Unlike Harlequins, popular Gothic novels are not restricted to one publisher, but are sold by a number of large publishers such as Ace and Fawcett. As a result, the Gothic formula is not quite as rigid as the Harlequin formula. The term "Gothic" is often used loosely to designate "suspense." Thus, Gothics tend to shade off, on the one hand, into the classical detective story and, on the other hand, into something like a Harlequin Romance which contains a little mystery thrown in for added spice. We will be concerned with neither of these, but with what the ex-editor of Ace Books calls "'pure' Gothics."

Gothics can be identified by their cover illustrations: each portrays a young girl wearing a long, flowing gown and standing in front of a large, menacing-looking castle or mansion. The atmosphere is dark and stormy, and the ethereal young girl appears to be frightened. In the typical Gothic plot, the heroine comes to a mysterious house, perhaps as a bride, perhaps in another capacity, and either starts to mistrust her husband or else finds herself in love with a mysterious man who appears to be some kind of criminal. She may suspect him of having killed his first wife (one recalls Catherine Morland's suspicions of General Tilney in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey) or of being out to kill someone else, most likely herself. She tries to convince herself that her suspicions are unfounded, that, since she loves him, he must be trustworthy and that she will have failed as a woman if she does not implicitly believe in him. Often, but not always, the man is proven innocent of all wrongdoing by the end of the novel, and the real culprit is discovered and punished.

A casual reader might at first suppose that the romantic formula and the Gothic formula are very similar. Indeed, even Kathryn
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Weibel, a student of women's popular culture, claims that the differences between the two types of stories are "so minor . . . that they might not seem worth mentioning fifty years hence." I have already had occasion to note some of the similarities between Gothics and Harlequins. Both deal with women's fears of and confusion about masculine behavior in a world in which men learn to devalue women. Harlequins enable women to believe that devaluation is only apparent, a mask, as it were, hiding the man's intense and ferocious love for the woman. But immediately we encounter some striking differences between the two types of narratives. In Gothic novels, the woman often suspects her lover or her husband of trying to drive her insane, or trying to murder her or both. Clearly, even the most disturbed reader would have difficulty attributing this bizarre behavior on the part of the male to a suppressed though nearly uncontrollable passion for the heroine. Another way of expressing the difference between the two types of narrative is to say that the Harlequin heroine's feelings undergo a transformation from fear into love, whereas for the Gothic heroine, the transformation is from love into fear:

That was the point at which I knew that love had gone out of my marriage, but not the point at which fear replaced it.3

She stared blindly down at his fingers, not hearing Max Alexander's voice, aware of nothing except that Jon [her husband] was a stranger to her whom she could not trust. It occurred to her dully to wonder if she had ever imagined unhappiness to be like this; it's not the raw nagging edge of desolation, she thought, but the tight darkness of fear. The pain is convex and opaque and absolute (Shore, 166-67).

In Harlequins, the transformation is aided by the reader's own participation in the story: she knows that the heroine has nothing to fear but love and thus she has a certain measure of power over the heroine and a feeling of being somewhat in control of the situation. In Gothics, on the other hand, the reader shares some of the heroine's uncertainty about what is going on and what the lover/husband is up to. The reader is nearly as powerless in her understanding as the heroine.

Perhaps one way of explaining the differences between the two forms of romance is to see them as corresponding to two different stages in a woman's life: roughly, courtship and marriage (the third form under consideration, soap opera, covers yet a third stage—motherhood and family life). Although this breakdown is somewhat overschematized, since studies show that a large number of college students are "hooked" on soap operas, and women of all ages tend to read romances and Gothics, it nevertheless has a certain heuristic value. It must be remembered, too, that psychologically speaking, all stages are more or less present at all times: the young woman anticipates future life; the older woman is a product of her past, or indeed reenacts the past in present relationships. In Harlequins, then, the preoccupation is with getting a man; in Gothics the concern is with understanding the relationship and the feelings involved once the union has been formed.

According to the ex-editor of Ace Books, "pure Gothics" almost always have "a handsome, magnetic suitor or husband who may or may not be a lunatic and/or murderer." Immediately one is struck by the strong element of paranoia suggested by this description, an element which surely requires a deeper explanation than the one Joanna Russ assigns it:

In one way the Gothics are a kind of justified paranoia: people are planning awful things about you; you can't trust your husband (lover, fiance); everybody's motives are devious and complex; only the most severe vigilance will enable you to snatch any happiness from the jaws of destruction.3

But this "justification" is what psychoanalysts who have studied the paranoid process call "the core of truth," which, they emphasize, is always present in paranoid delusions. Clearly, the core of truth in Gothics is not as large as in Harlequins. As we pointed out earlier, men are often cynical, mocking, and hostile in their relationships with women, just as the Harlequin heroes are. But they are not often lunatics or murderers. Thus, while we will try never to lose sight of the "core of truth" in our discussion of Gothics, we will necessarily have to look further to discover the appeal of the story of the persecuted heroine.

At least two psychoanalysts have expressed surprise over the lack of psychoanalytic literature on paranoia in married women,
since, according to these analysts, the phenomenon is not uncommon. We must ask, then, why marriage causes some women to become fearful and suspicious. We will begin by examining the social circumstances which are likely to foster a paranoid attitude toward the world; and then we will examine the psychological determinants of paranoia (bearing in mind that the social and psychological are, of course, mutually determining).

Norman Cameron, one of the foremost experts on paranoia, has cited social isolation as a major contributing factor to paranoia:

Isolation leaves a person at the mercy of his private daydreams without the safeguard of countervailing external contacts, without the corrective effects that the talk and action of others normally provide. Experimental work in sensory deprivation with normal subjects, and recent extensive studies of dreams and daydreams have brought such factors into prominence.

