

Liminality and Confinement in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Gothic Literature

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DEDICATION

For my dad, Byron Poston (1951 – 2010), who gave me a baby pygmy goat for a pet, ate all of the meatballs in the SpaghettiOs so that I didn't have to, and encouraged me to annoy my older sister when she was talking to boys on the front porch.

For my grandma, Kitty Weatherford (1928 – 2003), whose collection of Alfred Hitchcock and Ellery Queen mystery magazines probably has something to do with this weird project.

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ABSTRACT

Confinement and liminality, a condition of ambiguity existing in between two defined states, are both major characteristics of the Gothic. In this dissertation, I argue that the two rely on each other in order to create uncertainties and present captivating yet often ambiguous stories. This ambiguity has a key function in the Gothic, drawing in readers who want to make sense of the narrative but ultimately keeping final interpretation elusive. Avoiding absolute explanation heightens the horror or terror in the text by leaving readers uncertain. Liminality helps achieve ambiguity; characters trapped in liminal states necessarily remain in-between and unclearly defined. I argue that confinements can function as liminal spaces for the characters inside, as these confinements often call into question the line between protection and persecution, life and death, past and present, or sanity and madness. Rather than proceeding chronologically through texts, I look at specific instances of physical confinement, which I have divided into four major categories that also form the basis of my chapters: cloisters, graves, haunted houses, and asylums. Each category deals with different types of spatial confinement that function as liminal spaces for the characters inside. While the works on which I focus span a large time period, covering the “long” nineteenth-century, and move between America and Britain, they all share a common Gothic nature and utilize the trope of confinement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	
Abbeys, Convents, Nunneries, and Monasteries: Confining Catholic Cloisters in <i>The Monk</i> , <i>The Italian</i> , and <i>Zofloya</i>	32
CHAPTER TWO	
Grave Emergences: Undead Bodies in “Berenice,” “The Giant Wistaria,” and “John Mortonson’s Funeral”	89
CHAPTER THREE	
The Ghost in the Window: Locking Out Spirits in <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , <i>The Turn of the Screw</i> , and “The Old Nurse’s Story”	139
CHAPTER FOUR	
Managing Madness: The Confining Asylum in <i>Lady Audley’s Secret</i> , “A Whisper in the Dark,” and “The Yellow Wall-paper”	169
CONCLUSION	196
BIBLIOGRAPHY	203
VITA.....	235

INTRODUCTION

In the morning, Emily was relieved from her fears for Annette, who came at an early hour.

‘Here were fine doings in the castle, last night, ma’amselle,’ said she, as soon as she entered the room,—‘fine doings, indeed! Was you not frightened, ma’amselle, at not seeing me?’

‘I was alarmed both on your account and on my own,’ replied Emily—‘What detained you?’

‘Aye, I said so, I told him so; but it would not do. It was not my fault, indeed, ma’amselle, for I could not get out. That rogue Ludovico locked me up again.’

‘Locked you up!’ said Emily, with displeasure, ‘Why do you permit Ludovico to lock you up?’

‘Holy Saints!’ exclaimed Annette, ‘how can I help it! If he will lock the door, ma’amselle, and take away the key, how am I to get out, unless I jump through the window?’ (Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* 389)

In Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), the maid Annette is repeatedly locked in a closet by her lover Ludovico when he perceives that she might be in danger. While the selection above provides a humorous example of confinement in the Gothic, this trope often takes on much more serious tones. Indeed, while Ludovico locks Annette away in order to *protect* her, many times characters are instead locked away as a result of more sinister intentions. In *Udolpho*, Ludovico’s humorous and protective confinements of Annette provide a foil for more threatening confinements in the same novel, such as Montoni’s confinement of Emily St. Aubert in attempts first to force her to marry and then to gain her inheritance as well as Montoni’s similar confinement of Madame Montoni that ultimately leads to her illness and death.

Confinement is, in fact, one major characteristic of the Gothic—an unwanted wife locked away in a tower (as in Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance* [1790]), a disobedient son thrown into a dungeon (again, in *A Sicilian Romance*), an unfortunate sister interred alive (Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” [1839]). Confinements can be positive or negative—they can

protect from outside evil, as in the case of various heroines seeking refuge in convents, or they can be torturous or even deadly, as victims are sometimes crushed to death in prison cells or left to be eaten by maggots in subterranean crypts. Confinement is a central component of the Gothic perhaps most simply because spatial constrictions inspire feelings of claustrophobia, limitation, and powerlessness; the “stuckness” of confinement can be horrifying in and of itself. It makes sense, then, that confinement plays such an important role in the Gothic, as it creates an atmosphere that fosters the effect of the genre.

Another major characteristic of the Gothic is liminality, a state of ambiguity existing in between two defined states (discussed in detail in the next section of this introduction), which I argue functions in close connection with confinement. Gothic literature relies on uncertainties in order to present captivating yet ambiguous stories. This ambiguity has a key function in the Gothic, drawing in readers who want to make sense of the tale but ultimately keeping final interpretation elusive. Avoiding absolute explanation in this way heightens the horror or terror in the text by leaving readers uncertain. Liminality helps achieve ambiguity; characters trapped in liminal states necessarily remain in-between and unclearly defined. I argue that confinements can function as liminal spaces for the characters inside, as these confinements often call into question the line between protection and persecution, past and present, life and death, or sanity and madness.

In this dissertation, I explore how confinement and liminality function in close connection in Gothic texts. I look at specific instances of physical confinement, which I have divided into four major categories that also form the basis of my chapters: cloisters, graves, haunted houses, and asylums. Each category deals with a different type of spatial confinement that functions as a liminal space for the characters inside. My argument for examining

confinement as a liminal space in Gothic literature offers a new, more thorough means of understanding ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding confined characters than previous scholars' views. These ambiguities and uncertainties are, I argue, central to understanding the characters themselves. Moreover, an understanding of this common Gothic trope as a liminal space can be used to better define and interpret a notoriously undefinable and confusing genre than have previous models. Thus, the significance of my argument is twofold. First, my analysis offers a new understanding of the function of this convention—how authors use it again and again in Gothic works, and what happens to the confined characters in these particular confinements. Second, I offer a new understanding of how this convention impacts the Gothic genre itself, helping to create the uncertainties and ambiguities on which the genre depends.

While the argument I make in this dissertation sheds new light on a crucial dimension of Gothic literature, confinement in the Gothic is not a new subject in literary criticism. Over the years, much feminist criticism has read the “Female Gothic,” a term coined by Ellen Moers, as an allegory of female subjugation, patriarchal power, and domestic confinement.¹ As Ellen Malenas Ledoux sums up, “In short, Gothic spaces signify entrapment and Gothic narratives depict female suffering to unmask or to baffle the works of misogynist power structures” (322). Indeed, female confinement plays a large role in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), wherein they explore how prevalent the theme is in literature of the nineteenth century. They write:

Dramatizations of imprisonment and escape are so all-pervasive in nineteenth-century literature by women that we believe they represent a uniquely female tradition in this

¹ See Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace’s “The Female Gothic: Then and Now” for a history and brief overview of what is termed “the Female Gothic” and how critics have treated entrapped female victims in this type of text.

period. Interestingly, though works in this tradition generally begin by using houses as primary symbols of female imprisonment, they also use much of the other paraphernalia of “woman’s place” to enact their central symbolic drama of enclosure and escape. (85)

Critics have also noted that Gilbert and Gubar problematically ignore the connection between the Gothic and confinement in the works they address. For example, Carol Margaret Davison claims that Gilbert and Gubar “fail to recognize the centrality of the female Gothic to the female literary ‘tradition’ they identify” (“Ghosts in the Attic” 204). She argues that though they note that the theme of female confinement and escape largely originated in the Gothic, they do not address the impact of the female Gothic on the women writers and readers upon whom their book focuses. Davison then demonstrates the intrinsic links between confinement and the Gothic, especially in the Gothic literature written by women in the nineteenth century. Davison claims, “If a single trope is obsessively reiterated in the female Gothic as crystallizing the experience of female terror, that trope is the confined woman” (“Ghosts in the Attic” 206-7).

My treatment of confinement, however, will not focus solely on confined women or on confinement only in texts written by female authors. Relatedly, I also do not concentrate on the house or other symbols of domesticity as allegorical confinements, as other critics have done so at length. Instead of utilizing a social or ideological framework, I focus on literal, physical confinements and what happens to the character inside these confinements. This treatment will both broaden the scope of previous scholarship by not limiting works by gender and sharpen the focus by closely looking at specific instances of confinement.

Gothic criticism generally tends to be about ideological concerns. As discussed above, there is a large selection of feminist criticism that deals with what is defined as the subset of the Female Gothic. Many symbolic readings interpret Gothic architecture as metaphors for home,

patriarchal structures, and so forth. Kate Ferguson Ellis's *The Contested Castle* (1989), for example, is a seminal work that examines how the castle, a key architectural component in Gothic works, functions as a failed domestic space. Ferguson explores how Gothic novels present subversive criticism of a domestic idealism in a culture that ultimately imprisons its women. Other noteworthy criticism (which sometimes overlaps with feminist readings) employs Marxist, psychoanalytical, and sociocultural approaches. In *American Women's Ghost Stories in the Gilded Age* (2014), Dara Downey, for example, combines materialist and feminist analyses, claiming that nineteenth-century commodity culture gave material objects power and women writers from the period used supernatural themes to make statements about this power. In this way, Downey offers an updated and useful version of "thing theory" (though she does not use that terminology) to explore how objects are connected to women and how women haunt objects. While I disagree with some of her claims, especially what I view as a misreading of Poe's "Berenice," her methodology offers a helpful response to the tendency to excessively psychoanalyze Gothic writing.

I aim to move slightly away from these approaches and more towards the physical rather than symbolic. While I agree that the Gothic sometimes certainly represents sociopolitical concerns, works as a subversive form of power for women writers, and very often benefits from psychoanalytic interpretations, I aim for an interdisciplinary approach that maintains awareness of these methodologies while focusing on the significance of the repeating spatial tropes that I think deserve further exploration. Donna Heiland notes, "Gothic fiction at its core is about transgressions of all sorts: across national boundaries, social boundaries, sexual boundaries, the boundaries of one's own identity" (3). I focus on another kind of boundary—more literal, physical, spatial confinement, usually architectural. In doing so, I push back against overly

symbolic, overly psychoanalytic, overly gendered, overly *confined* definitions and turn to anthropological terminology to explore architectural components of this generic trope. I find this interdisciplinary approach valuable, as the concept of liminality arises from anthropology and the definition of the gothic is historically linked to architecture (as I discuss below); remaining aware of these connections helps create a new methodology for examining this common Gothic trope, opening new doors for not only deeper but different ways of understanding familiar ideas in familiar spaces.

Below, I will offer a definition and explanation of my use of the idea of “liminality” and then explain how I view confinement and liminality—two seemingly opposed concepts—working together by using the example of Schrödinger’s cat. To further define important terms and concepts of the project, I then offer a definition of the Gothic and explore how the term emerged from and remains linked to architecture. I end by outlining the chapters to follow.

Liminality: A Definition and an Explanation

Since liminal spaces are the focal point of this project, an explanation of the meaning and history of the concept of liminality proves necessary. Anthropologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep introduced the term “liminal” in his book *The Rites of Passage* (1908). Van Gennep claims that “[t]he life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another” (2-3). He posits that as an individual moves from stage to stage in life, whether it is through aging, occupation, religious affiliation, or similar changes, he or she leaves one “defined position” and assumes a different defined position (3). Van Gennep calls these movements from defined position to defined position “rites of passage,” and he further divides these into three major phases: rites of separation, rites of transition, and

rites of incorporation (10-11). Using the Latin term *limen*, meaning “threshold,” he defines these three categories in terms of their “liminal” status: rites of separation are preliminal, rites of transition are liminal, and rites of incorporation are postliminal (11). A “rite of passage,” or transition from one defined state to another defined state, represents movement through these three phases: separation occurs when an individual leaves the preliminal phase and is separated from his or her previously defined state, transition takes place when an individual enters the liminal phase where he or she remains in between definitions, and incorporation happens when an individual is incorporated back into society and assumes his or her new defined state.

In the 1960s, anthropologist Victor Turner rediscovered, expanded, and largely popularized van Gennep’s work. Turner focuses on the middle liminal state of van Gennep’s rites of passage. In this middle position, an individual’s previous, preliminal identity is left behind, and, as Turner explains, “[i]n this gap between ordered worlds almost anything can happen” (Preface 13). In this way, Turner moves van Gennep’s understanding of liminality from an indication of transition to focus on both transition and potentiality. While in the liminal, transitory space, individuals become capable of multiple, “potentially unlimited” possible realities or trajectories (Turner, Preface 14). Turner posits that liminality is “necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (*The Ritual Process* 95). Completely lacking definition, individuals in a liminal space remain “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arranged by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 95). They remain in these ambiguous but potential spaces as they move from the liminal middle phase into van Gennep’s third phase, which

solidifies a definition of their new identity according to their incorporation into a new position in society.

More recently, use of the term “liminal” has moved beyond the realm of anthropology and into literary studies.² Turner himself draws connections between ritual and theatrical performance in his book *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982).³ In this move to literary studies, the link between liminality and potentiality remains important. For example, the concept of the liminal space has been connected to central poststructuralist tenets, such as Jacques Derrida’s theory⁴ of *différance*. Derrida claims that difference “indicates the middle voice, it precedes and sets up the opposition between passivity and activity” (279); thus, it mirrors that “middle” state to which liminality refers. The concept of difference questions the interpretive process of human understanding, noting that language and ideas are understood in terms of differences. In this way, concepts are understood in terms of their relation to other concepts: “Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences” (Derrida

² In *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism* (1990), editor Kathleen M. Ashley presents a collection of essays that examine interdisciplinary connections between the social sciences and the humanities. Scholars explore the movement of Turner’s ideas from anthropology to the humanities and provide arguments about how Turner’s ideas can help expand literary criticism and foster a more interdisciplinary critical conversation.

Additionally, as Mark M. Hennelly, Jr. notes, “various disciplines provide various paradigms of ‘betwixt and between,’ ranging from D. W. Winnicott’s psychoanalytic model employing transitional objects in *Playing and Reality* to the behavioral scientist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s analysis of transformative ‘flow experiences’ in *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: The Experience of Play in Work and Games*” (205).

³ For other criticism that draws connections between theatre and anthropology, but from a theatrical rather than anthropological perspective, see Richard Schechner’s *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985) and *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual* (1990). Schechner and Turner worked together and influenced each other’s ideas.

⁴ I use the term “theory” and other similar means of classification loosely, keeping in mind Derrida’s reiteration that *différance* “is neither a word nor a concept” (279, 283), but lacking any other way of referring to it.

285). Human interpretation of language and the world ultimately becomes self-referential in this system—definition and identity exist only in terms of this chain or system of differences that continues endlessly with no anchor in an ideal sign, image, or concept. Due to this infinite chain of differences, Derrida claims, “Differance can refer to the whole complex of its meaning at once, for it is immediately and irreducibly multivalent” (283). This depiction of differance as multivalent provides a link between Derrida and Turner; Turner’s idea of liminality hinges on potentiality, and Derrida’s conception of differance presents a space of potentiality, a liminal area of uncertain but attempted definition floating between nonexistent absolute meanings and infinite interpretations. Differance allows for all of the potential meanings of a word or concept as others define it; similarly, Turner’s liminal space refers to a potential space in which individuals transition into a new identity as defined by other members of their society. Whereas liminality is meant to be a temporary space where multiple potential identities can be navigated while the individual remains identity-less outside of society, differance elicits a never-ending liminality but a constant process of attempting interpretation. Derrida’s concept of *différance* offers just one of many guiding ideas about the destabilization of meaning central to poststructuralism, illustrating how this field of literary theory can easily work with and adapt the concept of liminality.

As is the case with poststructuralism, liminality has also been linked to psychoanalytic theory. While, as I previously mentioned, I am moving away from a psychoanalytic model in this dissertation, it is worth noting the connection between liminality and certain ideas in psychoanalysis. For example, liminality is foundational in Jacques Lacan’s representation of identity in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.” In Lacan’s mirror stage, a child sees its image in a mirror and

moves from identifying itself in terms of its mother to identifying itself in terms of its own image in the mirror (441-2). This instance marks the beginning of an individual's ability to self identify and develop a distinct identity. However, as Gail T. Houston succinctly explains, "the child's concept of itself as unified and stable is actually an imitation of the mirror image rather than vice versa. In other words, the mirror image represents an ideal self, not the real and fragmented subject" (147-8). Because of this, an individual's interactions with a mirror are examples of what Lacan terms *méconnaissance*, or misrecognition (445). These misrecognitions actually allow the viewer to grow closer to recognition of him- or herself, continuously approaching a definition of self (much like a mathematical limit approaches an upper bound) but never completely negating the fragmentary nature of identity in order to form a coherent "ideal-I" (442). The fragmented vision of the self that is prompted by the mirror stage denies the unity and coherence of an individual's identity, placing subjects in perpetual liminal states of continuous fragmentary, ambiguous identities. Following van Gennep's model, the child leaves the preliminal state of identifying itself in terms of its mother when it first identifies its own image in the mirror. However, this identification in the mirror places the child in a liminal state where a coherent self is reached for but never obtained, so a postliminal reintegration of the self with a new identity is continuously deferred.

The concept of liminality not only connects to literary theory in the previously mentioned ways but has also been applied in literary criticism. Manuel Aguirre links liminality with the Gothic genre, arguing that the liminal thresholds in Gothic fiction reflect on the genre as a whole, which itself lies on a threshold between canonical and marginal texts, making it, Aguirre argues,

ultimately better perceived “not as ‘marginal’ but as ‘liminal’” (“Narrative Structure” 137).⁵ Like Aguirre, I also link liminality with the Gothic, but instead of using it as a means to explore the canonical or noncanonical (or in-between) status of the literature, I focus on the content within the text and the effect on the characters and readers.

I largely follow Turner’s focus on potentiality in my use of the term “liminal.” That is, my use of the term depends on the multiplicity and potentiality—as Turner calls it, “a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities” (“Dewey” 42)—of the liminal state. I situate my own use of the term “liminal” between the typical anthropological and literary uses, drawing from both its origin and later applications in order to develop a method that considers both uses of the term. While my use of the term relies on the multiplicity and potentiality of poststructuralism and the fragmentation of the identity outlined in psychoanalytic criticism, it is important to remember that these characteristics originally stem from the anthropological understanding. Additionally, the preliminal and postliminal states that the individual remains between when in a liminal state must be considered, and these are largely defined by the society or interpreters of the individual. The individual is “othered” and placed in a position of uncertainty due to lacking certain definitions necessary to remain in the preliminal or to move to the post liminal; while in transition, the individual remains outside of society simply because of the way that this society (un)defines him or her.

I focus a reading on the liminal experience of particular characters in particular physical, spatial situations—that of confinement. I argue that an examination of these characters in these situations can helpfully provide insight into the “chaos” and “possibilities” available in this

⁵ See also Aguirre’s “Liminal Terror: The Poetics of Gothic Spaces,” where he provides a formalist analysis of how physical thresholds in Gothic literature can elicit terror.

moment and the potentiality inherent in liminality within confinement itself. We tend to look at thresholds in binary terms—what is on one side of the door versus the other. Let us, instead, focus on the space where the two blend, where we are on neither one side nor the other. Using a geographical metaphor from Aguirre, we can imagine a shoreline along a beach: this shoreline is a clear place where the water meets the land, marked distinctly on maps. However, upon looking closer, it becomes evident that the shoreline is actually ever-changing: it is dependent on “perspective, scale, and time,” it morphs as one looks at it from different distances, angles, and it is continuously though minutely altered by the tide, erosion, and other environmental factors (“Austin’s Cat” 14). The identity of the shoreline (like that of confined characters), thus, is not bound to the water or the land but fluctuates in between the two and remains identified with both.

Confinement as a Liminal Space: The Example of Schrödinger’s Cat

I realize that linking liminality and confinement might, at first, seem somewhat contradictory, as liminality deals with thresholds and movement and fluctuation while confinement, by definition, specifically lacks those. Due to my focus on the middle liminal state, though, the movement over thresholds and between stations becomes less important than the ambiguous existence within the liminal space. In this way, I posit that physical confinements—prison cells, locked closets, sealed crypts, and so on—can function as liminal spaces for the characters who are placed or who place themselves inside these spaces. In an attempt to provide

a metaphorical example of a highly liminal confinement, I will briefly discuss the concept of Schrödinger's cat.⁶

An understanding of the thought experiment that is Schrödinger's cat must begin with some background about why the famous story of the cat exists in the first place—as a response to certain ideas in quantum mechanics,⁷ which I will briefly outline here. The Copenhagen Interpretation⁸ provides basic ideas of quantum mechanics by developing a number of principles; the central one is that quantum mechanics does not describe reality but only the probability of observing or measuring various aspects of it.⁹ All particles are associated with a wavefunction that “contains within it all the information that can be known about the particle” (Serway, Moses, and Moyer 191). That is, a quantum wavefunction mathematically describes all of the possibilities that might be. The act of observation causes the wavefunction to collapse and define the observed particle in just one state—and here we move from a realm of indeterminacy and possibility to actuality. This idea of how a wavefunction works presents two possible interpretations: either it presents a probability, not an absolute, of a certain state of existence, or all of the possible states of existence occur simultaneously in what is called a superposition. I posit that the concept of a superposition provides an analogue to the potentiality of a liminal

⁶ I am not the first to apply the concept of Schrödinger's cat to literary criticism. See, for example, Marie-Laure Ryan's “Narrative/Science Entanglements: On the Thousand and One Literary Lives of Schrödinger's Cat.”

⁷ This is a branch of physics dealing with phenomena occurring on a very small atomic scale.

⁸ This is an informal collection of rules developed by Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg that explain the mathematics of quantum mechanics in easy-to-understand language.

⁹ Another way to say this is “the observer interacts with the system to such an extent that the system cannot be thought of as having independent existence” (Gribbin 160). To somewhat further my connection between physics and literary scholarship, this concept provides an interesting link to reader-response criticism, particularly Stanley Fish's concept of meaning being imparted on a text by a reader during the act of reading it. See “Interpreting the *Variorum*” (1976).

space. All possible states of existence occur simultaneously much in the way that someone in a liminal state is in “a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities” (Turner, “Dewey” 42). However, the observation and measurement of the particle forces it to be only one way and collapses it into only one state. In my comparison, this movement is similar to an individual leaving a liminal state and entering a post-liminal state and assuming a new, clear, defined identity.

Physicist and one of the founders of quantum theory Erwin Schrödinger did not agree with the idea of superposition. He introduced the thought experiment¹⁰ regarding the now infamous cat in order to demonstrate that applying quantum physics to the macroscopic level would lead to absurd solutions, such as cats in uncertain states of existence. He did not have to use a cat. He could have just said that the atom had both decayed and not decayed, but having the cat both dead and alive is what sticks with us.¹¹ He used it as an exaggerated way of saying that the Heisenberg uncertainty principle and superposition are ridiculous—the behavior of macroscopic and microscopic objects cannot be linked. Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner briefly summarize the problem as follows: “Schrödinger’s cat, according to quantum theory, could be simultaneously dead and alive—until your observation *causes* it to be either dead or alive. Moreover, finding the cat dead would create a history of its developing rigor mortis; finding it alive would create a history of its developing hunger—*backward in time*” (13). Thus both present and past are created in the act of observation. However, since quantum theory seems to work, scientists usually just accept-but-ignore the problem evinced by the proverbial cat. J. M.

¹⁰ This is all hypothetical—no actual cats were put in boxes with poison.

¹¹ In an interesting connection to the Gothic, the cat could be seen as zombie-like or otherwise monstrous due to its “dead-and-not-dead” state of existence.

Jauch reportedly referred to these implications as “a kind of skeleton in the closet” of physicists (qtd. in Rosenblum and Kuttner 13).

However, what is important here is that Schrödinger’s thought experiment asserts that it is impossible to know what is going on in a box, and I find this uncertainty itself useful. Until a particle is observed and measured, it has a non-zero¹² probability of existing everywhere all at once. When it is observed, the wavefunction collapses, and the observer can determine its exact location at that time. Again, I see this particle (or cat), pre-observation, as an analogue to an individual in a liminal space. The cat is both dead and alive precisely because it is impossible to define it as either; the particle is everywhere, the cat is all states of being, and, similarly, the confined characters inhabit potential rather than absolute states. The particle’s superposition fulfills a similar role as an individual in the ambiguous yet potential position of liminality and demonstrates how confinement can serve as a liminal space—the very confinement produces potentiality, at least until the box is opened and the potential is actualized when the particle is observed and measured or the individual moves into a post-liminal state of definition.

The themes of uncertainty, the unknown, and death are abundant in Gothic texts. There are a series of characteristics common to the genre, but one that remains evident in each and every Gothic text is some form of uncertainty. Humans are uncomfortable with not understanding; from an early age, we categorize and define things in order not only to understand but also to be comfortable with them. Schrödinger’s thought experiment attempts to understand quantum mechanics by means of demonstrating just how confusing and absurd tenets of it are when applied to macro realities instead of quanta. The idea of reality not existing outside of observance similarly troubled scientists—Einstein is known to have referred to a particular

¹² This means very, very small, but technically still possible.

quantum phenomenon as “spooky” (qtd. in J. S. Bell 143), and Stephen Hawking once quipped, “when I hear of Schrödinger’s cat, I reach for my gun” (qtd. in Ferris 345n27). I attempt to better understand characters in Gothic texts by investigating their liminality during key moments of confinement. When we open the box, our observation causes the cat to be either dead or alive, but I am concerned with the liminal potentiality that exists *before* we crack the lid.

