggles with issues of identity and must confront and deny an alternate side of himself, but in this case he is not forced to meet a separate physical manifestation of his impulses. He is instead wholly a representative of civilization by day and atavism by night. Ward must recognize and suppress his

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atavistic nature in order to succeed within conventional society, but for him the

moment of confrontation is between himself and a representative of the nature world in

which his Teuton self thrives. It is a life and death struggle with a bear, not a

doppelgänger, that forces this confrontation with the self, and the eyes into which he

looks when he makes the decision to conform are not his own, but his frightened wife's.

Likewise, in London's "Samuel," Margaret Henan must decide whether to

conform and therefore assimilate into society at the cost of her individuality, strength of

character, and sense of self. Unlike Ward, she chooses to forgo community, and in her

alienation she becomes a sort of double of her dead husband in order to thrive. Once a

belle in her youth, in her old age she is weathered and masculine, with the calloused

hands of a hard laborer, but she is to be admired in comparison to her insular and

hypocritcal community.

Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," employs doubling on several different

levels. As Poe likewise depicts in the poem "The Haunted Palace," the house itself is

doubled in the central character, Roderick Usher, whose mental and physical

deterioration are mirrored by the equally deteriorating structure in which he lives.

Usher's house is decribed as having sentience, which further emphasizes the parallelism

between structure and occupant. Each is infected with an inescapable atmosphere of

oppressive sadness, and when one falls victim to this infection so does the other.

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The family name is also in a sense infected and close to death, since Roderick and his sister Madeline are the last in a line of inbred descent. As a result, soon after Roderick Usher literally falls to the floor a corpse, the house crumbles and falls into the tarn, and the family name falls into oblivion.   As fraternal twins, Roderick and his sister Madeline also serve as doubles of one another, sharing "sympathies of a scarcely intellegible nature" (Poe 240) and might therefore be read as projections of the masculine and femine sides of the same person. As Madeline dies, she takes Roderick with her, thus the twins begin life as one and are likewise reabsorbed into one in the tale's final image.

Some Gothic doubles appear as supernatural embodiments of their former selves, as is the case in Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Little Maid at the Door," "The Wind and the Rose-Bush," and "The Lost Ghost," all of which involve the ghost of an abandoned child. Known as Freeman's "forlorn little girl" tales, each involves an abused and neglected child whose ghost confronts a benevolent living woman who will ultimately become, whether temporarily or for eternity, the surrogate mother figure the child lacks.

Freeman's "A Gentle Ghost" is also included in the "forlorn little girl" series, but in this tale the perceived ghost is actually a real child whom two grieving women assume is the ghost of their deceased daughter and sister. While the little girl in this story does serve as a double for the dead child, she is given a reprieve from death

because the two maternal figures save her before it is too late. The child ghosts in the other three tales are beyond help and exist only as shadowy versions of themselves. The final story in the series, "The Lost Ghost," presents a closing image indicative of the most successful union between mother and child, as the once forlorn little girl actually welcomes her new mother into the ghostly realm, never again to be separated.

With the help of a living maid, Hartley, the ghostly double of Emma Saxon in Edith Wharton's "The Lady's Maid's Bell" strives vainly from the grave to protect her mistress from an abusive and tyrannical husband. Mrs. Brympton, Hartley, and Emma in a sense double one another, since each is frustrated, weak, and helpless in her own way. Mrs. Brympton is an invalid trapped in a horrible marriage; Hartley is weak from illness and further hampered by the fact that she is not privy to the secrets of the house, and Emma is dead and therefore unable to utter those secrets that might help to save her mistress.

Wharton's "The Fullness of Life" is narrated by the ghost of a woman who is being guided to the afterlife. Given the choice to meet her soul-mate in death or wait for the husband she had during life, the woman chooses duty over happiness and decides to wait for her "helpless" husband (for whom she feels as much passion as she does her grandmother) rather than experience spiritual fulfillment with an ideal mate in the next life.

What is perceived to be the ghostly double of a living person in Wharton's "Miss Mary Pask" is not actually an apparition but is instead a lonely old woman who, after losing her sister to the confines of marriage, chooses to pretend to be dead and to isolate herself from society in a remote and lonely home. The male narrator of the tale does not realize the truth until the end and therefore affords her an erotic, vampiric power in her death-in-life state.

While the protagonist and antagonizing madman of Wharton's "A Bottle of Perrier" are both male, the distinctly feminine characteristics embodied in Almodham's manservant Gosling nonetheless render him a symbolically female figure. The resulting relationship between tyrannical master and "female" servant is therefore reflective of a male-female dichotomy and thus effectively represents the frustrations of women imprisoned in both patriarchal society and unrewarding relationships.

Like Poe, Wharton deftly uses setting to mirror or double the psychological states of her characters, employing houses with dark and stifling interiors to symbolize the psychological and emotional imprisonment of the inhabitants trapped inside them. This is the case in "The Lady's Maid's Bell," "Miss Mary Pask," and "All Souls.'" In each story, the isolation inherent in the setting is indicative of the loneliness of the woman confined inside her home, who is either likewise imprisoned in an unfulfilling marriage or because of one, as in the case of Mary Pask.

In Wharton's "All Souls,'" aged protagonist Sara Clayburn might or might not

have seen a ghost, but the possibility is enough to paralyze her with fear when she is

left helpess, isolated, and injured in her home. She must confront Dickinson's goblin

double, Fear, while she is alone in the stifling darkness and silence of her house, and the

experience is so unnerving that she ultimately leaves in order to live with her narrator

cousin, thereby seeking companionship and comfort in the bonds of sisterhood rather

than remaining a prisoner of a home which is representative of the stiflingly patriarchal

institution of marriage.

In addition to employing doubling within and between their characters and

texts, both female and male authors of nineteenth and early twentieth-century

American Gothic literature are sometimes mirrored in the personas they create, thereby

affording a socially acceptable outlet for dealing with personal frustrations, fears, and

contrary impulses they would otherwise be forced to repress. For example, Emily

Dickinson's strict upbringing and well-known issues with panic disorder and

agorophobia might be mirrored in "Poem #9: Through lane it lay—through bramble,"

which counters the safety of home and family with the inherent danger and mystery of

nature. The children in this poem meet potentially deadly situations when leaving the

security of the home, which refects the anxiety with which Dickinson herself must have

struggled when she occasionally left the stifling protection of her father's house. The

poem likewise serves as a metaphor for the anxiety inherent in individuation and the

passage from childhood to adulthood, as one moves away from the comfort of home toward new experiences.

Dickinson's "Poem #1400: What mystery pervades a well" also uses the mysterious and sometimes frightening power of nature to convey anxieties she must have felt as both woman and author. Just as the water trapped within the well cannot be accessed to its full depth, Dickinson and her female contemporaries felt trapped by social expectation and convention and therefore could never truly be understood or appreciated either personally or creatively.

While Dickinson compares nature to a feminized haunted house in "Poem #1400," Poe compares a haunted house to the unstable mind of its equally haunted king in "The Haunted Palace," perhaps thereby mirroring his own struggle with alcoholism, drug use, and depression. The mad narrator of "The Black Cat" likewise blames his violent outbursts on alcohol, and William Wilson turns to the bottle as a temporary escape from his terrorizing double, a decision which only makes his moralizing projection follow him more doggedly. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe's narrator likens the oppressively dreary atomsphere surrounding the Usher house to the aftereffects of opium use, "the hideous dropping off of the veil" (231), a feeling with which Poe undoubtedly would have been familiar.

The frustrated motherhood inherent in Freeman's "forlorn little girl" tales could quite possibly reflect her own feelings of guilt and frustration, since at the time of their

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inception Freeman was single and childless. Therefore she failed to meet her socially sanctioned role as wife and mother. On the other hand, perhaps she is represented in the figure of the abandoned child, since all of her relatives died well before she eventually married, thereby abandoning her in an almost child-like state. Wharton's tales likewise reflect frustrations surrounding the roles women were expected to play in society, with female characters (who were always expected to choose duty over happiness) trapped in houses and marriages. Wharton was herself imprisoned in an unhappy domestic situation and, like Dickinson and Freeman, undoubtedly experienced anxiety and frustration as a female author in a patriarchal age.

As an author, Henry James made a living from his ability to become someone other than himself in the texts he created and thus would have had a personal understanding of the dual nature of the artist's public versus private persona which is central to "The Private Life." Furthermore, the age in which he lived required its players to wear a mask of gentility or feminity in order to meet the social expectations of gentlemen and women. "The Jolly Corner" might likewise reflect James's own questions regarding what life might have been like had he remained in New York rather than moving to London. Some critics speculate that he was also a closeted homosexual and might therefore be mirrored in the character of Spencer Brydon, who represses his true sexuality in order to conform to social convention.

Most critics agree that Jack London's personal beliefs regarding social Darwinism and atavism are reflected in his works, including "When the World Was Young" and "Samuel." The theory of atavism holds that something from man's primitive past remains suppressed in his psyche, just as James G. Ward's Teuton self emerges at night in comparison to his modern, civilized nature that is seen during the daylight hours. Ward chooses community over individuality, thereby repressing the most masculine, energetic part of his nature in favor of conformity. Margaret Henan of "Samuel" instead chooses individuality over community and is ostracized as a consequence; however, London's portrayal of her moral tenacity and strength of character in relation to her blindly insular community makes it clear that he admires her choice. While Ward loses a part of his masculinity with the suppression of his atavistic nature, Henan becomes a stronger figure because of her choice and is allowed to thrive without sacrificing her true nature.

Whereas some of the Gothic tales and poems discussed in the following chapters involve doppelgängers or projections of a fragmented consciousness that pursue the characters for whom they serve as doubles, others employ doubling between different characters or between living characters and their spectral representatives. Doubling can also be found to exist between texts themselves or between authors and the characters and texts they create. Regardless of the method of doubling, the result is an apt study of the shared doubts and fears of the collective American psyche.

In the female Gothic, texts often reveal anxieties related to the roles women are expected to play within conventional society, namely those of dutiful wives and mothers, and the subsequent identity crises that result from the repression of impulses contrary to those expectations of femininity. Images of imprisonment run throughout the female Gothic, representing the entrapment women experience in both society and personal relationships as a consequence of these stifling conventions. Anxieties revealed in the literature of the male Gothic are often based on expectations of masculinity and the identity crises that occur as a result of the failure to meet those social mores. Thus while the type of doubling employed by the author often varies, anxiety is the common thread that runs throughout each of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century American Gothic stories and poems analyzed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

ANXIOUS REFLECTIONS: PSYCHOLOGICAL FICTION, FEAR, AND THE GOTHIC

SUBCONSCIOUS

A great deal of scholarship is concerned with Gothic literary conventions, including but not limited to its often stifling, haunting architecture; the pursuit of innocents/innocence by villainous, tyrannical figures; madness, fear, and paranoia; eroticism; and character doubling. Few critics, however, have dealt singularly with the significance of doubling in all of its various forms. While Gothic protagonists frequently become trapped within their own minds by paranoia and anxiety and must struggle to prevent the psychic fragmentation that so often results in the convention known as the Gothic double, it is important to note that the doubling which occurs within these tales and poems is not limited to their characters alone; it exists between the texts themselves, as well as between authors and the protagonists and antagonists they create.

In the same way that Gothic texts are often read as psychological studies of the effects of fear on the human mind, with supernatural situations forcing affected characters to face their inner demons, the inner turmoil with which Gothic characters struggle can often be found to mirror the cultural and personal anxieties with which nineteenth and early twentieth-century American authors, female and male, are faced. As Peter Garrett aptly notes in his introduction to *Gothic Reflections*,

> In its darkened and monstrous images, Gothic reflects the central
>
> nineteenth-century preoccupation with the relation of self and society,
>
> which it shares with more realistic fiction, but reflects it in crisis and
>
> antagonism, where the self is estranged or abandoned, victimized or
>
> victimizing, absorbed in the self-enclosure of madness, the excess of
>
> passion, or the transgression of crime. (3)

Freudian psychology holds that anxiety is a consequence of repression, yet repression is often required in order to conform to society's accepted standards of civility. The fragmented psyches of anxious Gothic protagonists often expose the debilitating effects of the nineteenth-century tendency toward repression and interiorization. Gothic literature consequently lends itself particularly well to psychological analysis, and in doing so it serves a greater purpose than simply to horrify. As Edgar Allan Poe contends in his "Preface" to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), "terror is not of Germany, but of the soul" (1:6). What is truly

frightening is therefore not the Gothic plot itself but the underlying realistic anxieties

reflected therein, which are often allowed expression through various types of literary

doubling. Controversial topics such as sexual taboos and fears concerning death and

the unknown are acknowledged in the fictional situations created, as are frustrations

concerning conventional definitions of femininity and masculinity. Male and female

writers of the Gothic tradition use their craft as a way to articulate commonly held

apprehensions within their characters and pages, thereby creating embodiments of both

the angst produced by the historical and cultural changes occurring in nineteenth and

early twentieth-century America and more gender specific anxieties.

Emily Dickinson's "Poem #512: The Soul has Bandaged moments" (1862) is an

apt refelection of the dichotomous nature of the Gothic genre. In describing the cycle of

psychological imprisonment and escape so often found in Gothic texts, Dickinson

likewise echoes Ann Radcliffe's views on the opposing effects of terror and horror on

the soul. Radcliffe's 1826 essay entitled "On the Supernatural in Poetry" posits that

"terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the

faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates

them" (150). In the first stanza, Dickinson describes this paralyzing effect of horror on

the psyche: "The Soul has Bandaged moments – / When too appalled to stir " (1-2).

Paralysis then leads to psychological fragmentation, which results in a double

embodied by personified fear: "She feels some ghastly Fright come up / And stop to look at her " (Dickinson 3-4).

Only through the speaker's confrontation with her "Goblin" double can she escape this paralysis, perhaps brought about by the anxiety she experiences as a result of repressing what would be considered unconventional thoughts or impulses in the nineteenth century: "Unworthy, that a thought so mean / Accost a Theme – so – fair " (Dickinson 9-10). This fragmentation, and the confrontation with the self that results, is evocative of Radcliffe's definition of terror, since it is only with this confrontation that "[t]he soul has moments of Escape" (Dickinson 11). Now free, the once repressed second self (or the thoughts or impulses it embodies) "dances like a Bomb, abroad" and is compared to "the Bee – delirious borne – / Long Dungeoned from his Rose " (Dickinson 13-16). In another nod to Radcliffian notions of terror, the speaker's acknowledgement of and interaction with her second self allows her to "Touch Liberty – then know no more" (Dickinson 17). The release is fleeting, since she must again suppress the second self in order to assimilate effectively into conventional society. Dickson describes this forced suppression as "The Soul's retaken moments – / When, Felon led along, / With shackles on the plumed feet, / And staples, in the Song" (19-22). The imagery of imprisonment thus returns with the repression of the double, or second self, and the cycle continues as "Horror welcomes her, again" as a result of this repression (Dickinson 23).

Dickinson's "Poem #670: One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted" (1863) is particularly evocative of the danger inherent in the Gothic tendency toward interiorization. As feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note, "[the poem] comments upon the real significance of the gothic genre, especially for women: its usefulness in providing metaphors for those turbulent psychological states into which the divided selves of the nineteenth century so often fell" (624-625). For example, in the first stanza Dickinson notes, "The Brain has Corridors – surpassing / Material Place" (3-4), thereby expressing her belief that the complexity and capacity of the human brain often render it a metaphorical prison with an atmosphere more foreboding than any sprawling ghostly manor. In the second stanza, she indicates that a mind possessed by fear harbors within its walls forces more dangerous than any haunted house: "Far safer, of a Midnight Meeting / External Ghost / Than its interior Confronting – / That Cooler Host" (Dickinson 5-8). Gothic protagonists often become trapped within their own minds by paranoia and anxiety and must struggle to prevent the psychic fragmentation that so often results in the convention known as the Gothic double. Dickinson seems to warn of the danger of this psychological split in the fourth stanza when she notes, "Ourself behind ourself, concealed – / Should startle most – / Assassin hid in our Apartment / Be Horror's least" (13-16). Thus while it might seem as though a supernatural presence or outside force is often to be feared in Gothic literature, the most sinister force is often that of the protagonist's unsettled mind.

Edith Wharton consistently presents a motif of imprisonment in her fiction, but her characters are not restricted to symbolic entrapment in dysfunctional or inadequate relationships. In several of her supernatural tales, "the central characters are imprisoned by fear. They are 'well frightened' of their enclosed spaces, of the dark and silent night, of the specters that sometimes appear in these eerie settings, and, most importantly, of their own painful inadequacies, their own ghosts" (Fracasso 100-101). Thus the tales become psychological studies of the effects of fear on the human mind, as the supernatural situations force the affected characters to face their inner demons. Wharton again uses architectural symbolism to illustrate imprisonment, but in these circumstances the home is not a reflection of unexplored desire, marital entrapment, or stifling societal conventions. Rather, the often-menacing structures and isolated landscapes serve as claustrophobic representations of a character's troubled psyche. Such characters are confined in these dark, remote homes just as they are psychologically held hostage by their doubts and fears.