This is hardly a new insight; one recalls Dr. Johnson's cautions against the solitary life and his portrayal of the mad astronomer, who certainly had more than a little in common with Freud's Dr. Schreber. The constant stress on sociality one encounters in eighteenth-century literature must have arisen, in part, as a defense against the increasing isolation brought about by the formation of the nuclear family as well as the increase in the amount of leisure time that needed to be filled.

Obviously, all this has special pertinence for eighteenth-century women, who were expected as a matter of course to leave their own familiar surroundings and go wherever the husband dictated and who, according to a newly forming ideology, were supposed to be idle. Moreover, women's sense of reality, even before the extreme change brought about by marriage, must often have been somewhat tenuous. As Mary Wollstonecraft complained in her Gothic novel, Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman, young girls' lives were all too often cramped and confined. Cameron informs us that among the early social causes of the development of paranoid behavior are lack of "freedom to explore the neighborhood at an early age and [little] cooperative play with other children." One can readily understand why women were ripe candidates for novels expressing delusions of persecution—as well as why for Jane Austen's Catherine Morland, Gothic delusions were only a temporary aberration from which she easily recovered:

She was moreover noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down the slope at the back of the house. . . . [It] was not very wonderful that Catherine, who had by nature nothing heroic about her, should prefer cricket, base ball, riding on horseback, and running about the country, to books. . . .

It can scarcely be an accident, then, that the female Gothic arose in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Indeed, one of Ann Radcliffe's explicit purposes in The Mysteries of Udolpho, the prototype of the female Gothic, was to warn women against indulging in paranoid fancies and to exert them to keep busy in their solitude, the breeding ground for such fancies. Over and over again, Emily St. Aubert's superstitious fears are quieted as they are shown to have quite reasonable explanations:

'I perceive' said Emily, smiling, 'that all old mansions are haunted; I am lately come from a place of wonders; but unluckily, since I left it, I have heard almost all of them explained.'

But the explanations are notoriously unsatisfactory. Critics from Coleridge to the present have expressed irritation and frustration at the simple and mundane solutions Radcliffe gives to the most elaborate plots. In their book on The Paranoid, Swanson et al. note that "paradoxically, [the paranoid] will often suspect complicated motives behind the simplest acts or will supply surprisingly simple, naive explanations for situations that are very complicated." Perhaps Radcliffe's own social isolation rendered her incapable of dealing with the full complexity of events, forcing her to the paranoid extremes of making much out of very little, or, conversely, of minimizing the frightening atrocities to which her imagination continually led. The result is that one's own paranoid tendencies are somewhat intensified by a reading of the Mysteries, since we are left with a strong sense that the world of human events is terrifyingly out of kilter: everything is always a great deal more or a great deal less than it seems. Be that as it may, Gothics to this day perform...
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the contradictory function of showing women that while there is some basis for their paranoid fears, they must also struggle against succumbing to them:

As she at last put down the receiver and looked at the silent innocent shape of the telephone she wondered if she were getting a persecution complex.

People with those, she had heard, were suspicious of everybody and everything. They swore things had happened that hadn't. Their mania came from a secret profound desire for love. . . . She pressed her hands to her temples as a shout rose up in her. What is happening to me? (Afternoon, 79).

The feelings of social isolation imposed upon women who are suddenly thrust into relatively unfamiliar surroundings, an environment chosen and dominated by another, go a little way toward explaining the development of slight paranoid tendencies in certain married women. Another contributing and related factor is, no doubt, the letdown women feel as their dreams of romance and marital bliss (dreams which Harlequins promise will be utterly fulfilled) inevitably conflict with harsh reality. Cameron describes how in the early phases of paranoia, the individual begins to experience "feelings of estrangement and puzzlement..." Things have changed for him inexplicably; and he tries to understand what is happening. 16 Gothics provide one kind of outlet for women's feelings of estrangement and the sense of disorientation consequent upon what is usually considered the most momentous change in their lives. And so a frequent complaint of Gothic heroines is that environments which had in the past seemed so various and so beautiful are now menacing and ugly. Things have changed "inexplicably":

For Harriet Delvaney, the great house of Menfreya, standing like a fortress on the Cornish coast, has always been a citadel of happiness and high spirits. Not until she comes to Menfreya as a bride does Harriet discover the secret family legend of infidelity, jealousy, and murder (Menfreya, back cover). 17

Cameron goes on to describe the paranoid's reaction to these feelings of bewilderment:

He scrutinizes his surroundings uneasily, engages in solitary observations [one thinks of Jane Eyre on the window seat], and looks for hidden meanings. He watches the little things people do and say, their glances and gestures, their frowns, smiles and laughter. He listens to conversations, asks leading questions and ponders over it all like a detective. 18

One could scarcely draw a more accurate picture of the Gothic heroine's reactions to what goes on in the novels. Thus, the "Over-Subtle Emotions," which Russ identifies as characteristic of female Gothics constitute a classic paranoid trait. 19 To Cameron, this type of behavior marks the beginnings of an attempt to reestablish contact with social reality. The individual is on her way to constructing what Cameron felicitously calls a "pseudo-community" 20 of persecutors, of which the individual, in reaction to her feelings of loneliness and neglect, becomes the important center:

Mistrust seemed to creep toward me from every corner of the room—mistrust of every person in this house. . . . I felt like an innocent fly who had wandered into a spider's web and that all around me the spiders were gathering, ready to strangle me with strands of that web (Dragonmede, 270).

To be persecuted, as several analysts have observed, is better than being ignored.