Defining the Gothic

The word “Gothic” is notoriously hard to define, yet doing so, or attempting to do so, or at least gesturing towards doing so, is a requirement for scholarship on the topic. Many definitions of Gothic literature skirt around actual denotation and instead list tropes that determine the “Gothic-ness” of a text.¹³ For example, in her seminal work *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers a definition of the Gothic according to, as her title indicates, its conventions. As she points out in the first chapter, “Surely no other modern literary form as influential as the Gothic novel has also been as pervasively conventional. Once you know that a novel is of the Gothic kind (and you can tell that from the title), you can predict its contents with an unnerving certainty” (9). In their introduction to *The Gothic* (2004), David Punter and Glennis Byron similarly state that “the Gothic is more to do with particular moments, tropes, repeated motifs that can be found scattered, or disseminated,

¹³ Alternately, some scholars, such as Nick Groom, discuss the history of the word “Goth” dating back to the sack of Rome in order to demonstrate how the term’s previous connection to barbarism affects its later connection to literature. While I value the historical importance of the term in all its iterations, I will not recount that history here. See Groom’s chapter “Gothic Antiquity: From the Sack of Rome to *The Castle of Otranto*” (2014), Markman Ellis’s chapter “History and the Gothic Novel” (2007), and Robin Sowerby’s chapter “The Goths in History and Pre-Gothic Gothic” (2012) for accounts of the term’s use as it applied to specific groups of barbarians, various Germanic tribes, and a negatively-connoted, usually medieval, past before it transitioned into architecture, which I discuss in the following section.

through the modern western literary tradition” (xviii). These conventions begin with the first Gothic novel, widely recognized to be Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). This work incorporates an outstanding number of Gothic conventions, which later become stock characters, stereotypes, and clichés, providing the framework for future Gothic texts. Indeed, Fred Botting calls *Otranto* “the blueprint for a new mode of writing” (45). My conception of the Gothic merges that of Sedgwick with that of Punter and Byron; I base my understanding of the Gothic on its repetitions of themes, tropes, and conventions, often including but by no means limited to confinement, frame stories, found manuscripts, uncanny portraits, hauntings, curses or prophecies, and supernatural occurrences (explained or not).

Many other scholars focus on the function of the Gothic in their definitions, and it is often described as a means of subversively critiquing social, political, or cultural concerns. Botting, for example, claims that “Gothic signifies a writing of excess” (1), and these excesses originate in the depiction of threats and anxieties about cultural boundaries. Botting treats conventions as “embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties” (2). Judith Halberstam makes a similar claim linking the Gothic to excess in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995): “Gothic . . . may be loosely defined as the rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader. The production of fear in a literary text (as opposed to a cinematic text) emanates from a vertiginous excess of meaning” (2). I subscribe to Botting’s and Halberstam’s claims about Gothic excess, and I think this excess is evident in the repeated conventions that form the backbone of Gothic literature. As the Gothic is marked by excess, this excess often takes the form of some sort of monstrosity—a monstrous other, or a mysterious unknown—that represents cultural fears of the time in order to allow readers to experience and somewhat police these fears. My goal here, though, is not to focus on

the potential subversion or cultural critique, but rather on how the excesses originating from these anxieties inhabit confinements and enhance the fear that Halberstam mentions.

The Gothic is typically viewed, first off, as a historical occurrence, and works that clearly and wholly fit in the Gothic genre appeared around the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. During this time, the Gothic seems to operate as a specific literary genre. However, after and sometimes even during this period, boundaries began blurring, and “Gothic” became less of a genre and more of a trope, working its way into various situations and texts. As the Gothic becomes more diffuse, Gothic conventions sometimes even show up in non-Gothic works. As Dale Townshend explains, the Gothic “is best conceived of today as a protean, ever-changing mode rather than a fixed generic category—an imaginative tendency able, perhaps like no other, to infuse a variety of forms, mediums, and technologies across historical time and cultural space” (36).

As previously mentioned, Walpole’s *Otranto*, self-proclaimed as “A Gothic Story” in the second edition’s subtitle, is generally accepted as the first Gothic novel and incorporates a remarkable number of previously mentioned Gothic conventions, providing the framework for future Gothic texts. While other Gothic works were written over the next few decades, the Gothic did not reach its peak in Britain until the 1790s, which saw the publication of seminal works including most of Radcliffe’s oeuvre and Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796). The Gothic trend then continued for about thirty years in Britain, allowing for the production of Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* (1806) (a novel directly responding to works by Radcliffe and Lewis), Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Zastrozzi* (1810), and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), among others. As Natalie Neill points out, Gothic parodies appeared almost from the time of its inception, with works as early as 1773 poking fun at the formulaic, repeated conventions of the

genre (186-92). Jane Austen wrote her parody *Northanger Abbey* (1818) as early as 1799, although it was not published until nineteen years later. Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), a highly allusive satire of both the Gothic mode and its practitioners (with characters representing Coleridge and Percy Shelley, among others), came out the same year. The same trajectory is evident in America, as Donald A. Ringe catalogues several Gothic parodies printed in periodicals in the 1790s (17), and the narrative frame of Washington Irving's *Tales of a Traveller* (1824) sets up his narrator's simultaneous use of Gothic tropes and satire of the supernatural.

After Walpole, Gothic literature has typically been bifurcated into the categories of “terror” and “horror,” which are linked according to gender to female and male authorship, respectively, and largely modeled after the works of Radcliffe and Lewis. This distinction is based on Radcliffe's definitions in “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (1826), where she claims that “[t]error and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a higher degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (409). Radcliffe aims to evoke terror and the Burkean sublime she links to it, drawing a distinction between herself and writers such as Lewis who focus on horror. Radcliffe further links terror to the experience of the mind and horror to that of the body. Another distinction between terror and horror is use of the supernatural. Perhaps because of its link to the mind, terror Gothic such as Radcliffe's includes supernatural elements that are eventually explained. For example, the ghostly moans Ferdinand hears in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) turn out to be those of his imprisoned mother. Similarly, the seemingly supernatural veiled picture that serves as a source of anxiety for both readers and characters in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—“a spectacle so horrible, that she [Emily] had never remembered it, but with emotions of indescribable awe” (384)—is

revealed to be simply a wax figure. In both of these cases of terror Gothic, events that initially appear supernatural are ultimately explained away as natural occurrences. Lewis, on the other hand, does not explain away his incorporation of the supernatural. For instance, in *The Monk*, Matilda/Rosario serves as a literal envoy of Satan, and Satan himself shows up to enact a Faustian bargain with Ambrosio. Dacre's *Zofloya* complicates this gendered terror/horror categorization. Though she is a female author, her work better fits into the "horror" category, alongside *The Monk*, which she has even been accused of plagiarizing, as she depicts bodily acts of horror and does not explain away the supernatural.

Around the same time as these previously mentioned authors were writing, American literature was beginning with the Gothic; the push for creating a literature distinct from Britain after the Revolutionary War occurred concurrently with the development of the Gothic.¹⁴ In an oft-quoted line from *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), Leslie A. Fiedler claims that American fiction "is almost essentially a gothic one" (142). However, many critics note the difficulty writers had because of America's newness as a nation. Allan Lloyd-Smith explains the assumed issue thus: "Without a feudal past, or those relics so important to the English or European Gothicism, castles and monasteries and legends, the American landscape seemed inherently resistant to Gothic stories and settings" (26). However, American writers seemed to have no problem utilizing the Gothic, focusing on, as Lloyd-Smith points out, topics conducive

¹⁴ Charles Brockden Brown is known as one of the first American novelists, and *Wieland* (1789) has been called the "the first major novel to adapt the conventions of British Gothic to American circumstances" (Savoy 172). Brown might have done more than simply "adapt," as *Wieland* differs significantly from the British Gothic. Rather than being set in a distant, medieval past and a foreign location, the story takes place between the French and American Revolutions in America. This is not to say that Brown did not draw from previous Gothic work; while he developed the American Gothic mode, he also retained certain British Gothic conventions. For example, *Wieland*'s heroine is still valued for her innocence, and Carwin's hiding in her closet with the intent to rape her places him in the shoes of many previous Gothic villains.

to a specifically American form of the Gothic, such as “the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism” (37). Using the available topics, the American Gothic mode developed alongside the country and its literature.

Some critics also attempt to erect temporal bounds around both British and American forms of the Gothic. Many studies begin with *Otranto* in 1764 and end in 1818-1821, marking the “end” of the British Gothic (or its first “wave” or “cycle”) with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), or James Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Some critics see a break in American Gothic a little later, right before the Civil War. Ringe, for example, claims that 1860 marked the end of “the major phase of American Gothicism” (177), and notes further that “[t]he brief appearance of the Gothic mode in the serious fiction of the late nineteenth century was . . . a phenomenon of only minor importance” (189). While I agree that 1860 marks a turning point in American Gothicism, I disagree that the Gothic is either “brief” or “of minor importance” afterwards. Similarly, while I agree that the early British Gothic differs from that later in the century as we move from the Romantic to the Victorian period, the Gothic still clearly exists. The Gothic is unquestionably changed but still present, now infiltrating other genres such as realist novels and morphing into subgenres such as ghost stories in both America and Britain. For example, stories such as Charles W. Chesnutt’s “The Goophered Grapevine” (1887) mixes realism and the Gothic. Sarah Ingle posits the importance of reading this story in both ways: “To read ‘The Goophered Grapevine’ solely as a work of realism is to understand it only as John’s story; understanding the story from Julius’s perspective means reading it as a gothic text” (67). In this way, the story necessarily operates on both levels, the realism of the white, male narrator’s frame story, and the gothic supernaturalism of the former slave’s interior story. Additionally, writers well-known in

the realist tradition such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Edith Wharton, Henry James, and even William Dean Howells also wrote not only Gothic but specifically ghost stories and often had Gothic tropes creep into their realist novels, in examples such as the ghostly figure of Aunt Esther haunting the margins of Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848).

Critics also tend to divide the Gothic (as they do literature in general) into its British and American developments, and while there are unquestionable differences, I argue that analyzing these strands together allows for better understanding their alignments and dissimilarities. Indeed, as the Gothic is known for being a popular genre, these authors were reading and responding to each other, often utilizing similar scenes and including textual allusions to complementary works. An awareness of the Gothic's development outside of continental boundaries thus proves necessary for a full appreciation of the significance and variations of oft-repeated conventions as they develop throughout the century.

So, is the Gothic a genre? A mode? A form? A tradition? An aesthetic? An ideology? Yes. In a famous 1964 Supreme Court decision, Justice Potter Stewart explained his version of the definition of "hard-core pornography": "I know it when I see it" (United States). The same is also true of the Gothic—it is notoriously hard to define but fairly easy to recognize. It seems that readers, in a manner akin to Justice Stewart, can just tell if a work is Gothic or not. Chris Baldick describes the common way of defining the Gothic as "intuitive suggestion rather than by any agreed precision of reference" (xi). Accordingly, scholars often define the Gothic by its recognizable and repeated characteristics, tropes, or, at times, by their affective response to the text—the way it makes them feel. In this dissertation, I demonstrate the potential value of exploring a single aspect of these "laundry list" or "shopping list" definitions of the Gothic that critics both rely upon and denounce. My goal is to analyze a Gothic convention, confinement—

one of those tropes continuously relisted in attempts to define the genre—in hopes of moving towards a clearer definition while recognizing that, ultimately, the definition is as slippery as a freshly removed eyeball.

Gothic Architecture and Architecture in the Gothic

As I focus on the spatial dimensions of the Gothic in this dissertation, an understanding of how the term developed in and moved between architecture and literature becomes relevant. As previously mentioned, Architecture has been important to the Gothic since its inception as a literary genre. However, the term “Gothic” notably means different things in architectural and literary contexts.¹⁵ Why and how do uses of this term overlap? Horace Walpole’s famous castellated villa, Strawberry Hill, serves as a good nexus. In accordance with his antiquarian interests, Walpole purchased and significantly renovated and remodeled Strawberry Hill in a specifically Gothic architectural style and filled it with artifacts.¹⁶ Walpole linked his Gothically

¹⁵ Punter and Byron explain that the term “Gothic” came into use during the beginning of the Renaissance by Italian art historians seeking to describe older art and architecture as inferior to the current resurgence of classical style (32). See their chapter “Art and Architecture” for a brief overview of medieval Gothic architecture and its revival in popularity in the eighteenth century.

¹⁶ This was no casual effort, as Clive Bloom points out: “By his death in 1797 Walpole had spent a staggering £20,000 in recognizing his fantasy. . . . Walpole formed a Committee of ‘Taste’ . . . and an advisory group . . . who were to scour the cathedrals and ancient sites of England for models and antiques with which to furnish the dream” (29-30). James Watt reads Walpole’s project as a source of “amusement and diversion” operating “within a context of aristocratic display and conspicuous consumption” (17). See Walpole’s *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole* (1774, updated in 1784) for a detailed description of the villa and an inventory of its contents, including minute details such as each object’s location in the house.

See Anna Chalcraft and Judith Viscardi’s *Strawberry Hill: Horace Walpole’s Gothic Castle* (2007) for a detailed exploration of the villa as an eighteenth-century visitor would have experienced it while touring. See Michael Snodin and Cynthia Roman’s edited collection *Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill* (2009) for various essays examining the Walpole collection.

renovated home to the conception of *Otranto* in an anecdote related in a letter to Rev. William Cole dated March 9, 1765:

I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands, and I grew fond of it. (“To Cole” 88)

Walpole’s mind, “filled . . . with Gothic story,” is preoccupied, as many have noted, with the process of renovating and “Gothicising” his villa, Strawberry Hill (Markman Ellis 29). Thus the concept of “Gothic” moved from architecture to literature, as an architectural Gothic Revival fueled by an increase in antiquarianism bled over into literature.

The Gothic Revival was not limited to England, and, although architecture originally influenced literature, the opposite eventually became true as well. In *American Gothic Art and Architecture in the Age of Romantic Literature* (2014), Kerry Dean Carso analyzes the influence British Gothic novels and historical romances (particularly those of Sir Walter Scott) had on American art and architecture during the Gothic Revival. Carso explores examples such as Thomas Jefferson’s garden at Monticello and the homes of James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving as Gothic constructions. Interestingly, the gothicizing tendency that led to the creation of the first Gothic novel began to function symbiotically as literature also influenced architecture.

Though dated, Wayne Andrews’s *American Gothic: Its Origins, Its Trials, Its Triumphs* (1975) offers an interesting surface-level overview of how this architectural Gothic revival moved to America in the nineteenth century.

Some critical work has been done on the role of architecture in literature. In *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (1999), Sharon Marcus places the city and the home in conversation with each other, merging public and private in writing a history of two particular cities by analyzing the perspectives of the apartment houses within them. William A. Gleason's *Sites Unseen: Architecture, Race, and American Literature* (2011) interestingly and compellingly examines how built environments are shaped by race. Beginning with what he calls a "deceptively simple question"—"Why are there so many porches in the conjure tales of Charles Chesnutt?" (1)—Gleason examines representations of architecture in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature. Additionally, the field of narratology has recently showed increased interest in the function of physical space in narrative. In *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (2016), Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu argue for a focus on the narrative role of space. While architecture and literature have been linked (both historically and critically), and the function of space in narrative is a new area of critical exploration, examinations of this in Gothic literature are largely lacking.¹⁷ I aim to address this gap.

¹⁷ Some articles have recently examined physical space in Gothic works, including Aguirre's "Geometries of Terror: Numinous Spaces in Gothic, Horror and Science Fiction," in which he offers a reading of a specific scene in Radcliffe's *The Italian* in terms of the importance of thresholds. Additionally, Emily Cody's "Grave Matters: Gothic Places and Kinetic Spaces in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*" investigates how Gaskell's use of diegetic space allows her to blend the realist and Gothic genres. Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey's edited collection *Gothic Landscapes* (2016) features essays that discuss the function of landscape in the Gothic, including but not limited to architectural landscapes that at times overlap with my own study.

Cloisters, Graves, Haunted Houses, and Asylums

In this project, I deal with texts ranging in dates from *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to “John Mortonson’s Funeral” (1906)—from the first Gothic text to manifestations at the turn of the century, spanning nineteenth-century modes but not pushing into modernism. In this way, I remain within a loosely defined (extra)-long nineteenth century. I do not confine myself to solely British or American authors and instead prefer a transatlantic approach, as was also demonstrated by the two aforementioned examples. While I cover a large time period and move between America and Britain, all the works discussed share a common Gothic nature and utilize the trope of confinement in important ways. In this light I am focusing not just on the first wave of the Gothic but the first waves, and I am able to pay attention to larger issues such as how the genre mutates from its inception throughout the first century of its development, inside and outside the boundaries of both Britain and America.

While I have attempted to maintain a balance among time periods and locations, I do not proceed strictly chronologically or geographically through texts. Rather, I divided this dissertation into chapters according to the type and function of confinement discussed therein. I have identified the following four categories as common confining locations: cloisters, graves, haunted houses, and asylums. The liminal spatial confinements in each category call into question the line between protection and persecution, past and present, life and death, or sanity and madness, which are explained further below.

In the first chapter, “Abbeys, Convents, Nunneries, and Monasteries: Confining Catholic Cloisters in *The Monk*, *The Italian*, and *Zofloya*,” I focus on the cloister as the overarching architectural enclosure, a category that includes religious edifices such as convents, nunneries, monasteries, and abbeys. I also discuss dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition, a related confining

Catholic space. Cloistered confinement is often presented as a refuge that can protect someone from a threat, such as a convent wherein an innocent girl cannot be harassed with lecherous advances from unwanted suitors. However, confinement in these same spaces can also serve as a form of punishment, as when a disobedient daughter is made to take the veil to separate her from a lover. In this way, the confining cloister functions as a liminal space of protection and persecution of the character confined inside. This space is physically restrictive, and it imposes liminality on the confined character as the distinction between protection and persecution blurs. In this chapter, I discuss Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), and Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806), three early Gothic texts largely inspired by and in conversation with each other. I offer new insight into how these three authors respond to each other, and I provide a new way to consider the exceedingly common convention of the confining cloister.

The second chapter focuses on similar issues through a different form of confinement: the grave. In "Grave Emergences: Undead Bodies in 'Berenice,' 'The Giant Wistaria,' and 'John Mortonson's Funeral,'" I examine the grave as a form of confinement that often fails. While confinement in cloisters usually demonstrates a tension between protection and punishment, the grave serves as a midpoint between life and death. Though ostensibly meant to hold dead bodies, repeatedly we see graves fail to contain both the dead and the living. Poe, known for the "acute claustrophobia" common in his work (Savoy 181), often depicts the emergence of confined bodies in excessive or grotesque ways, as both living and dead bodies physically escape interment again and again (see "Berenice" [1835], "Morella" [1835], and "The Black Cat" [1843], among others). These confinements that do not successfully contain continue to show up in later works, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Giant Wistaria" (1891) and Ambrose Bierce's "John Mortonson's Funeral" (1906), both of which I argue were influenced by Poe's

earlier manipulation of this Gothic convention. In these works, the line between dead and alive becomes skewed as the grave, the appropriate space for a corpse, is occupied by someone or something still living or otherwise unsettled. I argue that these confinements place the confined beings in liminal spaces between life and death—into states of undeadness—and, in doing so, foster a sort of Kristevan ambiguity central to the Gothic itself.

The second and third chapters are closely related, as I move from the confinement of the grave to the confinement of the haunted house, both of which are related to dead bodies, the afterlife, and ghosts. Though ghost stories are sometimes viewed as distinct from the Gothic, I treat them as a specific generic subset. Ghosts are liminal figures, stuck between life and death, simultaneously familiar and frightening. These haunting entities have escaped their bodily confinements and often their graves but not left the world. In chapter 3, I analyze ghosts' relationships to specific physical locations in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story" (1852). More specifically, I focus on the figure of the ghost in the window in three key scenes from these Gothic works, and I examine the window as a threshold and a liminal space where the undead and the living interact across an unstable boundary. I draw from arguments put forth by Dale Bailey in *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* (1999). While he focuses on contemporary American writing and films, he posits a difference between the ghost story and the haunted house tale by locating the horror of these types in the psychological and the physical, respectively. While Bailey and other critics thus distinguish between psychological ghost stories and physical haunted house stories, I argue that examining the physical in what they define as the psychological is also important: the haunted space itself and the location of the ghosts are key.

In the fourth chapter, “Managing Madness: The Confining Asylum in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, ‘A Whisper in the Dark,’ and ‘The Yellow Wall-paper,’” I analyze the asylum as the final form of confinement treated in this dissertation. Characters in asylums are often ambiguously defined as neither sane nor insane. Circling back around to my original distinction of confinements as forms of protection or persecution, I argue that the asylum, like the cloister, is a space where the line between these two functions blur. Indeed, as Greg Buzwell points out, sensation fiction such as *Lady Audley’s Secret* feature “lunatic asylums and rambling mansions” in place of “convents and monasteries” and “[d]octors, with their numbing supplies of laudanum” instead of “evil abbesses” (123). The asylum can be a space where confined figures are protected from themselves and those outside the confinement are protected from those within; conversely, it can be a threat for those do not belong there and are falsely committed. This chapter thus investigates the distinctions between protection and persecution and between sanity and insanity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), Louisa May Alcott’s “A Whisper in the Dark” (1863), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-paper” (1892). These confinements in asylums or asylum-like locations creates liminality that builds the ambiguity on which the Gothic genre depends.

I conclude this dissertation by briefly look forward to the twentieth century and examining how my argument can be applied to Shirley Jackson’s “The Lovely House” (1952).

It may, at first, seem paradoxical to link confinement and liminality, as the former indicates boundedness and the latter boundlessness, but, as this dissertation shows, the two function in close connection in Gothic texts. Confinement and liminality are not as opposed as they seem. By taking a narrow view of confinement, previous scholars have failed to fully explore the function this convention has in the genre. My work serves a double purpose: I offer

a better understanding of these authors, their works, and their use of this common Gothic trope while also examining how this trope reflects on the genre (and its purpose) as a whole. As such, my argument is twofold—about confined characters but also the genre itself. By investigating Gothic confinements as liminal spaces over the course of this project, I provide deeper insight into the characters who are confined. Delving into their specific confinements allows me to explore the potentiality of the characters in these spaces and shed light on their ambiguities of identity as they see themselves and as others see them. As my chapters show, though the trope of confinement is more than common in Gothic texts, the way in which it is presented differs greatly—confinement can come in the form of a damp prison cell or a luxurious safe haven, and confinement can be forcefully imposed or willingly undertaken for a variety of reasons. In each instance of confinement I discuss, individuals enter a liminal space in which their identity changes from what it was before, pre-confinement, and becomes more multivalent precisely, albeit seemingly paradoxically, due to their confinement. Because of physical limitation, their identity is allowed to become full of both ambiguity and potentiality, an ambiguity and a potentiality that I see as important to investigate in itself rather than focusing solely on the end effect. Moreover, these ambiguities produced by these confining liminal spaces help make the Gothic function as it should, as Robert Miles explains, as “a discursive site, a carnivalesque mode for representations of the fragmented subject” (*Gothic Writing* 4).¹⁸ To use Miles’s terms, I

¹⁸ Miles continues, “Both the generic multiplicity of the Gothic, and what one might call its discursive primacy, effectively detach the Gothic from the tidy simplicity of thinking of it as so many predictable, fictional conventions. This may end up making ‘Gothic’ a more ambiguous, shifting term, but then the textual phenomena to which it points are shifting and ambiguous.” (*Gothic Writing* 4). It is important to note here that Miles is reacting against the convention of defining the Gothic according to its conventions. I agree that this can, at times, be too “tidy,” but I argue that investigating one specific convention, confinement, allows for a better understanding of this same shifty ambiguity to which Miles refers.

think that the specific spatial confinements within the Gothic provide even deeper discursive, carnivalesque sites, where order and organization are disrupted and excesses run rampant. The lack of order elicits the terror, horror, disgust, and—dare I say it?—fascination on which the genre depends.

CHAPTER ONE

Abbeys, Convents, Nunneries, and Monasteries: Confining Catholic Cloisters in *The Monk*, *The Italian*, and *Zofloya*

“‘The sanctuary is prophaned [*sic*],’ said Ellena, mildly, but with dignity: ‘it is become a prison.’” (Radcliffe, *The Italian* 84)

Abbeys are such common locations of confinement in Gothic novels that two early parodies—Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (completed 1803, published 1817) and Thomas Love Peacock’s *Nightmare Abbey* (1818)—reference an abbey in the title and largely take place there.¹⁹ Indeed, perusing the titles of early Gothic works reveals a plethora of abbeys: *Netley Abbey, a Gothic Story* (1795), *The Abbey of Saint Asaph* (1795), *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey* (1797), *Munster Abbey* (1797), *Grasville Abbey* (1797), *Ancient Records; or, The Abbey of Saint Oswythe* (1801), *Montbrasil Abbey* (1806), *The Spectre of Lanmere Abbey; or, The Mystery of the Blue and Silver Bag* (1820), to name just a few.²⁰

In this chapter I investigate this prominent architectural trope by focusing on a spatial confinement common in early British Gothic novels: the Catholic religious building. I concentrate largely on convents, perhaps the most common, or even conventional, space of confinement in these works, but I also discuss monasteries, abbeys (both of which could be

¹⁹ It is worth noting that the abbeys referenced in the titles of these two novels have been converted into late-eighteenth century homes and are no longer buildings inhabited by Catholic ascetics.

²⁰ This list was pulled from titles included in Ann B. Tracy’s *The Gothic Novel, 1790-1830: Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs* (1981). While this compilation is somewhat dated, it serves as a helpful guide to early Gothic novels, indexing titles and providing brief plot summaries.

grouped with the convent and nunnery under the more encompassing label of cloister),²¹ and the dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition. I examine Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), works that are regularly paired in critical discussions. I aim to offer a new vantage point by which we can explore how exactly this exceedingly common trope of religious confinement functions in these novels, thereby providing a new template for better understanding the intricacies of these canonical Gothic works. I then end this chapter with a discussion of Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806), a much less discussed work (although this has recently been changing) that I view as working in triangulation with those of Lewis and Radcliffe and offering a similar but more complicated Catholic confinement. Examining these two seminal texts in conjunction with another that complicates the genre and its conventions allows for a better perception of the importance of the iterations and complexities of this particular type of spatial confinement prevalent throughout early Gothic literature.