In "All Souls'" (1937), for example, Wharton's persistent emphasis on the intense silence and isolation of the large, ghostly home of Sara Clayburn provides descriptive evidence of the fears holding Mrs. Clayburn captive. Having been abandoned in the lonely home by all of her servants, the injured woman is forced to hobble around, panic-stricken, in search of someone—anyone—else in the house. She becomes

extremely unnerved by the unbearable silence with which the empty house envelops her:

> It was not the idea of noises that frightened her, but that inexorable and hostile silence, the sense that the house had retained in full daylight its nocturnal mystery, and was watching her as she was watching it; that in entering those empty orderly rooms she might be disturbing some unseen confabulation on which beings of flesh-and-blood had better not intrude. The deep silence accompanied her; she still felt it moving watchfully at her side, as though she were its prisoner and it might throw itself upon her if she attempted to escape. (Wharton 2:887-889)

McDowell comments, "Wharton communicates with skill and power the sense of absolute and unending silence, suggesting a total emptiness, an impenetrable isolation, an illimitable expanse of the infinite. The cold house seems to Sara Clayburn to have become a sepulcher" (90).

Thus the suffocating silence is directly related to the fear that consumes Sara: "the fear that she might lie there alone and untended till she died of cold, and the terror of her solitude" (Wharton 2:890). The tale becomes a psychological study of fear rather than a ghost story, since the real source of the terror is Clayburn's mind. She allows the horror to grow and build into a crescendo until her mind and body can no longer sustain the trauma, causing her to faint twice. While she never meets a ghost, per se,

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Sara Clayburn is nonetheless definitely haunted by her own mind. Completed near the

end of her life, this tale most likely presents Wharton's own fears regarding old age and

death.   Gloria C. Erlich notes, "In this, her very last work, the revenant from the other

world has become a figure of obscure threat, a female who lures the faithful to abandon

those who trust them and beckons the abandoned one to follow her into the next

world" (170). "'All Souls' depicts the quintessential terror of almost every aging person,

but especially those who live alone—fear of a sudden transition from independence to

helplessness. The absence of the servants presages death, the death of the house as well

as the death of its owner" (Erlich 170).

Mrs. Clayburn's apprehension is based on the fear of the unknown. She fears the

unknown terrors that she imagines to be awaiting her in the empty house; she fears the

unknown with regard to death, and she fears the unknown identity and intentions of

the strange woman whom she meets on All Soul's Eve before her abandonment. The

supernatural experience is made even more mysterious and frightening because no one

can vouch for the lapse of time she spends fumbling alone in the house, and they

dismiss her claims that the electricity and heat were cut off. Her doctor and servant

seem to think that she dreamt the entire affair or suffered a hallucination based on the

pain of her injury: "Perhaps the pain's made you a little confused, madam" (Wharton

2:891).

The anniversary of Clayburn's petrifying ordeal is marked by the return of the eerie figure who seemed to be the harbinger of abandonment and terror on the previous All Souls' Eve, and the horror of reliving her nightmarish experience compels Sara to flee rather than risk a similar fate: "A year later the same mysterious woman reappears on All Souls Eve, and the servants are eager to go forth with her again. Mrs. Clayburn, whose very name suggests consumption of flesh, flees her home forever to take up residence with her nearest relative" (Erlich 168). In the end, Sara Clayburn's imaginative cousin, the narrator of the tale, becomes convinced that the ghostly woman and the servants have some connection to witchcraft and that they were surreptitiously meeting with a coven on a night upon which superstition dictates the dead can walk among the living. McDowell writes, "Sara fears what, she insists, she does not believe in—an uncontrollable, undefinable force of evil. Her more immediate fears are abandonment, solitude and death—the universally haunting realities of the independent individual" (91).

Wharton responds to this ability to fear what one professes not to believe in her "Preface" to *Ghosts*: "To 'believe,' in that sense, is a conscious act of the intellect, and it is in the warm darkness of the prenatal fluid far below our conscious reason that the faculty dwells with which we apprehend the ghosts we may not be endowed with the gift of seeing" (2:875). Thus the ghosts Sara Clayburn truly fears cannot be seen. The specters she fears are death, the unknown, and isolation; therefore, whether she is ever

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truly convinced that her servants are involved in a coven is irrelevant. The strange

woman's return precisely one year later forces those ghosts associated with her initial

arrival to reappear in Mrs. Clayburn's mind, and rather than confront them again, Sara

chooses to flee to the security of companionship. Her cousin writes of Sara:

> She could not believe that incidents which might fit into the desolate
>
> landscape of the Hebrides could occur in the cheerful and populous
>
> Connecticut Valley; but if she did not believe, she at least feared—such
>
> moral paradoxes are not uncommon—and though she insisted that there
>
> must be some natural explanation of the mystery, she never returned to
>
> investigate it. (Wharton 2:897)

Clayburn is terrified by unknown, sinister elements presumably brought to her

home by the female stranger, and she searches the silent house in vain for signs of her

absent servants. She searches the servants's quarters, and while any sign of movement

would have been welcomed, she finds nothing: "[T]he room was empty but what

frightened her was not so much its emptiness as its air of scrupulous and undisturbed

order. There was no sign of anyone having lately dressed in it—or undressed the night

before. And the bed had not been slept in" (2:886). Zilversmit notes of this

"undisturbed order":

> The controlled mistress senses how her maids' conduct mirrors her own,
>
> making them doubles, almost equals, of suppressed desire. Even though

she avoids the quicker backstairs, this deserted mistress continues to

descend into lower realms, where elite women rarely go. She moves

closer to the scullery, to the kitchen, centers of the female space. When at

last, Mrs. Clayburn hears what sounds like a human voice, a man

speaking, not the comforting woman she seeks, she desperately moves

toward it. (323)

Sara Clayburn's fear reaches its crescendo when the horrifying silence in her

home is finally broken by a mysterious voice:

> A voice was speaking in the kitchen—a man's voice, low but emphatic,
>
> and which she had never heard before. The invisible stranger spoke so
>
> low that she could not make out what he was saying, but the tone was
>
> passionately earnest, almost threatening. The next moment she realized
>
> that he was speaking in a foreign language, a language unknown to her.
>
> In the middle of the carefully scoured table stood a portable wireless, and
>
> the voice she heard came out of it. . . . (2:890)

Allan Gardner Smith writes of this strange and horrifying voice: "[T]he crippled

intellect stumbling in its empty house carries sexual implications which are confirmed

by the location of Mrs. Clayburn's profoundest source of fear, a man's voice, speaking in

low, emphatic tones in the 'back premises,' specifically, the kitchen, which normally

belongs to the servants" (90). Ann Zilversmit adds:

Like most of Wharton's women who believe that their precarious self-esteem can be rescued by the desire of a man, this lonely, aging widow braves the encounter and flings open the kitchen door. But when even this tenuous relationship proves a voice on portable radio, as disembodied as men themselves are for her, she loses her grip entirely, drops her supporting cane, and faints. (323)

When confronted by the sinister woman a second time, Sara Clayburn first tries to stand her ground and keep the woman away from her home, but in the end her fear is too great, and she escapes to the safety and comfort of her cousin's home, vowing never to return to Whitegates. Sara becomes completely dependent on her cousin at this point, reaching out to her to meet her long-denied need for companionship and nurturing. The narrator writes, "I had never seen her as unquestioning and submissive, and that alarmed me even more than her pallor. She was not the woman to let herself be undressed and put to bed like a baby; but she submitted without a word" (2:894). Later the narrator adds, "her head sank back on the pillow and she looked at me like a frightened child" (2:895). Critics form varying interpretations of this new dynamic between Sara and her narrator cousin. Zilversmit observes the following of the women's relationship:

The last image in this last tale is two women bound, imprisoned with each other, not even enjoying the equality of sexual pleasure, the lesbian

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eroticism they have transferred to witches. This final arrestment is the true terror of the tale, more frightening than the silent house where confrontation with oneself still seemed possible. (325)

Wharton's Gothic short fiction is not concerned solely with the frustrations and anxieties of women. Annette Zilversmit posits the following regarding this diversity:

I am urging that we see Wharton not merely as a literary proselytizer of feminist protest or more recently as a creator of female heroes, but as a psychological novelist whose fictional portraits capture fragile, wounded, and doomed women. Ironically, Wharton criticism has been moving in such directions for her male characters. Their reticences, their obtuseness, their callousness, even their self-entrapments and "homosexual panics" (of which "All Souls'" may be the female version) are being thoroughly limned. (327)

Wharton deftly uses setting to affect a psychological response in "A Bottle of Perrier" (1926, under the title "A Bottle of Evian"), which serves as an example of one such psychological study in which the focus shifts toward male characters. As Carol J. Singley comments:

The story is more a psychodrama of desire and disappointment than a ghost story per se, drawing its power from the complex set of motivations and actions that transpire among the characters. These psychological

tensions are carefully provided for through an exotic setting that connotes

sensual excess and danger and through unsettling depictions of the absent

but potent Almodham. (275)

Wharton again employs a thematically significant setting which adds to the mystery

and eroticism of the tale: "[She] infuses wealth and sensuality with decadence.

Implicitly, she suggests that a remote setting, far from the regulating influences of

western culture, is inherently amoral or morally problematic: the Almodham house,

once a 'crusader's stronghold,' now literally and metaphorically stands alone in the

desert, outside religious or social order" (Singley 276). Furthermore, adds Singley,

"such a desert setting holds attraction for both the author and her characters. With her

desert setting, Wharton is able to achieve both an erotic *and* a gothic effect. It is no

exaggeration to say that for Edith Wharton, the exotic *was* the erotic and carried with it

the lure of forbidden and secret lust" (276).   The retreat is described by Medford as

follows:

> And what a place to rest in! The silence, the remoteness, the illimitable
>
> air! And in the heart of the wilderness green leafage, water, comfort—he
>
> had already caught a glimpse of wide wicker chairs under the palms—a
>
> humane and welcoming habitation. Yes, he began to understand
>
> Almodham. To anyone sick of the Western fret and fever the very walls of
>
> this desert fortress exuded peace. (Wharton 2:512)

He later observes, "once here, how easy not to leave!" (Wharton 2:515).

In addition to the eroticism inherent is the exotic locale, Mr. Almodham's intentions toward his young guest appear to be sexual in nature, as evidenced in Gosling's confession to Medford:

> "The very week before you come, I was to sail for England and 'ave my 'oliday, a 'ole month, sir—and I was entitled to six, if there was any justice—a 'ole month in 'Ammersmith, sir, in a cousin's 'ouse, and the chance to see Wembley thoroughly; and then 'e 'eard you was coming, sir, and 'e was bored and lonely 'ere, you understand—'e 'ad to have new excitements provided for 'im or 'ed go off 'is bat—and when 'e 'eard you were coming, 'e come out of his black mood in a flash and was 'arf crazy with pleasure, and said: 'I'll keep 'im 'ere all winter—a remarkable young man, Gosling—just my kind.'" (Wharton 2:531)

Medford, the central character, is visiting Mr. Henry Almodham at his home in the Arabian desert, but upon his arrival he learns from Almodham's servant, Gosling, that his host is out of town but expected to return. Once again, Wharton presents the reader with a house that seems to hold secrets captive between its walls. The decadence of this mysterious and isolated desert home is mirrored in the character of Almodham, to whom Medford is obviously sexually attracted:

The young American had met Henry Almodham at Luxor the previous

winter; had dined with him at old Colonel Swordsley's, on that perfumed

starlit terrace above the Nile; and, having somehow awakened the

archaeologist's interest, had been invited to look him up in the desert the

following year. They had spent only that one evening together, with old

Swordsley blinking at them under memory-laden lids, and two or three

charming women from the Winter Palace chattering and exclaiming; but

the two men had ridden back to Luxor together in the moonlight, and

during that ride Medford fancied he had puzzled out the essential lines of

Henry Almodham's character. (Wharton 2:518)

Medford observes of his new friend, "above all, in Almodham's hesitating movements

and the dreaming look of his long well-featured brown face with its shock of gray hair,

Medford detected an inertia, mental and moral, which life in this castle of romance

must have fostered and excused" (Wharton 2:518). This "moral inertia" could refer, in

part, to the thoughtless treatment of his servant. As Benjamin Fisher points out,

"Almodham has imbibed the isolation of his surroundings to a degree that he has

become indifferent to the human needs and desires of those around him. Thus Gosling

has been kept a virtual prisoner in this remote fortress" (32).

Candace Waid surmises that the story actually reflects Wharton's "anxieties

about the stagnation she associated with the place of women;" as Almodham's servant,

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Gosling thus represents a man who "cannot escape his feminine role" (184). Wharton

compares the homoerotic relationship among her characters to conventional nineteenth-

century male-female relationships: "Her depictions of homosexual relations quite

clearly correspond to the unequal power relations that exist between men and

women—one member aggressive and controlling, the other passive and vulnerable"

(Singley 278). Gosling's classically feminine characteristics include his unwavering

subservience to his master, his emotional fragility, and his inability to stand up for his

rights. Of course, he overcomes this inability to insist upon fair treatment, but only as a

result of a hysterical outburst of emotion. Singley adds, "Almodham shows no

benevolence for loyal service. During the twelve years that he has had the devotion of

his manservant, he has refused to grant the man a single vacation, once more

postponing the vacation when he learns that Medford will visit." (280) Such a selfish

mistake ultimately costs Almodham his life, but this remains unknown to Medford

until the end of the tale, when he makes a ghastly discovery.

Until that revelation is made clear, Medford leads the reader through various

hypotheses with regard to Almodham's disappearance. Initially he believes that

Almodham really is out of town, but his suspicions are raised after weeks of absence

without a sign of or message from his host. "Through the spell of inertia laid on him by

the drowsy place and its easeful comforts his instinct of alertness was struggling back"

(Wharton 2:519). Later, Medford begins to doubt the servant's excuses for his master's

absence and wonders about the man' s odd behavior. Gosling begins to appear more

sinister; on one occasion, Medford is startled awake by the feeling of a presence

looming above him in the bedroom: "He was awake in an instant, caught up his electric

hand lamp and flashed it into two astonished eyes. Gosling stood above the bed.

Gosling spoke in low controlled tones. His extreme self-possession gave Medford a

sense of danger" (Wharton 2:522-523). Upon hearing that Medford has conspired with

an Arab servant to search for Almodham, Gosling threatens to lock Medford inside his

room, insisting that the Arab will kill him: "'You don't suppose you'd ever 'ave come

back alive from that ride, do you?'" (Wharton 2:523). Medford can thus likewise be

read as a feminine character, representing Gothic fiction's conventional "young,

feminine innocent" affected by "threatening or enigmatic male forces" (Singley 271)

The tale becomes part psychological study and part crime drama as more clues

are uncovered, and Medford becomes more energized as the plot unfolds. He is no

longer a victim of the "inertia" of the secluded region. "The very impenetrableness of

the mystery stimulated him. He would stay, and he would find the truth" (Wharton

2:525). Strangely, though, after Medford begins to think his host might be hiding

somewhere on the premises, avoiding his guest, he felt "for the first time, a sharp sense

of isolation. He felt himself shut out, unwanted—the place, now that he imagined

someone might be living in it unknown to him, became lonely, inhospitable,

dangerous" (Wharton 2:528). Finally, Medford confronts Gosling with his theory that

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his host is in fact not out of town: "'Come! Own up that he's here and have done with it! Don't be a fool! It's not your fault if I guessed that Mr. Almodham walks here at night'" (Wharton 2:530).

At this point, Gosling can no longer control his psychosis. Believing that Medford has witnessed the ghost of his murdered master, he panics. He has hidden his murderous fit of rage for long enough, and in tears he admits his crime. His motivation becomes clear when he explains why he spared Medford's life: "'[I]t was what you said about Wembley. So help me, sir, I felt you meant it, and it 'eld me back'" (Wharton 2:530). Gosling allows Medford to live in the hopes that he will finally receive vacation time and will therefore be allowed to visit London, as Almodham had once promised. "Originally intending to pitch Medford into the well, an act that would unite Medford with Almodham in morbid finality, Gosling instead decides to save him because he has offered kindness and help" (Singley 286). Gosling is further convinced that his crime would have gone unnoticed had it not been for the lack of Perrier: "'I don't believe it'd ever 'ave crossed your mind, if only you'd 'ave had your Perrier regular, now would it? But you say 'e walks—and I knew he would! Only—what was I to do with him, with your turning up like that the very day?'" (Wharton 2:531).

In a tale reminiscent of Poe, Wharton's psychotic killer is thus driven to the point of complete paranoia and madness, prematurely revealing his secret. While Gosling is

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convinced that Medford already knew his horrifying secret, in actuality he is utterly

struck dumb by the confession:

> Medford, at his last words, had unvoluntarily shrunk back a few feet. The
>
> two men stood in the middle of the court and stared at each other without
>
> speaking. The moon, swinging high above the battlements, sent a
>
> searching spear of light down into the guilty darkness of the well.
>
> (Wharton 2:531)

In another Poesque supernatural story, "The Eyes" (1910), Wharton again

skillfully maneuvers psychological fiction, turning the focus of her attention mainly

toward male characters. The tale revolves around "Andrew Culwin's reminiscence of

his two acts of seemingly spontaneous generosity—the proposal of marriage to his

cousin Alice Nowell, his pretense of admiration for the literary talent of young Noyes—

and of the two ugly red sneering eyes which appeared after both incidents to glare at

him derisively" (Lewis 22). The eyes haunting Culwin first appear as he lay in bed the

night of his guilt-induced proposal to the cousin with whom he had a brief affair,

"bowed under the weight of the first good action he had ever consciously committed"

(Wharton 2:120). Culwin relays the initial sighting to his captive audience:

> My room had grown cold, and intensely still. I was waked by the queer
>
> feeling we all know—the feeling that there was something in the room
>
> that hadn't been there when I fell asleep. I sat up and strained my eyes

into the darkness. The room was pitch black, and at first I saw nothing;

but gradually a vague glimmer at the foot of the bed turned into two eyes

staring back at me. I couldn't distinguish the features attached to them,

but as I looked the eyes grew more and more distinct: they gave out a

light of their own. (Wharton 2:120)

In order to avoid the gaze of these haunting eyes, Culwin abandons his cousin and his

promise to marry her. Only upon the hasty retreat from this seemingly moral,

conscience-driven decision do the eyes cease to watch him.