But surely to be loved and admired is better than being persecuted. Yet Gothics are never about women who experience delusions of grandeur and omnipotence (a form paranoia occasionally takes); the Gothic heroine always feels helpless, confused, frightened, and despised. Obviously, then, to cite romantic disillusionment and feelings of social isolation in the newly married woman is not sufficient to explain the particular kinds of fantasies encountered in female Gothics. We must look deeper into the dynamics of the paranoid process as well as into female psychology in order to see how women come to form certain kinds of attitudes toward their husbands and, consequently, how Gothics help them to understand these attitudes.
In his massive study on *The Paranoid Process*, William Meissner claims that the paranoid usually comes from a family whose power structure is greatly skewed: one of the parents is perceived as omnipotent and domineering, while the other is perceived (and most usually perceives him/herself) as submissive to and victimized by the stronger partner. According to Meissner, the paranoid patient tends to introject these images of his/her parents and, even more importantly, internalizes the dynamics of the parental interaction: thus, the patient enacts within the self the war between victim and victimizer. When the internal battle becomes too painful to be tolerated, one of these elements gets projected onto the external environment—usually the aggressive introject, for, as Meissner points out, "aggressive impulses are tolerated best and with least conflict when we believe we are the victims of another's hostility." It should be clear how this has special relevance for the situation of women, since aggressive impulses are socially less acceptable in women than in men. Furthermore, since an imbalance in the power structure—with the male dominant—is considered the ideal familial situation in our culture, and since the aim of our socialization process is to get the child to identify with the parent of the same sex, the female is more likely than the male to retain the (feminine) "victim" introject and to deny (project) feelings of aggression and anger. At this point, we can see how Gothic novels, like Harlequins, perform the function of giving expression to women's hostility towards men while simultaneously allowing them to repudiate it. Because the male appears to be the outrageous persecutor, the reader can allow herself a measure of anger against him; yet at the same time she can identify with a heroine who is entirely without malice and innocent of any wrongdoing.

But both the paranoid process and Gothic novels are even more complex than this description suggests. The child, according to Meissner, not only feels anger at the domineering father, but also at the mother for allowing herself to be a victim and for—as often happens—taking out her own anger and aggressive impulses on the helpless child. And, in addition to harboring hostile feelings toward the parents, the child must contend with its love for and great dependence on both of the parents. To Meissner, then, the paranoid “cure” consists in the patient's being able to work through many of these ambivalent emotions. I suggest that Gothic novels provide one way for women to come at least partially to terms with their ambivalent attitudes towards the significant people in their lives.

Indeed, this was an important function of the earliest female Gothic, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Ellen Moers has suggested that in Radcliffe's novel, "the narrative as a whole is designed to accord with the rhythms of a woman's life. . . . [Radcliffe] blocks out the narrative in terms of female childhood, youth, and faded maturity." I would go even further and claim that the narrative is blocked out in terms of the vicissitudes of the female's *psychic* life. We note that at the very beginning of the novel Emily St. Aubert's relationship with both her parents is a very harmonious one, a harmony which is almost immediately interrupted by the death of Emily's mother. The young girl's "oedipal" wish to have the father completely to herself is conveniently and rapidly fulfilled. But it is not long before the idyllic relation between father and daughter is severed, for M. St. Aubert himself soon dies, leaving Emily under the care of a vain, capricious and willful aunt, Madame Cheron. In a study "On Women Who Hate Their Husbands," analyst David A. Freedman observes that as a child each of his paranoid women patients felt rejected by her father and "thrown on the mercies of a maternal figure toward whom her feelings were highly ambivalent." This is clearly Emily's situation: "abandonment" by the father followed by submission to a tyrannizing mother figure:

> The love of sway was her [Madame Cheron's] ruling passion. and she knew it would be highly gratified by taking into her house a young orphan, who had no appeal from her decisions, and on whom she could exercise without control the capricious humour of the moment.

Sometime later Madame Cheron marries Montoni, who takes her and Emily off to the mysterious and threatening Castle of Udolpho in Italy. The ensuing family dynamic which is enacted between Montoni, the evil, omnipotent tyrant, and his wife, the tormented and depressive victim, also finds an echo in Freedman's study: the mothers of his patients, he reports, were all isolated, paranoid women, convinced "that this is a man's world and all men are selfish. . . . Open conflict between the parents characterized [the] homes, involving accusations leveled against the father as a selfish, exploiting tyrant." The relationship between Montoni and his
wife reaches its climax when he imprisons her in a turret and allows her to die from a languishing fever.

A number of interesting points arise from this description of the plot. Ellen Moers has pointed out that Montoni is the evil father, "a shattered mirror image of the impossibly good father," M. St. Aubert. Yet she does not notice that Madame Montoni is in many ways the reverse image of the impossibly good mother. That real mothers are often conspicuously absent in early literature by women has often been commented upon, but very little explanation for this phenomenon has been forthcoming. Patricia Meyer Spacks remarks in an interesting aside that female writers before the twentieth century deal with their anger towards their mothers by eliminating them, and there is certainly some truth in this claim. But while real mothers (as compared to real fathers) are in short supply in female fiction, one encounters no lack of mother substitutes—unts, older women friends, etc. This substitution, one might speculate, provides a means by which ambivalence towards the mother can be worked through while it simultaneously prevents the mother/daughter relationship from being confronted too openly.