I claim that the cloister functions as a liminal space; in these works, it serves as a form of physical, spatial confinement that fosters the protection or persecution (or, complexly, both) of the character confined inside. Olivia Loksing Moy calls attention to this complicated and

²¹ These terms and their uses and misuses become a bit confusing. Abbey technically refers to a larger monastic community of twelve or more inhabitants. A monastery, then, is a smaller version of an abbey, and, contrary to common conception, is not necessarily made up of male inhabitants; the male version of a monastic is a monk and the female version is a nun. Convents, similarly, can refer to religious communities of either sex, though the term is generally used currently to refer to female religious communities of nuns. Additionally, there are distinctions between convents and nunneries. I tend to use the more general word cloister, which refers to an enclosed space with a religious function and has been used to denote both the community within and the architectural space itself. It is worth noting that many early Gothic writers, Radcliffe and Lewis included, seem to use much Catholic terminology (such as monk and friar or monastery and abbey) interchangeably. Various critics have discussed their inaccuracies regarding Catholicism, which I briefly discuss later in this chapter. I aim not to fixate on when and where these authors use such terminology correctly or incorrectly, but to instead maintain an awareness of the complicated nature of the terms as I myself slip into and out of certain usages that mirror those of the authors whose works I discuss.

seemingly paradoxical classification of imprisonment: “While the female prisoner as victim is a recurrent and clichéd theme, the novelty of this Gothic trope lies in the contention that although her room might serve as a prison, this prison is actually a safe haven” (378). Similarly, the confinements on which I focus in this chapter can be positive or negative, protecting or persecuting the confined character. Various Radcliffean heroines are known to seek protection in convents from outside evils; conversely, sometimes these same heroines are trapped in convents and forced (or almost forced) to take vows to become nuns. I view liminality as intrinsic to these frequent instances of spatial confinement. The complex nature of the confining cloister is made complex at least partially because of the liminal nature of the character confined, as the distinction between protection and persecution becomes blurred. While the spatial confinement is marked by some sort of boundary—usually an abbey wall, chamber door, or dungeon cell—the liminal potentiality operating within the confinement is itself boundless and chaotic.

As Moy points out, convents can offer safety, specifically a gendered safety that protects women from the sexual dangers existing in the outside world: “When imprisoned damsels appear frequently in Gothic novels of the 1790s, they are taught to seek retreat within their prisons, constantly reassured that the confines of the cell are far preferable to the violence and lust of Italian banditti outdoors. Such plots famously celebrate physical confinement as a safe haven from greater evils in the outside world” (378). Moy thus links protective confinement to moral safety. She goes on to use the Gothic and its theme of imprisonment to make claims about how these confinements influenced later female-authored poetry, specifically the sonnet form; she argues that the convention of confinement in early Gothic novels presented women “as melancholy sonneteers and as beneficiaries rather than victims of their confinement” in a manner that influenced later poetry in using the trope of Gothic confinement as an analogue for the form

of the sonnet (Moy 377). I agree with Moy about some confined women operating as “beneficiaries.” However, Moy connects her analysis to poetry, and I maintain focus on the novel and its narrative. The works that I examine in this chapter often complicate Moy’s claims by showing how sometimes the same space of protective confinement can also be dangerous, and these confinements often complicate and blur definitions rather than clarifying them.²²

Liminality is an in-between state meant to be inhabited temporarily and then passed through. The confinements discussed in this chapter often block the completion of movement through the liminal space, instead leaving the character essentially entrapped in an ambiguous, chaotic space in-between clear definitions. Entry into cloisters such as convents and monasteries is meant to be a willed act in which one gives up individual agency and agrees to abide by the internal rules and laws of the community. Interestingly, if entry to the cloister is willed, there is security in unlimited liminality available in this space. One becomes separated and protected from the world by the walls of the cloister. Becoming a nun or monk furthers this separation and places the individual in the liminal but protective cloistered community for life.

However, the justice of the laws governing the internal community, as we will see in the examples I utilize in this chapter, often falls prey to the desires of an individual authority figure, whether he or she is a superior, prioress, abbot, or other leader. This internal government leads to a curious sort of entrapment, one meant to be protective to the cloistered community but subject to the will (and often whims) of an individual who can easily move the communal rules and laws

²² For example, in Sophia Lee’s *The Recess* (1783-5), the space referred to in the title is a refuge for the secret twin daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots, until they come of age. This recess was originally a convent for nuns, later a hiding place for monks, and eventually the secret childhood home of Matilda and Ellinor. However, when they attempt to retreat back to this space for safety in adulthood, they find banditti inside. This experience provides a succinct example of how a previous space of refuge easily transitions into one of danger.

from the realm of protection to persecution. When this happens, confinement in the cloister can become a sort of living death, a different sort of liminality from which there seems to be no exit. Indeed, the lines between protection and persecution, community and individual, safety and danger are not always clear in these spaces—rather, the lines are skewed and jagged, often with breaks and holes, more like the walls of a decaying and overgrown abbey than a neat garden fence.

This loss of clear boundaries and definitions leads to a sort of Kristevan ambiguity, a move toward abjection, a state that is itself inherently ambiguous to the point of eliciting horrific disgust. In this way, I argue that the liminality experienced by the confined characters, the chaotic ambiguity of meanings that becomes apparent in these spatial confinements, contributes to the very sensation of horror on which the Gothic genre depends. My argument highlights the hidden importance of these conventional confinements in ways previously unconsidered and leads to better understandings not only of the entrapped characters but also of the effect of the genre on its readers.

While the trope of confinement, especially in Catholic spaces like abbeys, monasteries, and convents, is well known and perhaps even overused in early Gothic literature, criticism has generally focused on confinement as an allegory for gender expectations or provided psychoanalytical interpretations often linked to repressed desires. As I discussed in the introduction, I aim to move away from these more symbolic interpretations and instead look at specific topophobic spaces. I argue that these spaces of physical confinement do more than simply provide a claustrophobic environment that heightens suspense or allegorically represents repressed desires; rather, they provide insight into the multiplicity of tensions surrounding the characterization of the individual and the nature of the Gothic itself. Location, here, is key, as it

brings into conflict protection and persecution, safety and danger, and the individual and the community. In order to demonstrate these claims, I have chosen two seminal texts that illustrate the widespread Gothic convention of convents as liminal spaces and one text that complicates these very “conventions.” Examining these moments of cloistered confinement where protection and persecution mix and blur, I argue, is fundamental to understanding the characters in these spaces, the liminal nature of confinement, and, by extension, how the Gothic genre depends on ambiguity.

In the following sections, I will explain my choice of three novels for this chapter and discuss how they have been historically and critically placed in conversation with each other. I will provide a brief overview of the anti-Catholic sentiment evident in much early Gothic literature and link this to the common spatiotemporal distancings that authors utilize as they set their Gothic novels in distant times (usually during the Middle Ages or the Renaissance) and locations (usually in southern Europe). I then devote a section to each of the three novels, examining specific religious confinements and how they function as liminal spaces.

The Lewis/Radcliffe/Dacre Triangle

I have chosen to focus on Lewis’s *The Monk*, Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, and Dacre’s *Zofloya* in this chapter because they are three early Gothic texts prototypical in many ways of the height of the Romantic Gothic in British literature. I use these works to demonstrate how the same type of confinement functions in different Gothic texts from the same period. Additionally, I have chosen these three novels because they are largely inspired by and in conversation with each other. Importantly, Lewis read and praised Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) shortly before writing *The Monk*, calling it “one of the most interesting Books that ever have

been published” and stating that reading it inspired him “to go on with” writing his own romance (qtd. in Macdonald 109). D. L. Macdonald draws further connections between the two authors: “*The Mysteries of Udolpho* . . . inspired Lewis to finish *The Monk*, but it inspired him to answer it, not simply to imitate it, just as *The Monk* itself inspired Radcliffe to answer it with *The Italian* (1797)” (110). Because of this connection—Radcliffe’s *Udolpho* inspiring Lewis’s *The Monk*, which, in turn, led to Radcliffe’s *The Italian*—much previous scholarship has focused on Lewis and Radcliffe together.

Andrew Smith, for example, claims that “Radcliffe’s earlier Gothic writings are to some degree lampooned in *The Monk*, which provides a highly visual, semi-pornographic and violent version of her Gothic world” (27). Many others have examined how Lewis’s novel works in connection with Radcliffe’s but moves from “terror” to “horror” Gothic in its explicitness and, as Smith says, “semi-pornographic” and visceral depictions.²³ James Watt, in turn, discusses *The Italian* as Radcliffe’s response to these sorts of depictions, “a rejoinder to Lewis’s work” (117). Watt continues his discussion of the numerous connections between these two works, and many other critics have paired them as well because of the ways that they are writing to and about each other.²⁴ For these same reasons, I also use Radcliffe and Lewis in this chapter, focusing on the

²³ The distinction between terror and horror is discussed in the introduction.

²⁴ See Watt’s chapter “The First Poetess of Romantic Fiction: Ann Radcliffe” in *Contesting the Gothic* (1999) for an extended discussion of *The Italian* as a response to *The Monk*. See Lauren Fitzgerald’s “Gothic Properties: Radcliffe, Lewis and the Critics” for an examination of what she calls “[o]ne of the most fascinating Gothic tales to emerge from Radcliffe’s and Lewis’s novels”: the story of Radcliffe’s and Lewis’s gendered battle over the Gothic genre, or how *Udolpho* inspired *The Monk*, which, in turn, led to an “alleged rebuttal” with *The Italian* (167). Similarly, Vartan P. Messier’s “The Conservative, the Transgressive, and the Reactionary: Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* as a Response to Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*” analyzes moral differences in the writing of the two authors, claiming that Radcliffe’s moral messages and Lewis’s moral transgressions resulted in their receiving positive and negative

confinements they include in *The Italian* and *The Monk*, respectively, but moving the argument beyond potential authorial influences in order to explore previously neglected aspects of the pairing.

I add Dacre to the Lewis/Radcliffe connection, which has also been done in previous scholarship, though much less exists about Dacre's writing than about Lewis's and Radcliffe's. Dacre's *Zofloya* is often (in fact, almost always) paired with *The Monk*, which connection I discuss in further detail later in this chapter. Michael Gamer, for example, calls *Zofloya* "an extremely powerful rewriting of *The Monk*" and examines how contemporary reviewers linked the two novels and their distaste for both (87). Patrick R. O'Malley similarly views *Zofloya* as a revision of *The Monk*, stating that "Dacre's *Zofloya* rewrites Lewis's *Monk* by reconfiguring the gendered and racialised identities of the erotic couple at the heart of the novel's primary scene of power and seduction" ("Gender" 329). George E. Haggerty complicates the triangle, alternately suggesting that *The Italian* is a better foremother than *The Monk*: "This novel [*Zofloya*] seems at first more reminiscent of Lewis's *The Monk*, as critics have suggested, than of any work of Radcliffe's, but in fact *Zofloya* retells the story of Radcliffe's *The Italian* with a brutality that renders these concerns more urgent and more debilitating" (166). Corinna Wagner groups the three novels in her article "The Dream of a Transparent Body: Identity, Science and the Gothic Novel." However, she names them all as "1790s novels" (76), which is an inaccurate assertion for *Zofloya*, as it was published in 1806, and analyzes how disguise and visual identification work in these three novels. Robert Miles devotes a chapter to this trio of texts, "Avatars of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*: Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya; Or, The*

reviews, respectively. He goes on to examine *The Italian* as a moral response to *The Monk* that "totally neutered *The Monk*'s obscene and immoral aspects" (Messier 42).

Moor,” where he examines *The Italian* and *Zofloya* as revisions of *The Monk*, though he notes that they “provide widely differing views of the self” (*Gothic Writing* 175). In sum, these three novels have clearly been linked in various ways, usually viewed as rewritings of each other in some configuration. Again, I find these links between the three novels very important, but my argument moves beyond influence and offers a new way of understanding how these three authors utilize the Gothic trope of cloistered confinement in different ways, providing a new understanding of *The Italian* and *The Monk* and exploring aspects hitherto completely neglected in *Zofloya*.

By focusing on these three novels in this chapter, I expand on existing scholarship about the connections between the authors and their writings while also demonstrating how my claims about liminal confinement in Catholic edifices in early British Gothic literature present in canonical texts. Radcliffe and Lewis could be considered the prototypical authors of the early Gothic, and Dacre adds a complexly combined and reworked version of the same topic. Rather than focusing on which aspects of these three novels might be considered a revision or rewriting of another of the novels, I offer new ideas about previously linked authors and demonstrate how a model that focuses on their use of a repeating trope allows for better understandings of their characters and manipulation of the effects of the Gothic genre.

Early Gothic’s Anti-Catholicism / Spatiotemporal and Authorial Distancings

In this chapter, I take the discussion of Catholicism in Gothic literature in a new direction. In this section, I outline previous scholarship about Catholicism and anti-Catholicism in the early Gothic novel, beginning with the historical context that inspired the trope and then demonstrating how the “othering” of religion can be connected to other acts of narrative

distancing such as the time and location of the setting or the anonymity of the author. This background is necessary in order to understand how critics have previously discussed this facet of this topic and how my argument moves discussion in a new direction.

Catholicism and anti-Catholicism in the early Gothic have been much discussed.²⁵ As Angela Wright explains, “Critics have compared the labyrinthine nature of the cloisters and ruined monasteries to the element of mystery in which the Gothic’s protagonists are shrouded, and the decaying ruins of abbeys and convents to the crumbling edifices of power portrayed in the novels” (*Gothic Fiction* 74). Joel Porte similarly notes the importance of this Catholic architecture: “Surely the iniquitous convents and monasteries, the mouldering catacombs and graveyards, of high Gothic writing represent more than a congeries of discardable props or the

²⁵ Diane Long Hoeveler’s *Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary, 1780-1820* (2010) positions the Gothic as a secularizing force, “a way of alternately valorizing and at the same time slandering the realms of the supernatural, the sacred, the maternal, the primitive, the numinous, and *das unheimlich*” (xv). Hoeveler claims, “The gothic secularized the uncanny by making traditional religious beliefs and values both familiar and strange, both immanent and transcendent, both minimal and powerful at the same time” (2). Hoeveler expands on this argument in *The Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction, 1780-1880* (2014), where she examines how “a demonized and feudal Catholicism” (3) provides an other against which elite and middle-class British Protestants could define themselves in order to transition towards modernization and secularization. Similarly, in “The Catholic Monster in the Gothic Novel: Matthew G. Lewis’s *The Monk* and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*,” Regina McAloney examines what she calls “Catholicism’s literary reign of terror” (176) and offers a detailed history of Catholicism in England. Nancy F. Sweet’s chapter “A Woman with a Cross: The Transgressive, Transnational Nun in Anti-Catholic Fiction” takes the topic slightly forward in time, exploring transatlantic readings of anti-Catholic “convent narratives,” popular from 1830 to 1860, later in the nineteenth century. Patrick R. O’Malley’s *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* (2006) demonstrates how depictions of Catholicism in the Gothic are linked to “nonnormative sexual expression or identity” (3) in the Victorian period. Farrell O’Gorman’s *Catholicism and American Borders in the Gothic Literary Imagination* (2017) focuses solely on American literature, examining how canonical authors use the Gothic in relation to Catholicism. Conversely, in *The Gothic and Catholicism: Religion, Cultural Exchange and the Popular Novel, 1785-1829* (2009), Maria Purves claims that early Gothic literature is not intrinsically anti-Catholic, focusing her argument on examples of sympathetic and even positive representations of Catholicism.

simple anticlericalism of Protestant authors” (45). While Wright’s point is accurate in its estimation of Gothic criticism, Porte astutely points out that there might be more behind these locations than previously addressed.

Providing a historical explanation, Wright claims that tensions about potential French invasion following the beginning of the Seven Years War (1756-1783) led to related fears about Catholicism. She points out that these anxieties are evident in Hogarth’s work, where he represented “the fears of invasion in England during the Seven Years War, portraying the French as venal, lecherous, violent, and (above all else) Catholic. His engravings capture particularly well England’s recasting of France as its diabolically Catholic other” (*Britain, France and the Gothic* 3-5). These political and social tensions that existed before the first Gothic novel was even written²⁶ later became evident in literature as the Gothic genre “shed its ancient, nationalistic connotations, and instead became associated with Catholicism, superstition, and violence”; indeed, Gothic literature was called “terrorist” writing around the same time of the war in France and the Reign of Terror in France (Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic* 14). In this way, Wright claims, tensions between France and Britain led to an anti-Catholic sentiment that bled over into literature.

Relatedly, Maurice Lévy claims that the British were not the only readers who enjoyed this topic, claiming that “a more direct reason for the popularity of English Gothic fiction among French readers of the Revolutionary period was its fierce anti-Catholicism” (151). It seems both British and French readers enjoyed anti-Catholic topics, as “[t]he English had long ago shaken

²⁶ Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is generally accepted as the first Gothic novel and the impetus for the genre. The novel incorporates an outstanding number of Gothic conventions, which later become stock characters, stereotypes, and clichés, providing the framework for future Gothic texts. For this reason, Fred Botting calls *Otranto* “the blueprint for a new mode of writing” (45).

off what they considered the fetters of Popish superstition and tyranny” (Lévy 152) and related such beliefs to the French, while the French, during the Revolution, were working towards religious (and political) freedom as well.

Catholicism is thus treated as “other” in early Gothic texts, and, as such, these texts often take place spatially and temporally removed from contemporary Britain, usually in southern Europe several centuries earlier. *The Monk*, for example, begins at a church in Madrid, Spain. Wright claims that this setting allows for a sense of distance: “The church congregation can be read as representative of the range of religious, political and sovereign anxieties freighted onto the Gothic romance’s remote location” (*Gothic Fiction* 66). Indeed, though *The Monk* is not set in the past, it is an exception, as other Gothic novels tend to have frame stories that often enact the trope of a “found manuscript”²⁷ that place them remotely both spatially and temporally.

The preface to the first edition *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), for example, famously positions the text as a translation of a medieval Italian manuscript.²⁸ This preface frames the text

²⁷ The trope of the diegetic found manuscript appears in various forms, from constituting the majority of the text itself, as in *The Italian*, to being a brief document that illuminates some key plot point, as in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). The trope continues to be used in later Gothic works up to the present, even becoming adapted into other related genres such as the “found footage” horror film à la *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). I view the “found manuscript” as a more specific subcategory of frame stories in which framing also emerges as a common convention of the Gothic genre. With the use of such devices, the material nature of writing, the diegetic existence of incomplete and inadequate narratives that are ambiguous, unreliable, or otherwise disjointed highlight the concern permeating the Gothic—the instability of meaning.

²⁸ In the preface to the second edition, Walpole famously admits to his authorship. See Crystal B. Lake’s article “Bloody Records: Manuscripts and Politics in *The Castle of Otranto*” for a more detailed discussion about the use of a found manuscript as a framing device in *Otranto* alongside discussion of Walpole’s politics and the role of antiquarians in the mid-18th century. Lake argues against viewing the novel’s medievalism simply “as a means to achieve authorial distance from realism” (490) and instead claims that Walpole engages with history and politics by calling attention to how contemporary antiquaries problematically misuse medieval manuscripts “as playthings of politicians” (491). Jonathan Dent similarly calls attention to how the found manuscript works in connection with historical knowledge, claiming that the

that follows as archival, primary source material, discovered by William Marshal, a pseudonymous editor/translator:

The following work was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed in Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written does not appear. . . . If the story was written near the time when it is supposed to have happened, it must have been between 1095, the æra of the first crusade, and 1243, the date of the last, or not long afterwards. (Walpole 5)

This preface outlines false information about the text's origins, discovery, and the editorial process necessary to present it to readers as worthy of their attention. Crystal B. Lake explains how scholars have viewed this preface as a distancing mechanism: "By setting *Otranto* in the murky medieval past, Walpole would seem to remove characters and readers alike from the empiricist ideologies of the Enlightenment and the demands of realist fiction, facilitating the Gothic's unbelievable plot devices and sentimental effects" (489). Additionally, I would add, by utilizing Marshal as a fake editor/translator, Walpole also distances himself from the text.²⁹

discovered manuscript "symbolises the Gothic's obsession with, and problematisation of, historical knowledge" (41).

²⁹ Many Gothic authors of the time published anonymously or pseudonymously in order to separate their real identities from their authorship. Lewis published the first edition of *The Monk* anonymously, though he did include his initials at the end of the preface. He named himself as author in the second edition in October 1796. The revelation of his authorship, paired with his inclusion of "M. P." after his name due to his recent acquisition in July 1796 of a seat in the House of Commons (Berryman 20), resulted in scandal. Gamer explains, "The small flourish of these two final letters cost him dearly; reviewers, satirists, clergy, and politicians immediately joined in calling for the book's suppression for its supposed obscenity and blasphemy, sometimes even reversing their own previous positive reviews of the book" (74). Interestingly, both Walpole and Lewis were criticized for writing novels deemed morally or socially unacceptable while serving as members of Parliament.

"Charlotte Dacre," notably, is a pseudonym. Following the lead of other scholarship, I refer to the author as Charlotte Dacre, the pseudonym under which she published *Zofloya*, rather than Charlotte King, her real name (before marriage). Dacre never linked her actual identity to

Other authors used similar “found manuscript” tactics to merge the Gothic with the historical romance, such as Sophia Lee did in the aptly subtitled *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times* (1783-5). Following in *Otranto*’s footsteps, *The Recess* was published with an advertisement claiming it is a manuscript from the Renaissance era: “Not being permitted to publish the means which enriched me with the manuscript from whence the following tale is extracted, its simplicity alone can authenticate it.—I make no apology for altering the language to that of the present age, since the obsolete stile of the author would be frequently unintelligible” (Lee 5). With this advertisement, Lee positions herself as an editor rather than the author, in effect creating several removes by distancing the story from present-day England temporally and distancing herself from the text by disguising herself.

In another distancing act, Radcliffe sets her four most well-known novels—*A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *The*

her writing, always publishing under a pseudonym and sometimes a double pseudonym, as the novel was originally attributed to Rosa Matilda, a name under which she also published poetry. Beatriz González Moreno claims that Dacre’s use of “Rosa Matilda” as a pseudonym transgressed expectations in several ways: as a reference to Lewis’s *The Monk*, indicating “that she, as a woman writer displaying such a plethora of despicable and sexually connoted acts, could have only been considered by the reading public as a demon in disguise”; as a statement of the traditional angel/demon dichotomy; and as a sort of writerly androgyny because of the “tension between what she as a woman was supposed to write, or better, to imagine—namely a romance formed on the model of Ann Radcliffe’s—and what she did write—a romance which because of its content could have only been written by a man” (420). Jacqueline Pearson posits that Dacre got the names “Rosa Matilda” from *The Monk* and the name “Dacre” from Charlotte Smith’s *Marchmont* (1796). She argues that the use of these pseudonyms made Dacre “herself her first great Gothic creation” (117). See Lisa M. Wilson’s “Female Pseudonymity in the Romantic ‘Age of Personality’: The Career of Charlotte King/Rosa Matilda/Charlotte Dacre” for a thorough analysis of Dacre’s pseudonym use, where Wilson interprets “Charlotte Dacre” as a “round” character and “Rosa Matilda” as a “flat” caricature.

Radcliffe’s first two novels, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789) and *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), were published anonymously. The first edition (1791) of her next novel, *The Romance of the Forest*, was also published anonymously, but Radcliffe began including her name on the title page of her work from the second edition (1792) of *The Romance of the Forest* onwards.

Italian—apart from England. Sir Walter Scott notes this choice in his introduction to a collection of her works:

She has uniformly selected the south of Europe for her place of action, whose passions, like the weeds of the climate, are supposed to attain portentous growth under the fostering sun; which abounds with ruined monuments of antiquity, as well as the more massive remnants of the middle ages; and where feudal tyranny and Catholic superstition still continue to exercise their sway over slave and bigot, and to indulge to the haughty lord, or more haughty priest, that sort of despotic power, the exercise of which seldom fails to deprave the heart, and disorder the judgment. These circumstances are skillfully selected, to give probability to events which could not, without great violation of truth, be represented as having taken place in England. (xxiii)

Scott links the settings of these novels with a different climate, different relics and ruins, and perhaps most importantly, different ideologies, as what he deems “feudal tyranny and Catholic superstition” exist here. His presentation of the novels’ settings parallels Radcliffe’s, as he depicts the locations that are not England as exotic and haunted by various aspects of the past ranging from “ruined monuments” to ways of life. Additionally, Scott neglects to consider Radcliffe’s first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne: A Highland Story* (1789), which actually takes place, as its first sentence indicates, “[o]n the north-east coast of Scotland” (5).³⁰

³⁰ Alison Milbank also calls attention to the “unusual British setting” outside of “exotic Mediterranean landscapes” (vii) in her introduction to *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*. Though the novel’s Scottish setting is spatially close, it is temporally indistinct. In her explanatory notes to the Oxford edition, Milbank says that the descriptions of feudalism place the narrative in the middle ages (114), but the time is not explicitly stated anywhere in the text. Robert Miles rightly calls the setting “some vague time in pre-Reformation Scotland” (“The 1790s” 46).

However, his comments on Radcliffe's settings in general are accurate. *The Italian*, which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, takes place, as the title suggests, in Italy.

While both *The Monk* and *The Italian* are set spatially apart from England, neither is temporally distant. Critics sometimes refer to the setting of *The Monk* as the 17th century, but it is hard to find textual evidence to support this claim.³¹ The inner, framed narrative of *The Italian* takes place in 1758, only thirty-nine years before its publication date. *Zofloya*, the third novel I focus on in this chapter, is both spatially and temporally distant, as it takes place in 15th century Venice. Interestingly, this novel, which I will discuss partially in terms of its failure to fit into traditional Gothic expectations, better meets this distancing convention than either of those by Lewis or Radcliffe that I discuss here.

These spatial and temporal distancings I have identified work in connection with the anti-Catholic sentiment in these early Gothic works, as places and times distant from present-day Britain are connected to the Catholic other.³² Sister Mary Muriel Tarr addresses the topic in *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction: A Study of the Nature and Function of Catholic Materials in*

³¹ D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf refer to Lewis "displacing them [contemporary issues] onto a distant time and place, seventeenth-century Spain" (15). Serena Trowbridge claims that in *The Monk*, "the distance in time and place allows Lewis to be extremely critical of rigid religious practices" (25). Though critics refer to *The Monk* as having a temporal distance, I am not sure that textual evidence supports this claim, and instead I see *The Monk* as somewhat temporally indistinct.

³² Though it was common to do so, not all Gothic writers demonized Catholicism. In her chapter "Rethinking Surrender: Elizabeth Inchbald and the 'Catholic Novel,'" Kaley Kramer examines how Inchbald treats Catholicism in genre fiction, claiming that her characters are familiar, English, and, above all, not caricaturized (88). In this way, Inchbald, a Roman Catholic herself (Kramer 87) explores the experience of Catholics in Britain in a manner that adds complex tensions to her stories without demonizing either dominant form of religion.