Abroad, Culwin is free of their horrible gaze until he commits a second act of

remorse for his treatment of Alice Nowell. In response to Alice's written request, he

takes her cousin, Gilbert Noyes, under his wing in Rome. Culwin explains, "I was

touched by her having sent him to me. I had always wanted to do her some service, to

justify myself in my own eyes rather than hers; and here was a beautiful occasion"

(Wharton 2:123). Culwin obviously finds Alice's cousin to be a good source of youth

and energy, and his initial description of the young man takes into account an overt and

almost lecherous sexual attraction: "[O]ne morning, a charming youth came to me. As

he stood there in the warm light, slender and smooth and hyacinthine, he might have

stepped from a ruined alter—one to Antinous, say; but he'd come instead from New

York, with a letter from (of all people) Alice Nowell" (Wharton 2:123). Culwin later

adds of Noyes, "those months were delightful. Noyes was constantly with me, and the

more I saw of him the better I liked him. His stupidity was a natural grace—it was as beautiful, really, as his eyelashes. And he was so gay, so affectionate, so happy with me" (Wharton 2:124).

Culwin's narration adds to critics's assertions that he is not only sexually attracted to Noyes and his youthfulness, but that he also seems to feed, vampire-like, off of the admiration of his weaker and younger male disciple. Culwin appears to draw energy from the youth around him: "It was indeed a fact that Culwin, for all his dryness, specially tasted the lyric qualities in youth" (Wharton 2:116). Fisher observes, "[t]his man seems to 'collect' persons whose identities he perverts, or attempts to pervert, in satisfying his own oddly aesthetic mode of living. {…} Wharton makes the frightening eyes symbols (eyes are windows of the soul) of Culwin's hidden impulse" (21). Culwin appears to wish to keep Noyes permanently, like some sort of energetic and life-affirming pet:

> I said to myself: "I shall have him for life"—and I'd never yet seen anyone, man or woman, whom I was quite sure of wanting on those terms. Well, this impulse of egotism decided me. I was ashamed of it, and to get away from it I took a leap that landed me straight in Gilbert's arms. He hugged me, and I laughed and shook in his clutch. (Wharton 2:125)

As soon as Culwin makes the decision to keep Noyes with him for his own selfish (and presumably sexual) reasons, rather than revealing the truth that the young man has no talent, he is again visited by the eyes: "After I got into bed I lay for a long time smiling at the memory of his eyes—his blissful eyes… Then I fell asleep, and when I woke the room was deathly cold, and I sat up with a jerk—and there were *the other eyes*. . . ." (Wharton 2:126). While Culwin considers deserting Gilbert as he had Alice in order to banish the spectral eyes, his desire to control Gilbert and feed his ego proves too great: "I began to wonder if they would let up on me if I abandoned Gilbert. The temptation was insidious, and I had to stiffen myself against it; but really, dear boy! he was too charming to be sacrificed to such demons" (Wharton 2:127). Gilbert's talents prove vastly lacking, but as Lewis notes, "Culwin's fear of wounding him by making plain his literary ineptness is confused by some vague sense of remorse over abandoning Alice three years before" (22). Because of this seemingly kind refusal to reveal the painful truth to Noyes, the optical apparition returns. Culwin says of the eyes, "they reminded me of vampires with a taste for young flesh, they seemed so to gloat over the taste of a good conscience. Every night for a month they came to claim their morsel of mine: since I'd made Gilbert happy they simply wouldn't loosen their fangs" (Wharton 2:126). Culwin is free from the spectral visitation only after he concedes that the young man is incapable of creating decent literature by laughing heartlessly in response to Gilbert's question on the subject.

The source of the eyes is ambiguous. While they perhaps result from just a hallucination or dream, the most likely cause for the eyes appears to be reminiscent of a Poesque character struggle between desire and conscience. The tale can be compared with Poe's "William Wilson," in which the pleasure-loving central character is haunted by his overtly moral subconscious. According to Lewis, however, in "The Eyes," the source quite possibly is Andrew Culwin's ego:

> It is not only that the eyes represent Culwin's real self that lies hidden behind his "cold and drafty" intelligence, his utter detachment, his occasional moral contentment. It is also that, on the two occasions of generosity, his good conscience—his "glow of self-righteousness"—*is* the glare of the eyes. For a character like Culwin's, the generous gesture is a necessary concession to the ego; it is a feeding of the ego on the tenderness of flesh and spirit; and a part of him knows it. Edith Wharton was alert to the sinister impulses that can sometimes take the form of moral self-satisfaction. (22)

Thus Lewis contends that Culwin's seemingly moral actions are in fact prompted not by his guilty conscience but rather by a selfish compulsion to feed his ego. The eyes, therefore, are a psychological embodiment of his selfish desire to be appreciated and admired, and only when he deserts these missions of "goodwill" do they cease to chase him. Culwin says of the eyes, "I never saw them after my last talk with Gilbert. Put

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two and two together if you can. For my part, I haven't found the link" (Wharton

2:129).

Much like Poe's William Wilson, Andrew Culwin cannot perceive the origin of

the force pursuing him until the end of the tale, at which point the truth is revealed:

the eyes are a manifestation of his own troubled psyche and subconscious motives.

They are his greedy eyes, and they feed off of the dependence of others. Before Culwin

can realize this psychic connection, his most recent young devotee, who has been

listening intently to the tale, sees the eyes and understands Culwin's intentions.

"Frenham sits transfixed with horror. In the face of his mentor, the very shaper of his

own life and personality, Frenham has seen what Culwin remembered seeing: eyes that

reminded him 'of vampires with a taste for young flesh'" (Lewis 22). Puzzled, Culwin

responds: "'Cheer up, my dear Phil! It's been years since I've seen them—apparently

I've done nothing lately bad enough to call them out of chaos. Unless my present

evocation of them has made *you* see them; which would be their worst stroke yet!'"

(Wharton 2:130).

Only through the reaction of Phil Frenham, his newest victim, does Culwin

finally see himself behind the terrifying eyes: "He paused, his face level with the

mirror, as if scarcely recognizing the countenance in it as his own. But as he looked his

expression gradually changed, and for an appreciable space of time he and the image in

the glass confronted each other with a glare of slowly gathering hate" (Wharton 2:130).

McDowell adds:

> A master of self-deception, Culwin cannot see, until the final moment in
> the story, that the eyes are a symbol of his own hidden weakness. Irony
> derives from his assurance, before he relates his experience to his
> disciples, that he is done now and forever with the apparition, whereas he
> himself becomes the apparition. (83)

Culwin's "ghost story" is, in essence, a confession through which he divulges his psychological perversions to his listeners, finally exposing his true motivations and desires, and in doing so warns the next potential victim of his egocentricity. It is interesting to note that the setting for this divulgence is Culwin's library, which Erlich refers to as "that central scene of Wharton's consciousness" (104). As Fisher observes, "egotist that he is, Culwin could not do other than tell his own story, although he reveals what he perhaps did not intend, the genuine nature of his own bad, overwhelming self" (22). Thus the eyes appear again, this time in response to Culwin's sexual attraction toward and desire to possess Phil Frenham, as he once also desired Alice Nowell and Gilbert Noyes.

Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" (1839) is another confessionary tale in which the protagonist is tyrannized by his own psychological weaknesses, which seem to manifest in a human rival eerily identical to himself. The narrator gives himself the

pseudonym of William Wilson because he is too ashamed of his failure to meet society's standards of gentile masculinity to reveal his true identity: "The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation. This has been already too much an object for the scorn – for the horror – for the detestation of my race. {...} Oh, outcast of all outcasts most abandoned!" (Poe 626). Wilson further states:

> I would not, if I could, here or to-day, embody a record of my later years of unspeakable misery, and unpardonable crime. This epoch – these later years – took unto themselves a sudden elevation in turpitude, whose origin alone it is my present purpose to assign. Men usually grow base by degrees. From me, in an instant, all virtue dropped bodily as a mantle. (Poe 626)

This pleasure-loving central character, the antithesis of the nineteenth-century ideal, eventually becomes haunted by his overtly moral subconscious, which manifests itself in a human rival eerily identical to himself.

The initiation of Wilson's psychosis, his first encounter with this mirror image of himself, occurs in his earlier days at school. He seems to become lost in the dark recesses and roaming corridors of the school, a "large, rambling, Elizabethan house, in a misty looking village of England" (Poe 627). Trapped within this Gothic architecture, Wilson becomes increasingly interiorized. The claustrophobic rooms and winding passageways force him deeper into himself. He becomes a captive of both the old

house and his mind: "The house, I have said, was old and irregular. The grounds were extensive, and a high and solid brick wall, topped with a bed of mortar and broken glass, encompassed the whole. This prison-like rampart formed the limit of our domain; beyond it we saw but thrice a week" (Poe 627). Robert Coskren notes that "as it is described, this particular school is at once a palace of the infinite imagination and a concrete material prison" (156). He adds that "the central symbol of the contradictory will throughout is the wall, as it naturally suggests both restriction and defense," a duality mirrored in the fragmented psyche of William Wilson (Coskren 155).

Amid this atmosphere of isolation and alienation, Wilson is forced to confront his inner self embodied in the form of a mysterious stranger (hereupon designated as Wilson 2). While the two become "the most inseparable of companions," their relationship is not particularly friendly but consists instead of feelings of "some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy curiosity" (Poe 630-631). While his Gothic double is identical in appearance and manner to William Wilson, there is one elemental difference between the two. Wilson's "rival had a weakness in the faucial or guttural organs, which precluded him from raising his voice at any time *above a very low whisper*" (Poe 631). This husky-voiced twin speaks in a whisper because he represents Wilson's conscience and is therefore a source of irritation. The advisory whispers given by Wilson 2 are

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evocative of a "voice of reason," a moral aspect of himself that Wilson is intent on denying:

> [H]is moral sense, at least, if not his general talents and worldly wisdom, was far keener than my own; and that I might, to-day, have been a better, and thus a happier man, had I less frequently rejected the counsels embodied in those meaning whispers which I then but too cordially hated and too bitterly despised. (Poe 632)

Wilson does not want to hear Wilson 2's voice; thus, it is muffled, and he sinks deeper into an existence motivated by impulse and desire rather than conscience.

As Wilson 2 becomes a stronger presence in Wilson's life, this symbolic deafness continues, and his hatred for the double grows. "The feeling of vexation thus engendered grew stronger with every circumstance tending to show resemblance, moral or physical, between my rival and myself" (Poe 631). Wilson tries at every turn to evade his adversary, and thus his conscience, but he cannot escape this symbolic other who follows him like a nightmarish shadow. "*I fled in vain.* My evil destiny pursued me as if in exultation, and proved, indeed, that the exercise of its mysterious dominion had as yet only begun" (Poe 639). As Wilson's hatred and paranoia build, he begins to lose control. The two Wilson's have become moral opposites of one another, Wilson driven exclusively by the id and Wilson 2 by the superego. "Excited by such appliances to vice, my constitutional temperament broke forth with redoubled ardor,

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and I spurned even the common restraints of decency in the mad infatuation of my revels" (Poe 635-636).

These vices do not go unnoticed by Wilson 2, whose inopportune arrival seems for years to thwart his every scheme. Yonjea Jung aptly observes, "at Dr. Bransby's school, Eton, Oxford, throughout Europe, and finally in Rome, the second Wilson appears at every critical moment to thwart and expose the first Wilson's increasingly evil deeds" (82). Wilson's narration reflects the growing paranoia he feels as he is pursued by the moral side of his fragmented consciousness: "Years flew, while I experienced no relief. Villain!—at Rome, with how untimely, yet with how spectral an officiousness, stepped he in between me and my ambition! At Vienna, too—at Berlin—and at Moscow!" (Poe 639).

Wilson finds the illusion of strength and comfort in the bottom of a bottle, but the solace is purely temporary. In his drunkenness, he imagines an advantage over his twin, but in reality the alcohol serves to fuel his obsessive will to defeat Wilson 2. "I had given myself up entirely to wine; and its maddening influence upon my hereditary temper rendered me more and more impatient of control" (Poe 640). The Carnival atmosphere of Rome in which he is immersed reinforces Wilson's desire for wine and its maddening, mind-altering effects. In this milieu, in a haze induced by alcohol and revelry, Wilson seems to have forgotten his stalker, but when the impulse strikes to behave lasciviously at a masquerade, he magically appears in an identical disguise,

apparently to dispense advice in the usual whisper, at which point Wilson becomes completely lost in his delusion. "'Scoundrel!' I said, in a voice husky with rage, while every syllable I uttered seemed as new fuel to my fury, 'scoundrel! impostor! accursed villain! you *shall not* dog me unto death!'" (Poe 640).

Driven by the hatred he feels for him, Wilson cannot escape the uncontrollable desire to destroy his twin, and in doing so he kills whatever morality exists in his own consciousness at that moment. Only after Wilson stabs him is Wilson 2's voice raised above a whisper, because at this point Wilson finally realizes the horrifying and inescapable truth. He has rid himself of the annoyance of the whispered rationality, but at the price of his own life:

> A large mirror, —so at first it seemed to me in my confusion—now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait. (Poe 641)

The "other" with whom Wilson identifies is therefore finally exposed as a product of his fragmented psyche, his double, yet he believes the image is a stranger intent on controlling and destroying his life. In a fit of rage, he kills this imposter, his "twin," and in doing so actually kills himself. With utter astonishment, Wilson finally succumbs to death by his own hand:

I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said: *"You have*

conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead—dead to the World,

to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this

image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself". (Poe 641)

At this point, confronted with the knowledge that he has mortally wounded himself,

Wilson's victory becomes a failure. In killing the specular other and thus himself,

Wilson has actually succeeded in procuring his ultimate alienation, both literally and

figuratively. Wilson 2 yields physically to the knife, and the two selves are

consequently reunited in death. His voice must finally be heard, because he is no

longer the conscience in competition with the will. He is both conscience and will, an id

and ego finally balanced by the superego, and can no longer hide behind his delusions.

Neither self proves entirely successful in this struggle between conscience and

will, since one Wilson cannot exist without the other. The criminal narrative itself is

proof, however, that Wilson's two selves have become one, since it appears that the

conscience spurs him to confess, while the will fights to justify the crime. In fact, "the

main tensions of 'William Wilson' center upon this conflict of wills, of the tension

between the internal and the external self, in terms of a conflict between the individual

and society" (Coskren 155). Wilson reflects on his psychic confrontation, "death

approaches; and the shadow which foreruns him has thrown a softening influence on

my spirit. I long, in passing through the dim valley, for the sympathy—I had nearly

said for the pity—of my fellow men" (Poe 626). Thus this once obsessed, paranoid

madman becomes a pitiable creature seeking absolution and commiseration from

humanity. As Coskren aptly notes, "in the mirror and echo image of Wilson, Poe

creates, symbolically, a projection of the contradictory self; and the history of William

Wilson in the plot, his necessary appearance and brutal demise, parallels the gradual

disintegration of a self-divided psyche" (155).

Poe's poem, "The Haunted Palace" (1839), similarly describes the decay of the

mind into an eventual state of madness. The opening stanza presents a pastoral scene

in which the mind is symbolized by a palace "[i]n the monarch Thought's dominion"

(Poe 5). While the imagery of the first stanza is verdant and positive, with "the greenest

of our valleys / By good angels tenanted" (Poe 1-2), it is clear that this is a description of

the palace/mind in the past rather than its present haunted/affected state. The second

stanza reiterates this point: "(This— all this— was in the olden / Time long ago,)" (Poe

11-12). "Banners yellow, glorious, golden, / On its roof did float and flow" (Poe 9-10)

just like hair atop a human head.

In the third stanza, "[t]hrough two luminous windows" (Poe 18) passersby "saw

/ Spirits moving musically, / To a lute's well-tuned law" (Poe 19-20). The "two

luminous windows" in the third stanza symbolize a pair of eyes, which at this point are

clear and focused, and through which can be seen dancing "spirits" representing

rational thought and emotion. Within the palace, or head, the mind/soul sits on a

thrown like the ruler of a kingdom: "(Porphyrogene!) / In state his glory well-befitting" (Poe 22-23). The palace imagery continues in the fourth stanza, in which the door is compared to a mouth "with pearl and ruby glowing" (Poe 25), and through white teeth and red lips "came flowing, flowing, flowing, / And sparkling evermore, / A troop of Echoes" (Poe 27-28) who repeat "[i]n voices of surpassing beauty / The wit and wisdom of their king" (Poe 31-32). This rational mind has "wit" and "wisdom" to impart, but not for long.