Gertrude Ticho comments that for the female "the separation from home [as in marriage] revives early separation anxieties and unresolved oedipal conflicts." She suggests that a woman can achieve autonomy and relinquish her "masochistic identification with her mother"—the victim who in turn victimizes the child—"only by working through her hostility and, most important, her love for her mother." And if this is not possible, "if the mother is in reality unpleasant, at least some tolerance of her difficulties should become possible." Thus in the classic female Gothic, part of the heroine's progress involves a separation from home, a series of internal and/or external conflicts, and a more or less gradual understanding of the "mother's" situation. In The Mysteries of Udolpho Emily forgets "her resentment . . . impressed only by compassion for the pitiful state of her aunt, dying without succour." She "watched over her with the most tender solicitude, no longer seeing her imperious aunt in the poor object before her, but the sister of her late beloved father, in a situation that called for all her compassion." And in Jane Eyre even Jane's passionate hatred of Mrs. Reed is eventually overcome:

"Love me, then, or hate me, as you will," I said at last.

"you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God's and be at peace."

Poor suffering woman! it was too late for her to make now the effort to change her habitual frame of mind. Living, she had ever hated me—dying, she must hate me still.

Modern Gothics, too, help women to deal with their ambivalent attitudes towards their mothers as well as their "masochistic identification" with them. Thus in a great many of the novels the heroine has the uncanny sensation that the past is repeating itself through her. Usually she feels a strong identification with a woman from either the remote or the very recent past, a woman who in almost every case has died a mysterious and perhaps violent or gruesome death. In The Lady in the Tower the heroine learns of the legend of the young and beautiful woman walled up in a tower and left to die by her husband:

I could not think of any wickedness that would merit such a fate. I could not imagine seeing the last stones set into place. The last of the air, hands clawing, nails breaking, screams that only yourself could hear (Lady, 73).

In Menfreya in the Morning the heroine strongly resembles a woman from the past who was locked into a buttress and died with her child as she waited for her husband, the lord of the castle, to return to her. In Ammie, Come Home a woman who had been murdered by her father actually takes possession of the heroine, who describes the sensation thus:

You know the feeling, when you're waiting for something that you know will be very painful or unhappy? Like an operation; or somebody is going to die. Something you can't get out of, but that you know you are going to hate. You can't breathe. You keep gasping, but the air won't go down into your lungs. You can hear your own heart thudding, so hard it seems to be banging into your ribs. Your hands perspire. You want to run away, but you can't, it won't do any good, the thing you're afraid of will happen anyhow (Ammie, 87-88).
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In Spindrift the heroine identifies with a mad woman out of the past:

I stared at him in distress, because my own story and Zenia's were beginning to be intertwined... I was trapped in my age as Zenia had been trapped in hers (Spindrift, 281-82).

And in Monk's Court the heroine comes across a statue of a woman reputed to have cut off her hands to ransom a husband captured in the crusades. The heroine becomes obsessed with this woman and, reflecting on their common situation, thinks:

The somnolent world of Monk's Court; the dreamworld of Monk's Court, with herself trapped in the dream, and, as in all dreams—all nightmares—the dreamer, struggling to waken, struggling desperately, was helpless (Monk's Court, 122).

Joanna Russ, who notes this constant doubling in Gothics, asks, "Is it that every woman fears the same man and undergoes the same fate? Is it an echo of the family romance in which the Heroine plays daughter, the Super-Male is father, and the Other Woman/First Wife plays mother?" Russ does not pursue the issues she raises, but her questions are very much to the point.

We can perhaps go even further: it is not only that women fear being like their mothers, sharing the same fate; it is an echo of the family romance in which the Heroine plays daughter, the Super-Male is father, and the Other Woman/First Wife plays mother?4 Russ does not pursue the issues she raises, but her questions are very much to the point.

We can perhaps go even further: it is not only that women fear being like their mothers, sharing the same fate, but also that, in an important sense, they fear being their mothers—hence the emphasis on identity in physical appearance, the sensation of actually being possessed, the feeling that past and present are not merely similar but are "intertwined," etc. In each case, the heroine feels suffocated—as well as desperate and panic stricken in her inability to break free of the past. We recall Ticho's remark that the separation from home revives early separation anxieties. As Nancy Chodorow persuasively argues, the female child generally has more difficulty than the male child in separating herself from the mother. Case studies of mother-child relationships reveal that while the mother recognizes the boy's differences from herself, she often does not recognize or denies the existence of the daughter as a separate person, and the daughter herself...
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guard marriage with horror; the disillusion of them both;
she in finding a virile young husband, he a frigid wife
(King, 284).

There are some striking differences between the typical popular Gothic plot and the plot which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar take to be the "paradigmatic female story." For Gilbert and Gubar, this is the story of the imprisoned madwoman whose anger and rebelliousness represents the heroine's own repressed rage and whose forced confinement functions paradoxically both as a metaphor for the restrictions of the feminine role and as a warning against stepping outside this role, demanding a larger freedom. The imprisoned woman in our stories, by contrast, is presented not as a rebel, but almost wholly as a victim, even a self-victimizer (e.g. the woman who cut off her own hands), and it is against assuming the victim's role that the heroine desperately struggles. This too is an old plot, and may be equally paradigmatic. We have seen it in the earliest female Gothic, and it can also be seen in other popular works written before the twentieth century.

Some of Louisa May Alcott's thrillers are variations on this plot, with the interesting difference that the mother figure in Alcott's stories is often a real mother rather than a substitute. In "A Whisper in the Dark," the heroine, Sybil, is locked into an insane asylum by a vicious and degenerate man who poses as her uncle in order to gain possession of her fortune. There, she begins to hear incessant footsteps in the room directly above her, and before long Sybil is unconsciously pacing her room in time to the pacing of the person upstairs—another instance of "possession," which reaches its climax when the mysterious person is found dead:

the face I saw was a pale image of my own. Sharpened
by suffering, pallid with death, the features were as
familiar as those I used to see; the hair, beautiful and
blond as mine had been, streamed long over the pulse-
less breast, and on the head, still clenched in that last
struggle, shone the likeness of a ring I wore, a ring be-
quethed me by my father. An awesome fancy that it
was myself assailed me: I had plotted death and with the
waywardness of a shattered mind, I recalled legends of
spirits returning to behold the bodies they had left.