Gothic Fiction in England (1762-1820),³³ where she examines the use and function of “Catholic materials” (v) in Gothic fiction. Citing Richard Hurd, she points out that Catholicism and Gothicism are both linked to medievalism (Tarr 6). Their shared connotations, she claims, lead to not only a medieval setting but also a Catholic one. In fact, this “medieval” setting is rather loosely defined in the Gothic: “There is no specific historical epoch that is referred to consistently in Gothic fiction as the Middle Ages” (Tarr 8). Addressing Radcliffe’s work, Tarr claims that Radcliffe does not set her stories in the distant past but instead utilizes distant locations, thereby creating “a contemporary, continental medieval period” (9). Tarr provides an early and specifically Catholic perception of Gothic fiction, offering insight into nuances such as what type of mass takes place in the texts and whether this is realistic according to Catholic dogma or fictionally manipulated in order to heighten sensation. These works thus displace the reader in various ways by manipulating times, places, and religious practices.

It is also worth noting that critics including Tarr have discussed both Lewis’s and Radcliffe’s mistakes about Catholicism, pointing out inaccuracies made by the non-Catholic authors. D. L. Macdonald’s and Kathleen Scherf’s footnotes in the Broadview edition of *The Monk* call attention to occurrences such as the Poor Clares visiting the church of the Capuchins for confession, an act they say an enclosed order would not take (53n1). Though Lewis misrepresents this aspect of cloistered life, he accurately notes that Lorenzo would have to meet with his sister “at the parlour-grate” (53), a physical separation between visitors and nuns. This suggests a mixed understanding of enclosed orders. It is also worth noting that Christoval and Lorenzo consider the act of the nuns of St. Clare coming to visit Ambrosio at the abbey

³³ Tarr notably uses Thomas Leland’s *Longsword, Earl of Salisbury* (1762) as her earliest text rather than *The Castle of Otranto*, though she recognizes that the latter is credited with beginning the Gothic genre.

extraordinary. Indeed, the nuns take special precautions by coming through a private door under the cover of dusk. These special circumstances are partially what prompt Christoval and Lorenzo to conceal themselves to watch. Though Lewis's misrepresentation or even ignorance of Catholicism could be to blame for such scenes, the sheer infatuation with Ambrosio pervading Madrid could offer an alternate explanation for the nuns leaving their convent as well.

Religion is further complicated in Dacre's work because, as Diane Long Hoeveler points out in "Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*: The Gothic Demonization of the Jew," Dacre comes from a Jewish family. Hoeveler even goes so far as to read *Zofloya* as a "construction of the abjected Jew" onto whom Dacre projects herself and her own concerns about Jewish identity (170). However, Hoeveler neglects to mention that *Zofloya* is clearly a "Moor," as even the subtitle of the novel reminds us, which was used to refer his blackness but is also typically used with a religious connotation to refer to Muslims.³⁴ Hoeveler's claims about *Zofloya*'s potential Jewishness would be more convincing if she also discussed these other religious connotations and provided more justification than Dacre's own familial background. Regardless, *Zofloya* clearly deals with Catholic characters and a Catholic other in the depiction of Signora di Modena and a Satan figure mirroring the one in *The Monk*.

³⁴ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term "Moor" originally referred to "a native or inhabitant of Mauretania, a region of North Africa corresponding to parts of present-day Morocco and Algeria." Later, though, the term is defined as "a member of the Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent inhabiting north-western Africa (now mainly present-day Mauritania), who in the 8th cent. conquered Spain." There is also an archaic usage dating back to 1588 that also equates "Moor" to "Muslim," although here specifically "a Muslim inhabitant of India or Sri Lanka" ("Moor"). *Zofloya*, the text reveals, was "reduced to a menial situation" after the fall of Granada (Dacre 141), which took place in 1492 and marked the end of the war between Catholic and Islamic forces in Spain and the Moors' expulsion from Spain. He is also said to be "of noble birth, of the race of the Abdoulrahmans" (Dacre 141), which refers to Abd al-Rahman I, or Abdul Rahman I, the founder of a Muslim dynasty in Iberia in the 8th century. *Zofloya* is clearly a Spanish Moor, though one depicted with heavily exoticized orientalism.

As I have demonstrated, both Catholicism and distant settings in past times are common elements of the Gothic, and these two elements are intrinsically related. Religion, time, and space are all utilized as ways to create an “other” for the readers of these texts. I argue that these links between the religious and spatiotemporal distancings allow for more comfortable exploration of contemporary concerns and fears, permitting the reader to consider ideas and occurrences that blur boundaries, distort definitions, and elicit horror from a seemingly safely removed distance.

Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*

The Monk outraged its contemporary readers.³⁵ Wright remarks that this “tale of incest, seduction, matricide, and Catholic hypocrisy” led to negative responses towards the Gothic genre as a whole as “critics began to reflect upon the pernicious effects of the Gothic genre *en masse*” (*Gothic Fiction* 15). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, she notes, “led the charge” against this novel, specifically being incensed by Lewis’s treatment of the Bible (*Gothic Fiction* 15). It is not Lewis’s use of the supernatural or horror (though he does raise issue with both) that most disturbs Coleridge but Lewis’s treatment of religion.³⁶ Ultimately, Coleridge is appalled that Lewis depicts the Bible as improper reading for a young lady:

³⁵ Even present-day critics still like to point out the shocking content of the novel, as Frederick S. Frank does in his “A Concordance of Bosoms: Reconstructing Lewis’s *The Monk*”: “Any Gothic novel concocted of decaying infants, subterranean fornication, violent matricide, sepulchral rape, a demonic femme fatale, one Wandering Jew, one Bleeding Nun, one frontally nude Satan, the mutilation of an evil Prioress, devil worship, erotically explicit details of the boudoir, poetic *injustice*, and a spectacular victory of evil over good certainly must have something in it for the hedonistic reader” (157).

³⁶ Coleridge critiques Lewis’s blasphemy more than his use of the supernatural. This focus makes sense, as Coleridge himself makes use of the supernatural, most notably in *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* (1798) and *Christabel* (1816).

We believe it not absolutely impossible that a mind may be so deeply depraved by the habit of reading lewd and voluptuous tales, as to use even the Bible in conjuring up the spirit of uncleanness. The most innocent expressions might become the first link in the chain of association, when a man's soul had be so poisoned and we believe it not absolutely impossible that he might extract pollution from the word of purity, and, in a literal sense, *turn the grace of God into wantonness*. (198)

Coleridge's distaste for Lewis's apparent lack of moral instruction in the novel leads to him going so far as to call it "a *mormo* for children, a poison for youth and a provocative for the debauchee" (197).

Wright points out that many critics in addition to Coleridge were worried about the lack of instruction in this new genre of Gothic novels, such as the anonymous author of "Terrorist Novel Writing" (1797), an article that not only features the oft-cited recipe poking fun at Gothic conventions³⁷ but also takes issue with the lack of instruction in the genre: "A novel, if at all useful, ought to be a representation of human life and manners, with a view to direct the conduct in the most important duties of life, and to correct its follies. But what instruction is to be reaped from the distorted ideas of lunatics, I am at a loss to conceive" (228). Critics of the time seem to be concerned that readers of these novels, like Arabella in Charlotte Lennox's earlier *The Female*

³⁷ This recipe for a Gothic text is as follows:

"*Take*—An old castle, half of it ruinous.

A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.

Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.

As many skeletons, in chests and presses.

An old woman hanging by the neck, with her throat cut.

Assassins and desperadoes, *quant suff*.

Noise, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.

Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering-places before going to bed. PROBATUM EST." ("Terrorist Novel Writing" 229)

Quixote (1752) or, perhaps more accurately as regards the Gothic, Arabella's literary successor Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* would be unable to distinguish between novelistic fiction, particularly romances and Gothic novels, respectively, and reality.

I claim that representations of Catholicism and confinement play a large role in this reception of the novel. For example, Victoria Nelson claims that "[t]hough Lewis serves up the obligatory moldering vaults and gloomy medieval atmosphere of earlier Gothic tales, this faux Catholic story focuses obsessively on the Roman clergy's sexual transgressions, abuses of power, and hypocritical cruelty toward confessed sinners" (89). I agree, to some extent, but I claim that these repressions and transgressions would not be possible without the confinements. I find these confinements key and claim that other topics critics have previously focused on would not be possible without the confinement that they have neglected.

Coleridge and other contemporaries were outraged not only at Lewis's treatment of Christianity but also at the possibly negative moral effect the genre as a whole might have on its readers. But while the shocking subject matter might have worried some people, the genre was hugely popular, so it also clearly titillated them. I argue that these very moralistically questionable acts that incensed some reviewers yet enticed an extraordinary amount of readers ultimately depend on confinement. The murdering, torturing, raping, and demon summoning could not take place outside of these confining spaces.

Unlike other critics, I focus on four different spatial confinements in *The Monk*: Agnes in St. Clare's convent and then burial vaults, Ambrosio in the Capuchin abbey, Antonia in St. Clare's burial vaults, and Ambrosio and Matilda in the dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition. Importantly, all of these confining spaces fall under the larger category of religious buildings.

I begin with Agnes de Medina because her experience exhibits the two most common forms of cloistered confinement in early Gothic novels and clearly demonstrates both models of protection and persecution. Agnes first willingly confines herself in a convent as a means of protecting herself from the world after having a negative experience with love. Her experience in the convent, however, transitions into one of persecution when she is prevented from leaving, falsely reported as dead, interred in its burial vaults, and then locked away in a secret prison underneath the burial vaults.

Agnes, then, provides an example of someone who willingly confined herself, viewing the act of taking the veil as a sort of protection and separation from the world. When first discussing Agnes with her brother, Lorenzo de Medina, Christoval is horrified that she is in a convent: “I am amazed, Don Lorenzo, how you could think of immuring so charming a girl within the walls of a cloister!” (53). Lorenzo somewhat agrees with his perception, claiming that he is not capable of such “barbarity” and explaining that he actually tried to make her change her mind (53).³⁸ Agnes confines herself in the convent of St. Clare because of what Lorenzo calls “particular circumstances” early in the novel (53); these circumstances are later revealed to be an unfortunate love affair. She believes that Raymond de las Cisternas,³⁹ the man with whom she planned (and unsuccessfully attempted) to run away in order to avoid the cloister, abandoned her

³⁸ Raymond later reveals to Lorenzo that Agnes actually “has been destined to the convent from her cradle” (134) because of a sickbed promise made by her mother. This fact has been purposefully hidden from Lorenzo and their uncle, the Duke de Medina, as both would disapprove and attempt to prevent it from happening. While Agnes herself was resistant to becoming a nun for a while, she ultimately willingly takes her vows as a means to escape from the world and the heartache she suffers from believing Raymond abandoned her.

³⁹ At this time, Raymond is going by the pseudonym of Don Alphonso d’Alvarada, hiding his rank in order to mingle freely during his travels. I have chosen to refer to him consistently as Raymond to avoid confusion. Additionally, this portion of the narrative is told after the fact, related by Raymond after he has abandoned the pseudonym and revealed his true identity to all involved parties.

because of her lack of fortune. Their failed attempt to elope actually resulted from Raymond's encounter with the ghost of the Bleeding Nun and his various injuries, and, further, Agnes's jealous aunt lied to her and said Raymond was no longer interested. Agnes explains, "An horrible adventure, and the treachery of a relation, separated us from each other. I believed him lost to me and threw myself into a convent from motives of despair" (70). This experience led to her willingly agreeing to become a nun, an act that has been pushed on her by her family but that she had hitherto resisted. Her aunt's lies, in particular, led her to view cloistered life as a means of escape and solace.

Lorenzo goes on to explain that Agnes refused to see him until the day before she took the veil. Highlighting his perception of the convent as a place of persecution, Lorenzo does not believe that hers is a willing absence; he states that he "hesitated not to avow my suspicions, that her being kept from me was against her own inclinations" (106). At this point, though, Agnes is purposefully avoiding speaking with her brother, intent on not being persuaded to abandon her intentions to become a nun. When they do meet, she explains that she feels "a convent was the only place where she could now hope for tranquility" (106). These early examples show how even while Agnes views the convent as a place of protection, her brother and others remain skeptical.

Agnes's willing self-confinement transitions into unwilling imprisonment when Ambrosio, the eponymous monk, discovers her secret letter from Raymond. He then reveals both her escape plan and pregnancy to the prioress of St. Clare, Mother St. Agatha. The prioress, embarrassed by having Ambrosio witness one of her nun's violation of vows, determines to punish Agnes to the extent of her powers, going so far as to bring into play archaic laws of their

order no longer commonly used. Mother St. Ursula later describes the specifics of the plan for Agnes's confinement in more detail when she publicly accuses St. Agatha of her crimes:

St. Clare's rules are severe: but grown antiquated and neglected, many of late years have either been forgotten, or changed by universal consent into milder punishments. The penance adjudged to the crime of Agnes was most cruel, most inhuman. The law had been long exploded. Alas! it still existed, and the revengeful prioress now determined to revive it. This law decreed, that the offender should be plunged into a private dungeon, expressly constituted to hide from the world for ever the victim of cruelty and tyrannic superstition. In this dreadful abode she was to lead a perpetual solitude, deprived of all society, and believed to be dead by those, whom affection might have prompted to attempt her rescue. Thus was she to languish out the remainder of her days, with no other food than bread and water, and no other comfort than the free indulgence of her tears. (298-99)

The prioress takes Agnes's transgression, and its revelation to Ambrosio, as a personal affront and determines to treat her (and her unborn child, by extension) as harshly as possible, opting to enact this "antiquated and neglected" punishment more for her own vindication than to actually help Agnes atone for sins. Thus Agnes is forced into a horrible imprisonment within the convent.

During Agnes's confinement, St. Agatha's purposeful lies demonstrate an individual in power over a community acting in a manner that places those she is supposed to protect in danger. The prioress originally tells Lorenzo that his sister is growing increasingly ill and unable to leave the bed to speak with him. Though he and Raymond assume this is a lie, they do not know how to get her out of the convent and away from the prioress. Indeed, the discovered elopement was considered necessary to remove her from the prioress's power before a papal bull

released her from her vows because of concern about the prioress's reaction. When Lorenzo does finally show up at the convent with the bull, the prioress immediately changes tactics, claiming that Agnes is actually dead, not ill, and was buried three days ago.

In actuality, Agnes is not sick or dead; St. Agatha has put into action St. Ursula's previously mentioned description of Agnes's confinement. Agnes has been chained to a wall in a damp, cold burial vault, fed only bread and water. When finally found by Lorenzo by accident, she has been without bread or water for three days and is clutching the decaying corpse of her infant, whom she gave birth to while imprisoned. Lorenzo finds her during the riots but, notably, does not even recognize his own sister:

It [a light] proceeded from a small lamp which was placed upon a heap of stones, and whose faint and melancholy rays served rather to point out than dispel the horrors of a narrow gloomy dungeon, formed in one side of the cavern: it also shewed several other recesses of similar construction, but whose depth was buried in obscurity. Coldly played the light upon the damp walls, whose dew-stained surface gave back a feeble reflection. A thick and pestilential fog clouded the height of the vaulted dungeon. As Lorenzo advanced, he felt a piercing chillness spread itself through his veins. The frequent groans still engaged him to move forwards. He turned towards them, and by the lamp's glimmering beams beheld, in a corner of this loathsome abode, a creature stretched upon a bed of straw, so wretched, so emaciated, so pale, that he doubted to think her a woman. She was half naked: her long dishevelled hair fell in disorder over her face, and almost entirely concealed it. One wasted arm hung listlessly upon a tattered rug, which covered her convulsed and shivering limbs: the other was wrapped around a small bundle, and held it closely to her bosom. (311)

This section of the novel, often discussed as a prime example of Lewis's evocation of physical, visceral horror, clearly demonstrates how Agnes's confinement is in no way protective at this point. Her interment has instead caused the death of her child and nearly her own death as well, which would have shortly occurred if Lorenzo had not accidentally stumbled upon her.

At the end of the novel, Agnes gives her own account of her confinement in the burial vaults of St. Clare. The novel narratively circles back on itself by further describing scenes already experienced by other characters. Here, Agnes provides more details than the reader was previously privy to, relating that when originally confined she awakened in a tomb with a decaying corpse: "As I raised myself with this design, my hand rested upon something soft: I grasped it, and advanced it toward the light. Almighty God! what was my disgust! my consternation! In spite of its putridity, and the worms which preyed upon it, I perceived a corrupted human head, and recognised the features of a nun who had died some months before" (335). Agnes here has been placed, still living, in a space meant for the dead. The decaying corpse being eaten by worms illustrates the abjection and blurring of boundaries and meanings that Agnes experiences as the living worms here consume the dead. Making her way out of the grated ceiling of her tomb, she finds herself in a larger chamber, though one still full of "skulls, shoulder-blades, thigh-bones, and other reliques of mortality" (335). However, the door to this larger room is locked from the outside, and Agnes soon discovers that the prioress and the four nuns who gave her the poison which seemed to kill her actually plan to keep her imprisoned alive in a secret prison beneath the burial vaults: "Beneath these vaults there exist prisons . . . artfully is their entrance concealed, and she who enters them must resign all hopes of liberty. . . . Chained down in one of these secret dungeons, shut out from the world and light for ever, with

no comfort but religion, no society but repentance; thus must you groan away the remainder of your days” (339).

The prison under the burial vaults is not much of an improvement from the tomb where Agnes first awoke. As previously mentioned, she is chained to a wall, given a “forlorn and comfortless” bed of straw, and, apparently, plagued by “reptiles of every description” (339). It is on this bed of straw, still chained, where she gives birth to an infant who dies within a few hours. Again, another depiction of physical horror occurs, as Agnes refuses to give up her infant’s body even once it becomes “a mass of putridity” (342), and both she and her infant’s body are assaulted by the previously mentioned reptiles (and other creatures):

My slumbers were constantly interrupted by some obnoxious insect crawling over me. Sometimes I felt the bloated toad, hideous and pampered with the poisonous vapours of the dungeon, dragging his loathsome length along my bosom. Sometimes the quick cold lizard roused me, leaving his slimy track upon my face, and entangling itself in the tresses of my wild and matted hair. Often have I at waking found my fingers ringed with the long worms which bred in the corrupted flesh of my infant. (343)

This depiction of Agnes, confined in a subterranean vault, starving, and clutching her worm-infested infant, is the enduring image of the novel. She has clearly moved from the state of willing confinement that she views as protection to the utmost persecution, demonstrating in the same character (and even parts of the same convent), the transition and confusion between these two functions of confinement.

My second example from *The Monk* is that of the eponymous character, the Monk, or, Ambrosio. Even though Ambrosio is not a damsel in distress the way that Agnes is, I argue that the monastery where he lives also serves as a space of both protection and persecution. His

confinement is much different from what typically comes to mind when considering early Gothic novels: he is not confined against his will, though his confinement is, interestingly, linked to virtue. Early in the novel, Lorenzo describes Ambrosio much as Ambrosio thinks of himself, as a saint-like religious figure who not only resists temptation but also revels in doing so better than everyone else:

Ambrosio's character is perfectly without reproach; and a man who has passed the whole of his life within the walls of a convent, cannot have found the opportunity to be guilty, even were he possessed of the inclination. But now, when, obliged by the duties of his situation, he must enter occasionally into the world, and be thrown in the way of temptation, it is now that it behoves [*sic*] him to show the brilliance of his virtue. (50)

Lorenzo's estimation of Ambrosio's character reflects how Madrid in general sees its favorite monk. Ambrosio has cultivated his reputation and been idolized by admirers largely because of his confinement in a monastery. He exists apart from society and the world, which makes him seem purer because, as Lorenzo puts it, "the opportunity to be guilty" seems unlikely to occur in such isolation. This isolation additionally makes his rare public appearances seem even more important, as evinced by the overwhelming crowd in attendance at the church of the Capuchins in the opening scene. Antonia shares similar thoughts; after first hearing him preach, she sheds a tear and thinks, "He is separated from the world! . . . perhaps, I shall never see him more!" (49). In this way, Ambrosio's confinement in a monastery makes him seem exceptional both to others and himself, which, in turn, builds up his reputation and makes his rare interactions with the public seem that much more special.

Ambrosio enjoys his liminal existence in the monastery, able to pass time in isolation but still interact with others apart from the public world. He views this as a means of protection from temptation, much as Lorenzo does in the previously mentioned passage:

After passing many a long hour in solitude, if I could express to you the joy which I feel at once more beholding a fellow-creature! 'Tis this in particular that I place the principle merit of a monastic institution. It secludes man from the temptations of vice; it procures that leisure necessary for the proper service of the Supreme; it spares him the mortification of witnessing the crimes of the worldly, and yet permits him to enjoy the blessing of society. (76)

This somewhat paradoxical existence makes monastic life preferable to that of both worldly life and hermitage, according to Ambrosio. In a monastery, he is able to simultaneously isolate himself and interact with others, to protect himself from the world but not completely abandon it. Steven Blakemore points out that this “emphasis on monastic male chastity . . . has its correspondence in female virginity and virtue—the subject of so many eighteenth-century conduct books and novels” (522). Blakemore uses this point to argue for Ambrosio’s feminized position; I argue that it also places him in a position of protection within a religious system, separating him, he thinks, from the dangers of the world. We can clearly see how the monastery is meant to, and initially does, serve as a space of protection for Ambrosio, though this very protection ultimately leads to complications.

Ironically, the threat to Ambrosio comes from within the monastery, not without, as Lorenzo assumes.⁴⁰ Ambrosio has ultimately inadvertently locked himself in with a monster who

⁴⁰ There is also obviously a threat from within his own person, as Ambrosio’s vanity and pride are evident from the beginning of the text. The Devil himself points out this culpability

may be a woman, demon, or both, Rosario/Matilda. Macdonald and Scherf call Matilda “the most fascinating and troubling character in the novel,” a character particularly hard to define:

She not only talks him [Ambrosio] into most of his crimes, she provides the equipment for many of them: the magic myrtle he uses for his second attempt to rape Antonia, the opiate he uses for his successful third attempt, the dagger he uses to stab her, and finally the book he uses to summon the Devil. Along the way, she goes through a bewildering series of transformations, from a timid (and apparently male) novice, to a virtuous if unconventional woman, an enthusiastic and expert sexual partner, a Sadean super-villain, and finally a glamorous witch. (12)

Readers are left unsure whether she is or was ever actually a woman or if they should accept the Devil’s explanation that she is “a subordinate but crafty spirit” who assumed an appearance like that of Ambrosio’s portrait of the Madonna (Lewis 361). Macdonald and Scherf point out that certain passages in the novel depend upon her actually being a human woman, and they therefore interpret the Devil’s explanation as a lie (12). Miles similarly calls attention to the problem of defining Matilda: “is she a young woman who sells her soul in order to possess Ambrosio, or is she, from the start, the devil’s creature, a demonic spectre?” (*Gothic Writing* 159). He ultimately avoids positing an answer, instead claiming, “The text appears contradictory on this point, but the ambiguity allows Lewis to move in and out of novel and romance” (*Gothic Writing* 159). I agree with these estimations of Matilda, as different points of the text do appear contradictory. Reading Matilda/Rosario as inhabiting an unclear and undefined space that is neither clearly

near the end of the novel: “Know, vain man! that I have long marked you for my prey: I watched the movements of your heart; I saw that you were virtuous from vanity, not principle, and I seized the fit moment of seduction” (361).

human nor demon allows for play with the character that I find necessary to her function as catalyst for Ambrosio's destruction.

Returning to Ambrosio after three consecutive chapters dedicated to Lorenzo and Raymond, notably Raymond's relating his history with Agnes and the Bleeding Nun, readers find Ambrosio and Matilda exactly where they left them, clutching each other in bed. It seems we have given them enough textual privacy to have sex and then returned to their story just as "[t]he burst of transport was passed" (204). Having broken his thirty years of celibacy, Ambrosio is entranced with sex: "his only fear was lest death should rob him of his enjoyments, for which his long fast had only given a keener edge to his appetite" (205). Here, we see Ambrosio's supposed protected status as a monk within a monastery actually fostering rather than preventing his downfall. His previous isolation from the world has left him a prime candidate for seduction because of his ignorance and naiveté about sexual matters. Though the monastery and his confinement protects him from the outside world in ways that he appreciates, his isolation has also set him up for larger transgressions than what might otherwise occur. Ambrosio's perceived sanctuary ends up making him particularly susceptible to demonic influence.

The importance of the spatial confinement of the monastery that I am highlighting here again becomes evident when Ambrosio transgresses its physical bounds (and, in doing so, its laws and his own vows) twice.⁴¹ He becomes so focused on his physical, sexual desires that he

⁴¹ It is worth noting that Ambrosio actually leaves the monastery several times, visiting Antonia and Elvira daily for a period of time. He also goes with Matilda to the burial chambers of St. Clare a second time in order to assist in summoning a demon to help seduce Antonia. However, the two locations into which he trespasses are the same in these cases—Elvira and Antonia's home and the burial vaults of St. Clare. Additionally, Ambrosio does eventually leave the monastery openly after Elvira's death when Jacintha requests his help with Elvira's ghost. Here, he is driven by his worry about and desire for Antonia, but he still "hoped that the singularity of this adventure would justify him in the eyes of Madrid" (280).

leaves the monastery, first to go to the burial ground of St. Clare and then to visit Elvira and Antonia at their home. The monastery where Ambrosio and Matilda live is adjacent to the convent of St. Clare, and the two share common burial vaults divided in half by iron railing (208). In order to save Matilda's life, Ambrosio procures the key to the cemetery, where he accompanies her on a midnight journey to conduct black magic, though he remains ignorant of these details at the time. Notably, Matilda and Ambrosio cross from the monastery's side to the sisterhood's side, passing through a gate in the iron railing in order to enter the subterranean vaults of St. Clare. They have left the spatial confinement of their convent and entered into a new space, one marked by death and apparently conducive to magic. While it is unclear at this point if Ambrosio interprets this journey as breaking his vow to never leave the monastery, it is later revealed that the ground of St. Clare are considered outside the bounds of his vow. Indeed, when he later goes to get the liquor from their laboratory that will allow him to fake Antonia's death, "his arrival threw the whole sisterhood into the utmost amazement," and the prioress shows "surprise at his having broken through his resolution" (284). If we view the visit from the nuns earlier in the novel as violating their enclosure, as Macdonald and Scherf do, then certainly Ambrosio's moving into their side of the cemetery marks a similar transgression of boundaries. This, paired with the nuns' reactions to his visit later in the text, makes clear that his following Matilda from the side of the cemetery belonging to his order to the side belonging to the neighboring nuns indeed constitutes leaving the monastery and breaking his vows.