In the fifth stanza, the mood changes from idyllic to sinister, as "evil things, in robes of sorrow, / Assailed the monarch's high estate" (Poe 33-34). These "evil things" that begin to corrupt the mind can be read to represent depression ("robes of sorrow"), alcoholism, drug use, or any other negative element that causes a once clear mind to become muddled with despair or lunacy, perhaps reflecting Poe's own debilitating battles with depression and substance abuse. Once "assailed," the kingdom/mind is irrevocably damaged: "(Ah, let us morn! – for never morrow / Shall dawn upon him desolate!) (Poe 35-36). The previously robust mind "[t]hat blushed and bloomed, / Is but a dim-remembered story / Of the old time entombed" (Poe 38-40). The clarity that once prevailed is "entombed" and thus inaccessible, existing only as a distant memory, just as substance abuse, depression, or mental illness might take over one's mind/soul to the point that the sufferer can barely remember better days, if at all.

The sixth stanza describes the corrupted mind/palace as it exists in the present time, with "red-litten windows" through which can be seen "[v]ast forms, that move fantastically / To a discordant melody" (Poe 42-44). The eyes are now bloodshot and irritated, and irrational thoughts race to "a discordant melody." The deterioration continues, as "like a ghastly rapid river, / Through the pale door / A hideous throng rush out forever" (Poe 45-47). The once red, healthy lips are now pale, and the "sparkling," "flowing," Echoes are corrupted into a "hideous," continually rushing "throng" that can "laugh—but smile no more" (Poe 47-48). Thus Poe's final image is one of hysteria and lunacy in which empty laughter holds no joy. The poem is a reflection of the mind in crisis and is therefore particularly evocative of the mental imprisonment and fragmentation which are central to the Gothic genre.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN HER GILDED CAGE: EXPECTATIONS OF FEMININITY AND FRUSTRATED

IDENTITY IN THE FEMALE GOTHIC

In their seminal study entitled *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), feminist critics Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar often refer to the "Female Gothic," a term first coined by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1976), as the uniquely feminine version of Gothic literature which so often reflects "the anxiety-inducing connections between what women writers tend to see as their parallel confinements in texts, houses, and maternal female bodies" (89). Anxieties and frustrations commonly felt among American women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as those resulting from stifling social conventions of marriage and domesticity and a consequential lack of personal fulfillment, are often reflected in the literature of the female Gothic. Latent sexual desires resulting from unsatisfying marital relationships are often evident in its psychologically imprisoned characters.

Edith Wharton, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Emily Dickinson often use their texts and characters as a vehicle through which, consciously or unconsciously, they struggle to mitigate the contrary forces driving them, those of the artist and the socially acceptable woman. Gilbert and Gubar identify "the real significance of the gothic genre, especially for women: its usefulness in providing metaphors for those turbulent psychological states into which the divided selves of the nineteenth century so often fell" (624-625). As they further explain, "female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them" (Gilbert & Gubar 78). The female Gothic thereby aptly exposes anxieties concerning this active/passive opposition and the subsequent repression of the female voice, and thus female power, by patriarchal forces. In doing so, this type of Gothicism provides women writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with an outlet through which they can exert power heretofore denied them.

Gothic fiction produced by nineteenth and early twentieth-century American women writers thus provides a singular focus on gender-specific issues ignored by the fiction of their male literary counterparts. As Barbara Patrick observes, "just as James Fenimore Cooper, Brown, and Irving purported to create a distinctly *American* Gothic mode, American women created a distinctly *feminine* Gothic mode, in which Gothic vehicles could express women's concerns" (73). These decidedly feminine issues include but are not limited to conventional attitudes toward marriage and domesticity.

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Therefore the overt sexuality and eroticism used by Wharton and some of her

contemporaries in addressing these issues runs directly counter to nineteenth and early

twentieth-century conventional society's notions of respectability and femininity.

Nonetheless, as Kathy A. Fedorko explains, "encouraged to 'hold her tongue' in her

childhood and youth, the adult Wharton undertakes, in her Gothic fiction, the 'perilous'

task of recording the terrors of powerlessness, isolation, silence, and suppressed

sexuality that haunt and may even destroy women" (103). Thus, through her fiction,

"Wharton not only tells the 'unutterable' story of women's lives, but also asserts her

right to speak and be heard" (Fedorko 102).

Fedorko asserts that Wharton's first published ghost story, "The Lady's Maid's

Bell" (1902), illustrates the author's own discordant marital history:

> [The tale's] Gothic qualities reflect not only Wharton's perspectives of
>
> social realities but her personal horrors. Only a few years before, in 1902,
>
> she had suffered a nervous breakdown, one of several during her socially
>
> correct but physically and emotionally miserable marriage to Teddy
>
> Wharton. For while maintaining an active social and artistic life during
>
> these years, she was at the same time experiencing the Gothic firsthand,
>
> the dark, fearful, otherworld of isolation and despair, the dreadfulness of
>
> suppressed sexuality, the entrapment of marriage. (83-84)

The same entrapment and extreme discontent is mirrored in the marriage of Mrs. Brympton, whom the narrator, Hartley, serves in "The Lady's Maid's Bell." Hartley's prospective mistress and the house entombing her are described as follows: "'[I]t's not a cheerful place I'm sending you to. The house is big and gloomy; my niece is nervous, vaporish; her husband—well, he's generally away; and the two children are dead. She wants a maid that can be something of a companion. It's a lonely life'" (Wharton 1: 457-458). It is not only a lonely life for Mrs. Brympton, but it is also a dangerous life. On the few occasions when Mr. Brympton is present, he is described as an absolute tyrant, and the entire staff feels the unpleasant, oppressive effects of his visits. Likewise, they share a collective sigh of relief upon his departure: "Mr. Brympton took himself off the next morning, and the whole house drew a long breath when he drove away" (Wharton 1:462).

Only in her husband's absence does Mrs. Brympton regain a semblance of her long-past youth and happiness, and this regeneration is largely the result of her relationship with Mr. Ranford:

> As for my mistress, she put on her hat and furs (for it was a fine winter morning) and went out for a walk in the gardens, coming back quite fresh and rosy, so that for a minute, before her color faded, I could guess what a pretty young lady she must have been, and not so long ago, either. She had met Mr. Ranford in the grounds, and the two came back together, I

remember, smiling and talking as they walked along the terrace under my

window. (Wharton 1:462)

In his "Introduction" to *The Collected Short Stories of Edith Wharton,* R. W. B. Lewis likens

this situation to Wharton's marriage:

> The chief cluster of stories bearing upon marriage, divorce and adultery
>
> were written during the years (up to 1913) when her personal problems in
>
> those regards were most pressing: when, among other things, her own
>
> marriage was becoming unbearable to her, when her husband Edward
>
> Robbins ("Teddy") Wharton was succumbing to mental illness and given
>
> ever more frequently to bouts of disjointed irascibility, and when her
>
> relation to Walter Berry (the international lawyer who was her mentor
>
> and romantic idol) arrived at one peak of intensity. (x)

Thus Wharton finds solace from her situation in the company of another man, just as

Mrs. Brympton discovers a more suitable match in Mr. Ranford, yet both women are

trapped within the confines of marriage.

The relief found in the mental and physical connection with an understanding

and equal male counterpart is temporary. There is also relief to be found in

companionship with other women. This aspect of feminine Gothicism can be observed

in the relationships between Mrs. Brympton and Emma Saxon before and after Emma's

death and between Hartley and Mrs. Brympton. Fedorko comments of "The Lady's

Maid's Bell," "[t]his ghost story portrays not only women's constraint but also the

nascent companionship among them, hampered by a reticence that prevents them from

truly helping one another" (90). Emma Saxon's ghost and Hartley cannot save Mrs.

Brympton from the arrival of Mr. Brympton and her subsequent death, but they both

exhibit a strong desire to protect their kind and weak mistress, who is more like

themselves than they perhaps realize. While their situations obviously differ, all three

women nonetheless suffer the frustration of being effectively rendered helpless. Mrs.

Brympton is an invalid, trapped in her home and marriage. Hartley is also rather weak,

having recently been ill, and she is hampered by a lack of a complete knowledge of the

secrets hidden in the walls of the house. Emma Saxon's ghost cannot reveal the secrets

she had been privy to in life. "Emma has a story to tell. That she does not tell her story,

but instead stares helplessly, leaves an emptiness where a resource should be. Her

disembodiment and muteness make her the ideal symbol for the untold female story"

(Fedorko 91).

In revealing the captivity women locked inside unfulfilling marriages often felt,

Gothic tales written by nineteenth-century women often use the home to symbolize a

claustrophobic prison. Barbara Patrick notes, "far from being a safe haven, the home is

a place of stultification, exhaustion, treachery, and terror. In ghost stories, women

Gothicists portrayed a range of horrors attendant upon women's confinement to

domestic pursuits" (75). Gilbert and Gubar add, "enclosed in parlors and encased in

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texts, imprisoned in kitchens and enshrined in stanzas, women artists naturally found themselves describing dark interiors and confusing their sense that they were house-bound with their rebellion against being duty bound" (84). This negative association between marriage and the home is readily apparent in Hartley's description of Brympton in "The Lady's Maid's Bell":

> It was a dull October day, with rain hanging close overhead, and by the time we turned in to Brympton Place woods the daylight was almost gone. The drive wound through the woods for a mile or two, and came out on a gravel court shut in with thickets of tall black-looking shrubs. There were no lights in the windows, and the house *did* look a bit gloomy. (Wharton 1:458)

In addition to the symbolism apparent in the structural descriptions of such Gothic homes, the weather and natural surroundings further exemplify the psychological and physical seclusion of their inhabitants. Benjamin Fisher notes of the wintry, barren landscape, "death, in terms of actual dying or else blighted hopes, can have nothing less than full sway among these peoples. Snowscapes like this one, in which emotional isolation is enhanced by the natural surroundings, contribute important symbolism to many of Wharton's other ghostly tales" (21).

An isolating landscape is likewise symbolically important in Wharton's "Miss Mary Pask" (1925). As Fisher notes of the story's Gothic setting, "the late hour, the

darkness and the nearby ocean's eerie roar, the superstitions of the old French maid (who refuses to remain in Mary's house after dark), and the near-erotic aura of the meeting: All mingle in constituting an excellent supernaturalism" (24). The tale's unnamed male narrator likewise comments of his surroundings, "as suddenly as a pair of hands clapped over one's eyes, the sea fog shut down on us. A minute before we had been driving over a wide bare upland, our backs turned to a sunset that crimsoned the road ahead; now the densest night enveloped us" (Wharton 2:374). The narrator's apprehension grows steadily in response to both Mary Pask's environment and her supposed ghost. Jennice G. Thomas notes the growing anxiety which blinds him from seeing Pask as the sad, benign old woman she really is:

> The narrator's dread of being fed to the hungry waves is soon translated into his fear of becoming consumed in Mary Pask's schemes to seduce him. For, although she should be in her grave, she seems to be beckoning him into a ghastly embrace. Indeed, as gusts of wind whip the night fog into a storm, so her power to enthrall him increases. (112)

Like the invalid matriarch in "The Lady's Maid's Bell," the mistress of the house in "Miss Mary Pask" is thus detached from society, having found seclusion in a home made more remote by the landscape and weather. The difference between the two tales is that while Mrs. Brympton is held captive in her marriage, Mary Pask essentially imprisons herself in order to avoid a similar fate. Note, however, that Pask chooses a

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symbolic death only after losing her sister to the institution of marriage. Thus in a sense

she remains another example of a woman imprisoned as a result of marriage.

Nonetheless, by pretending to be dead and separating herself from society on her own

terms, Pask becomes a uniquely powerful female presence. In her self-induced pseudo-

death, or death-in-life, she is afforded a certain erotic, vampiric power, which in the end

serves only further to segregate her from society. As Thomas observes of her choice, in

exchange she is forced to "pay the price exacted of women who push their way out of

patriarchal definitions. She is given the power to frighten the arrogant male narrator

literally out of his senses. But her reward is loneliness because she is denied the

benefits of sisterhood" (108).

The narrator of "Miss Mary Pask" is convinced that the "dead" Mary desires him

sexually, and he imagines that she is flirting with him: "Come in, come in," she fluted,

cocking her white untidy head on one side and rolling her bulging blue eyes at me. The

horrible thing was that she still practiced the same arts, all the childish wiles of a

clumsy capering coquetry" (Wharton 2:378). He further notes, "'I wonder if she isn't

better off than when she was alive?' Perhaps she was—but I was sure *I* wasn't, in her

company. And her way of sliding nearer to the door made me distinctly want to reach

it before she did" (Wharton 2:380). In actuality, Mary Pask is not a sinister spirit luring

him to her out of a desperate need for a final lusty physical connection; rather, she is

simply an old lonely woman seeking human companionship. Unmarried, aging, and

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alone, she longs for conversation and companionship with members of the opposite sex

as well as her own, but her decision to pretend she is dead precludes her from such

interaction: "'I've had so few visitors since my death, you see'" (Wharton 2:379). She is

later brought to tears at the suggestion that the narrator's visit would soon be ending:

> "Going—going away? Altogether?" Her eyes were still fixed on me, and I
>
> saw two tears gather in their corners and run down over the red glistening
>
> circles on her cheeks. "Oh, but you mustn't," she said gently. "I'm too
>
> lonely…Lonely, lonely! If you *knew* how lonely! It was a lie when I told
>
> you I wasn't! And now you come, and your face looks friendly…and you
>
> say you're going to leave me! No—no—no—you shan't! Or else, why did
>
> you come? It's cruel…I used to think I knew what loneliness was…after
>
> Grace married, you know. Grace thought she was always thinking of me,
>
> but she wasn't. She called me 'darling,' but she was thinking of her
>
> husband and children. I said to myself then: 'You couldn't be lonelier if
>
> you were dead.'" (Wharton 2:380-381)

While Pask's decision to separate from society results partly from her sister's

marriage, it was more than likely also based on artistic pursuits. "Wharton is clearly

aware that women were often forced to choose between marriage and an artistic career,

and that loneliness and contempt were the price patriarchy expected women to pay for

their devotion to art or literature" (Thomas 115). Thus the narrator patronizingly

disregards any artistic endeavors on the part of Mary Pask, preferring to consider her a

rejected creature forced by lack of male companionship to be forever alone and

deserving of pity:

> I never quite understood why Mary Pask refused to join Grace in America.
>
> Grace said it was because she was "too artistic"—but, knowing the elder
>
> Miss Pask, and the extremely elementary nature of her interest in art, I
>
> wondered whether it were not rather because she disliked Horace
>
> Bridgeworth. There was a third alternative—more conceivable if one
>
> knew Horace—and that was that she may have liked him too much. But
>
> that again became untenable (at least I supposed it did) when one knew
>
> Miss Pask: Miss Pask with her round flushed face, her innocent bulging
>
> eyes, her old-maidish flat decorated with art-tidies, and her vague and
>
> timid philanthropy. Aspire to Horace! (Wharton 2:374)

The narrator's complete dismissal of Mary Pasks's human and societal value

exemplifies the common belief that a woman's worth relates solely to her marital and

domestic role:

> Well, it was all rather puzzling, or would have been if it had been
>
> interesting enough to be worth puzzling over. But it was not. Mary Pask
>
> was like hundreds of other dowdy old maids, cheerful derelicts content
>
> with their innumerable little substitutes for living. Even Grace would not

have interested me particularly if she hadn't happened to marry one of my

oldest friends, and to be kind to his friends. (Wharton 2:374)

As Thomas posits, however, "clearly, Wharton expects us to see through his

pretensions. Even the fact that Wharton leaves him nameless while giving Mary a name

with so many powerful associations helps us to see through his empty vanity to a

reality that either escapes or threatens him" (115).

Isolated in her remote home, Mary Pask naturally does not want the narrator to

leave her, but instead of responding to her with compassion, he perverts her loneliness

into a vampiristic desire to feed off of him. Thomas contends:

> Mary's appeal for companionship is interpreted by the narrator as an
>
> appeal for masculine protection and a ploy for sexual entrapment. Ghost
>
> or not, in his mind Mary is a spinster still eager to catch an eligible
>
> bachelor in the bonds of matrimony. He cannot quite tell whether she
>
> wants to drag him into her bed or into her grave, and he is not amused to
>
> reflect that there may no longer be any real difference between the two.
>
> (113-114)

The narrator's panic grows and reaches a feverish pitch after Mary pleads with

him to stay:

> "There's been no loneliness like this last year's . . . none! And sometimes I
>
> sit here and think: 'If a man came along someday and took a fancy to

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you?'" She gave another wavering cackle. "Well, such things *have*

happened, you know, even after youth's gone . . . a man who'd had his

troubles too. But no one came till tonight . . . and now you say you're

going!" Suddenly she flung herself toward me. "Oh, stay with me . . . just

tonight . . . . It's so sweet and quiet here . . . . No one need know . . . no one

will ever come and trouble us." (Wharton 2:381)

Thomas observes: "Mary's pleas that he remain for the night to relieve her loneliness

with news about her sister strike him as both threatening and pathetic. Although

Mary's loneliness is clearly caused by the desertion of her sister, the narrator feels

himself to be the object of Mary's desires" (113). Ultimately, this fear of impending

seduction proves overwhelming, and the narrator runs out of the ghostly house and

away from the spectral presence of Mary Pask, leaving her alone once again: "I heard a

whimper from the blackness behind me; but I scrambled on to the hall door, dragged it

open and bolted out into the night. I slammed the door on that pitiful low whimper,

and the fog and wind enveloped me in healing arms" (Wharton 2:381). Thus the fog

which initially causes the narrator's anxiety to increase now provides a comforting

separation between himself and Pask; the supposed threat is escaped, order is restored,

and Mary Pask continues to play the part of the ghost, choosing a living death over a

conventional life in nineteenth-century society.