Of course, the woman turns out to have been Sybil's mother. Sybil
is able to effect her escape shortly after finding a letter from the
woman, a letter assuring her, "I try to help you in my poor way";
describing the mother's love for her child, "I sing to lull the baby
whom I never saw"; and urging the young woman to get away
before she too becomes helplessly, hopelessly mad, "for the air is
poison, the solitude fatal." Thus Sybil is assured that her mother
has not voluntarily "abandoned" her, that on the contrary, she has
done all in her meager powers to help the daughter achieve the free-
dom the mother has been denied. Sybil, then, achieves autonomy
because love for the mother and "tolerance" for her "difficulties"
has indeed become possible.

III

Thus far we have been analyzing Gothics in terms of the
separation anxieties which, as Ticho observes, the female often relives upon leaving home. According to Ticho, we remember, un-
resolved oedipal conflicts are also experienced at this time. Separa-
tion anxieties and oedipal conflicts are of course interrelated, and
for females, as many analysts have observed, the interrelationship
is especially complex and the resolution of the anxieties and con-
licts fraught with difficulties.

For the female child, as well as for the male child, the mother is
(in our society) the first and strongest attachment. Children of both
sexes first perceive the father as "the enemy"—the person capable
of taking the mother away from the child. We might say that from
the very beginning of the child's life what we have seen to be the
typical "paranoid" family dynamic is incipient in the interaction
among the three family members: the child perceives the father as
capable of controlling the mother and hence develops hostility
towards both parents, the father because he is the "tyrant" and the
mother because she is unable or unwilling to resist her husband's
"control" over her. Later in the child's life, however, the father
comes to be valued for the very function which was originally re-
sented—his aid in furthering the child's necessary separation from
the mother. As Chodorow remarks, children of both sexes tend to
see the father as a "symbol of freedom from . . . dependence and
merging." The boy, as is well known, accomplishes his separation
by identifying with the former "enemy"; the girl, like the boy, must
relinquish her first love—her mother—but, unlike the boy, she
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must make her “enemy” her “lover” (We recall the Harlequin titles). If the father is seen to be remote and/or rejecting, the child may be thrown back on its mother, and for several reasons the merging is likely to be more thoroughgoing in the girl’s case: because, as we have seen, the mother perceives the female child as “an extension of herself,” because the female child does not distinguish herself from her mother by virtue of an anatomical difference, and because, while the boy may still “identify” with a remote father, a girl can hardly consider herself well loved by such a parent. At this point, the girl is likely to feel renewed hostility toward the father: he has once again disappointed his daughter and one again becomes the enemy.

Meissner suggests that the “need for an enemy,” a classic paranoid trait, may very well be a necessary step in the process of separation-individuation each child must undergo, for the self largely comes to be defined through opposition and differentiation. But now we encounter the knottiest problem. If the mother perceives her husband to be an enemy—a tyrant and victimizer—then the “enemy” father only serves to confirm rather than break the young girl’s identification with the mother. And, given the fact that in our society men are often dominant within the home, one would expect feelings of victimization, however slight, to be relatively common in wives and mothers (an expectation which, as we have seen, is confirmed by Freedman’s study). The mother-daughter boundary confusion which Chodorow speaks of is, then, aggravated both by the father’s remoteness from his children and by his powerful position in relation to his wife. According to analysts who have studied paranoia, “confusion about the boundaries of the self, causing difficulty in locating the problem or discomfort . . . is the essence of projection.”

This analysis helps us to account for two strong tendencies in Gothic novels: the desperate need of the heroine to find out who her “enemy” is and the equally imperative desire to discover that the enemy is not the father (or the lover, who is the father substitute). For, on the one hand, being able to project an enemy enables the paranoid to establish the boundaries of the self and also, as we have seen, allows her to deny intolerable ambivalent feelings, especially aggressive ones (“I do not want to harm him; he is persecuting me”). But, on the other hand, to find out that the enemy is indeed the “father” would only increase the “boundary confusion” the “paranoid” is struggling to eliminate.

The Gothic heroine’s intense need to locate an enemy she can blame for her “discomfort” is repeatedly expressed in the typical paranoid manner described by Swanson: “Statements are frequently made about wanting to find out the real truth. Every action, every unexplained statement is scrutinized closely.” The purpose of this behavior is “to find a basis for the mistrust.”

It was better to bring it into the open and face it once and for all. Answers could only be found if I retraced my steps, watching for some betrayal along the way that would point to guilt. I knew there was guilt (Spindrift, 46).

. . . she longed to take him in her arms and say, “Jonny, why didn’t you tell me about the anonymous phone call? . . . And why did you say nothing else to Marijohn and she say nothing to you? The conversation should have begun then, not ended. It was all so strange and so puzzling, and I want so much to understand. . . .”

But she said nothing, not liking to confess that she had eavesdropped on their conversation by creeping back downstairs and listening at the closed door . . . (Shore, 111-12).