Ambrosio's second transgression of the physical bounds of his monastery occurs soon afterward. I want to again stress that Ambrosio's protected status in the monastery allows him to transgress its physical bounds, which ultimately leads him to crime. Heretofore he had only left on Thursdays to appear in public to give a sermon, and though he served as confessor to many,

“[i]n his resolution of never stirring out of his convent he still persisted” (215). He now breaks his rule in order to visit Elvira himself rather than sending some other confessor: “He resolved to be the confessor himself. He could leave the abbey unobserved without difficulty . . . [;] he doubted not to keep Madrid in ignorance that he had broken his vow never to see the outside of the abbey-walls” (219). Here, Ambrosio is primarily concerned with not being discovered by Madrid (or by Leonella, who would undoubtedly gossip about this to all of Madrid) and with seeing Antonia, not with providing confession to a dying woman. Indeed, he takes care to ask both Elvira and Antonia to be sure to keep his visit secret. From here on, he begins visiting daily, set on seducing Antonia.

Ambrosio is notably helped in this seduction by a magic talisman, a myrtle branch that a summoned demon gives to Matilda to give to him: “Receive this constellated myrtle: while you bear this in your hand, every door will fly open to you. It will procure you access to-morrow night to Antonia’s chamber: then breathe upon it thrice, pronounce her name, and place it upon her pillow. A death-like slumber will immediately seize upon her, and deprive her of the power of resisting your attempts” (245). This myrtle branch thus functions as an object of unconfinement, unbarring locked doors for Ambrosio to literally foster his movement and putting Antonia to sleep to more metaphorically unbar his access to her body (while also adding an element of somnambulism/necrophilia to the planned rape). However, it is worth noting that he is unable to actually rape Antonia at this point—he undresses her, kisses her, and rips off his own clothes, but then her mother comes in and interrupts. Ambrosio then adds another sin to his quickly growing repertoire by murdering Elvira. This, for a time, saves Antonia, as he has lost his desire for her, and she “now appear[s] to him an object of disgust” (265). He instead flees

back to the monastery, revisiting, but in a new form, its original role of protection, as it physically separates him from the world and the crimes he just committed.

The locations and significance of the two transgressions I have just discussed work together in the next major example of a character's confinement, one that solidifies her persecution: Antonia in the burial vaults of St. Clare. Following Matilda's instructions, Ambrosio fakes Antonia's death by adding some herb-based liquor to her medicine; he has her buried at St. Clare, successfully removing her from the living world and placing her in confinement with the dead in a way that parallels how the prioress of St. Clare imprisoned Agnes. Both women are thus presented as dead to the outside world. However, while Agnes's confinement was punishment for sexual transgression, Antonia's is intended to make her sexually available to Ambrosio.⁴²

Earlier in the novel, residency in a convent was offered as a means of protection for Antonia, but her actual experience ends up much different. When Ambrosio first visits Elvira's sickbed, before he has dedicated himself to pursuing her daughter, he tells her that he will help keep Antonia safe if Elvira should die: "He doubted not being able to secure for Antonia a safe refuge in the house of one of his penitents, the marchioness of Villa-Franca: this was a lady of acknowledged virtue, remarkable for strict principles and extensive charity. Should accident deprive her of this resource, he engaged to procure Antonia a reception in some respectable convent, that is to say, in quality of boarder" (222). However, by the time Elvira actually does die (and at Ambrosio's hand, no less), Ambrosio's feelings about Antonia have changed so much

⁴² Ironically, the same burial vaults that hold Agnes and Antonia prisoner offer protection to some of the nuns of St. Clare later during the riot. Lorenzo additionally offers to defend them while they wait for the crowd to calm down: "till you can proceed with security, this sepulchre will prove an impenetrable asylum. Here you run no risque of a discovery, and I would advise your remaining quiet for the next two or three hours" (306).

that he fakes her death and imprisons her in a tomb rather than safely placing her with the marchioness⁴³ or in a convent as previously promised.

Antonia's tomb, shared with other actually dead bodies, juxtaposes her life and innocence with death and decay. As Ambrosio waits for her to wake, he examines the grotesque environment surrounding her: "By the side of three putrid half-corrupted bodies lay the sleeping beauty. A lively red, the forerunner of returning animation, had already spread itself over her cheeks; and, as wrapped in her shroud she reclined upon her funeral bier, she seemed to smile at the images of death around her" (318). Antonia herself notes the horror of the burial vaults when she awakens: "Here are nothing but graves, and tombs, and skeletons! This place frightens me!" (319). It is clear that Antonia's experiences here fall completely into the realm of persecution, as Ambrosio has removed her from the world of the living without her consent and solely for lecherous means. Additionally, he plans to keep her here, originally in order to have ready access whenever he so chooses, but later deciding to do so to keep her from revealing his actions to the world even though he no longer physically desires her.

After raping Antonia, Ambrosio regrets his actions but determines that he must keep her locked in the burial vault to protect himself: "He determined to leave the world persuaded of her death, and to retain her a captive in this gloomy prison. There he proposed to visit her every night, to bring her food, to profess his penitence, and mingle his tears with hers" (323). He frames this idea to himself as a mixture of persecution and protection; he realizes that keeping Antonia in the crypt is "unjust and cruel" but also views it as a means of protecting her from the

⁴³ This same marchioness, it is later revealed, is Virginia's mother. Virginia is introduced towards the end of the novel during the procession of St. Clare; she ends up nursing Agnes back to health and marrying Lorenzo. Here, Ambrosio is offering Antonia refuge in the home of the other woman who loves and will eventually marry Lorenzo, though neither realizes this, of course.

fate of being “marked with infamy, and condemned to sorrow and solitude for the remainder of her existence” (323). What Ambrosio fails to realize is that maintaining Antonia’s imprisonment in a tomb full of rotting corpses also relegates her to “sorrow and solitude for the remainder of her existence” in a manner that, for her, is much more horrible than being potentially looked down upon by society because she was raped. Though he tries to offer justification, this persecution of Antonia is clearly meant to mainly serve as protection for Ambrosio.

However, Ambrosio’s plan does not come to fruition as he ends up stabbing and killing Antonia in an attempt to silence her screams for help as Lorenzo and officers of the Inquisition explore the burial vault. Antonia’s death moves her from the realm of a living person displaced in a space meant for the dead to being a dead person in a place where the dead are meant to be. She thus moves from a liminal space into a post-liminal space.

In my final example from *The Monk*, Ambrosio and Matilda’s confinement in the prison of the Spanish Inquisition obviously falls into the category of persecution. Indeed, the Inquisitors physically torture Ambrosio in attempts to “make him confess not only the crimes which he had committed, but those also of which he was innocent” (350). However, at this point, readers are even more aware than the Inquisitors are of the extent of Ambrosio’s sins; we have seen him rape and murder Antonia, and we are privy that his thoughts are more concerned with avoiding punishment than with repenting of his crimes. Due to this, the normal negative function of the Inquisition is complicated; it becomes evident that persecution is not always linked to victimization and in this case is even warranted. While Gothic novels typically treat this institution and representation of Catholic power as a sort of evil villain, Lewis’s depiction is more complex because readers are acutely aware of how much Ambrosio deserves to be punished by them. As Macdonald and Scherf point out in a footnote, “It [the Inquisition] is a

common topic in British anti-Catholic writing; the partly positive role it plays in *The Monk* is unusual” (177n1). This partly positive role is in the Inquisition’s attempting (though ultimately failing) to enact real justice and punish Ambrosio and Matilda by burning them at an upcoming Auto da Fé. While this would normally be a verdict that inspires horror towards the Catholic church, readers have already experienced worse horrors in witnessing the crimes committed by Ambrosio and Mother St. Agatha, so Ambrosio’s punishment seems fitting rather than horrifying, and the Inquisition thus occupies a curiously ambivalent position.

These four examples of spatial confinement in *The Monk* demonstrate how different confinements can function in various confining Catholic spaces, including a convent, a monastery, the same convent’s burial vault and secret underground prison, and the dungeon of the Spanish Inquisition. As I have demonstrated, in each of these examples, characters are spatially separated from the world, bounded by physical constraints that limit their interaction and participation with others. Central to my argument, these confinements function as liminal spaces in which a variety of forms of protection and persecution exist. Agnes moves from seeing the convent of St. Clare as protection to suffering horrendous persecution within its walls. Ambrosio transverses more complexly between the two states continuously. Antonia is solely persecuted within the convent’s walls, though a different convent notably offered a form of protection. The Spanish Inquisition, finally, functions ambivalently as both a positive and negative force, reminding us that confinements are rarely as simple as they seem at first sight, which is also the case in *The Italian* and *Zofloya*, as I will next show.

Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*

Although all of Radcliffe's previous novels (*The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, *A Sicilian Romance*, *The Romance of the Forest*, and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) contain Gothic confinements, I choose to focus on *The Italian*, her final novel published during her lifetime,⁴⁴ because it best displays confinement in specifically religious edifices and, as earlier discussed, it is often considered a direct response to *The Monk*.

The Italian begins, as many gothic novels do, with a frame: English travelers in Naples come across the Santa Maria del Pianto, and, struck with appreciation of the church's portico and curiosity about an "extraordinary" and "singular" man who is pacing there, stop to explore (1). While the strange man in the frame does not turn out to be the villain of the novel proper as one might expect—indeed, a friar reveals that the man is an assassin, but the Italian in the party clarifies that he has "no relation" to the story about to be related (3)—his presence marks the novel with a sense of mystery and danger from the very beginning. His presence, specifically his entering the confessional, prompts the Italian to remember "some very extraordinary circumstances" he offers to relate to the English travelers by sending them a written narrative related to an unusual confession that took place at that church (3). The rest of the novel is purportedly that very manuscript.⁴⁵

This justification of the framed story not only logistically sets up the narrative to come but also paints it in a specifically Catholic light. As one of the English travelers notes,

⁴⁴ *Gaston de Blondville* was published posthumously in 1826.

⁴⁵ The "found manuscript" trope, as mentioned before, is exceptionally common in Gothic works. Although the narrative relating to this confession is written down and passed along on purpose rather than found decaying in a skeleton's hand in a dungeon, the same principle is in operation—the text that novel's reader is encountering is meant to be understood as the same text that a character in the frame of the story is reading. That is, the text of the novel (excluding the frame) exists diegetically within the story as well.

confessions are not typically made public. His Italian friend explains: “Your observation is reasonable . . . [T]he faith of the priest is never broken, except by an especial command from an higher power; and the circumstances must even then be very extraordinary to justify such a departure from the law. But, when you read the narrative, your surprise on this head will cease” (4). In this way, the narrative begins (like *The Monk*), physically within a Catholic edifice, and readers are only made privy to it because of a priest making a confession public due to extraordinary circumstances.⁴⁶

Before moving into the novel proper, or the inner framed narrative, I would like to circle back for a moment to the assassin whose presence prompted the remembrance of the story. Though a seemingly insignificant figure who could even be passed off as a mere plot device, his residence at the Santa Maria del Pianto actually provides a brief example of the protection/persecution model on which this chapter hinges. The Englishman is shocked to learn that an assassin has taken refuge in the church—“an assassin and at liberty!” he exclaims, unable to reconcile the two concepts (2). It is revealed that, since the assassin cannot leave the church, people bring him food (the Englishman, conversely, thinks he should be left in danger of starving), and here he lives simultaneously protected and persecuted, cared for yet unable to leave. The assassin’s liminal status as a persecuted criminal protected by the church and some of its members clearly demonstrates how a character can be confined in a self-imposed yet still undesirable manner that is complexly both protecting and punishing him.

In this section, I focus on two examples of spatial confinement that Ellena di Rosalba experiences: her time in the convents of Santa Maria della Pietà and San Stefano. In this novel,

⁴⁶ Tarr, among others, has pointed out that Radcliffe is inaccurate in her depiction of Catholicism here, as confessions would not be made public even by command of the Inquisition as depicted in the novel (39-42).

there are clearly “good” and “bad” convents, with Santa Maria della Pieta falling into the former category and San Stefano the latter. Ellena’s unwilling imprisonment at San Stefano greatly contrasts with her desire to take shelter at Santa Maria della Pieta. I also discuss the dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition as a third confinement where Vivaldi and Schedoni are kept and prosecuted for crimes. The depictions of the Inquisition are largely negative at first when it wrongfully persecutes Vivaldi, but they become somewhat ambivalent when it actually punishes a real criminal by sentencing Schedoni to death.

Haggerty points out how central confinements are to this text: “Ellena di Rosalba, in Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, moves from one ruthless enclosure to another, until she is trapped in a seaside house in which her captors are planning her murder. For Ellena, this is not an unusual situation” (159). I agree with Haggerty’s remarks about Ellena’s continuous confinements throughout the novel. I would like to note that in this chapter I am not discussing what is perhaps the most famous confinement of the novel, Spalatro’s seaside cottage, which Haggerty also mentions, because it is the house of a criminal rather than a religious building. This confinement (and others from the other texts in this chapter, such as Cunegonda in the closet in *The Monk* and Lilla in the cave in *Zofloya*) demonstrates that not all confinements in these early Gothic texts are religious in nature. Indeed, a different project might focus on these closets and caves and cottages. For the sake of enacting boundaries on my own work, I am focusing solely on religious buildings as confining spaces in this chapter, as these cloisters so clearly demonstrate the tensions between protection and persecution that I argue foster the liminality necessary for the genre.

Santa Maria della Pieta is, from the first, marked as a safe space, clearly falling into the category of protection used in this chapter. Ellena, who embroiders silks for this convent,

attempts to go here for protection when her guardian aunt dies. Her lover, Vivaldi, is not even alarmed at this determination: “He was neither surprized or averse to her withdrawing awhile to a convent” (57). Here, as opposed to Lorenzo and Christoval’s reactions in *The Monk*, Vivaldi sees the convent as a harmless location. Ellena has a positive working relationship with this convent, with which she has been “amicably connected” for several years (46), and she determines to spend some time at the convent for various reasons:

When the service concluded, she withdrew to the parlour of the lady Abbess, who mingled with her own consolations many entreaties that Ellena would make the convent her present asylum; and her affliction required little persuasion on the subject. It was her wish to retire hither, as to a sanctuary, which was not only suitable to her particular circumstances, but especially adapted to the present state of her spirits. (57)

Here the convent is described solely in protective terms—“asylum” and “sanctuary”—and depicted as a place of refuge for Ellena as she no longer has a guardian and needs time to mourn before marrying Vivaldi.

However, this would not be a proper Gothic novel if Ellena were allowed to retire to Santa Maria della Pieta peacefully; instead, she is forcefully kidnapped from her home and taken to a different convent, San Stefano, where she is persecuted at the orders of Vivaldi’s mother, the Marchesa di Vivaldi. San Stefano provides a marked counterpoint to Santa Maria della Pieta, as rather than being a desirable asylum, it is a hostile prison. Ellena is now unwillingly confined, locked into her room and given only “a scanty portion of food” (83). After four days of this treatment, “when, probably, it was believed that her spirits were subdued by confinement” (83), Ellena is given an ultimatum: take the veil or accept a husband of the Marchesa’s choosing. Her options are of two forms of forced marriage, neither desirable to Ellena—the former to the

church and the latter to an unknown and likely horrible husband. She refuses both options, astutely stating instead that because of the Abbess's actions the convent does not offer protection as it should: "'The sanctuary is prophaned [*sic*],' said Ellena mildly, but with dignity: 'it is become a prison'" (84). Here, again, as in *The Monk*, we see a superior overstep the bounds of communal law and thus transform asylum into hell.

Because of Ellena's consistent refusal to acquiesce to the Abbess's (and, by proxy, the Marchesa's) demands, her confinement intensifies and she remains in a liminal space. Another nun in the convent, Olivia,⁴⁷ reveals that there are plans to place her in a situation very similar to that experienced by Agnes in *The Monk*:

Within the deepest recesses of our convent, is a stone chamber, secured by doors of iron, to which such as the sisterhood as have been guilty of any heinous offence have, from time to time, been consigned. This condemnation admits of no reprieve; the unfortunate captive is left to languish in chains and darkness, receiving only an allowance of bread and water just sufficient to prolong her sufferings, till nature, at length, sinking under their intolerable pressure, obtains refuge in death. Our records relate several instance of such horrible punishment, which has generally been inflicted on nuns, who, weary of the life they have chosen under the first delusions of the imagination, or which they have been compelled to accept by the rigour or avarice of parents, have been detected in escaping from the convent. (126)

This confinement goes beyond what Ellena has already experienced, aiming to increase her hardships and ultimately lead to death. However, Ellena ultimately avoids the horror of the above

⁴⁷ In a classic Gothic twist, Olivia is later revealed to be Ellena's mother.

described imprisonment. In this way, Radcliffe only gestures towards the horrors that Lewis describes in full grotesque detail, as critics often note.

Ellena eventually escapes from San Stefano with the help of Olivia and Vivaldi, and she again aims to go to Santa Maria della Pieta for safety, still viewing this other convent as a realm of safety and protection. However, she ends up spending time in a different convent, that of the Ursulines, “a respectable asylum” (164), because she gets sick and cannot travel for two weeks. From here, Ellena and Vivaldi determine to go ahead and get married, but in the process of doing so, more problems arise. Officers of the Inquisition⁴⁸ show up and falsely accuse Vivaldi of kidnapping a nun from a convent. Ellena is not a nun, as she resisted taking the vows, but she did leave San Stefano disguised in a nun’s veil and continued to wear it afterwards. Vivaldi and Ellena are here separated and taken to different confinements: Vivaldi to the prisons of the Inquisition in Rome and Ellena to Spalatro’s seaside cottage.

Ellena later finally gets to the convent of Santa Maria della Pieta, “a large convent, well secured, and where, as she had been known to them from her infancy, the abbess and her sisters might be supposed to be not indifferent concerning her welfare” (288). Perhaps more important than their lack of indifference is their lack of aggressiveness; in this convent Ellena is not subjected to commands to take the veil and further her confinement from society. This convent

⁴⁸ It is later revealed that those who interrupted the marriage are not really officers of the Inquisition. Those who take Vivaldi captive, however, do turn him over to the actual Inquisition: “Vivaldi was struck with the circumstance of the guard being changed, and still more with the appearance of the party, who now composed it. When he compared the manners of the late, with those of the present guard, he thought he discovered in the first the mere ferocity of ruffians; but in the latter, the principles of cunning and cruelty, which seems to particularly characterize Inquisitors; he was inclined to believe, that a stratagem had enthralled him, and that now, for the first time, he was in the custody of the *Holy Office*” (193-94).

has been variously mentioned throughout the novel as a possible place of hopeful refuge for the heroine, and here she finally gains a safe asylum.

Miles draws attention to the depictions of these two convents, one “good” and one “bad,” and their vastly different leadership:

A similar blurring of lines—of Kristevian ambiguity—structures the relationship between the Abbess of San Stefano and the Superior of Santa della Pieta. Although a Catholic, the Superior runs an enlightened regime based on a Protestant freedom of conscience. As such she is the antithesis of the tyrannical, bigoted Abbess of San Stefano. There are two ways we can see this comparison; as an assertion of the fundamental difference between Catholicism and Protestantism; or as an assertion of their similarity. The point is not that we are invited to chose [*sic*] between these alternatives; it is rather that as an expression of abjection the Gothic tarries over moments of ambiguity where familiar lines of difference become blurred. (“Abjection” 67)

Miles’s astute estimation of the similarities and differences between the two convents and their respective leaders highlights the importance of ambiguity in the Gothic genre. I agree with his claim that choosing between these alternatives is not what is at stake here; instead, the “moments of ambiguity” that he points out—or, what I read as contrastive spaces of liminal confinement—distort familiar boundaries and thus heighten the liminality and ambiguity of being in-between on which the genre itself depends. The ambiguity evident in these two contrasting convents, I argue, clearly shows how characters confined therein inhabit liminal spaces of blurred definitions.

The dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition serve as my third example of confinement in this novel. Not surprisingly, the Inquisition as an institution and its individual officers are largely

depicted in negative terms. The unfairness of Vivaldi's confinement is highlighted again and again as he is pressured to confess to crimes he did not commit and threatened with torture if he does not. This persecuting aspect—the condemnation of both the guilty and the innocent because of the means taken to extract confession—is largely what leads to a negative conception of the Inquisition even outside of this novel.

However, the function of this organization becomes a bit more complicated once Schedoni is also imprisoned by the Inquisition. Vivaldi, for example, remarks positively about one particular inquisitor who seems to be more concerned with justice and fairness: “‘Are these the sentiments of an inquisitor!’ said Vivaldi to himself, ‘can such glorious candour appear amidst the tribunal of an Inquisition!’ Tears fell fast on Vivaldi’s cheek while he gazed upon this just judge, whose candour, had it been exerted in his cause, could not have excited more powerful sensations of esteem and admiration” (352). Vivaldi’s experience here marks the beginning of the Inquisition’s move from complete negativity to mild ambivalence. Similar to the earlier example from *The Monk*, the Inquisition’s punishment of Schedoni offers a sort of redemption; its just performance of its duties softens some of the earlier horrors depicted because readers want to see the villain punished. However, even this punishment is complicated, as Schedoni ends up dying from poisoning himself while a prisoner rather than suffering the punishment prescribed by the Inquisition. In addition to their attempted punishment of the villain, their release of the hero when Vivaldi is freed further moves the Inquisition away from a completely negative depiction. In that way, justice is somewhat served.

The Catholic confinements in *The Italian* work complexly, then. San Stefano and Santa Maria della Pieta are represented as oppositions, the former a place of persecution and violence and the latter a sanctuary of protection and kindness. Indeed, Olivia ends up transferring away

from San Stefano in what she refers to as an unusual move for a nun because of being “persecuted by the suspicions of the abbess” (370). She ends up at Santa Maria della Pieta largely because of the positive reviews Ellena gave it. The juxtaposition of these two extremely different convents, specifically Ellena’s unwilling confinement at San Stefano and her willing retreat to Santa Maria della Pieta, distinctly demonstrates the persecution/protection model at issue here. Additionally, the Inquisition imprisons Vivaldi and Schedoni but ultimately deals with them in a just manner, complicating the expectations for a completely negative, persecuting institutional entity. In this way, Radcliffe moves beyond the simple anti-Catholicism often attributed to her and instead presents a more complex picture that involves both helpful and hurtful forms of confinement.

Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya*

Zofloya, in turn, is notoriously hard to categorize. It is less known, less read, and less discussed than the other two novels in this chapter. Kim Ian Michasiw explains how the subject matter of the novel might have affected its current reception: “The suspicion that Dacre’s narrator is of the devil’s party and knows it perfectly well is unavoidable and has done much to justify Dacre’s consignment to literary oblivion. A mother-hating triple murderess who dreams of sexual congress with a demon of color has not been judged a proper model for the young reader either in the last century or in this” (Introduction x).

When discussed, *Zofloya* is often compared to *The Monk*; any reader of the two will note that they contain several obvious similarities, such as a Faustian deal with the devil that results in the anti-hero being hurled to his or her death from a cliff. The sheer number of comparisons between the two novels is, in fact, staggering. Their linkage began in reviews from the moment

Zofloya was published. One review from *Monthly Literary Recreations* in July 1806, for example, refers to the novel as “a humble, very humble, imitation of the *Monk*, possessing in an eminent degree all the defects of that wild performance, but entirely destitute of all its beauties” (qtd. in Craciun 261). As Wright points out, “[a]lmost all of the contemporary reviews of the novel commented negatively upon the thematic similarities to Lewis’s plot” (*Gothic Fiction* 144). This connection between the novels, although not necessarily the same negativity toward them, continues into present-day criticism.⁴⁹

Because of their numerous similarities and their pairing at the time of publication, much criticism focuses on their connections, viewing Dacre as performing some form of rewriting or revision of *The Monk*. Indeed, it is exceedingly rare to see criticism about *Zofloya* that does not mention *The Monk* in some way. Gamer points out that Dacre was “[a] self-proclaimed follower of Lewis” (87) who dedicated her first novel to him. He calls *Zofloya* “an extremely powerful rewriting of *The Monk* that dramatized its heroine’s relentless pursuit of sexual power and knowledge” (87). James A. Dunn claims that Dacre uses Lewis but takes his ideas further, in a new direction: “She pays homage to ‘Monk’ Lewis in a number of ways, but in perhaps the most

⁴⁹ Like *The Monk*, *Zofloya* also received scathing contemporary reviews. Although Dacre overtly moralized throughout the novel, contemporary readers were shocked and largely viewed the text as inappropriate, especially since a woman had written it. One 1806 review from *Monthly Literary Recreations* claims that “there has seldom been a romance so void of merit, so destitute of delicacy, displaying such disgusting depravity of morals, as the present” (qtd. in Craciun 261). Similarly commenting on the (lack of) morality, this time specifically chastising Dacre as a woman, an 1806 review from *The Annual Review* calls the novel “odious and indecent,” suggesting that Dacre “keep to the humble walk of versifying for the newspapers, and to leave the profession of romance writing to female who possess more delicacy of mind, more facility of style and purity of sentiments, than she, in the present work, has exhibited” (qtd. in Craciun 262). Reviews not only critiqued the moral quality of the text, but also the writing itself. One review in particular, from *The Literary Journal* in 1806, presented the novel as evidence of Dacre being subject to an infectious disease: “That our fair authoress is afflicted with the dismal malady of maggots in the brain is, alas, but too apparent” (qtd. in Craciun 266).

important way she declares her independence from him—let us have our sex and violence, she seems to say, but let us see what it looks like beyond the stock feminine props of persecution and victimization; let us make women the subject rather than the object of a toxic erotic agony” (308). Sara D. Schotland claims that *Zofloya* is “modeled” on *The Monk*, but that Dacre “reverse[s] the genders of the principal characters . . . [and] changes the race of the arch-villain” (123).

When not compared solely to Lewis, Dacre’s writing is often seen as a fusion of Lewis and Radcliffe. Michasiw claims that Dacre’s “bold synthesis of the supposedly opposed Gothic forms of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis is carried through in *Zofloya* without hesitation” (Introduction viii). Sue Chaplin contrasts *The Italian* and *Zofloya* in terms of their depictions of the feminine experience with the sublime. She draws a distinction between the “terror” associated with Radcliffe’s works and the “horror” linked with Lewis’s in order to claim that Dacre “appropriates the horror aesthetic in order to subvert it” (138). Similarly, in his 1974 introduction to the novel, Devendra P. Varma states that Dacre “carefully selected and blended the strands of terror and horror” (xx).