Mary Pask represents a skewed version of the conventional nineteenth-century

spinster. While she is miserably alone, she is nonetheless a powerful figure. Wharton's

role reversal allows her to control the narrator, and "he quickly succumbs to her power

to terrorize him into a state of utter passivity. Reversing the stereotype that gives

hysteria its female name, Wharton portrays the narrator as a hysterical bachelor, whose

intermittent artistic pursuits are punctuated by frequent visits to various European

sanatoriums for rest cures" (Thomas 111). Lori Jirousek further comments on this

notion of male hysteria, stating that Wharton and other female Gothicists "utilized the

veiled social criticism of supernatural fiction to illuminate the conflicting definitions of

masculinity troubling men at the turn of the century. Within these stories, they

employed the hysterical man, and individual in crisis, as the vehicle for their critique of

American manhood" (52).

Wharton's narrator clearly exhibits symptoms of hysteria prior to his arrival at

Pask's home: "I lingered on abroad for several months—not for pleasure, God knows,

but because of a nervous collapse supposed to be the result of having taken up my work

again too soon after my touch of fever in Egypt" (Wharton 2:373). The narrator is thus

already emotionally, physically, and psychologically compromised before he meets

Pask and continues to deteriorate throughout the tale: "As if he is caught up in a

strange dream, the narrator is removed from the everyday world of reality, quite

literally by means of the dense fog that enshrouds the central occurrences, and moved

into a nightmare" (Fisher 23). The ghostly encounter terrifies and unsettles the narrator, and he is once again thrust into a hysteric illness: "I could not have spoken of the affair before, to [Mrs. Bridgeworth] or to anyone else; not till I had been rest-cured and built up again at one of those wonderful Swiss sanatoria where they clean the cobwebs out of you" (Wharton 2:373). Fedorko adds:

> He can't assimilate this mysterious experience. He needs to have it "rest-cured" away and buried. He cares too much about not appearing "queer," as he puts it. Worse, when he learns that the intense emotional encounter has been real, not supernatural, he dismisses it and Mary Pask with cold finality. Real emotion he can't or won't cope with. He represents, then, Wharton's biting indictment of "normal society," with its good intentions and lack of emotional courage. (211)

While women consider marriage a prison, they routinely choose to be incarcerated in order to meet the expectations of this "normal society," perhaps finding merit in the routine of domesticity. If nothing else, marriage affords women an identity, the only alternative being the spinster figure represented in "Miss Mary Pask." While these marriages afford a sense of comfort to women, they all too often lack passion and true emotional connection. Wharton expounds this common lack of physical fulfillment in marriage in "The Fullness of Life" (1893), another piece which is most likely reflective of her personal marital disappointments. Wharton again uses the home as a feminine

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symbol, representing the entrapment of women in loveless marriages. The narrator, a dead woman who is being guided by a spirit to the afterlife, compares the secret emotions and desires of women to locked rooms in a house:

> "I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows wither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes." (Wharton 1:14)

While Wharton sought solace from marital stultification in an affair with Morton Fullerton and a relationship with Walter Berry, as Mrs. Brympton of "The Lady's Maid's Bell" temporarily found solace in Mr. Ranford, the narrator of "The Fullness of Life" ultimately chooses the comfort of routine. She says of her passionless relationship: "'I was fond of him, yes, just as I was fond of my grandmother, and the house that I was born in, and my old nurse'" (Wharton 1:14). The Spirit questions the narrator's decision to choose her husband and his annoying habits over a true soul-mate in the afterlife "'But you said just now,' said the Spirit, 'that you did not love him.' 'True,' she answered, simply; 'but don't you understand that I shouldn't feel at home without him?

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Besides, no one else would know how to look after him, he is so helpless'" (Wharton

1:19-20). Whatever love she feels for her husband is largely maternal; she feels a

responsibility to care for him. Fedorko comments:

> In the Gothic stories marriage becomes nightmarish. In "The Fullness of
>
> Life" the woman's marriage is more humdrum than nightmare. The story
>
> suggests that a marriage of equals could also be quite dull, but it is
>
> impossible anyway when a woman can't feel, as the heroine puts it, "at
>
> home" outside her role as mother to a helpless husband. She thus builds
>
> her own cage. This woman is captive of her own belief that the "fulness of
>
> life" derives from marriage and the compliant female role she is used to,
>
> rather than from her own sensations and choices. The full horror of this
>
> prisoner mentality comes through in the Gothic stories. (49-51)

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman likewise addresses nineteenth and early twentieth-

century notions of respectability, particularly expectations of motherhood and the role

of the woman as mother in society and the home. As Alfred Bendixen states, the

principal "source of terror in most of her supernatural tales is the perversion of the

home, the distortion of normal family relationships" (247). Of these supernatural tales,

four share a common element in the form of a ghostly child. "A Gentle Ghost" (1889),

"The Little Maid at the Door" (1892), "The Wind in the Rose-Bush" (1902), and "The

Lost Ghost" (1903) involve a child who has been abused and neglected in some manner

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and whose life has been taken from her either literally or figuratively, rendering her a restless and shadowy wanderer among the living. As Beth Wynne Fisken observes, "Freeman returns again and again to the plight of this orphaned and mistreated child, badly in need of safe harbor and a surrogate parent" (43).

In a letter to Sarah Orne Jewett (reprinted in Brent L. Kendrick's *The Infant Sphinx: Collected Letters of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*), Freeman writes of the child in "A Gentle Ghost": "that forlorn little girl had been in my head a matter of a dozen years" (97). Critics speculate that a possible impetus for this "forlorn little girl" can be found in Freeman's own life. For Example, Fisken notes that Freeman had a strained relationship with a younger sister, Anna Holbrook Wilkins (Nan), who was favored by her parents and who died in 1876 at the age of seventeen. "The guilt that surrounds the manifestation of this ghostly little girl may derive from the natural jealousy felt by an older child whose secure status in the family was threatened by the appearance of a rival at a particularly stressful time" (Fisken 43). Fisken adds, "Any understandable jealousy that Mary felt, the natural sense of loss at having been supplanted as the favored child, might have shamed and tortured her after Nan's premature death" (44). The issues of abandonment in the "forlorn little girl" tales might also relate to the deaths of Freeman's parents, with whom she lived into adulthood:

> The details of Mary Wilkins Freeman's biography also strongly suggest
>
> that this lost and abandoned little girl was she as well as her sister—first,

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psychologically abandoned in the mind of young Mary, eclipsed by and

engaging and talented sister, and then, abandoned in earnest, as the years

1876 through 1883 saw the deaths of her sister, her mother, and her father.

(Fisken 44)

Another source for the frustrated motherhood inherent in these tales could arise

from Freeman's own anxieties concerning her childlessness and marital status at the

time of the publication of "The Gentle Ghost," at which point she "created her first

version of this ghost of a lost and neglected girl, searching for a family, who seems also

to represent the child that she never had" (Fisken 47). As both an author and a single

woman in her thirties with no prospect of marriage and children, Freeman quite

possibly struggled with guilt and anxiety over not meeting the standards of

womanhood set by nineteenth-century society. "During Mary Wilkins Freeman's time,

an unmarried woman was frequently viewed as unnatural and pitiful, and an

unmarried woman who wrote was an especially monstrous phenomenon" (Fisken 47).

Thus the figure of the "forlorn little girl," who first appears in "The Gentle Ghost" and

who is not exorcised until "The Lost Ghost," could manifest Freeman's own inner

demons.

"The Gentle Ghost" proves to be the most benign of the four "forlorn little girl"

stories, since the neglect is corrected before the child's death. While the tale proves to

be not quite a ghost story, and all supernatural occurrences are thus explained away,

the story nonetheless stands as an effective example of psychological fiction. As Mary

R. Reichardt observes, "the story is a chilling study of the close association of grief, fear,

and superstition as mother and daughter cling to each other for comfort in the days

following Jenny's burial" (69). The story centers on two female, maternal characters,

Mrs. Dunn and her daughter Flora, who are seized by grief and fear over the death of

their sixteen-year-old daughter/sister, whom they believe is haunting them. In

actuality, the cries they hear are emanating not from beyond the grave but from the

poorhouse next door, and the source of the moaning is not the deceased Jenny Dunn,

but the very much alive yet neglected Nancy Wren.

Bereft of her parents and "having read on a family tombstone in the graveyard

across the street the words 'Our Father' and 'Our Mother,' the lonely child fantasizes

that the people buried there were her family" (Fisken 45). Fisken notes that "the power

of these fantasies, fueled by loss and loneliness, is matched by the nervous and neurotic

intensity of Mrs. Dunn and her daughter, {...} [who] have convinced themselves that

Nancy's sobs are nightly manifestations of Jenny's loneliness and grief" (45-46):

> This fancy, delusion, superstition, whichever one might name it, of theirs
>
> had lasted now three months—ever since young Jenny Dunn had died.
>
> There was apparently no reason why it should not last much longer, if
>
> delusion it were; the temperaments of these two women, naturally

nervous and imaginative, overwrought now by long care and sorrow,

would perpetuate it. (Freeman 247)

Poor, orphaned, and mistreated, Nancy embodies the "forlorn little girl" figure, yet in

this instance salvation is possible and comes in the form of Mrs. Dunn, who swoops

into the almshouse and resues Nancy from her abusers. Mrs. Dunn thus prevents the

future neglect and abuse of Nancy Wren and simultaneously fulfills her own maternal

needs, replacing the child she has lost and exorcising the demons she carries with her as

a result of that profound loss.

Leah Blatt Glasser parallels aspects of Freeman's life and relationship with her

mother to the characters and circumstances in "The Gentle Ghost," observing in regard

to the tale's ending:

> The restorative twist the story takes reflects Freeman's wishful recounting
>
> of the past. {…} In this way, Freeman manages through her fiction to fill
>
> the void *her* mother experienced and her own loss as well through a newly
>
> invented child, and the burden is lifted. She revives Anna's life by
>
> creating a new child for her mother and herself. {…} Flora is no longer the
>
> sole survivor requiring excessive protection. Freeman's fiction, in this
>
> sense, takes away grief, restores and remakes a childhood dominated by
>
> the unquiet ghosts of her mother's losses. (8-9)

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The family in Freeman's imagination is obviously more successful in recovering from loss than Freeman and her mother were, and the last lines in the story reflect this unfulfilled wish to put her family's ghosts to rest:

> It was a beautiful Sunday. After they left the cemetery they strolled a little way down the road. The road lay between deep green meadows and cottage yards. It was not quite time for the roses, and the lilacs were turning gray. The buttercups in the meadows had blossomed out, but the dandelions had lost their yellow crowns, and their flimsy skulls appeared. They stood like ghosts among crowds of golden buttercups; but none of the family thought of that; their ghosts were laid in peace. (Freeman 252)

Another of Freeman's "forlorn little girl" figures appears in "The Little Maid at the Door," a Gothic tale both overtly supernatural and psychological in nature in which characters are once again driven by fear of the unknown intensified by loss and loneliness upon the death of a child. This short story "studies the escalation of fear in Joseph and Ann Bayley, a prominent Puritan couple, as they journey through the woods on horseback during the witchcraft hysteria" (Reichardt 60). The Bayleys, who have suffered the loss of a child, pass the home of the Proctor family, all of whom have been jailed for witchcraft, leaving the youngest daughter behind:

> None of the family was spared save this little Abigail, who was deemed too young and insignificant to have dealings with Satan, and was

therefore not thrown into prison, but was left alone in the desolate Proctor

house in the midst of woods said to be full of evil spirits and witches, to

die of fright or starvation as she might. There was but little mercy shown

the families of those accused of witchcraft. (Freeman 239)

Just as Mrs. Dunn and Flora, affected by stress, depression, and fear, convince

themselves that they hear the ghost of the lost child, the Bayleys are likewise moved by

fear and the superstitious climate surrounding the witch trials, and they imagine that

they see on their journey all sorts of creatures in league with the devil:

Their own fancies cast gigantic projections which eclipsed the sweet show

of the spring and almost their own personalities. That year the leaves

came out and the flowers bloomed in vain for the people in and about

Salem village. There was epidemic a disease of the mind which deafened

and blinded to all save its own pains. (Freeman 226)

Reichardt notes that Freeman "succeeds in rendering palpable the terror Salem

residents suffered during this time of great stress. Freeman, like Hawthorne in 'Young

Goodman Brown,' locates the source of evil in the individual psyche's tendency to

deceive itself under extreme duress" (61). Little Abigail Proctor is not immune to this

fear that grips the Bayleys and other members of the community; abandoned and

afraid, she too imagines that she sees devilish figures in the woods. "Ironically {...} she

has internalized the superstitions of her society, and terrified by the night sounds

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around her, she first flees into the woods and then locks herself in the house, sobbing through the night. Townspeople rob the house of all food, and she is left with nothing" (Fisken 51).

Another similarity between the "The Lost Ghost" and "The Little Maid at the Door" can be found in the psychological reactions of "forlorn little girls" Nancy Wren and Abigail Proctor. Each is abandoned by her family, whether by death or imprisonment, and each therefore creates an illusory family to protect and comfort her. Abigail fashions a doll out of a corncob to replace her beloved doll that has been thrown down the well during the arrest because of the fear that it carries some sort of dark power. "All the garments of her lost parents and sister and brother that she could find she gathered together, and formed in a circle on the keeping-room floor; then she crept inside with her corn-cob poppet, and lay there hugging it all night" (Freeman 243). Like Nancy Wren, Abigail is befriended by a benevolent and maternal figure, Ann Bayley; unfortunately for Abigail, however, this "help" proves insufficient:

> Despite her fears, Ann Bayley aids and comforts the child, then leaves,
> telling the little girl to watch in the doorway for her return. Although the
> child dies from neglect in the meantime, her ghost appears in the doorway
> when Ann rides by again several days later, thereby fulfilling her promise
> to the woman who had been kind to her. (Fisken 50)

While Ann Bayley's fears are overcome by her maternal instincts, and she does offer the "forlorn little girl" comfort and kindness, she is nonetheless partly responsible for Abigail Proctor's fate. As Reichardt observes, "the story's irony lies in the fact that the Bayleys themselves are complicit in the Proctor family's arrest and in the girl's starvation, for Joseph is a court magistrate" (62).

The appearance of Abigail's ghost serves not to frighten Ann but to ease her suffering:

> "I trow she looks better than she did. The roses are in her cheeks, and
> they have combed her yellow hair, and put a clean white gown on her.
> She holds a doll, too." "I see nobody," said Joseph Bayley, wonderingly.
> "Nay, but she stands there. I never saw aught shine like her hair and her
> white gown; the sunlight lies full in the door. See! See! She is smiling! I
> trow all her griefs be well over." (Freeman 243-244)

In a sense, "The Little Maid at the Door" is another story in which a lost child is reunited with a maternal figure. Abigail's ghost returns and comforts the distraught Ann Bayley, who herself suffered the loss of a child and is dealing with feelings of frustrated maternity. As Reichardt notes, Anne's "delusive final vision of the happy, well-fed child thus serves to mitigate both her guilt over Abigail's death and her grief over her own child's death even as she proceeds with her husband toward the next witch trial" (62).

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"The Wind in the Rose-Bush" likewise concerns the fate of a neglected and abused "forlorn little girl," but in this case the abuse is even more flagrant, because the girl's family is guilty of willful and criminal neglect. Rebecca Flint travels from Michigan to Ford Village to collect her niece, Agnes, who has been living with her stepmother, Mrs. Dent, since her father's death. Once again, benevolence comes too little and too late for the neglected child, who is denied medicine by her stepmother and consequently dies over a year before Rebecca's arrival. She excuses her delay in receiving the child into her home by explaining,

> "I wasn't so situated that I could take her when her mother died. I had my own mother to care for, and was school-teaching. Now mother has gone, and my uncle died six months ago and left me quite a little property, and I've given up my school, and I've come for Agnes. I guess she'll be glad to go with me, though, I suppose her stepmother is a good woman, and has always done for her." (Freeman 7)

Rebecca's decision to adopt her niece reflects her obviously sympathetic and maternal instincts, which are emphasized by the fact that she takes on the feminine role of caretaker for both her mother and various students under her instruction; likewise, the physical description of her matronliness alone seems to reflect her motherly inclinations and "suggests that her single life has been at odds with the needs of her nature; it is not surprising that the spirit of the neglected child is drawn to her as if to a

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surrogate mother" (Fisken 56). The fact remains, however, that Agnes is orphaned by

both natural parents several years prior to Rebecca's arrival and is therefore denied her

aunt's maternal influences. Rebecca is thus partly to blame for Agnes's neglect at the

hands of her cruel stepmother and consequently must pay the price by losing her only

opportunity to fulfill her desire to be a mother. As Glasser observes, "her niece's

shadow and the wind in the rosebush from which a rose has been plucked and placed

on her niece's nightgown become haunting reminders of the opportunity of

motherhood that has passed Rebecca by" (220).