Often the attempt to find an enemy and the attempt to exonerate the father are part of the same project: the heroine of Spindrift, for example, undertakes to prove that her father did not really kill himself, as everyone else in the novel keeps insisting, but was, in fact, murdered. Such a plot, we can speculate, serves a variety of functions. Feminine feelings of anger against the father can be simultaneously expressed and denied (the father is killed off, but the heroine’s determined efforts to find out who did it help to avenge his murder). Moreover, feminine fears of abandonment by the father are assuaged (the father did not “desert” his daughter by killing himself). The plot of Someone Waiting is very similar: the heroine is the only person in the novel to believe that her guardian’s death was a murder and not a suicide:

Leonie soon sensed that the house was hostile to her, that someone was watching her, waiting—for she had stubbornly reopened the issue of Marcus’s murder (Waiting, back cover).
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And in Orphan of the Shadows the heroine sets out to prove that her father was not really a Nazi (I) as her uncle has told her all her life.

However, the most typical plot of female Gothics, as Russ observes, is one in which the lover plays the “father,” and the heroine either suspects him of having killed his first wife or else fears that her own relationship with him will be a repetition of one which occurred in the past (perhaps involving one of the man’s ancestors). Thus, in Monk’s Court, the heroine believes she witnessed a murder committed by the man she loves. Throughout the novel she tries to deny the testimony of her own eyes, constantly telling herself that true love means maintaining absolute faith in the loved one. She compares her situation to that of the woman who cut off her hands to ransom her husband.

Catharine, lying there, brave Catharine. Brave at the last, at any rate. Had she, too, flinched, and shrunk from the giving of her gift of love? ... How deeply, deeply, she must have loved, how passionately, with both her soul and her body. Two hands gone. Two hands that had willingly, gladly been held out. How could she? Mutilation, truly the gift of gifts. More than life (210).

But though the heroine accepts the ideal of feminine self-sacrifice in theory, she can never really apply it to herself. Rather, women’s fears that marriage involves either voluntary self-mutilation (as in the above quote) or involuntary victimage (the-woman-imprisoned-in-the-tower motif) must be put to rest by establishing beyond any doubt the fact that the lover/husband is not guilty:

... she would stay on here, a little longer, anyway, in hope of finding proof of his innocence. It was all very well to say that true faith, faith worthy of the name, had no need of proof, but it was proof, and proof alone, that would make her existence endurable (Monk’s Court, 179).

Only after the heroine has obtained “absolute proof” of the man’s innocence can “oedipal conflicts” be resolved and reconciliation with the father become possible; only then can identification with the victimized “mother” be broken; and only then can the lover be accepted.

Moreover, in Gothics the process of detachment from the “mother” through attachment to the “father” is often overdetermined—additional proof, if it is needed, of the intensity of female “separation anxieties” and “oedipal difficulties.” Russ mentions the frequency with which young children appear in Gothics—their only function, apparently, to be befriended by the heroine. Russ sees this plot device simply as an easy and quick way of establishing the heroine’s “goodness” and keeping her at the same time solidly within the feminine role. But the child in these novels also serves as an additional reassurance that the heroine will be unlike the “mother”—a helpless, depressive victim who is therefore unable to protect the child against the tyrannies of the father or to provide it with adequate love and nurturance. In each novel in which a child appears, the main male figure seems to despise it, or at the very least to be utterly indifferent towards it. In The King of the Castle and The Lady in the Tower the child is convinced its father has murdered its mother. In Nine Coaches Waiting the heroine believes that the man she loves is out to murder his nephew. In all cases, the heroine, who may be too timid ever to speak up for herself or to act in order to further her own claims, is able to brave the man’s fiercest wrath in the interests of the child. The heroine’s intervention between “father” and child is usually very effective, causing the man to show more interest in and tenderness towards the child. In Monk’s Court, for example, the male alternates between sarcasm and indifference in his treatment of his daughter until the heroine speaks up for the girl:

With her courage failing then, she moved quickly to the stairs, but on the first step she paused and turned, and daring the rebuff of Sir Hugh’s hard, glacial silence, added gravely, “She loves you very much—in case you don’t realize it” (238).

Thereafter, he is much kinder and more considerate in his behavior towards his daughter and, interestingly, the daughter who up until this time has been unable to “give her father up” begins to accept the attentions of her suitor.
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Except in the important matter of the child, the heroine, as a rule, is extraordinarily timid in relation to her husband or lover. Often she is unable even to initiate a conversation with him:

Once more I considered Joel's closed door. I supposed I should let him know I would no longer share an adjoining room. But I still didn't want to face him. A sense of indecision and foreboding held me back (Spindrift, 112).

The heroine's fearfulness is especially striking because she is often presented as brave, resourceful, and self-reliant until shnalls-.Th in love. In a study of phobias in married women, Alexandra Symonds discusses several female patients who all seemed excessively self-reliant before marriage and after marriage became excessively helpless and unable to cope with the least stress or difficulty. She notes that these women all came from families who, for one reason or another, were “unable to respond to [the] child's needs.” Hence the child learned to repress her childishness and developed “qualities that gave the illusion of strength.”49 Such women, however, are generally waiting for an opportunity to give in to their feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. Marriage offers the prime opportunity because it provides a “socially acceptable” way for women to be utterly reliant on another. “Marriage then becomes their ‘declaration of dependence.’ If for any reason...the marriage does not seem to be all they expected they are in a panic and they cling even more.”50 The panic, the denial of their anger, the sense of being restricted all result in phobias. “They described their fears as fear of being closed in, a fear of being trapped, a fear that they could not be able to leave anytime they wanted to”—in short, all the fears repeatedly expressed and often materially embodied in Gothics.