In addition to that mentioned above, other scholarship has worked to place the novel—or, conversely, to discuss how it is not easily placed—within the frameworks of Lewisite or Radcliffean Gothic, or the related “male Gothic” and “female Gothic” categories (Moreno; Davison, “Getting Their Knickers in a Twist”). Critics have focused on the novel’s treatment of moral issues (Brewster), its use of doppelgängers (Murillo), and the role of Venice (Donovan-Condron). They have examined Dacre’s depiction of violence, specifically female violence (Dunn). They have examined power structures and debated about the distinction between

Zofloya the Moor and Zofloya the Devil (Burley).⁵⁰ Critics have examined how race functions in the novel (Mellor) and historically connected it to contemporary debates about such issues as abolition, British participation in the slave trade, and anxiety about slave revolts in the West Indies (Schotland; Michasiw, “Charlotte Dacre’s Postcolonial Moor”).

None of this scholarship, however, discusses confinement to any great extent, as I do in this chapter. Occasionally Victoria di Loredani’s time confined at the home of Signora di Modena is mentioned in passing in a plot summary, and somewhat more often Lilla’s confinement in a cave is discussed as an example of gender inversions since Victoria is the villainous confiner in that situation. In one of the few sources that do discuss this aspect of the novel to any extent, Beatriz González Moreno claims that Victoria here reverses the Radcliffean Gothic by rescuing herself from her confinement rather than waiting for a hero (428). Michasiw similarly claims that “the Victoria of Chapter VII [persecuted, abandoned, and tricked into

⁵⁰ Zofloya’s uncertain classification interestingly mirror’s Matilda’s in *The Monk*. There are differing interpretations as to whether Zofloya actually dies in the novel or not. Latoni claims to have killed him, but Zofloya claims to have survived with the help of a fisherman and “a secret transmitted to [him] by [his] ancestors” (142). Oddly, the first dream Victoria has of him—before which she notes feeling “under the influence of some superior and unknown power” (135)—occurs before his potential death. But, also worth noting is the fact that Victoria thinks, “Zofloya, before his sudden disappearance, and Zofloya, since his return, were widely different of each other” (145). Critics variously note either the complexity of understanding Zofloya’s possession or treat him as two distinct characters: Zofloya as Moor and Zofloya as Satan. Sara D. Schotland points out that “[t]he identification of Zofloya with Satan is complicated by ambiguity whether the person Zofloya, initially presented as a noble royal slave, has become Satan or has been invaded by him” (129). Eugenia DeLamotte claims, “there are two Moors: the cultivated slave, really of noble birth, whom the author treats sympathetically, and then the Moor’s bodily form as usurped by Satan. Unlike the real Zofloya, this one is a figure of obsessive desire, revulsion, and moral contempt” (23). Stephanie Burley similarly argues that Zofloya only becomes possessed after death, when Satan assumes residence in his body: “there are actually two Zofloyas in the text, one demonic, and one dead” (202). Ann H. Jones interprets them as distinct figures as well, claiming that the real Zofloya has died and Satan has taken control of his body (235-36). As is the case with Matilda, I think that defining Zofloya as human or Satan, living or undead, wholly evil or made so by satanic possession, is impossible, and part of his intrigue lies in this ambiguity.

captivity] is very much a figure in the Radcliffe tradition” (Introduction xvi). However, “[w]hen Victoria escapes captivity in the house of Signora di Modena and makes her way to Venice she leaves one generic pattern for another, though she does not move immediately onto Lewis’s territory” (Introduction xvi). I agree with Moreno’s and Michasiw’s estimations of Victoria’s confinement as Radcliffean, but see this as problematically so, or as, perhaps, the beginning of the transition away from a Radcliffean Gothic. Additionally, I view Victoria’s confinement at Signora di Modena’s as an integral point in the novel, a turning point in Victoria’s identity that deserves more attention. Because of the importance of this portion of the novel, I include *Zofloya* in this chapter as a third (but much more complicated) example of religious spatial confinement serving as the liminal space of both protection and persecution, and I examine aspects of the novel hitherto neglected by other scholarship.

This novel, at first, may seem a contentious choice for the discussion of religious confinement. It notably does not contain confining Catholic cloisters in the same way that *The Monk* and *The Italian* do. The words “monastery,” “abbey,” and “nunnery” do not even appear in the text, and “convent” only does a very few times in reference to music heard from a neighboring edifice. However, I am treating Victoria’s confinement with her Catholic aunt, Signora di Modena, as the key religious confinement in this novel. I concede that this confinement can seem to be a bit of a stretch in relation to the other examples discussed in this chapter. However, I find it highly significant that, during a time when Gothic novels were largely expected to be anti-Catholic, and in a novel that is, as previously mentioned, in direct conversation with one so focused on religion as *The Monk* and that includes a character who turns out to be Satan himself, Dacre chose *not* to include typical scenes of convent confinement.

The absence of the confining convent marks yet another example of this novel falling outside of generic expectations.

Though Catholicism is not foregrounded in the novel the same way that it is in works such as *The Monk* and *The Italian*, it does appear in relation to Signora di Modena, who describes herself as “a good and pious catholic” (50) and is depicted somewhat mockingly by the narrator as “this worthy and pious catholic” (47) and “this worthy catholic” (52).⁵¹ Indeed, Victoria’s confinement with Signora di Modena at her home, Il Bosco, is largely, at least nominally, because of the Signora’s pious nature and thus her home can be seen as a secular convent. In reality, Count Ardolph selects this location to get Victoria out of the way of his relationship with her mother, Laurina, calling it “an admirable seclusion” (34).

And though the confinement Signora di Modena enforces is not state sanctioned or subject to the same oversight as a real convent—no Spanish Inquisitors are going to show up and punish her for confining Victoria—she easily meets the criteria of an unpleasant, dictatorial abbess in the style of Mother St. Agatha from *The Monk* or the Abbess of San Stefano from *The Italian*. Other scholars have also noted this connection; in her examination of the novel’s subversion of Radcliffean sublimity, Moreno states, “the Signora di Modena will act as the abbess of the oppressive convent” (428). Indeed, she fits this role well. She is reserved, a “forbidding female” with “frigid features” (38), and she lacks sexuality, as “[n]o man, even in the best of her days, had ever glanced toward her with an eye of admiration, much less attempted to solicit her in marriage” (39). Most importantly, she is overbearing and power hungry, intent on

⁵¹ The term “catholic” does come up once more later in the novel. Zofloya asks Victoria, “Are you not a holy catholic, Signora?—yet to love so much an earthly being—” (149), making fun of her obsessive infatuation with Henriquez.

subjecting others to her own morals, a characteristic to which Ardolph appeals when soliciting her to take Victoria into her care:

‘I am to inform you, then, that the young girl, who has just left the apartment, I am desirous to commit for a certain period to your care. Naturally evil disposed, of a haughty and audacious temper, she has been nearly by flattery and indulgence destroyed. Her ideas are entirely corrupted, and, child as you may think her, for she is scarcely eighteen, there have not been wanting those of the other sex who have sought to undermine her principles.’—Here the Signora heaved a loud tremulous sigh, and, turning up her eyes to heaven, made the holy sign of the cross. The Count with external gravity and secret contempt proceeded:—‘What I would therefore presume to request of you is, that you will condescend to keep over this proud and forward girl so strict a watch, as scarcely to suffer her ever from your sight.’ (40-41)

Ardolph’s appeal to Signora di Modena’s pride successfully results in her accepting Victoria as her charge/prisoner in order to improve Victoria’s disposition and behavior, or to “do the duty of a good catholic” towards her, as Signora di Modena puts it (42). Thus Ardolph and Laurina abandon an unwitting Victoria at Il Bosco.

This confinement falls into both categories of protection and persecution. Though Ardolph does not actually have good motives behind leaving Victoria with her aunt, he pretends that this confinement will help improve Victoria as a person; similarly, Signora di Modena tells herself that she is helping Victoria spiritually in order to improve her chances for religious salvation. Additionally, Ardolph and Laurina remove Victoria from Venice and leave her at Il Bosco largely to separate her from Berenza, who they worry is seducing Victoria. These reasons could ostensibly categorize Victoria’s confinement as a means of protection of both her body and

soul. However, the duplicitous actions Ardolph and Laurina take to place Victoria in her aunt's care and the actual character of Signora di Modena ultimately make this confinement a persecution.

Upon discovering her situation, Victoria decides to behave "precisely as events might shew necessary" (46) and not provoke the Signora. Signora di Modena, however, is determined to force Victoria into provoking her in order to better exercise her control:

When she [Victoria] was gone, this worthy and pious catholic began to reflect, that, by means like these, Victoria would escape from all the arrangements she had been making to punish and mortify her. 'This will never do,' she cried, while ruminating how best she might vex and harass the mind of her unfortunate guest: 'she has become *reconciled* to her situation without any attempt on my side to render her so; but she shall not escape thus—I will break that proud spirit, and make her submit afterwards.' (47)

In order to better "break" Victoria, the Signora more fully implements confinement, locking Victoria in her room from the outside, feeding her only "milk and a slice of coarse bread" (48) until this treatment begins "to have a visible effect upon her health" (49). Victoria's confinement here resembles those of Agnes and Ellena, locked away and fed scantily. Signora di Modena, however, becoming aware of Victoria's declining health, gradually lessens her confinement, ultimately letting her leave her room but not to go beyond the walls of the garden and requiring her to "peruse such religious book as I shall put into your hands," "abjure the vanities of dress," and "meekly comply with every requisition, that, as a good and pious catholic, anxious for the salvation of your soul, I shall think it my duty to make of you" (50). In this way the Signora is much less a villain than Ambrosio or Mother St. Agatha from *The Monk* but still a persecuting prison guard whose focus is "the torment and annoyance of her unhappy charge" (51).

As previously noted, Victoria escapes from her confinement within the walls of Il Bosco largely of her own accord (although with the help of Catau, a servant who gets the gate key and trades clothes with her). After a brief time of being lost in the woods, she eventually makes her way to Venice and Berenza. Her time in confinement, though, serves as a key point in the development of her character, not to improve it as Signora di Modena claimed was her purpose, but to solidify her allegiance to self-preservation and the pursuance of her own desires. It is at this point, as Michasiw claims, that the novel moves from more Radcliffean to more Lewisite, as Victoria is by no means a confined victim waiting to be rescued but rather an assertive escapee who rescues herself.

Many of the cloisters depicted in early Gothic novels are scenes of rape, murder, incest, torture, and countless other horrors. As I have shown here, this example of confinement in *Zofloya* provides a more complicated version of religious confinement than those in novels such as *The Monk* and *The Italian*. Dacre manipulates this trope, placing Victoria in a secular version of a religious confinement that also functions as a liminal space of protection and persecution. Though Il Bosco is not a specifically Catholic edifice like the abbeys and other buildings mentioned in the previous texts are, Signora di Modena makes it a Catholic space and utilizes religion to justify her treatment of Victoria. While the novel marks a shift in this treatment of the Gothic trope, Victoria's escape from Il Bosco marks a shift in her identity. At Il Bosco, which notably lies outside of the bounds of Venice, Victoria is removed from the world and physically bounded by a garden wall. This confinement is nominally meant to be protective but is in actuality a persecution, and it provides a pivotal moment in the novel wherein Victoria decides to save herself and so moves from the realm of feminine, Radcliffean Gothic to more masculine,

Lewisite Gothic—one might say from one type of liminality to another—that ultimately leads to her deal with the devil.

Conclusion

Although we are well over 200 years past the historical moment of the early Gothic, no longer in the throes of the French Revolution, Catholic-based horror remains a staple in media productions even today, and religion often still plays a complicated and ambivalent role in works of terror or horror. Films such as the well-known horror movie *The Exorcist* (1973) and television shows such as Showtime's recent series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) depict Catholicism as other but as a necessary and important other; religious authorities other than priests are not, for some reason, religious enough to perform the necessary exorcisms and rid bodies of demons. As Nelson pithily puts it, "Demon possession, open-and-shut case. Who you gonna call? Not your rabbi, imam, or Methodist minister. No, you want that Roman Catholic priest with his collar, cross, holy water, and Vulgate Bible" (87). Catholicism, in this way, seems to be represented as an extreme form of Christian power, one capable of performing supernatural tasks such as banishing demons to hell that others cannot. Catholicism here is not simply demonized but is instead used as an extreme answer to demons in recent horror media, media that could be considered complexly anti- and pro-Catholic.

Additionally, other instances related to Catholic confinement have been reappropriated and reused in contemporary works. An action similar to "taking the veil" occurs in George R. R. Martin's epic saga *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-), the popular contemporary fantasy, where, in a gender inversion, male characters can "take the Black"—live in isolation from the rest of the continent, wear certain attire, and take vows, according to the religion of their choice, not to own

land, marry, or father children. Becoming a brother of the Night's Watch (which, notably, uses similar terminology as monkhood) functions as both protection and persecution. One can join the Night's Watch as a form of exile or penance after committing certain crimes; this protects one's life but also serves as a form of constant persecution, as one loses family, rank, and so forth by joining. Additionally, the Night's Watch are known as protectors themselves, as they are indeed keeping watch over the wild and dangerous area and its inhabitants to the north (Martin). Similarly, women are still being confined for religious and moral purposes in the same work. The Maidenvault, for example, is part of a religious building where a past king known for his religious fervor, Baelor the Blessed, confined his sisters (one of whom was also previously his wife) to protect them from the eyes of men and perhaps himself (Martin, García, and Antonsson 90-92). This example functions as a sort of protection for the confiner, Baelor, but a persecution of his sisters, even as it protects them from incest. With these examples, we can see that the protection/persecution model continues into the present day in modified and updated forms.

These moments of protecting and persecuting confinements, of representing Catholicism as a potential savior and demon, can teach us about the genre, the time period, and the religion. Though these representations of the confining Catholic cloister first began as a response to tensions related to British Protestant selfhood, it is still used as a means to depict an Other who is sometimes demonized and sometimes complexly idolized. Treatment of this particular type of spatial confinement is important to understanding the Gothic genre itself. It creates or heightens liminality, a quality that I claim is intrinsic to the Gothic genre. This helps us better understand the genre not only in early British canonical examples such as the ones discussed in this chapter but also its later iterations as it transmutes and reappears in forms from sensation novels to fantasy sagas to horror films that are not "the Gothic" proper but nonetheless "gothic."

In this chapter, I have argued that the Catholic cloister (and, by extension, abbeys, convents, monasteries, and dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition) can function as a liminal space when it is a confinement; in the works discussed above, the cloister is a physical and spatial location that places confined characters in liminal spaces moving between or simultaneously experiencing protection and persecution. In doing so, I have offered a new means of understanding how this exceptionally common trope of religious-based physical confinement functions in early Gothic novels in order to provide a new model for understanding this component of these canonical works. Bounded spatial confinements complexly and somewhat paradoxically foster a boundless and chaotic liminal potentiality that eludes clear definitions. This liminality, in turn, heightens the affect of the Gothic, eliciting the sensations of horror, terror, or repulsion on which the genre depends by refusing to allow clear definitions for both characters and readers. To make this argument, I have used examples from three canonical early British Gothic works that I see working in triangulation with each other in order to examine the different iterations and variations of this model of confinement. This chapter fits with the larger argument of this dissertation as a whole by examining a specific form of spatial confinement as a liminal space. The following chapter will take up similar issues through focus on a different but related form of confinement: the grave. While characters in this chapter were sometimes physically imprisoned in ways that more metaphorically resembled live burial, the next chapter examines fears related to the boundaries of graves more literally.

CHAPTER TWO

Grave Emergences: Undead Bodies in “Berenice,” “The Giant Wistaria,” and “John Mortonson’s Funeral”⁵²

“There ain’t no grave gonna hold my body down.”
(traditional American gospel song)

Ambrose Bierce’s “One Summer Night” (1906) begins inside the grave of the freshly buried Henry Armstrong. Henry Armstrong, notably, does not believe that he is actually dead, despite evidence to the contrary:

The fact that Henry Armstrong was buried did not seem to him to prove that he was dead: he had always been a hard man to convince. That he really was buried the testimony of his senses compelled him to admit. His posture—flat upon his back, with his hands crossed upon his stomach and tied with something that he easily broke without profitably altering the situation—the strict confinement of his entire person, the black darkness and profound silence, made a body of evidence impossible to controvert and he accepted it without cavil. (543)

Though he recognizes and accepts that he has been buried, he maintains that “he was only very, very ill,” not dead (543). The story next depicts two medical students accompanied by Jess, an employee at the local cemetery, digging up this same grave on a dark and stormy summer night. Bierce, in his usual sardonic way, notes the possibility that the cemetery “was not so populous as its register may have shown it to be” because of actions such as those taken by Jess and the two medical students (543). Ultimately, the trio exhumes Henry Armstrong, who was correct in his

⁵² Portions of this chapter are an adapted version of an article titled “‘Horror More Horrible from Being Vague, and Terror More Terrible from Ambiguity’: Liminal Figures in Poe’s ‘Berenice’ and Gilman’s ‘The Giant Wistaria,’” in *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, volume 20, no. 1. Copyright © 2019 by The Pennsylvania State University Press. This article is used by permission of The Pennsylvania State University Press.

belief that he was not actually dead. When the supposed-to-be-dead Henry Armstrong sits up in his casket, the medical students panic and flee. Bierce's stories often contain a final shock, though, and Jess is determined to get his pay; the next morning, he is waiting for the medical students at the college with Henry Armstrong's body, "the head defiled with blood and with clay from a blow with a spade" (544).

Bierce's story calls attention to two relevant historical concerns of the time: live burial and body snatching.⁵³ It also highlights an interest in and an anxiety about deadness and undeadness that will be the focus of this chapter. Graves are ostensibly meant to contain dead bodies. Regardless of this fact, Gothic works continuously show graves that fail to serve this purpose, as the dead, the living, and the undead escape interment again and again. In Edgar Allan Poe's "Berenice" (1835) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Giant Wistaria" (1891),⁵⁴ graves are depicted as containers for bodies that refuse to stay entombed, either because they are still living or otherwise unsettled. Similarly, another story by Bierce, "John Mortonson's Funeral" (1906),⁵⁵ depicts the horrific yet somehow humorous failure of a coffin, another space meant to

⁵³ While the terms "grave robbing" and "body snatching" are often used interchangeably, Mary Roach draws a distinction between them: she defines the former as stealing valuable objects such as jewelry from graves and the latter as focusing on the body for purposes of dissection (43). I think this is a valuable distinction, and I follow her lead.

⁵⁴ Gilman published "The Giant Wistaria" while she was married to Charles Walter Stetson. Her name appears as Charlotte P. Stetson on the original publication. This and other works she signed as Stetson are referenced as such in the bibliography of this dissertation.

⁵⁵ Some discussion of the publication history and attribution of "John Mortonson's Funeral" is necessary. Bierce first published the story in *Cosmopolitan* in March 1906. It was accompanied by "One Summer Night" and "Staley Fleming's Hallucination" under the overarching title "Some Uncanny Tales." Writing about these stories in a letter to George Sterling on February 3, 1906, Bierce says, "I've done three little stories for the March number (they may be postponed) that are ghastly enough to make a pig squeal" (146). There is no indication of Leigh Bierce, Ambrose Bierce's son, being an author in the original *Cosmopolitan* publication or in this letter. However, when Bierce republished the story in *Collected Works* (1909) as a part of *Can Such Things Be?*, the following was included as a footnote: "Rough notes

enclose the dead. These three stories feature an undeadness that refuses to remain contained, defined, or confined. The authors present this undeadness as a story to be told (or untold), an entertaining (but shocking) narrative event. By complicating the distinction between states of life and death and manipulating the exceedingly common Gothic trope of confinement, Poe, Gilman, and Bierce place undead characters in liminal spaces or spaces of ambiguity and potentiality existing between two defined states.

As I argue throughout this dissertation, Gothic literature relies on uncertainties. Gaps and confusions in narratives captivate readers who are compelled to “make sense” but ultimately remain unable to reach any absolute meaning. These uncertainties, I argue, heighten the horror or terror that the text elicits, as ambiguity leaves readers uncomfortable. Liminality, I claim, often helps achieve this ambiguity; characters trapped in liminal states necessarily remain in-between, ambiguous, and unclearly defined. Examining the liminal nature of the characters in “Berenice” and “The Giant Wistaria”—trapped between life and death, sanity and insanity, childhood innocence and adult sexuality, and so on—provides a framework for better understanding how

of this tale were found among the papers of the late Leigh Bierce. It is printed here with such revision only as the author might himself have made in transcription” (252). S. T. Joshi explains that the story is “actually a tale by Bierce’s son Leigh, but one which Bierce extensively polished and prepared for publication” (166). Because Leigh Bierce was not originally named as an author and Ambrose Bierce ultimately completed and published the story, I refer to it here (as other scholars do) as Ambrose Bierce’s tale. However, I have noted Leigh Bierce as an unnamed coauthor in the Works Cited for this chapter.

Can Such Things Be? also has a somewhat complicated publication history. It was originally published in 1893 and did not include “John Mortonson’s Funeral” at that time. Bierce extensively reorganized and expanded this collection and *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (first edition 1891) for their republication in *Collected Works*, moving many tales from *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* to *Can Such Things Be?* Joshi claims that the purpose of this reorganization was “the segregation of his supernatural and nonsupernatural tales” (148). Bierce also added “John Mortonson’s Funeral” to *Can Such Things Be?* See Joshi’s chapter on Bierce in *The Weird Tale* for a more complete discussion of the publication history of a variety of Bierce tales.

uncertainty itself serves a crucial role in the Gothic genre. In “John Mortonson’s Funeral,” an animal rather than a woman exists in a liminal space between the realms of the living and the dead, providing an interesting twist on the trope of failed entombments. Additionally, exploring connections between these three authors in terms of their similar uses of the trope of confinement in the Gothic genre demonstrates a curious link between them despite their differences in times and purposes. As I demonstrate, Poe’s writing near the beginning of the nineteenth century serves as a precursor to Gilman’s and Bierce’s use of the Gothic over 50 years later. In these three stories, buried (or soon to be buried) bodies—in the form of a cataleptic woman buried alive in “Berenice,” the ghost of an unwed mother who suffers an uncertain cause of death in “The Giant Wistaria,” and John Mortonson and his cat in “John Mortonson’s Funeral”—reemerge as undead figures. In this way, Poe’s undeadness is rendered mobile and mutable and has, during the development of the Gothic over the course of the nineteenth century, transformed into something that can move into and out of different places and spaces.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing historical conceptions of death and burial, focusing on the two aspects mentioned above: fears of live burial and body snatching. Then I examine previous historical and critical connections between Poe, Gilman, and Bierce. Moving to the three stories in question, I begin each section with a brief summary of the story and then explore instances of confinement, specifically the confinements in graves or coffins that ultimately fail to function as intended. I analyze these confinements as liminal spaces, or spaces of “undeadness” rather than clear life or death. Finally, I demonstrate how the liminal nature of undeadness itself heightens the ambiguity in and, by extension, the horror of these stories. In this way, I explore connections between Poe’s, Gilman’s, and Bierce’s use of the common Gothic trope of confinement. I argue that these confinements, specifically of the grave, tomb, coffin, or other

space meant to contain the dead, create a liminality and ambiguity inherent in and central to the Gothic itself.

Fears of the Grave: Live Burial and Body Snatching

Why were concerns of live burial and body snatching so prevalent at this particular time? Changes and advances in medical science and the rise of periodicals both contribute to this occurrence. The fear of being buried alive hinges on the misdiagnosis of death, demonstrating skepticism about medical science, its practitioners, and the extent of their possible knowledge. In terms of literary depictions, J. Gerald Kennedy explains that the “subgenre” of stories about premature burial, “became prevalent at a specific historical moment, its proliferation symptomatic of certain broad changes in the way Western culture had begun to understand death and burial” (34-35). Additionally, Kennedy points out, the rise of anatomical studies of the dead (linked to the body snatching discussed later in this chapter) prompted renewed investigations of the difference of life and death. Where is the line, and how do medical practitioners confirm a person is actually dead? The uncertainty of determining the lines between life and death became a subject of increased investigation at this time, with researchers attempting to determine if, for example, a measurable occurrence like heartbeat or respiration determines life, when either could potentially stop and be restarted. What about brain function, which, as this time, we really have no way of measuring?

Determining death largely depended on if the individual “looked dead,” which people were aware could be mistaken. People came up with “death tests” ranging from the more conventional means of checking for a heartbeat (perhaps by using the newly-invented stethoscope in 1819) to checking for breath (with a mirror or candle the mirror under the nose) to

more extreme measures such as poking the needles under toenails, administering a tobacco smoke enema, or applying boiling liquids or heated irons to the presumed-dead body (Roach 171; Dossey 349-350). In addition to these topics of medical science, outbreaks of contagious disease (such as cholera epidemics in both America and Britain) led to increased contact with the dead, often by those without formal medical or funerary training. Bodies often needed to be buried quickly, and this sometimes led to the fear of it happening *too* quickly (Rosenberg).

The heightened anxiety about premature burial during the nineteenth century combines natural fears—darkness, confinement, enclosure, suffocation, helplessness, and above all, death—with concerns raised by topics in medical science and the proliferation of both realistic and over-exaggerated accounts of premature burial ranging from newspaper stories to fictional narrative. This fixation on live burial and body snatching is thus linked to advances and changes in medical science, as there are attempts to better understand a more exact distinction between life and death and a rise in the study of anatomy, the former prompting fears about misdiagnoses resulting in premature burial and the latter representing a real concern about what happens to a body after it is buried. Thus social fears influence medical debate, and vice versa.

A conflation between states of life and death is somewhat common in Poe's oeuvre, which includes many tales in which the living are buried alive, the dead return to life, or things—sometimes human, sometimes animal, sometimes even dismembered body parts—refuse to stay dead and/or buried. Indeed, Poe treated the fear of live burial specifically in the aptly titled “The Premature Burial” (1844). “The Pit and the Pendulum” (1843) similarly features a narrator with an extreme fear of being buried while still alive. In addition to “Berenice,” both “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) and “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846) portray the actual live burial of a human, the former accidental and the latter maliciously purposeful. “The Black Cat” (1843) and

“The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843) involve dead humans temporarily interred in parts of houses but ultimately released due to noises, as the former includes the accidental live burial of the eponymous cat and the latter features a heartbeat the narrator hears (and does not realize is probably his own). These noises, whether via the still-living cat or the imagined heartbeat, result in makeshift tombs being opened and murders being revealed. “Morella” (1835) and “Ligeia” (1838) provide variations on the same theme in their presentation of reanimated corpses, and Psyche Zenobia in “A Predicament” (1838) provides a final, rather humorous example, as she somehow continues to function as a collection of dismembered body parts.