> While her intentions are clearly good, Rebecca's delay proves fatal to her neice

and thus prevents Rebecca from assuming the role of mother: "[Her] anguish comes

when she finally comprehends that she has arrived for Agnes too late, that her last

opportunity for motherhood, one she has unaccountably delayed in grasping, has been

wrenched from her—and in the most horrifying manner" (Reichardt 70). "Freeman

suggests that to avoid motherhood is to be haunted by maternal impulses and by ghosts

of children one has never had" (Glasser 220). Glasser further posits that the

circumstances reflected in Rebecca Flint's story, among others, reflect Freeman's own

concerns relative to issues surrounding motherhood:

> > Much as Freeman may have expressed her own "unfulfilled needs"
> >
> > through the haunted consciousness of a childless woman in "The Wind in
> >
> > the Rose-Bush," she also recognized that fulfilling the maternal impulse

was an extraordinarily dangerous undertaking for women. Perhaps

having observed her own mother's selfless attention to her needs as a

child, Freeman saw motherhood as an insurmountable threat to self-

possession. (221)

These concerns are echoed in the final "forlorn little girl" tale entitled "The Lost

Ghost." This Gothic tale involves the most flagrant evidence of child abuse yet on the

part of the ghost-child's mother, who locks the girl in a room to starve and freeze while

she leaves town with her lover, thereby abandoning her roles of wife and mother. The

ghost appears before two old, childless women and their boarder, and one of the

women, Mrs. Bird, ultimately seems willingly to sacrifice her own life to fulfill the role

of mother to the abandoned child. Evidence suggests that Mrs. Bird chooses to die in

order to help the poor girl:

> "She was a good woman, and one that couldn't do things enough for
>
> other folks. It seemed as if that was what she lived on. I don't thing she
>
> was ever so scared by that poor little ghost, as much as she pitied it, and
>
> she was 'most heartbroken because she could have done for a live child. 'It
>
> seems to me sometimes as if I should die if I can't get that awful little
>
> white robe off that child and get her in some clothes and feed her and stop
>
> her looking for her mother,' I heard her say once, and she was in earnsest.

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She cried when she said it. That wasn't long before she died." (Freeman

235)

As Fisken observes, "this symbiosis between the needs of the abused and abandoned

child and those of the motherless woman is portrayed as even more dangerous, and

ultimately, destructive" (57).

This story gives further insight into Freeman's thoughts and fears concerning the

role society deemed fit and necessary for her and her female conterparts to play.

Glasser comments, "[the story] captures both the sense that Freeman was haunted by

the child she never had and the idea that by giving to a child, one loses one's capacity to

give to oneself" (222). In his "Afterward" to Freeman's *The Wind in the Rose-Bush*

Bendixen adds, "in the tale we find a strong sympathy for the deprived child combined

with the suggestion that motherhood may require self-sacrifice to the point of sacrifice

of self" (249). This self-sacrifice is mirrored in the death of Abbey Bird, a childless

widow who is moved by maternal impulses to fulfill her natural role after death, thus

uniting the motherless "forlorn little girl" with a mother. "Her cry, 'I can't find my

mother,' comes across as a demand for Abby to respond as mother, and then give up

self" (Glasser 222). While the story seems to reflect Freeman's own guilt and conflicting

emotions involving her childlessness, it also seems to reflect some qualities carried over

from her troubled childhood. Fisken notes that the "demands of this last incantation of

that 'forlorn little girl' are particularly powerful; they match the demands of the lonely child in Wilkins Freeman that cried out for constant attention and fostering" (59).

Since the figure of the motherless ghost-child does not reappear, one must assume that Freeman is successful in exorcising the ghosts of her past through her artistic endeavors. Whatever the impetus behind these tales of abuse and abandonment, the ending of "The Lost Ghost" presents a lasting image of a final successful union of mother and child:

> We saw, as plain as we ever saw anything in our lives, Mrs. Abbey Bird walking off over the white snow-path with that child holding fast to her hand, nestling close to her as if she had found her own mother. {...} We hurried upstairs as fast as we could go, and she was dead in her bed, and smiling as if she was dreaming, and one arm and hand was stretched out as if something had hold of it; and it couldn't be straightened even at the last—it lay out over her casket at the funeral. (Freeman 236-237)

Fisken notes of Freeman's ghost fiction, "the specter of a little girl who is starved, abused, and/or abandoned, whether deliberately or involuntarily by those who should love and care for her, haunts women who are most vulnerable to her claims—women who have lost children of their own or childless women with strong maternal feelings" (43). Each of the four Gothic short stories discussed above includes incidences of child abuse, neglect, and abandonment, as well as a countering impulse to protect and

nurture on the part of the surrogate mother figures who deem it their duty/nature and desire to comfort and safeguard a "forlorn little girl." As a nineteenth-century woman, Freeman no doubt struggled with guilt and insecurity concerning her own childlessness, and the stories quite possibly manifest her doubts and frustrations concerning the accepted role of women in her society.

Not only would her role as a female author have been deemed questionable and unconventional, but her failure to comply with her expected role as a nurturing maternal figure would also have led Freeman to be classified as unnatural and quite possibly dangerous in respectable, duty-oriented Victorian society. Issues of guilt and abandonment can also be traced to her childhood and to relationships with her family members, all of whom died well before she was married, thus in a sense abandoning her in a quasi-childlike state. Freeman uses these conflicts and inner demons to construct four tales through which she is finally able to purge the "forlorn little girl" that haunts her during the years following her sister's death. Each stands as an example not only of supernatural fiction but also of a psychological study of the effects of fear and sadness on the human psyche. The emotions (fear, superstition, loneliness, inadequacy, and benevolence) that drive the surrogate mothers in each tale, rendering them particularly susceptible to the appearance of ghost-children, are emotions that would have been easily recognizable in nineteenth-century society and that readers certainly continue to indentify with today.

Emily Dickinson's "Poem #9: Through lane it lay—through bramble" (1858)

likewise involves children in perilous situations, using nature to reflect the dangers

with which they are confronted while outside the comforting realm of the home and the

protection of their parents, and it is evocative of the overwhelming anxiety Dickinson

herself faced (she became a recluse in adulthood) when venturing outside the security

of her overly protective father's house. The opening lines of the poem present a

hazardous natural landscape through which children must traverse in order to reach

the safety of the home: "Through lane it lay—through bramble— / Through clearing

and through wood— / Banditti often passed us / Upon the lonely road" (Dickinson 1-4).

The children cannot avoid this "lonely road" on which they are passed by "banditti," or

outlaws and marauders. Danger continues in the second stanza, as "[t]he wolf came

peering curious— / The owl looked puzzled down— / The serpent's satin figure / Glid

stealthily along" (Dickinson 5-8). The wolf is obviously to be avoided, but the owl also

carries a negative connotation as a sign of impending death in folklore. As the tempter

of the biblical Eve, the snake is both dangerous and alluring.

Nature continues to threaten the children in the penultimate stanza: "The

tempests touched our garments— / The lightning's poniards gleamed— / Fierce from

the Crag above us / The hungry Vulture screamed" (Dickinson 9-12). Wind and

lightening from passing storms accost the children as they pass, and another ominous

sign of impending death appears in the form of a "hungry Vulture" screaming from the

rocks above their path. In the final stanza, "[t]he satyr's fingers beckoned— / The valley

murmured 'Come'" (Dickinson 13-14), and the mythological "satyr" beckoning the

children perhaps connotes a lure of Dionysian debauchery with which naive, sheltered

children might be confronted along their path to adulthood.

Though apparently still under the protection of their parents, the children are

nonetheless confronted by hazardous forces and temptations when venturing away

from the security of the home. Dickinson's poem expounds upon the anxiety and peril

with which one can be gripped even under familiar circumstances. The children

undoubtedly travel the path toward home frequently, but they cannot control the

actions of the natural world around them, a world rife with mystery and potential

danger. The poem seems to be reflective of Dickinson's own bouts with agoraphobia

and panic disorder. While she rarely left the safe haven of her father's home, the nature

of panic attacks is such that even in that familiar, domestic environment she

nevertheless would have been faced with bouts of uncontrollable anxiety, which is

likewise suggestive of the inescapable anxieties nineteenth-century women faced in

everyday life while enclosed in the houses of their fathers and husbands.

Dickinson's "Poem #1400: What mystery pervades a well" (1877) compares

nature to a haunted house, and like Poem #9 it presents the natural world as a

potentially threatening enigma that can never be fully understood and is thus capable

of eliciting anxiety and fear in those who encounter her. Careful analysis of Dickinson's

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imagery and choice of pronoun usage also suggests that the poem is representative of the inability of women to be truly understood while enclosed within the social patriarchy of the nineteenth century. For instance, in the first stanza Dickinson introduces the yonic symbol of the well: "What mystery pervades a well! / That water lives so far -- / A neighbor from another world / Residing in a jar" (1-4). The well's water is trapped deep within its vessel, just as the true emotions and identities of Dickinson's nineteenth-century female contemporaries are often forced to remain hidden.

In the second stanza, Dickinson continues using imagery of enclosure in her description of the well's mysteries: "Whose limit none have ever seen, / But just his lid of glass" (5-6). Only the surface of the well water can be seen, since the rest of its contents are hidden deep down below. Her choice of the possessive pronoun "his" in describing the "lid of glass" is indicative of the stifling limitations placed on women by men in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Staring into the well does not allow one to see its true content, just as staring into the face of a woman forced to wear the mask of respectability is "[l]ike looking every time you please / In an abyss's face" (Dickinson 7-8). The well is thus a source of mystery, and the choice of the word "abyss" connotes the danger inherent in the unknown.

In the third stanza, Dickinson describes the reactions of the surrounding landscape to the well, contrasting her sense of wonder with its complacency: "The

grass does not appear afraid, / I often wonder he / Can stand so close and look so bold / At what is awe to me" (9-12). Likewise, the fourth stanza compares the well's surrounding grass to the marsh grass thriving near the potentially dangerous ocean: "Related somehow they may be, / The sedge stands next the sea – / Where he is floorless / And does no timidity betray" (Dickinson 13-16). As a part of the landscape, these grasses do not fear that which is impossible for humans to comprehend. While Dickinson chooses female pronouns to describe nature in her last two stanzas, her choice of masculine pronouns in the third and fourth stanzas reflects nineteenth-century expectations of masculinity. The grasses do not "appear" to be afraid; they "look" bold and do not "betray" any fear they may experience.

Dickinson feminizes nature in the fifth stanza, declaring her a stranger symbolized by a haunted house: "But nature is a stranger yet; / The ones that cite her most / Have never passed her haunted house, / Nor simplified her ghost" (17-20). Thus imagery of enclosure is employed once again in association with women, as it so often is in nineteenth and early twentieth-century poetry and prose. The final stanza repeats the point that neither nature nor women can be simplified or truly understood: "To pity those that know her not / Is helped by the regret / That those who know her, know her less / The nearer her they get" (Dickinson 21-24). The closer one gets to a well, the less one understands of the contents inside, since only the surface of its water can be seen. Likewise, the more one tries to understand another person, for example a woman

stifled by social convention or enclosed within the realm of the domestic, the less one is

truly capable of comprehending her. Even if attempted, each layer of her personality

exposed would reveal another layer hidden. This poem is therefore not only indicative

of the plight of her female contemporaries to be understood and appreciated, but it is

also reflective of the frustrations Dickinson herself must have struggled after being

undervalued as both an artist and a person because of her gender as well as her

psychological disorders and social eccentricities.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MEASURE OF A MAN: EXPECTATIONS OF MASCULINITY AND

FRUSTRATED IDENTITY IN THE MALE GOTHIC

Just as the female Gothic reflects anxiety as a consequence of repression, in what

might be termed the "Male Gothic," doubling similarly occurs between characters,

texts, and the authors who create them and often presents subjects struggling with fears

and urges considered contrary to conventional social norms. Anne-Marie Harvey

describes the conflicted subjects of the male Gothic as "men painfully divided between

the impulses of their 'natural,' energetic selves and the necessity of civilized constraint"

(5). In order to exist successfully within accepted social mores, the protagonist of the

male Gothic must therefore reject the primal, atavistic aspects of his psyche and

behavior in favor of the repression required of civility. Gothic texts written by

American men during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often reveal

commonly held anxieties occurring as a consequence of this struggle to meet social

standards of masculinity and gentility.

Authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, and Jack London employ

doubling among their characters and texts, and just as in the female Gothic, their

personal struggles with insecurity and weakness are often mirrored in the literature

they create. Robert Coskern echoes Peter Garret's previously noted observation,

pointing out that these texts often "center upon this conflict of wills, of the tension

between the internal and the external self, in terms of a conflict between the individual

and society" (155). Often forcing their protagonists to confront the embodiments of

their doubts and fears in the form of tyrannizing doubles or doppelgängers, male

authors of the Gothic likewise use their texts to confront identity crises brought about

largely by the anxiety-inducing social, cultural, and scientific changes occurring in

nineteenth and early twentieth-century America.

As in the previously discussed short story "William Wilson," Edgar Allan Poe's

"The Black Cat" (1843) serves as the confession of a doomed, paranoid madman driven

to violence and murder, the impetus for which he blames on alcohol and the seemingly

demonic force pursuing him. The initial indication that the narrator is as equally

deranged as Wilson occurs in the first few lines of the tale, as he professes his sanity:

> For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I
>
> neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a
>
> case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I

not—and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I

would unburthen my soul. (Poe 223)

The narrator of this tale is similar to William Wilson in that he too is an outsider, a man

just out of reach of normal society who is therefore drawn deeper into his psyche until

he snaps. Likewise, alienation is again worsened by the effects of alcohol on the

isolated man, which is perhaps a reflection of the inner demons with which Poe himself

struggled.

Ann V. Bliss adds of the affected narrator's societal alienation, "Poe situates the

story within the household, thus aligning the narrator with the feminized domestic

sphere. The male narrator's feminine traits are apparent, and he struggles to recast this

inappropriate femininity into a sensitive masculinity" (96). While he has a peculiar

connection with and affinity toward animals, he is incapable of normal interaction and

society with humans:

> From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my
>
> disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make
>
> me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals {…}. With
>
> these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding
>
> and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth,
>
> and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of
>
> pleasure. (Poe 223)

As Michael L. Burduck observes, "[a]t this point the reader knows that such an unusual outlook will cause nothing but trouble for this disturbed man. He has buried himself in a form of misanthropy that makes him value animals over his fellow man" (96). The narrator explains his love for creatures and distaste for humans as follows: "There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere *Man*" (Poe 223).

Although limited to his relationships with animals, the narrator is capable of experiencing deep emotions such as joy and compassion. However, this self-confessed emotionality, among other things, runs counter to nineteenth-century notions of masculinity and therefore further separates him from conventional society. Bliss adds the following observations concerning his failure to meet social standards of masculinity:

> While the narrator's marriage conventionally establishes his masculinity, he fails to fully inhabit the role of husband. The story spans several years, but the couple has no children, nor does the narrator appear to be employed. Both childlessness and joblessness indicate the narrator's inability to meet biologically and culturally determined gender expectations. (97)

This struggle to repress his true feminine nature in favor of conventional masculinity causes the narrator to become increasingly anxious and violent.

As time passes, the narrator undergoes a tremendous change in character due to overindulgences in alcohol ["my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!" (Poe 224)], and anxiety and paranoia intensify his dark moods and fuel the hatred he begins to feel toward the animals he once loved. While he previously described his relationships with his pets as if they were human, the narrator now treats them as objects upon which he can exact his rage and vent his frustration. "One night, returning home, much intoxicated, {…} [t]he fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take flight from my body; and a more fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame" (Poe 224). In his first act of extreme violence, the speaker maliciously gouges out one of the eyes of his once beloved cat. Burduck notes of Poe's foreshadowing of his narrator's demise, "[t]he name of this old cat-Pluto-conjures images of the death awaiting the narrator at the conclusion. The animal constantly follows him, just as death relentlessly pursues all humans" (97).

The narrator later feels guilty, but not for long: "[T]his feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS" (Poe 224-225). As his anxiety grows, he becomes less humane rather than more masculine, and his mental deterioration leads to continued violence. In a

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second act of cruelty, the narrator hangs Pluto in a fit of grief and rage and later

convinces himself that its reincarnated spirit continues to stalk him from the body of

another cat. The narrator's anger toward his perceived feline pursuer continues to grow

and his behavior becomes more erratic as "[t]he new cat's resemblance to the first and

its affection for [his] wife serve to constantly remind the narrator of his failed

masculinity and, more importantly, what he has lost in denying his femininity" (Bliss

98). The man who once described his own "docility and humanity" and "tenderness of

heart" (Poe 223) is now incapable of such emotions. His wife, however, "possessed, in a

high degree, that humanity of feeling which had one been [his] distinguishing trait, and

the source of many of [his] simplest and purest pleasures" (Poe 227). As Bliss observes,

"[r]ejecting his innate femininity in favor of violent hypermasculinity means he has

irretrievably lost these pleasures" (98).

The speaker, like William Wilson, is haunted by an inescapable anxiety and

paranoia and as a result convinces himself that a terrorizing force, in this case a

supernatural force emodied in a cat, is out to ruin him. "Alas! Neither by day nor night

knew I the blessing of Rest any more! {…} the creature left me no moment alone" (Poe

227-228). Consequently, he attemps to kill the new cat, but in doing so succeeds in

murdering his wife:

> The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me
>
> headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in

my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed

a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal

had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of

my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I

withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell

dead upon the spot, without a groan. (Poe 228)

Bliss notes of the narrator's gender identification after this final act of violence,

"Initially, the hypermasculine act of murder banishes all manifestations of the

narrator's femininity, {…} [but] [t]his veneer of masculinity is short lived; the story

ends with the narrator stripped of power and irrevocably aligned with the feminine"

(98).