Symonds is struck by her patients’ total “inability to communicate clearly to their partner.” For, “since these are people who consider ordinary assertion to be the equivalent of hostility, they have an exaggerated fear” of any encounter which might entail friction.”51 According to Symonds, the woman deals with her emotional turmoil—her repudiated aggression and her fear—by “externalizing,” by making her husband into a “villain”: “It appears as though all her troubles would be over if only she had a different husband or if only someone else would get her husband to change.”52 This, more or less, is the typical Gothic “solution.” The woman has either gotten involved with the wrong man, and the right man comes along and saves her from the villainy of the first man; or else the lover/husband “changes”—far from being the villain the heroine mistook him for, he is revealed to be the true hero. From then on, the heroine’s troubles are over.

The constant splitting of male characteristics which occurs in the Gothics deserves comment. Russ, as I noted in the previous chapter, divides the men in the novels into two categories: the Super-Male and the Shadow-Male, the former almost always the apparent villain but the real hero, the latter usually a kind, considerate, gentle male who turns out to be vicious, insane, and/or murderous. The phenomenon of the “splitting of the male” in female literature has been little noted in feminist critical writings, yet it is a fascinating one and worthy of much attention. Feminists (as well as traditional psychoanalysts) have frequently cited the male tendency to divide women into two opposing and unreconcilable classes: the “spiritualized” mother and the whore.48 But there is also a corresponding tendency in women to divide men into two classes: the omnipotent, domineering, aloof male and the gentle, but passive and fairly ineffectual male. (One of Meissner’s female paranoid patients divided all men into “brutes” and “puppy dogs.”) This tendency has characterized the female Gothic since its inception. Not only is Montoni of The Mysteries of Udolpho the mirror image of the good father, but a further splitting also occurs along the lines we have been discussing. Whereas Montoni is a kind of forerunner of the “Super-Male,” Valancourt is in many ways the prototype of the “Shadow-Male.” Although Valancourt is, of course, not the villain of the piece, he is remarkably incapable of affording Emily any protection either against the domineering “mother,” or, later, against the brutality of the “father.” He pays, however, quite dearly for his weakness by being forced at the end of the novel to undergo a long trial during which he must prove himself worthy of Emily’s love.

Interestingly, the female’s tendency to classify men into two extreme categories is attributable to conflicts with the mother as well as with the father. Freedman observes that his female “paranoid” patients all looked for mates in possession “of an extremely unlikely combination of qualities”:...
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He must, on the one hand, be passive and dependent enough in his orientation to the significant female in his life not to repeat the traumatic desertion [of the father]. On the other hand he must be strong enough to supply the kind of ego function that the patient felt she herself lacked and had to derive from the maternal relation.  

Since the “combination of qualities” sought by these women was unrealizable, the patients all chose passive, reliable men who were not outstanding in any way (Shadow-Males, in effect). This choice was in part determined by the father’s early rejection of the patient and her consequent “inability to see herself as a person of sufficient potential and significance to hold the man she really admired.” But either alternative—the passive male or the strong, omnipotent male—is ultimately unsatisfactory, involving threats to the woman’s weak sense of autonomy. The passive male—the Valancourt type—may be unable or unwilling to desert the woman, but his reluctance to assert himself may nevertheless result in feminine feelings of isolation. The strong male, like Montoni, may be capable of protecting the woman, but he is also capable of abusing and victimizing her. Valancourt is driven away from Emily by Madame Cheron (and doesn’t return until Emily’s adventures are almost at an end); Montoni kidnaps and tyrannizes over Emily and her aunt. In both cases separation anxieties remain unresolved, the woman is forced to retain her strong identification with the mother, and the male becomes an object of feminine resentment.

Modern Gothics usually solve this dilemma by endowing one man with the “unlikely combination of qualities” described by Freedman. In most cases, the feared omnipotent male is shown to have unsuspected reserves of tenderness and love:

The victory came in less than five seconds. She felt him relax, saw his eyes soften, felt his mouth curve in a smile, and she knew for the first time that there would be no more dread of the Distant Mood, no more tension and worry because she did not understand or could not cope with his changes of humor (Shore, 222-23).

Thus the admired male—the “father”—who had formerly been perceived as remote and rejecting, finally accepts the heroine, releasing her from the uncomfortable identification with the mother and simultaneously supplying the strength the heroine lacks. Moreover, by making either the feminized (Shadow) male or, occasionally, a woman, responsible for the crimes committed in the story, Gothics further reinforce women’s distance from their “victimized” mothers, “proving” that men—“real men,” at any rate—are not tyrants and brutes.

IV

Although I have been analyzing Gothics in the light of what is usually seen to be a psychic illness—paranoia—I have not done so in order to show up Gothic readers as neurotic and unstable. Many analysts have stressed that the paranoid process plays an inevitable part in human psychological development. “[P]aranoid traits may be quite mild, are almost universal and are often found in persons whose ego strengths may be otherwise quite sound.” And Freedman’s study of paranoid women, like Wolowitz’s study of the hysterical character referred to in the previous chapter, concludes by pointing out the similarity between his patients’ attitudes and “the orientation . . . still generally considered appropriate . . . for women in some areas of Western Culture.” My analysis of Gothic Romances is meant to confirm and expand this claim. The structure of the Western family, with its unequal distribution of power, almost inevitably generates the kinds of feminine conflicts and anxieties we have been discussing.

Gothics, then, are expressions of the “normal” feminine paranoid personality, just as Harlequins are in some ways expressions of the “normal” feminine hysterical character. Further, each kind of text may be seen to relate to two basic anxieties, guilt and fear. The following distinction drawn by one analyst between the “depressive” and the “paranoid” type suggestively defines the positions of both the heroines and the readers of our two texts:

The paranoid individual faces physical persecution (as in dreams of being attacked by murderous figures) while the depressed individual faces moral persecution (as, for example, in feeling surrounded by accusing eyes and pointing fingers), so that Klein regards both positions as setting up a primary anxiety.
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From the very beginnings of the novel, the two most popular forms for women have centered around these two "primary anxieties." We have seen how romances are centrally (though often only implicitly) concerned with the issue of guilt, how the plot of the very first romance, Pamela, focused on the moral persecution of the heroine, and how moral persecution continued even outside the book, as Fielding and others pointed accusing fingers at the "sham" heroine. The Mysteries of Udolpho, on the other hand, introduced the plot of the physically persecuted heroine surrounded by murderous figures.