Fixation on premature burial was not just common in Poe’s work but also in American and British culture during the nineteenth century due to reasons discussed above.⁵⁶ The famous case of Eleanor Markham, for example, appears in various newspaper articles. According to one account, Markham was reportedly pronounced dead and placed in her coffin but managed to alert the pallbearers to the mistake by tapping (“From the Dead”). Other versions expand the story, describing the discovery of “her face white and contorted, and her eyes distended in terror” as she cries, “You are burying me alive!” (“In Her Coffin Alive”). Countless other newspaper articles give accounts of people narrowly escaping live burial. For example, a Mrs. John Graper was reportedly knocked unconscious, pronounced dead, and prepared for burial before waking up in her coffin; her family claimed to have then put her in bed and kept the details of the incident a secret from her (“Escapes a Live Burial”). A similar account depicts a man suffering from medical issues that make him appear dead, not unlike the catalepsy depicted in many of

⁵⁶ For an interesting account of live burial from classical antiquity to present times, see Jan Bondeson’s *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear* (2001), a book that straddles the line between popular and scholarly, written by a physician for a lay audience but obviously well researched with its inclusion of many useful endnotes for the curious scholar.

Poe's stories; again, he is prepared for burial, when, at the last minute, someone notices signs of life ("Almost Buried Alive"). Stories of this sort are not uncommon and often sensationalized. Other accounts describe people who were not so lucky, as their disinterred bodies appear to have struggled to escape from the coffin ("Burying a Man Alive").

Hearing about such cases caused anxiety, and people came up with various tactics to prevent live burial. Dr. Carl Barnes claimed that an x-ray of the hand could indicate if the person were really dead ("No More Live Burials"). William Tebb and Edward Perry Vollum wrote a treatise entitled *Premature Burial and How It May Be Prevented* (1896) on the subject. Larry Dossey notes that there was often a waiting period between death and burial during which "[t]he deceased could be left lying in the caskets for days or weeks, just to make sure they were dead" (347). Some, like Poe's narrator in "The Premature Burial," utilized other methods such as specially designed burial vaults and coffins that could be opened from the inside (268-69). Dossey describes people being buried with crowbars or shovels intended to allow them to dig their own way out and pipes going into the casket to allow the revenant to communicate with those above ground (347). Some "safety coffins" included bells (again, like the example in "The Premature Burial"), flags, or even pyrotechnics that movement of the supposed-corpse would trigger on the surface (Dossey 349). Other people, desiring to be definitively dead rather than possibly rescued, left instructions to be "decapitated, exsanguinated, or stabbed through the heart" before burial or, alternately, provided with a means of suicide such as a gun or poison in their coffin (Dossey 349). Others opted for cremation, apparently preferring to be burned rather than buried alive (Dossey 350). People preferred certainty to uncertainty and thus created methods for preventing live burial by addressing either of the components of the term—either becoming unburied or ensuring death. To be buried, one must be dead, and to be unburied, one

must be alive. The liminality inherent in a conflation of these states—being buried but also being alive—destabilizes boundaries and creates anxiety and fear.

While some were worried about being buried alive and not found, others worried about being properly buried but not left alone. In *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911), Bierce satirically defines “grave” as “[a] place in which the dead are laid to await the coming of the medical student” (69). While Bierce is being humorous, the practice of body snatching was not as uncommon as one might hope in early nineteenth century Britain and America.⁵⁷ Michael P. Hutchens explains that medical schools suffered from a “shortage of specimens” used for dissection that led to “a system in which bodies were stolen from cemeteries, brought to the schools by the thieves or middlemen, and paid for by docents or student caretakers” (1115). This practice of removing freshly buried bodies from graves for the purposes of medical dissection greatly contributed to fears of the undead at the time, as the transgression of the bounds of the grave were violated by medical professionals, or those under their employment. Body snatchers, often referred to as “resurrectionists,” would regularly dig up, strip, and sell corpses. According to Reginald Magee, this was a rather pecuniary business: “In Lambeth in 1795, there was a professional gang of 15 who served eight surgeons of repute from 30 burial grounds, working winter only. Corpses cost 2 guineas and a crown; children cost 6 shillings for the first foot and 9 pence for each extra inch. By 1820 the cost had risen to 20 guineas for a standard corpse; ‘freaks’ cost a lot more” (378).

⁵⁷ I aim here to provide a brief overview of the historical context and anxieties surrounding body snatching in the nineteenth century to demonstrate concerns about the bounds of the grave. See Michael Sappol's *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002) for an extensive cultural history of the practice of anatomy and human dissection in America with a focus on class and power dynamics. See Ruth Richardson's *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (1987) for a similar exploration focused on nineteenth-century Britain.

Though body snatching was not a legally⁵⁸ or even morally accepted practice, it largely continued until the infamous William Burke and William Hare murders in Edinburgh in 1828.⁵⁹ Edward C. Halperin points out that in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century America, the graves of marginalized people such as slaves, free African Americans, and the poor were often targeted (489). Focusing on those with little to no power in America and Britain reduced the risk of complaints and reform. However, instead of removing bodies from graves, Burke and Hare began murdering people at Hare's lodging house and selling the bodies to a doctor at the University of Edinburgh. The two men killed and sold at least fifteen people before being caught (R. Michael Gordon 2). Public outcry about this event led to stricter regulation regarding obtaining corpses, resulting in the Anatomy Act of 1832 in Britain, which ultimately "allowed the bodies of those maintained by the State, such as those in workhouses, to be passed to the anatomists if not claimed by relatives" (Magee 379). Similar reforms took place in the United States as anatomy laws were passed in different states, such as Massachusetts's Anatomy Act of 1831 (Halperin 491; Tward and Patterson 1183). However, such laws certainly did not entirely eliminate the issue. For example, Halperin claims that southern whites circulated the legend of "night doctors," or people who kidnapped and murdered members of northern African American communities in order to sell them for dissection, in attempts to quell mass migration from the south to the north after the Civil War (494).

Some people took special precautions to prevent being unwillingly "resurrected" from their graves, such as being buried in special coffins meant to prevent body snatchers from getting

⁵⁸ At this time, the corpses legally used for dissection were supposed to be restricted to those of executed criminals (Magee 377; R. Michael Gordon 8).

⁵⁹ For more information about this scandal, see R. Michael Gordon's *The Infamous Burke and Hare: Serial Killers and Resurrectionists of Nineteenth Century Edinburgh* (2009).

in, cadavers from getting out, or both (Halperin 491; Roach 48). Some used mortsafes, or iron cages placed around the grave or coffin (Roach 48). Others relied on the desirability of the corpse and utilized “dead houses,” or buildings where the body decomposed before burial, or, alternatively, had people watch over the new grave until the body was thought to have decayed enough to no longer be viable for dissection (Roach 48; Halperin 491).⁶⁰ These practices seem to have declined alongside the demand for bodies; Suzanne M. Shultz explains that body snatching tapered off by the end of the nineteenth century due to development of embalming techniques that allowed cadavers to be stored until needed rather than immediately dissected (90).

The practice of body snatching showed up in fiction in large and small ways as authors incorporated concerns about bodies and what happens to them after death. Bierce’s “One Summer Night,” discussed above, provides an apt example. A handful of more canonical examples of nineteenth century works that feature instances of grave robbing or body snatching include Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), and Robert Louis Stevenson’s “The Body Snatcher” (1884).

Concerns about the grave and its proper function were, then, evidently prevalent during the times when Poe, Gilman, and Bierce were writing, as we see from earlier dissection scandals

⁶⁰ The practice of body snatching for medical research provides some additional insight into why, in Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” (1839) Roderick Usher does not want Madeline Usher immediately buried and instead places her in a walled vault inside their home. The narrator explains Roderick’s concerns about immediately burying Madeline: “The brother had been led to his resolution (so he told me) by consideration of the unusual character of the malady of the deceased, of certain obtrusive and eager inquiries on the part of her medical men, and of the remote and exposed situation of the burial-ground of the family” (287-88). Roderick’s concern that medical men would dig up her grave to further examine her body is perhaps not as paranoid as one might think, as such events were known to occur at the time when Poe wrote the story.

and anatomy laws to later application of ingenious methods of preventing live burial. While these fears were perhaps not as extensive as sensationalized accounts might suggest, both historical and literary examples demonstrate that graves failing to contain dead bodies was a source of anxiety. Perversions of the function of the grave—transgression of the appropriate bounds of the grave—such as live burial and body snatching were both public fears and Gothic tropes, feeding into each other as authors gain inspiration from fear and, in doing so, build on them with their depictions of undead bodies reemerging from tombs that fail to properly contain them.

Connections Between Poe, Gilman, and Bierce

Poe unquestionably influenced the Gothic genre, and, in doing so, impacted authors who utilized the genre after him. Gilman and Bierce were both familiar with Poe's writing and style. In this section I will outline historical and scholarly connections between the three authors, beginning with the abundance of primary and secondary material linking Poe and Gilman, moving to the always assumed but not fully explored connections between Poe and Bierce, and ending with Gilman and Bierce's unpleasant relationship. Doing so demonstrates how Poe functions as a precursor to Gilman and Bierce and highlights gaps in scholarship about the three authors that I address in this chapter.

Gilman's diary indicates that she was familiar with Poe's writing long before she published "The Giant Wistaria."⁶¹ For example, in an entry from January 9, 1885, Gilman notes that she obtained "two books of Poe's tales" (along with other literature) and read Poe's "The

⁶¹ Denise D. Knight provides evidence that Gilman began writing "The Giant Wistaria" in 1886, four years earlier than previously thought ("New Evidence").

Black Cat” to her mother-in-law (*The Diaries* 310). Later diary entries chronicle her continued reading of Poe (311, 380). Gilman’s husband at the time compared “The Yellow Wall-paper” (1892), her most popular story, to Poe’s writing, which she explains in a letter from 1890: “Walter says he has read it *four* times, and thinks it the most ghastly tale he ever read. Says it beats Poe and Doré! But that’s only a husband’s opinion” (“To Martha Luther Lane” 26). During her initial attempts to publish “The Yellow Wall-paper,” Gilman sent a copy to William Dean Howells, who passed it along to Horace Scudder, then editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. In a rejection letter, Scudder wrote to Gilman, “Mr. Howells has handed me this story. I could not forgive myself if I made others as miserable as I have made myself!” (“To Charlotte Perkins Stetson” 27). In response, Gilman compared her own story to Poe’s work, noting in her autobiography, “This was funny. The story was meant to be dreadful, and succeeded. I suppose he would have sent back one of Poe’s on the same ground” (“Pasadena” 119). Indeed, Annette Kolodny claims that this story, for Gilman, “located itself not as any deviation from a previous tradition of women’s fiction but, instead, as a continuation of a genre popularized by Poe” (455).

Gilman furthered the link between Poe’s work and her own when, in 1894, just a few years after publishing “The Giant Wistaria” and “The Yellow Wall-paper,” she began a “Studies in Style” series for *The Impress*, a literary magazine she managed at the time. For this series, she produced sixteen short stories and one play, all written in the style of well-known authors. The series purported to help readers understand specific literary styles; it also aimed to sell copies of the magazine by engaging readers in a guessing game of figuring out whose style the stories imitated in order to win a free copy of that author’s books (Knight, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* 29-30). Gilman included Poe in her selection of treated authors, demonstrating her familiarity with his work to the extent that she felt comfortable explicitly imitating it. However, Knight evaluates

the story that Gilman wrote in imitation of Poe, “The Unwatched Door,” as, “at best, a parody, combining elements from several of Poe’s best-known stories in a tale that fails to achieve his trademark ‘unity of effect’” (Knight, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* 32). Although her imitation of Poe may have failed, the influence of his stories remains evident. In this way, Poe serves as a direct influence on Gilman and her writing style, and the two authors share a similarity in their attraction to certain Gothic conventions.

A letter Gilman wrote to Silas Weir Mitchell⁶² in 1887 provides another connection between the two authors, as Gilman links her mental state to Poe’s work. A selection from her description of her own family and personal medical history reads as follows:

The mental history is more important. A clever and precocious child. At eight my imagination was already at work and I regaled myself with visions of unattainable delights, not occasionally, but as a nightly solace before sleeping. . . . This habit grew, making up for a thousand outside ills, till at thirteen it was a large part of my life, and so real that I actually believed it.

This powerful current of thought my mother suddenly checked, telling me it was dangerous and wrong, and I must never think of those things again. Conscience and will were equal to the task, and I shut back that lovely dream world out of my mind forever. No new channel was presented to me however, and as a natural consequence I found one, worse than the other. Having always a taste for the morbid and ghostly I now launched

⁶² Much biographical criticism has been written about Mitchell’s treatment of Gilman with his infamous “Rest Cure” and its influence on “The Yellow Wall-paper.” See, among other sources, Denise D. Knight’s “‘All the Facts of the Case’: Gilman’s Lost Letter to Dr. S. Weir Mitchell” and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz’s *Wild Unrest: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Making of “The Yellow Wall-Paper”* (2010) for more discussion of the topic.

myself upon a sea of Poe-like visions, carrying my dream life through a most wicked and unhealthy world. ("To Silas Weir Mitchell" 47)

Here, Gilman describes herself as a child engaging in fantastical mental exercises that are not only Poe-like, as she points out, but also oddly similar to the mental reveries of Egæus, the narrator of "Berenice" who spends his life isolated and fixating on fantasy in his family library.

In addition to these biographical links, there is a large and growing body of scholarship about connections between Poe and Gilman. Gabriele Rippl, Marty Roth, and Rae Beth Gordon all discuss connections between the two authors in terms of their use of the arabesque, a design concept that shows up in a variety of Poe's tales and in Gilman's notorious wallpaper.⁶³ Dara Downey similarly briefly compares "The Yellow Wall-paper" to "Ligeia" in terms of Poe's "The Philosophy of Furniture" and his theory of the arabesque (*American Women's Ghost Stories* 45-54). Niles Tomlinson compares Poe's "The Black Cat" to Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper," examining how both authors treat animality as a monstrous and haunting Other. Beverly A. Hume also links "The Black Cat" to "The Yellow-Wallpaper" in her compelling exploration of Gilman's mad narrator. Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm's *Poe, "The House of Usher," and the American Gothic* features a chapter linking the titular Poe tale to Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper." Perry and Sederholm argue that "The Yellow Wall-paper" provides a gendered inversion of "The Fall of the House of Usher" that encourages readers to consider Poe's tale from Madeline Usher's perspective. Kolodny notes disjunctions between the authors and their works in terms of strategies employed by their readers. Though Kolodny says that Gilman places

⁶³ Poe's use of the term "arabesque," especially as it compares to "grotesque" in his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), has been much discussed by scholars.

herself in the tradition of Poe, she argues that her readers failed to do so because of their expectations of fiction written by a woman.

Poe and Bierce were also connected both while Bierce was publishing and, to some extent, in later scholarship. Bierce notably praises Poe in his essay “Who Are Great?” (1901): “I should say that the greatest American that we know about, if not George Sterling, was Edgar Allan Poe” (249). Bierce variously encouraged and denied connections between his work and ideology and Poe’s. In a May 11, 1904, letter to George Sterling, Bierce links his thoughts on poetry with Poe’s: “I hold (with Poe) that there is no such thing as a *long* poem—a poem the length of an Epic” (123). Interestingly, he makes almost exactly the same comment in a letter to the same recipient again on June 16, 1905: “I hold, with Poe, that there are no long poems—only bursts of poetry in long spinnings of metrical prose” (138). In this same letter, he briefly quotes Poe’s “To Helen” (1831) (138). Though Bierce seems to align himself with Poe here, in other cases, he bristled at the comparison. For example, in a 1909 letter to S. O. Howes, Bierce mentions that an anonymous author in *Current Literature* has accused him of “imitating Poe” (197). Bierce defensively remarks, “If I had left the tragic and supernatural out of my stories I would still have been an ‘imitator of Poe,’ for they would still have been stories; so what’s the use?” (197).

As Gilman did with “The Unwatched Door,” Bierce also worked explicitly with Poe’s writing, in this case in a more parodic manner. He notably revised Poe’s poem “Ulalume” (1847) and reprinted it as “The New ‘Ulalume’” (1903); the revision consists of the first verse of the poem with all of the repeated words removed. Though Bierce seems to praise Poe in other places, this revision provides perhaps a tongue-in-cheek critique of Poe’s poetic style, specifically the amount of repetition he used in his poetry.

Carroll D. Hall's *Bierce and the Poe Hoax* (1934) details Bierce's attempt to enact a literary hoax regarding Poe's work in 1899.⁶⁴ Bierce, Herman Scheffauer, and Carroll Carrington conspired to present one of Scheffauer's poems, "The Sea of Serenity," in the *Examiner* as a newly found poem by Poe. However, Hall relates that readers were neither excited nor skeptical, and the lack of reaction disappointed Bierce.

Though Poe and Bierce were often compared while Bierce was writing, and brief mentions of their stylistic similarities often still occur, there is a curious lack of articles providing extensive explorations of connections between their works as there is for Poe and Gilman. Scholarship that does link Poe and Bierce generally tends to be much older and less in-depth than that linking Poe and Gilman. Arthur M. Miller's 1932 article "The Influence of Edgar Allan Poe on Ambrose Bierce" may be rather dated, but it contains many apt comparisons on the levels of both theory and plot. Chronicling links between the authors, Miller notes, "the comments [concerning Bierce's indebtedness to Poe] . . . have been, usually, incidental or haphazard remarks, with no supporting evidence offered" (131). Over eighty years later, I make largely the same claim. While some older articles (two besides Miller's, specifically, that I discuss below), link the two authors, they do not fully explore potential connections; additionally, more recent criticism has the same problem that Miller pointed out in 1932, as connections are assumed but not supported.

George Snell's 1945 "Poe Redivivus" places Ambrose Bierce and Lafcadio Hearn in the tradition of Poe. Snell calls Bierce "always a Poe disciple" (50) and claims that Bierce's fiction is utterly indebted to Poe:

⁶⁴ Poe himself was also a fan of perpetrating literary hoaxes, with "The Balloon-Hoax" (1844) as his most famous. See Lynda Walsh's *Sins Against Science: The Scientific Media Hoaxes of Poe, Twain, and Others* (2006) for further discussion of the hoax genre.

Bierce wrote fiction exclusively and solely in this vein [the apocalyptic tradition of Poe]; he modelled [*sic*] his form and his subject matter directly upon Poe, and while he never achieved the artistry or the psychological overtones of his master, he exhibited some aspects of the imagination never seen before. Irritated as he was by contemporary jibes at his Poe-idolatry, it is nevertheless perfectly apparent that Poe was his inspiration and exemplar, and hardly any other influence can be detected in his work. (51)

I disagree with several parts of the above statement, as it is filled with overreaching and unqualified claims and peppered with an oddly unfavorable tone towards Bierce's work (and these same attributes afflict the entire article). This article attempts to place Poe and Bierce (and Hearn) in conversation but does not quite do so convincingly. However, I do think that there are clear links between Poe and Bierce (and possibly Hearn, although that lies outside the purview of this chapter) that deserve further exploration.

In another older article, M. E. Grenander's 1957 "Bierce's Turn of the Screw: Tales of Ironical Terror," Grenander focuses on demonstrating how Bierce and Poe differ in their tales of terror, claiming that Bierce utilizes an ironical terror distinct from Poe's. More recently, Poe and Bierce have been linked with Lovecraft. Andrew Wheeler's "Infratextual Structures in Poe, Bierce, and Lovecraft" examines the three as authors who exemplify "the pinnacle of the American horror tale" (4). Svitlana Shurma also links these same three authors in her exploration of how symbols function in their Gothic short stories.

Other scholars have more recently tended to briefly mention Poe and Bierce together in a sentence or so before moving on. Robert L. Gale briefly notes various possible influences for particular stories in his annotations of Bierce's work, linking Bierce's "Beyond the Wall" (1907) to Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (28), Bierce's "Moxon's Master" (1899) to Poe's

“Maelzel’s Chess-Player” (1836) (198), Bierce’s “The Boarded Window” (1891) to Poe’s “The Premature Burial” (37), Bierce’s “The Mystery of Charles Farquharson” (1888) to Poe’s “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” (1844) (202), Bierce’s “The Widower Turmore” (1891) to Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” (303), and, as I will discuss in more detail later, Bierce’s “John Mortonson’s Funeral” to Poe’s “The Black Cat” (151). Christopher Linforth similarly claims that Bierce is “emulating his predecessor Edgar Allan Poe” in “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” (1890) in the way he “forges a unity of theme that is emboldened by his clinical aesthetic” (57-58). Charles L. Crow calls Bierce’s “An Inhabitant of Carcosa” a story “in the tradition of Poe” with a setting that is a “familiar Poescape” (100). Clearly, more thorough work on Poe and Bierce needs to be done. What does exist is largely dated or only assumes connections between the two in passing without providing evidence or fully exploring claims.

While very little scholarship exists linking Poe and Bierce, none does so with Bierce and Gilman. Interestingly, although the two were writing at the same time and both have since been recognized as canonical nineteenth-century American authors, critics simply do not pair their works. However, Bierce and Gilman were in conversation with each other, in a sense, in a notable feud. Bierce and Gilman ended up writing in California at the same time and while there had a decidedly bad relationship. Bierce lived in California from 1875 to 1899, with brief exceptions. Gilman’s residence overlapped, as she lived there from 1888 to 1895. Lawrence J. Oliver and Gary Scharnhorst detail the “war of words” between Bierce and female journalists belonging to the Pacific Coast Women’s Press Association specifically and Gilman in particular (32). Bierce’s gendered attacks include, for example, calling “women who write” “moral idiots” in his October 4, 1891, “Prattle” column (qtd. in Oliver and Scharnhorst 32). Personal attacks on Gilman include claiming that her husband, from whom she was separated at the time, could

easily use the quality of her poetry as grounds for divorce (Oliver and Scharnhorst 41). Gilman, in turn, fought for what she considered ethical journalism. Oliver and Scharnhorst point out that she wrote a satirical poem called “The War-Skunk” about Bierce in 1891, though it was not published at the time (33). They additionally note that she also wrote to Brander Matthews, naming Bierce as a corrupt and sensationalist journalist and asking for help addressing his attacks against her. In this October 19, 1892, letter, she opens by asking, “Will you excuse a very earnest woman for appealing to you as a *critic* of high standing, and a gentleman, to know if there is not some literary tribunal before which a writer of peculiarly scurrilous and evil habits may be brought, exposed, and punished?” (“To Brander Matthews” 209).

As evinced by the works cited above, historical connections between Poe, Gilman, and Bierce are abundant, yet, though frequently republished alongside each other in anthologies of American literature and Gothic literature, sources do not treat the three authors together. Scholars largely tend to pair Gilman’s most well-known story, “The Yellow Wall-paper,” with one or more of Poe’s tales, discuss similarities between Poe’s and Bierce’s ideas about writing, or, occasionally, anecdotally mention the historical feud between Gilman and Bierce with no mention of their literary works. This chapter addresses this curious gap in scholarship linking these three authors. In doing so, I focus on three of their stories that have received, relative to others, less critical attention and that have not previously been discussed in connection.⁶⁵ When

⁶⁵ “Berenice” is by no means lacking critical attention, but scholars have tended to remain fixated on its shock value or visceral impact on the reader. The tale has received the label of Poe’s “most horrible story” (Ringe 128), “his most horrific tale” (Cappello 54) “one of his most morbid and grotesque tales” (Jung 227) and “unusually grotesque even for the Poe canon” (Sloane 19). Poe himself admits in a letter to *The Southern Literary Messenger* editor Thomas White that “[t]he subject is by far too horrible,” and explains that “[t]he Tale originated in a bet that I could produce nothing effective on a subject so singular, provided I treated it seriously” (“To Thomas W. White” 57).

we examine these three stories, we gain insight into the ways that the common Gothic tropes of confinement and undeadness have moved and changed over the course of the nineteenth century.⁶⁶

In this chapter, I am not necessarily trying to make an argument about indebtedness—for instance, I am not suggesting that Gilman consciously echoed Poe in “The Giant Wistaria” as she did in “The Unwatched Door” or claiming that Bierce blindly imitated Poe (a claim that would undoubtedly anger him). I am instead examining how each author uses the exceedingly common Gothic tropes of confinement and undeadness in ways that overlap with and depend upon liminality and ambiguity. So, while I do not claim that Bierce and Gilman imitate or mimic Poe in these particular stories, Poe certainly looms as an influence on their writing and the Gothic genre as a whole. In this way, this chapter contributes to understandings of complicated relationships between Poe, Gilman, and Bierce as well as to recent discussions of Gothic forms, Gothic influences, and Gothic aesthetics.

Gilman’s “The Giant Wistaria” has received little critical attention when compared to “The Yellow Wall-paper,” but there has been a growing body of scholarly work on the story. For example, in the recent “Dangerous Houses in the Uncanny Tales of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary E. Wilkins,” Dara Downey examines connections between women and the domestic spaces in which they live, using the haunted house in “The Giant Wistaria” as one of her examples. Other sources about the story are included later in the chapter.

Bierce’s “John Mortonson’s Funeral” has been largely ignored. Mentions of the story in criticism can only be gleaned from lists of stories included in *Can Such Things Be?* Occasionally scholars will reference it as a sort of anomaly in their conception of groupings of Bierce’s work. For example, Cathy N. Davidson says that “John Mortonson’s Funeral” along with “The Applicant” (1892) are examples of “a few stories” in which Bierce offers rational explanations for events (16). Joshi similarly notes that it is the “lone exception to the supernaturalism of *Can Such Things Be?*” (166).

⁶⁶ Poe’s influence on Gilman’s use of Gothic tropes becomes further evident in their more popular (and more critically addressed) Gothic stories—“The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Yellow Wall-paper”—both of which deal with the same themes of confinement, monomania, and liminality. These two stories, written after the earlier works of the authors addressed here, demonstrate a development of the authors’ treatments of these themes and may in some ways be regarded as extensions of the earlier texts.

Edgar Allan Poe's "Berenice"

In "Berenice," Egæus, the narrator, becomes obsessed with the teeth of his cousin/fiancée, Berenice. Berenice suffers from catalepsy, a disease that makes her appear dead for indeterminate periods of time, which eventually results in her accidental live burial. Egæus uses this opportunity to extract all of her teeth from her still-living body, but he forgets or represses memory of this action. The story ends with the discovery of Berenice's living but mutilated body on the edge of her grave and the revelation of Egæus's possession of "some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances" (26).