The deranged narrator decides to conceal his wife's body behind a wall in the

cellar and then kill Pluto's feline double, but it apparently disappears before he can

carry out its murder. The absence of the cat brings an initial false sense of security to

the narrator, and it is this supposed victory that spells his defeat. Visited by the police,

the killer's careless confidence and bravado cause him to tap the cellar wall with his

cane. As a result, the cat's cry, "utterly anomalous and inhuman—a howl—a wailing

shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen out of hell,

conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult

damnation," alerts the officials to the dead and entombed body of his wife (Poe 230).

The narrator describes the first victim of his madness as it sits atop the corpse of his final victim: "[W]ith red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman" (Poe 230). Interestingly, "when the police discover the body, the narrator swoons, perhaps his most telling, and stereotypically feminine, act. {…}[He] is left weak, faint-hearted, and emasculated" (Bliss 98).

Unable to repress his true self, like William Wilson the speaker thus hands down his own death sentence by murdering his other half, in this case his wife. Blinded by an obsession fueled by rage and alcohol, he exacts revenge on his imagined tormentor, the demonic cat, at the price of his own life and his wife's. Hence obsession and paranoia, coupled with an inability to understand one's true nature, once again drive an unsteady character to commit murder in order to be free from a terrorizing influence that in fact exists purely in his affected mind.

Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) also deals with a protagonist whose unstable mind becomes infected by anxiety and paranoia, the result of which is a psychological fragmentation that produces both a literal and symbolic loss of identity. However, rather than functioning as a confessionary tale presented by the affected character himself, this cautionary tale is provided to the reader by an unnamed male narrator who is a representative of rationality rather than madness, at least by comparison. The more rational narrator therefore serves as a foil to his mentally

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disturbed friend, whose deteriorating physical and psychological states are mirrored in the deterioration of the House of Usher itself.

From the beginning of the tale, the House of Usher is described in oppressively negative terms and afforded human characteristics which produce an uncanny effect upon the narrator, who observes upon approaching the "melancholy" structure, "I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit" (Poe 231). The sentience of this house in which his friend, Roderick Usher, imprisons himself is emphasized by the narrator's repetitive description of its "vacant eye-like windows" (Poe 231), and upon further study of its face, the narrator discerns "a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn" (Poe 233), a structural flaw that he will soon discover is indicative of the mental and physical deterioration of its occupants.

As in the previously analyzed poem "The Haunted Palace," which Poe places in the center of the tale as the product of Roderick's declining mental state, Usher's psychological state becomes emblematic of the house itself, which eventually crumbles and sinks into the abyss of the murky water surrounding it. Roderick Usher is the victim of "a constitutional and a family evil" which he calls "a mere nervous affection" that "displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations" (Poe 235). As the narrator learns of his friend's condition,

He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of a certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror. (Poe 235)

While the root of his problems is most likely connected to the fact that "the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain" (Poe 232), Usher instead blames his sickness in part on the house itself, believing his condition to be "an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence" (Poe 235). He professes that the other source of his malady involves an equally imprisoned and deteriorating member of the house, Madeline Usher:

He admitted {...} although with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which thus afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable origin—to the severe and long-continued illness—indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution—of a tenderly beloved sister, his sole companion for long years, and his last and only relative on earth. (Poe 235-236)

Madeline functions as her brother Roderick's double and is likewise infected, suffering from a condition producing "a settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character" (Poe 236). This soon leads to her live burial in the family vault by Roderick and the narrator, who, upon looking at her face in the coffin, discovers "a striking similitude between the brother and sister" (Poe 240) and learns that they are actually twins, between whom "sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed" (Poe 240). This shared consciousness that exists between the Usher twins is reflected in the fact that as she awakens and fights madly to free herself from her enclosure, which is hidden deep within the recesses of the house, her brother is instantly aware of her struggle and believes he can hear her movements and even the "heavy and horrible beating of her heart" (Poe 245) as she suffers, and he likewise deteriorates into madness as a result, evincing "a species of mad hilarity in his eyes—an evidently restrained *hysteria* in his whole demeanor" (Poe 242).

Beverly R. Voloshin observes of the symbolic implications of Roderick's worsening condition, which reaches its crescendo as his sister finally succeeds in escaping her grave and appears in the doorway:

> [W]hen Madeline re-emerges from the tomb, she is the embodiment of
> will, while Roderick becomes pure sentience. And the roles of male and
> female reverse, Madeline taking the part of the conquering male hero, {…}

while Roderick enacts the traditional role of ravished maiden. Madeline

comes to represent life-in-death; Roderick, death-in-life. The oppositions

of self and other, male and female, life and death are in a sense cancelled

through this inversion of oppositions, prefiguring the erasure of the line

between Roderick and Madeline in their final union. (427)

Diane Long Hoeveler takes this Gothic twinning a step further, positing the

following of the relationship between the siblings:

Roderick's sister Madeline, in other words, functions as that abjected

aspect of Rodericks's self-loathing ego. He projects out of himself his

feminine element as a "twin sister," what in religious ideology is known

as the consort, and in traditional psychoanalysis as the fragmented self,

the idealized double or alter-ego. (391)

Madeline can therefore be read as representative of Roderick's self-dividing

consciousness, and as with William Wilson, the final confrontation between the twins

results in the demise of both:

For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the

threshold—then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the

person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies,

bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had

anticipated. (Poe 245)

As Roderick's twin thus collapses on top of him, she seems to consume him, just as the house falls victim to its fissure and is consumed by the tarn in the tale's closing image:

> While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened—there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind—the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight—my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "*House of Usher."* (Poe 245)

Functioning as doubles dependent upon one another for existence, all versions of the House of Usher—the physical house, its inhabitants, and the family name—are thus destroyed in this final moment of fragmentation.

Henry James's "The Jolly Corner" (1908) likewise portrays a protagonist overcome by anxiety who is forced to confront the embodiment of his doubts and fears in the form of a double haunting his ancestral home. Douglass H. Thomson notes of James's brand of Gothic fiction, "Jamesian ghosts are 'psychological,' frequently *doppelgängers* or subjective correlatives of inner passions or turmoils, rather than the real things" (203).   The ghostly double who resides on the jolly corner proves to be no exception.

Lynda Zwinger summarizes the plot of the tale as follows:

A fifty-six-year-old man returns to New York, having been living as an

expatriate for the prior thirty-three years, to look after his patrimony (two

houses, one being converted to an apartment building). While the

apartment project is in process, he takes to wandering around at night in

his other house, the one he grew up in, which is vacant. The story tells us

that he is doing so in order to meet his other, his unlived life—the one

he'd have lived had he not left America at the age of twenty-three. (1)

Unable to shake his anxiety over what life might have been had he made different

choices, the protagonist, Spencer Brydon, stalks his childhood home in order to face and

interrogate his alternate self, by whom he is convinced the house is haunted. "'Oh

ghosts – of course the place must swarm with them!'" (James 705).

In true Gothic form, Brydon's voluntary entrapment in the dark recesses of the

house mirrors his increasing focus inward:

> The house, as the case stood, admirably lent itself; he might wonder at the
>
> taste, the native architecture of the particular time, which could rejoice so
>
> in the multiplication of doors – the opposite extreme to the modern, the
>
> actual almost complete proscription of them; but it had fairly contributed
>
> to provoke this obsession of the presence encountered telescopically, as he
>
> might say, focused and studied in diminishing perspective and as by a
>
> rest for the elbow. (James 718)

It is interesting to note Brydon's observation of the home's many doors, which seem to

symbolize the closeting of the self with whom he is ultimately confronted.

Brydon reveals a growing fixation on his alternate life in the following comments

to friend and confidant Alice Staverton:

> "[I]t's only a question of what fantastic, yet perfectly possible,
>
> development of my own nature I mayn't have missed. It comes over me
>
> that I had then a strange *alter ego* deep down somewhere within me, as the
>
> full-blown flower is in the small tight bud, and that I just took the course, I
>
> just transferred him to the climate, that blighted him for once and for
>
> ever." (James 707)

In neurotically analyzing the course of his existence, the protagonist consequently

becomes acutely aware of his own shortcomings. As he further confesses to Alice:

> "I've not been edifying – I believe I'm thought in a hundred quarters to
>
> have been barely decent. I've followed strange paths and worshipped
>
> strange gods; it must have come to you again and again – in fact you've
>
> admitted to me as much – that I was leading, at any time these thirty
>
> years, a selfish frivolous scandalous life. And you see what it has made of
>
> me." (James 707)

Regarding this path not taken, Zwinger observes that Brydon "does in fact meet this life, apparently, embodied (which is to say, prosopopoeia'd) in an apparition that scares him to death" (1).

The image, or double, whom Brydon finally meets but by whom he is repulsed is a construct of his fragmented psyche and represents the other he might have become had he followed a different path in life, an alter ego made monstrous by suppressed impulses antithetical to respectable nineteenth-century American society, whom he must confront in order to gain the self-knowledge he initially seeks but ultimately refuses. Shalyn Clagget likens James's central character to Narcissus, observing that "Brydon becomes obsessed with his own image, but, unlike his mythic counterpart, when he finally views the object of his desire, he finds it horrifying and faints" (1). Clagget adds a significant caveat to this analysis, stating of the moment of recognition that "Narcissus *comprehends* his image and dies; Brydon *denies* his image and survives" (2).

Considering the potential outcome of this inevitable moment of recognition between the protagonist's two selves, Clagget aptly posits: "Brydon can either live as a closeted homosexual in a homosocial society or acknowledge his identity as an ambiguously homosexual European aesthete" (3). In actuality, he proves capable only of recoiling from his double, proclaiming "such an identity fitted his at *no* point, made its alternative monstrous. A thousand times yes, as it came upon him nearer now, the

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face was the face of a stranger" (James 725). He tells Alice, "'There's somebody – an

awful beast; whom I brought, too horribly, to bay. But it's not me'" (James 729).

Eric Savoy, among others, reads the text as the psychological struggle of a man in

conflict with his own suppressed sexuality, noting that "Spencer Brydon's melancholy

fixation upon a hypothetical, heterosexual other suggests that his double emerges from

a long-repressed desire for the consolations of normative American identification" (19).

Scholars differ, however, as to the implications of Brydon's ultimate denial of the

embodiment of his true nature. While some find redemption in his rejection of

difference (and therefore individuality) in favor of conformity, in reality Brydon's

psyche will simply prove too weak to handle his inevitable confrontation with the

double haunting the jolly corner. The outcome is just as Brydon had imagined:

> He knew – yes, as he had never known anything – that, *should* he see the
>
> door open, it would all too abjectly be the end of him. It would mean that
>
> the agent of his shame – for his shame was the deep abjection – was once
>
> more at large and in general possession; and what glared him thus in the
>
> face was the act that this would determine for him. (James 722)

Rationalizing the troubled protagonist's repudiating response, Savoy observes

that "the effect of Brydon's gothic melancholia, his extreme psychosis, is that he cannot

accommodate difference or plurality" (19). He therefore must deny the existence of the

other as a fragment of his own consciousness and choose in favor of the more

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psychically and socially comfortable façade of a life with Alice Staverton. "'Ah I've

come to myself now – thanks to you, dearest. But this brute, with his awful face – this

brute's a black stranger. He's none of *me,* even as I *might* have been,' Brydon sturdily

declared" (James 730). As Clagget likewise concludes:

> Alice can "complete" Brydon, not because she is a woman and he is a
>
> man, but because she mirrors back the *imago* he assumes. By her account,
>
> Alice knows that Brydon has seen himself, but, realizing that Brydon does
>
> not want to admit this, she reassures him by participating in his denial
>
> {…}. (196)

Adding, "James does not give us a happy ending—or an unhappy one. In fact, James

seems to avoid cultural binaries altogether by providing an ending in which Brydon's

acceptance of Alice is a necessary act of psychic survival rather than a heartfelt

acceptance of dominant cultural norms" (Clagget 196).

James's "The Private Life" (1893) also deals with issues of identity, serving as an

apt commentary on the duality of one's public versus one's private persona, and is

therefore indicative of the dual selves often found in psychological fiction and poetry of

the Gothic genre. It is especially reflective of the dichotomy that exists between the

personas presented by artists such as James as well as the everyman/woman figure who

wears a metaphorical mask, whether by choice or force of social convention. As

Priscilla Walton notes, "[t]he tale revolves around the narrator, who, while holidaying

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at a mountain resort in Switzerland, spends his time observing his friends and companions {...} Blanche Adney, an actress; Clare Vawdrey, a famous writer; and Lord Mellifont, a social lion" (13). The crux of the story involves the narrator and Blanche Adney's unmasking, although not publicly, of both Lord Mellifont and Clare Vawdrey, the former of whom only exists as a public persona and the latter of whom's literary success is completely dependent upon the work of his more intellectual and creative doppelganger.

While James's story focuses on the mysteries surrounding the identities of Lord Mellifont and Clare Vawdrey, each of the narrator's vacationing friends wears his or her own mask. Lady Mellifont "had a secret, and if you didn't find it out as you knew her better you at least perceived that she was gentle and unaffected and limited, and also rather submissively sad. She was like a woman with a painless malady" (James 8). Her malady stems from being the wife of a nobleman of whom the narrator comments, "it was not possible for him to be taken – he only took. No one, in the nature of things, could know this better than Lady Mellifont" (James 8). As a result, like the previously discussed women trapped in unfulfilling relationships, she is a miserable and misunderstood figure. The narrator adds, "I had originally been rather afraid of her, thinking her, with her stiff silences and the extreme blackness of almost everything that made up her person, somewhat hard, even a little saturnine" (James 8).

Blanche Adney is an accomplished actress and thus makes her living portraying the identities of others, yet "none of the things she had done was the thing she had dreamed of {...}. This was the canker in the rose, the ache beneath the smile" (James 15). He further describes her as a "charming woman, who was beautiful without beauty and complete with a dozen deficiencies" (James 16). Her husband Vincent Adney has his wife to thank for his identity: "He had been only a fiddler at her theater, always in his place during the acts; but she made him something rare and misunderstood" (James 9). Each suffers from his or her own insecurities and is therefore unwilling or incapable of revealing his or her *true* self to the world. As Daniel K. Hannah observes, even the narrator unintenionally reveals the following inadequacies to the reader:

> [H]is half-concealed jealousy, as an unsuccessful playwright, of
> Vawdrey's literary fame; his half-hidden desire for his interpretive
> partner, Blanche Adney, and his hopes for writing a "great part" for her to
> play; and his further complicating queer desire for Vawdrey, as the subject
> of Blanche's adulation. (71)

Of their group, however, Clare Vawdrey and Lord Mellifont present the falsest personas. The narrator notes of Vawdrey's social character:

> He had his hours and his habits, his tailor and his hatter, his hygiene and
> his particular wine, but all these things together never made up an
> attitude. Yet they constituted the only attitude he ever adopted {...}. *He*

was exempt from variations, and not a shade either less or more nice in one place than in another. He differed from other people, but never from himself (save in the extraordinary sense I will presently explain), and struck me as having neither moods nor sensibilities nor preferences. {...} I never found him anything but loud and cheerful and copious, and I never heard him utter a paradox or express a shade or play with an idea.

(James 6)

Though described by his friend as "the greatest (in the opinion of many) of our literary glories" (James 4), the social Vawdrey is nevertheless a disappointment to both the narrator and Blanche Adney, whereas the persona who toils at his desk is intellegent and remarkable. After having finally confronted the novelist while the narrator kept his social persona occupied, Adney comments, "'He's splendid. {…} 'He *is* the one who does it!' {…} 'We understood each other'" (James 53).

Perhaps the reason Blanche Adney is given the opportunity to meet both of Vawdrey's personas and experiences such a connection with his more intelligent nature is that she too makes a living being two-faced and is an actress both inside and outside her theater. The narrator, on the other hand, is not acknowledged in any way and is allowed only a glimpse of the author persona hunched over his desk and writing in the dark. He remarks of the discovery, "'it looked like the author of Vawdrey's admirable

works. It looked infinitely more like him than our friend does himself'" (James 31).

James's narrator adds of the impressive Vawdrey with whom they are socially familiar:

> "[He] Disappoints *me* – disappoints every one who looks in him for the
>
> genius that created the pages they adore. {…} I've often wondered – now I
>
> know. There are two of them. {…} One goes out, the other stays at home.
>
> One is the genius, the other's the bourgeois, and it's only the bourgeois
>
> whom we personally know." (James 31)

On the other hand, Blanche observes of their aquaintance Lord Mellifont, "'[I]f

Clare Vawdrey is double {…}, his lordship there has the opposite complaint: he isn't

even whole. {…} [I]f there are two of Mr. Vawdrey, there isn't so much as one, all told,

of Lord Mellifont'" (James 33). The narrator adds the following uncanny description of

their noble acquaintance:

> [W]ith more perfections, somehow, heaped upon his handsome head than
>
> one had ever seen accumulated before, he struck me as so essentially, so
>
> conspicuously and uniformly the public character that I read in a flash the
>
> answer to Blanche Adney's riddle. He was all public and no
>
> corresponding private life, just as Clare Vawdrey was all private and had
>
> no corresponding public one. {…} I had secretly pitied him for the
>
> perfection of his performance, had wondered what blank face such a mask
>
> had to cover, what was left to him for the immitigable hours in which a

man sits down with himself, or, more serious still, with that intenser self, his lawful wife. (James 34-36)

He likewise questions the paradox of Mellifont's nature: "He represented to his wife and he was a hero to his servants, and what one wanted to arrive at was what really became of him when no eye could see" (James 36).