"Blaming" is a characteristic of both the depressive and the paranoid position, but in the former the blame is directed at the self, whereas in the latter it is placed on someone outside the self:

Paradoxically, in the depressive state, it is the aggressive introject which is retained and which forms the basis for the patient's self-blaming. Conversely, in the paranoid condition, it is the depressive introject which is retained, and the aggressive component which is projected externally and which is then seen as the agency of blame. . . . Thus in the depressive state the patient is both victim and victimizer, but in the paranoid state he is able to regard himself more purely as only a victim (emphasis added).

This distinction has relevance for the two types of feminine narrative under discussion. The reader of Gothics, as compared to the reader of romance, is able to regard herself "more purely as only a victim." In considering the point of view of romances, we saw how the combination of personal and apersonal narration reinforced feminine guilt feelings by making the reader feel as if female "victims" are partial agents of their own "victimization" (i.e. seductions). Gothics are often written in the first person, allowing for a more direct identification with the heroine. And even though Gothics may occasionally employ third person narration, we don't encounter the same difficulties we did in Harlequins. Because Gothics have evolved such complex mechanisms as externalization, projection, doubling, and splitting, they permit women to experience hostile emotions without forcing them to see this hostility turned against themselves. Women in Gothics are persecuted, to be sure, but the persecution is not, as in romances, experienced as half-pleasurable. The Gothic heroine, unlike the romantic heroine, is not destined to turn her victimization into a triumph; she has not fallen in love with her victimizer (although she may for a time think she has; nevertheless she must have proof that this is not the case in order to "make her existence endurable"). In Gothics, then, feminine resentment is fully justified and, instead of being sabotaged by the woman herself, is satisfied through locating and punishing a "criminal" outside the self.

This distinction helps us to understand why Gothics have, since the eighteenth century, proved very attractive to many women writers, including avowed feminists. For Gothics probe the deepest layers of the feminine unconscious, providing a way for women to work through profound psychic conflicts, especially ambivalence towards the significant people in their lives—mothers, fathers, lovers. And furthermore, in the hands of a writer like Mary Wollstonecraft, the genre is used to explore these conflicts in relation to a society which systematically oppresses women. In other words, the Gothic has been used to drive home the "core of truth" in feminine paranoid fears and to connect the social with the psychological, the personal with the political. It has been used to show how women are at least potentially "pure victims," but how, in coming to view themselves as such, they perpetuate the cycle of victimization which occurs between fathers and mothers, mothers and daughters.

In Wollstonecraft's Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman, for example, the insane asylum in which Maria is imprisoned is not simply a physical embodiment of her fears of entrapment; it is also a real insane asylum, into which her husband has had the legal right to place her in order to gain control of her fortune. One of Maria's greatest anxieties during her imprisonment concerns her daughter's fate. We have seen how Gothics in part serve to convince women that they will not be victims the way their mothers were and to provide a means by which women can work through their hostility towards their relatively unavailable (because "victimized") mothers and also, perhaps, develop some tolerance for their mothers' difficulties. The longest section in Maria is a letter written by her to her daughter in which she tries to explain the social and psychological factors leading up to her imprisonment and hence her seeming "abandonment" of her daughter. Thus Maria hopes to obtain her daughter's forgiveness and to break the chain of victimization handed down from one generation to the next.
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In the letter Maria carefully shows how the circumstances we have discussed in this essay contributed to her present helplessness: social isolation ("Gain experience—ah! gain it—while experience is worth having"); and a father who tyrannized over the mother ("He was to be instantly obeyed, especially by my mother, whom he very benevolently married for love; but took care to remind her of the obligation, when she dared, in the slightest instance, to question his absolute authority.") As in many of the Gothics we have been discussing, Maria marries a man who seems gentle, kind, and supportive, but who turns out to be brutal and tyrannical. Finally he has Maria committed to an insane asylum so that he can legally obtain her money. In this prison, Maria meets Henry Darnford, a man who on one occasion had saved her from the tyrannies of her husband and whom she desperately tries to invest with the "unlike-ly combination of qualities" of a Super-Male: "Pygmalion formed an ivory maid, and longed for an informing soul. She, on the contrary, combined all the qualities of a hero's mind, and fate presented a statue in which she might enshrine them." But, unlike the endings of popular Gothics, the fantasy ending is not destined to work out. Wollstonecraft died before she could finish her novel, but it is clear from the notes she left that she intended Darnford to betray and abandon Maria.

The difference between popular Gothics—usually dismissed as escapist and trivial literature—and a militantly feminist Gothic novel like Maria is that the latter explores on a conscious level conflicts which popular Gothics exploit, yet keep at an unconscious level. Popular Gothics resolve the conflicts through a fantasy ending, whereas the ending of Maria leaves the conflicts unresolved. Yet both types of Gothic testify to women's extreme discontent with the social and psychological processes which transform them into victims. For it ought to be clear by now that although modern Gothics may frequently contain statements endorsing notions of feminine self-sacrifice, the workings of the plot actually run counter to such professions. In other words, modern Gothics may inform us that "mutilation" is "truly the gift of gifts," but they also assure us, to our immense relief, that it won't be extracted from us.