Only the actress can identify Mellifont's secret and therefore the answer to the narrator's query. Just as he instigates Blanche to surprise Vawdrey's double while he is alone in his room, Blanche induces the narrator to catch Lord Mellifont by surprise while he is alone in his room, claiming of the result, "'You won't see anything!'" (James 34). The only time Mellifont is even capable of presenting himself is when he has an audience for the scene; as she explains, "'He's there from the moment he knows somebody else is'" (James 42). Mellifont's identity is consequently dependent upon a social construct, whereas Vawdrey's success is dependent upon a private one. Sarah Wadsworth aptly observes a similarity between the two successful yet nonetheless imperfect men:

> Whether it is ultimately an integrative or a fragmenting experience, to have a double life suggests division, twinning, splitting into two. It is for this reason that Vawdrey's double life is ultimately just as limiting as the half life of Lord Mellifont, who exists, apparently, only in the presence of others. (224)

While critcs argue as to James's inspiration for the tale, whether autobiographical or based on his friendship with Robert Browning, they seem to agree that his point is to provide a commentary of society and the paradoxical role authors and artists must play within it. As Isobel Waters comments, "Clare Vawdry's split between public and private selves is the means by which his work can continue" (267), and the same must be said for James or any other artist whose success depends on the ability to become someone other than him or herself.

Just as Spencer Brydon confronts and denies his identity in James's "The Jolly Corner," the protagonist of Jack London's "When the World Was Young" (1910) must suppress his true nature in order to survive. In the case of London's tale, however, the central character's choice is unambiguously motivated by a conscious desire to conform to conventions of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century society. In order to exist successfully within those social norms, he must reject the primal, atavistic aspects of his psyche and behavior in favor of the repression required of civility.

London's troubled protagonist, James G. Ward, is similar to Poe's William Wilson and James's Spencer Brydon in that the source of his misery likewise proves to be himself: "James G. Ward was forty years of age, a successful business man, and very unhappy. For forty years he had vainly tried to solve a problem that was really himself and that with increasing years became more and more a woeful affliction" (79). Ward is outwardly successful by day but inwardly tortured at night, a protagonist whom Anne-

Marie Harvey finds typical of London's conflicted male heroes, "men painfully divided between the impulses of their 'natural,' energetic selves and the necessity of civilized constraint" (5). As London observes of Ward's psychic division,

> In himself he was two men, and, chronologically speaking, these men were several thousand years or so apart {…} His two personalities were so mixed that they were practically aware of themselves and of each other all the time. His one self was that of a man whose rearing and education were modern and who had lived through the latter part of the nineteenth century and well into the first decade of the twentieth. His other self he had located as a savage and a barbarian living under the primitive conditions of several thousand years before. But which self was he, and which was the other, he could never tell. For he was both selves, and both selves all the time. (79-80)

Ward's baser instincts are visible even in childhood: "He was known as a little demon of insensate cruelty and viciousness. The family medicos privately adjudged him a mental monstrosity and a degenerate" (London 81). While the adults dismiss Ward as a failure because of his difference, the younger members of society are in awe of his brute physicality: "Such few boys companions as he had, hailed him a wonder, though they were all afraid of him. He could outclimb, outswim, outrun, outdevil any of them; while none dared fight with him. He was too terribly strong, too madly

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furious" (London 81-82). As he grows older and stronger, so does his primitive self, which at times he proves unable to control:

> [H]is fellows were afraid to box with him, and he signalized his last wrestling bout by sinking his teeth into the shoulder of his opponent. {…} By some quirk of atavism, a certain portion of that early self's language had come down to him as a racial memory. In moments of happiness, exaltation, or battle, he was prone to burst out in wild barbaric songs or chants. It was by this means that he located in time and space that strayed half of him who should have been dead and dust for thousands of years. (London 83-84)

Ward thus tries to negotiate the alternating impulses of his fragmented psyche, "his one self that was a night-prowling savage that kept his other self sleepy of mornings, and that other self that was cultured and refined and that wanted to be normal and love and prosecute business like other people" (London 85). In an attempt to allow both selves to exist, "afternoons and early evenings he gave to the one, the nights to the other, the forenoons and parts of the nights were devoted to sleep for the twain" (London 85). Consequently, during the light of day, Ward is "as normal and conventional a man of business as could be found in the city" (London 87). Like a predator, his primal other thrives at night, surrounded by the activity and openness of nature:

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> [A]s evening lengthened, the night called to him. There came a
>
> quickening of all his perceptions and a restlessness. His hearing was
>
> suddenly acute; the myriad night-noises told him a luring and familiar
>
> story; and, if alone, he would begin to pace up and down the narrow room
>
> like any caged animal from the wild. (London 87)

One important aspect of "civilized" society, marriage, remains elusive, however, for London's protagonist. The nocturnal requirements of his second self present a unique danger to marital success: "He found it appalling to imagine being married and encountering his wife after dark" (London 88). Consequently, after meeting Lillian Gersdale:

> James Ward made a fresh and heroic effort to control the Teutonic
>
> barbarian that was half of him. So well did he make it a point to see
>
> Lillian in the afternoons and early evenings, that the time came when she
>
> accepted him for better or worse, and when he prayed privily and
>
> fervently that it was not for worse {...}. (London 88)

As Harvey aptly notes, "[Ward's] double life becomes intolerable when he falls in love with a gentle, civilized woman whom his savage self might harm" (41).

Although Ward is painfully aware of the duality of his consciousness, that "half of him was late American and the other half early Teuton" (London 85), it is not until he endures a life and death struggle that he is finally able to banish the other and its

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uncivilized impulses. As his animalistic nature takes over and he viciously defends

himself against an attacking bear, Ward's fiancé Lilian "gazed horror-stricken at a

yellow-haired, wild-eyed giant whom she recognized as the man who was to be her

husband. {…} Never had she dreamed so formidable and magnificent a savage lurked

under the starched shirt and conventional garb of her betrothed" (London 93). Lillian

further observes that "this was not Mr. James J. Ward, the San Francisco business man,

but one unnamed and unknown, a crude, rude savage creature who, by some freak of

chance, lived again after thrice a thousand years" (London 93).

It is only after this primal battle that Ward realizes his primal self cannot coexist

with his modern self: "[L]ooking out of the eyes of the early Teuton, [he] saw the fair

frail Twentieth Century girl he loved, and he felt something snap in his brain. {…} It

seemed as if the soul of him were flying asunder" (London 95). Instantly, his savage

nature retreats: "Following the excited gaze of the others, he glanced back and saw the

carcass of the bear. The sight filled him with fear. He uttered a cry and would have

fled, had they not restrained him and led him into the bungalow" (London 95).

A psychological battle thus ensues in tandem with the battle between Ward and

the bear, and the victor of this confrontation is the more civilized of the protagonist's

selves:

> The early Teuton in him died the night of the Mill Valley fight with the
>
> bear. James J. Ward is now wholly James J. Ward, and he shares no part

of his being with any vagabond anachronism from the younger world.

And so wholly is James J. Ward modern, that he knows in all its bitter

fullness the curse of civilized fear. (London 95)

As Harvey observes, "the modern, conventional and mature self triumphs, but at the

cost of [his] connection to nature, his abundant energy and his fearlessness" (41).

Anxiety is thus a consequence of repression: "He is now afraid of the dark, and night in

the forest is to him a thing of abysmal terror. His city house is of the spick and span

order, and he evinces a great interest in burglar-proof devices" (London 95-96).

Whereas once "the four walls of a room were an irk and a restraint," they now provide

comfort and security to Ward, who both literally and symbolically imprisons himself

within them (London 81).

While James Ward denies his primal nature in order to conform, the protagonist

of London's seldom studied Gothic short story "Samuel" (1909) decides instead to

counter societal expectations, effectively choosing alienation rather than community.

While the central character of "Samuel" is female, London affords her overtly masculine

characteristics and therefore in a sense likewise uses her persona to comment upon

identity and man's relationship to society. Rather than adopting her community's blind

acceptance of what is deemed to be truth and morality, Margaret stubbornly clings to

her own truths and denies the hypocrisy on which the insular community of Island

McGill is built, a choice which the unnamed male narrator questions yet obviously admires.

When he first sees the old woman lugging huge sacks of grain back and forth, London's narrator describes Margaret Henan as a "striking figure" who "walked with sure though tottering stride," laboring "with so dogged a certitude that it never entered my mind that her strength could fail her and let that hundred-weight sack fall from the lean and withered frame that well-nigh doubled under it" (London 466). Time-worn and weathered, she is nonetheless a strong figure with masculine characteristics of manner and dress. As Henan lights and smokes a pipe, the narrator takes notice of her hands:

> They were large-knuckled, sinewy and malformed by labor, rimed with callouses, the nails blunt and broken, and with here and there cuts and bruises, healed and healing, such as are common to the hands of hard-working men. On the back were huge, upstanding veins, eloquent of age and toil. Looking at them, it was hard to believe that they were the hands of the woman who had once been the belle of Island McGill. (466)

He adds that "[s]he wore heavy man's brogans," and "[h]er legs were stockingless, {...} while [h]er figure, shapeless and waistless, was garbed in a rough man's shirt and in a ragged flannel petticoat that had once been red" (London 466). Further distinguishing Henan is the fact that "her eyes were clear as a girl's – clear, out-looking, and far-seeing,

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and with an open and unblinking steadfastness of gaze that was disconcerting"
(London 467).

As in the previously discussed Gothic works in which issues of identity are
central, the reality of Henan's true nature becomes increasingly elusive as the narrator
attempts to define it:

> Here was a human soul that, save for the most glimmering of contacts,
> was beyond the humanness of me. And the more I learned of Margaret
> Henan in the weeks that followed the more mysteriously remote she
> become. She was as alien as a far-journeyer from some other star, and no
> hint could she nor all the countryside give me of what norms of living,
> what heats of feeling, or rules of philosophic contemplation actuated her
> in all that she had been and was. (London 467)

Before she literally steps into her husband's brogans later in life and, in effect,
becomes his double, Henan is described as "one of the island belles," and "[b]eyond the
usual housewife's tasks she had never been accustomed to work" (London 469). The
reason she adopts this uniquely masculine description is that she must in order to
survive, having been abandoned by all of her family members as well as society because
of her stubborn insistence upon naming each of her sons "Samuel" after her favorite
brother. The people of Island McGill become convinced that the name is cursed after
the original Samuel dies blaspheming God because his wife, mistakenly thinking her

husband has been lost at sea, kills their child and then herself after a minister's mistake renders their marriage invalid and thus their son technically illegitimate. The community basically likens Henan to a murderer because each male heir to her brother's name is killed in one fashion or another. They even blame her for her husband's death, when in actuality, as Laura Bedwell asserts, "it was the community's condemnation that led Tom Henan to murder his son and hang himself in remorse" (157).

As for the Henan boys, they obviously would have died regardless of the name with which they were christened, but as Bedwell aptly observes of the island, "extreme insularity leads to inbreeding and narrow mindedness. Tradition and public opinion become law, and a person who defies the community pays for that temerity" (152). Henan's alienation is thus deemed a rightful consequence of her own choices, even though it defies the very values and morals her community claims to uphold. As Mrs. Ross reasons,

> "She fetch't ut on tull herself. She drove them from the house just oz she drove old Tom Henan, thot was her husband, tull hus death. {…} Ut all come, I tell you, o' her wucked-headed an' foolish stubborness. For a Samuel she must hov; an' ut was the death of the four of her sons." (London 470)

As the narrator learns what he can of Margaret Henan from her neighbors, their comments illuminate the hypocrisy of her undeserved punishment. Mrs. Ross admits just minutes after her previous condemnation, "'Margaret was a guid wife an' a guid mother, an' I doubt she would harm a fly. She brought up her family God-fearin' an' decent-minded" (London 470).

The choice Margaret Henan must make concerning her identity in relation to society clearly comes with a price, just as James Ward's does. While Ward chooses society over individuality, Henan makes the opposite decision. At least in the eyes of the tale's male narrator, this stubborn insistence on truth over hypocrisy, superstition, and crowd mentality is something to be revered. In the final image he provides the reader of Henan, she is described as a near-double of her husband: "[W]ith her callous thumb she pressed down the live fire of her pipe and gazed out across the twilight-sombered fields. It was the very bench Tom Henan had sat upon that last sanguinary day of life" (London 477).

As emblematic of her individuality of thought and character, however, her "clear, out-looking, and wide-seeing" (London 477) eyes continue to distinguish her from her husband and the rest of her community. As Laura Bedwell notes:

> Margaret Henan of "Samuel" does more than survive in her alienation
>
> from community; she thrives. In doing so she reveals a side of London's
>
> thought not generally recognized: his admiration for the individual who

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upholds a personal, and deeply gratifying, vision of truth in the face of

intense opposition from a community whose values are inimical to human

freedom. (151)

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

ANXIETIES REVEALED: THE DOUBLE UNMASKED

The stifling architecture and darkly atmospheric settings inherent in conventional Gothic tales serve a much larger purpose than simply adding spooky detail. These often menacing structures and isolated landscapes in which characters are trapped serve as claustrophobic representations of their troubled minds, from which they likewise cannot escape. The Gothic protagonist is frequently confined in space, just as he or she is psychologically held hostage by doubt and fear, and the resulting paranoia is often manifested in the form of a second self, or double, created by the protagonist's fragmented consciousness whom he or she must confront. These texts reflect the cultural and societal conflicts commonly felt by nineteenth and early twentieth-century American authors and likewise serve as apt psychological studies of the effects of fear on the human psyche, with terror-inducing situations forcing the affected characters and authors to face their inner demons, thereby effectively

demonstrating humanity's struggle to achieve mental harmony in the face of crippling

anxiety.

Doubling, whether between or within the Gothic character or text, serves as an

impressively effective vehicle for the expression of anxieties and frustrations commonly

held among nineteenth and early twentieth-century American society. For example,

many female Gothic works, such as those of Emily Dickinson, Mary E. Wilkins

Freeman, and Edith Wharton, include instances of marital discord and lack of personal

fulfillment that often mirror the disatisfying personal experiences of women writers

themselves. Patriarchal domination within these texts often reflects the repression and

subsequent anxiety of authorship with which female writers of the period are known to

have strugged. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, the madwoman character often found in

female Gothic texts "is usually in some sense the *author's* double, and image of her own

anxiety and rage" (78). Through the creation of this madwoman figure, female authors

are allowed to transform themselves from victims to victimizers:

> For it is, after all, through the violence of the double that the female author
>
> enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while
>
> at the same time it is through the double's violence that this anxious
>
> author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed
>
> until it can no longer be contained. {…} [T]herefore infection continually

breeds in the sentences of women whose writing obsessively enacts this

drama of enclose an escape. (Gilbert and Gubar 85)

In presenting these narratives of imprisonment and escape, "imagery of

enclosure reflects the woman writer's own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her

fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places" (Gilbert and Gubar 84). The

misunderstood and undervalued female writer is thus reflective of Dickinson's poetic

image of water enclosed deep within a well, "[a] neighbor from another world /

Residing in a jar" (3-4). Whether trapped within the confines of a restrictive and

patriarchal society or within the constraints of unfulfilling domestic relationships,

writers of the female Gothic undoubtedly felt a sense of imprisonment that spills over

into their artistic creations and is mirrored in the stifling settings and oppressive

atmospheres in which their anxious protagonists are likewise enclosed.

As Gilbert and Gubar aptly observe, "[w]omen authors {…} reflect the literal

reality of their own confinement in the constraints they depict. {…} Recording their own

distinctively female experience, they are secretly working through and within the

conventions of literary texts to define their own lives" (87). Without the benefit of this

outlet for covert expression and therefore exorcism of the anxieties haunting them,

women would otherwise be defined only by the patriarchal systems in which they

were enclosed. They would be valued and defined merely as wives and mothers,

emissaries of the strictly feminine and domestic realm, rather than the multifaceted

artists whose unique fears and struggles we are capable of appreciating and identifying with today.

In a society in which difference is perceived as weakness and repression is a requirement of civility, texts written by male authors of the period likewise use doubling to reveal anxieties resulting from the failure to conform to social mores. As Savoy notes of the male Gothic protagonist, "his double emerges from a long-repressed desire for the consolations of normative American identification" (19). Consequently, failure to fit the mold of masculinity and gentility created by what is perceived to be civilized society thus results in repression, of which anxiety is always a product, and like their female counterparts, writers of the male Gothic, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, and Jack London, likewise exorcise the anxieties haunting them by projecting them into the literature they create.

Like those of the female Gothic, writers of the male Gothic employ doubling within and between their characters and texts in order to effectively acknowledge and overcome anxieties they would otherwise be forced to repress. In the case of the male Gothic author, however, those anxieties would not be based on a lack of appreciation for his artistic value, since as a man he would have automatically been afforded that credibility. What is more commonly revealed in the male Gothic are anxieties related to the person a man might become if allowed to forgo societal expectations. The doppelgänger provides a useful venue for the exploration of man's conflicting natures,

those that meet social mores and those that run contrary to it. The doubles that haunt

the ancestral homes of male Gothic authors are thus emblematic of the contrary

impulses which haunt the authors themselves. By projecting these taboo habits,

thoughts, and characteristics onto their artistic creations, writers of the male Gothic are

likewise provided an impressively effective vehicle for dealing with anxieties which

might otherwise remain repressed.

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