Even before her live burial, Berenice balances between life and death due to her catalepsy. Egæus informs the reader that Berenice endures a disease that "fell like the simoom upon her frame," effecting physical, mental, and behavioral changes in her to the extent of "disturbing even the identity of her person" (18). Though he does not detail her disease more specifically, he indicates that catalepsy occurs as a tangential symptom:

Among the numerous train of maladies superinduced by that fatal and primary one which effected a revolution of so horrible a kind in the moral and physical being of my cousin, may be mentioned as the most distressing and obstinate in its nature, a species of epilepsy not unfrequently terminating in *trance* itself—trance very nearly resembling positive dissolution, and from which her manner of recovery was, in most instances, startlingly abrupt. (18-19)

This catalepsy places Berenice in a liminal state, making her appear dead while still living, thereby complicating how others define her. Though the catalepsy functions separately from

Berenice's main illness or concern, it often affects her, and misinterpretation of it ultimately leads to her live burial.

Berenice's live burial serves as a striking example of confinement in liminal space. Here, she not only appears dead but is also imprisoned in a space meant for the dead. Berenice is left unable to behave as a living person due to her cataleptic state and unable to inhabit the world of the living due to her burial. When a maid informs Egæus of Berenice's perceived death and subsequent preparation for burial, he immediately accepts her account instead of inspecting the body for signs of life himself. In fact, the text—at least the version that Poe last revised—skips over any account of her body or burial.⁶⁷ After being informed of her death, the next information the reader receives details Egæus's confusion and memory loss after her burial: "I found myself sitting in the library, and again sitting there alone. . . . I knew that it was now midnight, and I was well aware that since the setting of the sun Berenice had been interred. But of that dreary period which intervened I had no positive—at least no definite comprehension" (25). Though he forgets or represses his actions between being told Berenice is dead and her burial, Egæus's

⁶⁷ The original version of "Berenice" that appeared in *The Southern Literary Messenger* in 1835 contains a passage in which Egæus leaves the library and visits Berenice's body in a coffin in her bedroom. In this account, Egæus confines himself with Berenice, separated from the living by the curtains surrounding her bed: "[W]ith a sense of suffocation I dragged myself to the side of the bed. Gently I uplifted the sable draperies of the curtains. As I let them fall they descended upon my shoulders, and shutting me thus out from the living, enclosed me in the strictest communion with the deceased" (335). During his inspection of her body, Egæus thinks he sees Berenice's finger move, and he notes that the band around her jaws has been broken. However, instead of taking these as clues that Berenice still lives, Egæus's monomania takes over as he becomes distracted by her teeth and runs from the room.

Poe removed this section of the story in his revisions for republication in the *Broadway Journal* in 1845, possibly due to this scene being viewed as too gruesome or in order to focus the story on Egæus's self-confinement in his library by removing the portion of the story that depicts him elsewhere.

In this chapter, I use Poe's 1945 revision unless otherwise indicated since it is clear that he made purposeful changes. This is the version reprinted in Harrison's Virginia Edition.

engagements during that time soon become evident as a servant enters the library and points out Egæus's muddy clothes, fingernail-marked hands, and shovel. At this point Egæus seizes a box and, dropping it to the floor, reveals Berenice's extracted teeth, which he strove to possess—and confine in a box, much like he did their rightful owner—in fulfillment of his obsession. For Berenice, the misunderstanding and misreading of her medical condition, coupled with Egæus's monomaniacal fixation on her teeth, leads to her live burial and mutilation, a doubly horrifying fate.

Viewing the coffin/grave in a Freudian sense as a womb supports the argument that this confinement infantilizes Berenice, rendering her liminality one of not only between life and death but also between childhood innocence and adult sexuality. In an article about pregnancy in Poe's work, Dawn Keetley claims that Poe's obsessive interest in dead and dying women actually relates to his hidden interest in female procreativity, and she ultimately reads the story's ending as "a disguised childbed scene" with various aspects evoking images of childbirth (6). Though she uses a Kleinian mother-infant model for most of her argument that does not prove applicable here, she interestingly treats Berenice as not just a figurative mother but as a literally pregnant woman. She argues that Egæus mistakes Berenice's normal adolescent changes and burgeoning sexuality as a disease that changes her identity and consequently represses knowledge of her pregnancy, also pointing out that "[t]his utter change in identity, which the narrator perceives helplessly as a terrifying mystery, is identical to the transformation in *Morella* when she becomes pregnant" (5). Read through the lens of this other Poe story, Berenice's physical changes take on an uncanny tone. Keetley points out that pregnancy sheds new light on why Egæus calls Berenice's disease a "fallen and desolate condition" yet proposes to her "in an evil moment" even though he "had never loved her . . . [and] shuddered in her presence, and

grew pale at her approach” (25). He attempts to wed her to prevent the shame of an illegitimate child in a situation similar to that of “The Giant Wistaria.” Gloria A. Biamonte mentions “a destructiveness that . . . perverts the realm of motherhood into one of sin” in her reading of “The Giant Wistaria,” and that same perversion could be said to exist here in “Berenice” (37).

Keetley’s reading does not fully address all textual evidence, though, as Egæus notably describes Berenice’s “emaciation” as “excessive” (22). However, following Keetley’s interpretation, he could be referring to her *identity* as having become shrunken and unrecognizable, not necessarily her body, or her pregnancy could have actually made her ill and caused her to begin withering away. Reading Berenice as pregnant suggests that not only does their impending wedding and her “illness” terrify and revolt Egæus, but the thought of her as a reproductive creature also elicits a deeper panic, and he therefore removes her teeth in an act of sterilization.⁶⁸ Even reading Berenice as a potentially reproductive figure, but not *necessarily* pregnant, highlights her liminality—balanced as she is between the roles of young, innocent cousin and sexually available future-wife. This liminality is multiplied with the particular

⁶⁸ Several critics have provided psychoanalytic readings of Berenice’s teeth as representatives of fertility or power. Marie Bonaparte connects Egæus’s fear of and infatuation with the teeth to the concept of *vagina dentata*, where “[m]outh and vagina are equated in the unconscious.” She claims that removing Berenice’s teeth serves as a means of “retributive castration” for an impotent narrator (218). Similarly, Vivian Lee Givhan claims that Egæus’s “obsession with Berenice’s teeth and his extraction of them represents an attempt to regain control of himself and to assert his masculine dominance intellectually, emotionally, and physically” (198). Hal Blythe and Charlie Sweet also examine Berenice’s teeth as a symbol of power, claiming that Poe presents Berenice satirically as a vampire. They claim that she is vampiric in Egæus’s overactive and diseased imagination, and he thus attempts to destroy her “not by the traditional methods of the stake, not by running water, not by sunlight, not by decapitation, but by *pulling its teeth*” (24). While these readings usually do not consider possible pregnancy as Keetley does, the noted significance of the teeth seems to generally support rather than detract from her argument. Ultimately, for Egæus, Berenice’s teeth serve as taunting objects. He feels he must remove them yet possess them in order to assume a position of power and agency. They are, for Egæus, what the titular yellow wallpaper is for the narrator in Gilman’s most well-known story.

circumstances of her disease and live burial, placing her at a crossroads of childhood innocence and adult sexuality and of life and death—if her grave is a womb, she is both the child being born and the mother giving birth.

One of Poe's most well-known and probably over-quoted lines posits that "the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world" ("The Philosophy of Composition" 982). However, I argue that the horror in "Berenice" comes largely from the fact that Berenice *does not* die⁶⁹—instead, she not only suffers the psychological trauma of being entombed alive, but she also experiences the physical trauma of having all of her teeth removed. The last we hear of her is the servant's account of "a violated grave—of a disfigured body discovered upon its margin—a body enshrouded, yet still breathing, still palpitating, still *alive!*" (26). Berenice, then, does not neatly fit into the category of Poe's beautiful dead women; although she is presumed to be dead for a portion of the story, she actually never dies, and, further, her beauty is defiled. Berenice has reemerged from her grave, from this space meant for the dead. Though still alive, others have defined her, controlled her by defanging her, and placed

⁶⁹ There is a strange history of critics misreading the ending of the tale and assuming that Berenice is dead (much like Egæus does) although the text clearly states otherwise. Dara Downey states, "in a cataleptic trance, he [Egæus] gouges the teeth (with which he has become morbidly fascinated) from her yet-breathing mouth, killing her at the very moment that she has become most artistically and intellectually interesting to him" (*American Women's Ghost Stories* 18). Firstly, Egæus's trance is not cataleptic, as he certainly moves during this period of time; more importantly, the text clearly indicates that the act of pulling Berenice's teeth does not kill her—she is still alive after Egæus has returned to the library. In her critique of Poe's treatment of women, Beth Ann Bassein similarly thinks Egæus's act kills Berenice: "We assume he got the teeth at the expense of her life" (50). Likewise, examining "Berenice" as setting "a pattern for the love relations in other tales," David Halliburton claims that the story, unlike Poe's others, "tended to affirm the reality of death" in that "Berenice expires and does not come back" (369). He continues this argument, claiming that Poe "makes up for this by having the women return from death, thus confirming the indestructibility of life," in his later stories (369). It remains unclear why these critics kill off Berenice.

her in a space meant for the dead, suggesting that only her perfect teeth have value as a conqueror's trophy, not the woman herself.

The confinements in this story notably work in tandem with monomania or some form of psychological obsession. Egæus's monomaniacal fixation on Berenice's teeth provides the focus of the story, and his monomania leads to him confining (and later mutilating) Berenice. Interestingly, Poe's male confiner of his affianced confines himself as well, largely because of his monomania. David Halliburton claims that, for Egæus, the library functions as an objective correlative of his consciousness—"he *cannot* leave it, consciously, because its boundaries are identical with consciousness" (201). Egæus confines himself to the library for the duration of the story: "In that chamber was I born. . . . into the very regions of fairy-land—into a palace of imagination—into the wild dominions of monastic thought and erudition . . . I loitered away my boyhood in books, and dissipated my youth in reverie" (17). William Freedman points out that this link between the fantastic imaginings and monastic thought "blurs the fundamental distinction between intellect and fancy, between the identifiable realities of the world and the untethered musings of the privatized mind. . . . Reality and imagination have not exchanged places here; they have become, like misery, blended yet distinct, at once the same and obscurely different" (69). Remaining in the library where he was born, Egæus places himself in a liminal space where the bounds between reality and fantasy are skewed. This liminality further calls into question his role as narrator and highlights the gaps in his storytelling.

Egæus's confinement both stems from and fosters his mental condition, which Marie Bonaparte breaks into three distinct categories of disorder: "schizoid tendencies," "obsessional rumination" (213), and epilepsy closely followed by amnesia (217). His "schizoid tendencies" explain his difficulty discerning between reality and fiction, his "obsessional rumination" leads

directly to his monomaniacal fixation on objects (such as Berenice's teeth), and his epilepsy paired with amnesia serves as an explanation for his confusion regarding his actions during and after Berenice's burial. These psychological maladies work together to confine him, or to make him confine himself, inside the library for the duration of the narrative; the one point at which he leaves to extract Berenice's teeth is notably absent from the text.⁷⁰ While Berenice has confinement imposed on her, Egæus suffers from self-imposed confinement that, in turn, fosters his psychological breakdown.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Giant Wistaria"

Gilman's "The Giant Wistaria," published over fifty years after "Berenice," is a ghost story divided into two parts. It hinges on the fate of a young woman locked away by her father and then found wrapped in "the strangling grasp" of a wistaria root under a porch a century later (485). The first, shorter section of the story takes place in colonial New England. It depicts a young woman who has given birth out of wedlock being separated from her child and locked in her room by her father. He plans to move their family back to England, to force his daughter into an unwanted marriage to her cousin, and to leave her newborn in America in order to avoid shame. The second part of the story, set about 100 years later, details the interactions of the young mother's ghost with summer occupants who have rented the same house. These interactions lead to the discovery of her body under the porch and her baby's body in the cellar well.

⁷⁰ As previously noted, the original (1835) version of "Berenice" contains a passage wherein Egæus leaves the library, but Poe purposefully omitted this section in his subsequent revisions of the story. See David E. E. Sloane and Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV's "Poe's Revisions in 'Berenice': Beyond the Gothic" for an examination of large and small changes Poe made between the 1835 and 1845 versions of the tale.

Similar to Berenice's live burial due to her catalepsy, Gilman's unnamed young mother suffers confinement due to a medical issue—becoming pregnant and giving birth—complicated by the social stigma of her being unmarried while doing so. Denise D. Knight aptly defines this story as “both a ghost story and a tale about the suffering of women under patriarchal rule” (*Charlotte Perkins Gilman* 20). Because of this “patriarchal rule” and the social stigmas surrounding unwed childbirth and motherhood, the young woman is physically confined in her room while alive and then under the porch after death. Further, her father vilifies her for giving birth out of wedlock, referring to the situation as “open shame” and claiming that he would rather “have seen our child cleanly drowned, than live to this end!” (480). Though her condition does not result in a live burial as in “Berenice,” Gilman's young mother experiences physical confinement because of male constraints on and perceptions of her body and its functions. Her father sends her to her room—“Get to thy chamber, and be not seen again to-night” (480)—and threatens to have her physically bound. A “hard-faced serving woman” locks the girl in the room, as evinced by her bringing out a key to the parents, and the girl remains looking out of her upstairs window, “a white face among the leaves, with eyes of wasted fire” (481). The father not only orders the young woman locked in her room, but he also physically silences her: “Her voice rose in a strange, low cry, broken by her father's hand upon her mouth” (480). He thus negates her physical presence as well as her ability to speak. He highlights her lack of agency in his remarks about forcing her to marry against her will: “She hath but small choice now! . . . She weddeth him ere we sail to-morrow, or she stayeth ever in that chamber” (480). By locking her in a room, her father separates her from both her child and from the outside world. Juliann E. Fleenor links this story to “The Yellow Wall-paper,” claiming that women are confined and punished simply “for being women” in both (233). She explains that, in these two stories,

“women are punished for having babies because doing so imprisons them in the social structure symbolized by the house” (233). Indeed, there is an irony behind the double meaning of “confinement,” which in the past has been used colloquially to refer to a woman’s childbirth. Here, being “in confinement” suggests both the act of childbirth as well as the physical imprisonment that results from it. In this way, “The Giant Wistaria” features “confinement” as a particular interpretation of a medical condition as well as its consequences. Whereas Berenice is misdiagnosed perhaps due to fears about female sexuality, Gilman’s young mother is stigmatized and shamed, and both end up confined and mute.

Confinement is clearly linked to liminality in these two cases, as both Gilman’s young mother and Berenice exist in uncertain spaces between life and death. Knight provocatively calls the young mother “an archetypal death-in-life character” (*Charlotte Perkins Gilman* 21) not because of her presence as a ghost, but because of the descriptions of her physical condition while living. The concept of a “death-in-life” character interestingly links her to what other critics have said about Poe’s “Berenice.” Darrel Abel defines Berenice as “explicitly a representation of Death-in-Life,” claiming that Berenice’s changes in appearance and demeanor indicate her possession by a ghost (218). While this supernatural explanation deserves more qualifications than Abel provides, the concept of Berenice’s illness making her seem death-like provides a noteworthy connection between interpretations of the two stories by foregrounding the similarities between the characters’ confinements in liminal, undead spaces. The terse description of Gilman’s young mother while living indicates her possession of “nervous fingers,” “weary eyes that yet had a flickering, uncertain blaze in their shaded depths,” and “a white face . . . with eyes of wasted fire” (480-81). Similarly, Berenice maintains silence like that forced upon the young girl by her father—“she spoke no word”—and resembles death due to her “very pale,

and singularly placid” forehead, “reigning melancholy of the countenance,” and “glassy stare” (22-23). Her impact on Egæus reinforces this reading; when he sees her, he feels “an icy chill,” “a sense of insufferable anxiety,” and he becomes “breathless and motionless” before even noticing her ever-frightening-yet-much-desired teeth (22-23). The physical descriptions of Berenice and the young mother thus suggest impending or already-occurring death.

In a similar manner to Berenice, Gilman’s young mother in “The Giant Wistaria” begins the story in a liminal space between youthful innocence and adult sexuality, and this liminal space transitions to a balance between life and death when she becomes a ghost. Her father treats her as both a child and an adult, denying her any agency by locking her in her room like a misbehaving child but implementing this confinement with a planned forced marriage because of her perceived adult transgressions. While her pregnancy and subsequent birth here are more definite than the possible pregnancy that Keetley proposes for Berenice, both women become confined because of their sexuality—either as a consequence of past actions, a preventative measure against future sexual transgressions, or a combination of both.

Even after her death, Gilman’s young mother remains confined, trapped as a ghost in a space between life and death. Though her corpse lies “in the strangling grasp of the roots of the great wistaria” (485), reinstating her physical confinement, her spirit does not remain there and instead interacts with living people who have rented the house for the summer. Her ghost creeps about the house and appears to the summer visitors in their dreams. Jenny hears the chain in the cellar well rattle and creak; Jack sees a “poor creature” wearing a shawl and a red cross necklace take things from the drawers in his room; and George sees the same shawled woman wearing the same necklace in the cellar (483-4).

How the young mother escapes from her confinement and what leads to the death of her and her child remain uncertain.⁷¹ Scholars have questioned what narrative best fits into the story's gaps. Biamonte asks a series of questions about the events left out of the narrative:

Did her father upon hearing her refusal to return to England kill the child? Did he, in fact, kill her? Or, was the horror of that decision left to the young mother, who, deserted by her family, locked away in her chamber, and without a supportive community to turn to, saw death as the only answer to a life she could not recreate, or using a metaphor that Gilman vividly brings to life in "The Yellow Wallpaper," could not rewrite? (36)

Other critics have similarly sketched possible explanations. In his reading of the story, Gary Scharnhorst outlines what potentially happened to the ghost: "The young woman apparently escaped from her chamber, hid under the porch, drowned her baby rather than abandon it, and then starved to death rather than submit to her father's demand that she marry for the sake of propriety and return to England" (157). However, while the textual evidence allows for this scenario as one possibility, the gaps in the story negate any definitive answers. As Scharnhorst later points out, the young mother and her child could just have easily been killed and had their bodies disposed of by her father in a fit of anger or in an attempt to hide his family's shame, and, perhaps, even to cover up incest in the process (161). Whether by suicide or murder, the young woman's death moves her into a liminal and undead state; she becomes a ghost existing between the realms of life and death. Ultimately, both the young woman's identity and her story remain somewhat ambiguous, but their traces remain disturbing. As Jenny aptly notes, "I'm convinced there is a story, if we could only find it" (482). Indeed, what both characters and readers are able

⁷¹ Lundie claims that the young mother "commits both infanticide and suicide" (10), basing her interpretation, it seems, on Gilman's own "deliberate, rational decision to end her life" in 1935 (123). While this version is a possibility, it is, as I discuss, by no means a certainty.

to piece together comes from the different versions of hauntings each character experiences and shares over breakfast the following morning.

Both “Berenice” and “The Giant Wistaria,” then, present portraits of misunderstood women and their misperceived or stigmatized medical conditions. A maid interprets Berenice’s cataleptic trance as death, and the young woman’s father interprets her childbirth as an unforgivable sin that brings shame on the entire family. Though Egæus does not personally enact Berenice’s confinement like the young woman’s father does, he puts forth no effort to prevent it, and he ultimately uses it as an opportunity to explore his own obsession by exploiting her body. Though no evidence indicates that Gilman read “Berenice” specifically, her treatment of confinement and male oppression in “The Giant Wistaria” in many ways mirrors that of Poe, and both authors utilize the theme of a physically and emotionally trapped woman in order to explore and rework the Gothic conventions of confinement and undeadness.

Though the monomania in “The Giant Wistaria” remains less evident than it is in “Berenice,” obsession still appears in the figure of the young mother both while alive and as a ghost. Additionally, the father evinces a monomania with covering up his daughter’s sexuality in a manner similar to Egæus. The young mother yearns for her child in the first part of the story and reappears as a ghost in the second part with a seemingly similar agenda. The confinement in this story is clear; the monomania is less evident but can be attributed to the young girl as a ghost with a singular purpose of revealing her history. In the brief first section of the story while the young mother lives, she begs for reunion with her child: She first pleads, ““Give me my child, mother, and then I will be quiet!”” and, after being hushed, continues, ““Art thou a mother and hast no pity on me, a mother? Give me my child!” (480). These two appeals for her child are the only words that she speaks in the entire story. Locked away after the second request, and a ghost

in the second half of the story, the young mother remains voiceless after her failed entreaties. In addition to her pleas for her child, the young mother's physical description further displays her despondency; her "nervous fingers" that "wavered, clutched at a small carnelian cross that hung from her neck, then fell despairingly" indicate her physical distress (480). Her mother also notes that "[s]he grieveth sore for the child" (480), but the young mother remains separated from her child and understandably passionate about their reunion. In the second portion of the story, the young mother reappears as a ghost. The existence of a ghost, a spirit in a liminal space between life and death, generally indicates some unfinished business or untold story lacking closure; with this in mind, the ghost can be viewed as fixated on both her child and her story. Only the discovery of their corpses will reunite the mother and child and make their story known, though, of course, never completely understood.

Ambrose Bierce's "John Mortonson's Funeral"

In the midst of the Ambrose Bierce's more supernatural collection *Can Such Things Be?* appears the short, strange, and darkly humorous six-paragraph story "John Mortonson's Funeral." The story depicts, as the title indicates, John Mortonson's funeral. This funeral begins as a nice, calm, and respectable affair. John Mortonson has died, but he has an attractive coffin, and the undertaker did a good job making his body look as pleasant as a dead body can. Mourners pay their respects, the minister gives a eulogy, and people cry; basically, what is supposed to happen at a funeral happens. However, when the funeral-goers look into the coffin a final time, they are met with a sight that causes horror, disgust, and even fainting. They knock over the coffin in their panic, and John Mortonson's cat, which has apparently been inside the coffin and eating its owner's body, casually crawls out.

Bierce's tale echoes Poe in many ways. The first and perhaps most obvious connection lies between this story and Poe's "The Black Cat" as both authors depict a pet cat accidentally interred alongside its owner. Poe's story ends with a description of the cat's "red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire" as it sits on the head of the narrator's wife's corpse after a group of policemen exhume it from the cellar wall (155). The "red extended mouth" is an ambiguous description—perhaps the cat's mouth is open and naturally red on the inside, as its cries are what alert the police to its presence. Or, perhaps, the cat has been forced to eat its owner as it has been walled up with her for four days. This interpretation also helps explain why the corpse is "already greatly decayed and clotted with gore" after only four days—a cat has been eating and drinking it before avenging its murder (155).

While Poe leaves such interpretations to the readers, Bierce makes clear the grotesque results of entombing a cat with a corpse. "John Mortonson's Funeral" ends with a description of the cat's "crimson muzzle" (254); here, the face itself rather than just the mouth is described as crimson, removing any ambiguity about whether this is natural coloring or blood. Additionally, the animal "tranquilly wiped its crimson muzzle with a forepaw," an act of cleaning cats are known to do after eating (254). If the description of the cat's muzzle and its cleaning leave any room for doubt, the viewers' reactions to seeing Mortonson's body through its glass-topped coffin remove it. His widow faints, his friends "turned away, sick and faint," and one person is so upset that, "trying in his terror to escape the awful sight," he knocks the coffin over, which causes the glass to break and the cat to calmly emerge (254). This cat has certainly not gone hungry.

Sight is a key component in this story. John Mortonson's body, notably, is placed "in a fine mahogany coffin fitted with a plate of glass" (252). The novelty of a coffin with a glass

faceplate demands a little more discussion. While there is obviously a difference between coffins with a glass face-plate or glass top and coffins made almost entirely of glass, various references to both can be found in nineteenth-century newspapers and indicate that glass or partially-glass coffins like John Mortonson's, while new and somewhat strange, were not unheard of at this time. While today a glass coffin might seem a little odd (one thinks of Snow White, or perhaps Vladimir Lenin), apparently this was somewhat of a fad.⁷² The description of John Mortonson's coffin identifies the most important material aspect of the funeral—the coffin—as a luxurious commodity, which, in turn, builds the sense in the beginning of the story that this funeral is

⁷² Several articles from 1842 mention that a man from England named James Fryer made a glass coffin, “ornamented it with blue glass death’s head and cross bones on the sides and his name on the lid,” and left instructions for a cousin to determine “if he rots any faster than if he was in a leaden coffin” (“Glass Coffin”). Other articles mention patents filed by various entities over the years. In 1847, Mr. Parke of Peckham, England, filed a patent for making glass coffins so that “bodies may be seen without opening the coffins” (“Glass Coffins,” *Scientific American*). At the end of 1859, newspapers reported that J. R. Canon of New Albany, Indiana, got a patent for glass coffins that allow bodies to be “preserved in their natural state for all time to come, and when placed in vaults, can always be accessible to the gaze of those left behind” (“Glass Coffins,” *The Southern Field and Fireside*.) Other articles began poking fun at such inventions; the *Detroit Free Press* noted in 1860 that the “patent glass coffins” made in Louisville, Kentucky, “are transparent, which necessitates putting on your best clothes to be buried in” (“Glass Coffins,” *Detroit Free Press*). However, in an article from December 30, 1883, an undertaker being interviewed remarks that glass plates in coffins allowing viewing of the dead’s face “were introduced about thirty years ago, but they are not much used nowadays” (“The Cost of Coffins and Funerals”). Articles continue mentioning glass and glass-plated coffins as newly invented, newly patented, and newly manufactured in different places and by different entities, varying from praising the technology as a means to prevent live burial (“One Sure Test of Death”), to better prevent corpses of those who died from contagious diseases bodies from infecting others (“Glass Coffins,” *New York Times*), to better preserve bodies (“Coffins of Glass”). While some romanticize the invention, comparing it to the story of Snow White and positing that “[t]o be buried in a block of crystal sounds certainly more poetic than to be entombed in a case of lead” (“A Modern Version of an Old Fairy Story”), others call the idea of being able to see a corpse decay “a horror unspeakable” (“A recent horror”). These articles indicate a desire to both protect the body from outside elements and to protect the living from any potential contamination from the body while also allowing the living to see the dead (or conversely, as one article quipped, to “give the deceased a chance to see what kind of a procession he has”) (“Brevities”).

functioning not only correctly but also well. The comfort suggested by Mortonson's coffin and the normalcy of the funeral in the first few paragraphs lulls readers into a sense of comfort that we never have with Poe's story, which begins with the narrator's ravings. The plate of glass, similarly, allows funeral-goers to see Mortonson's face, which "was not disagreeable to look upon: it bore a faint smile, and as the death had been painless, had not been distorted beyond the repairing power of the undertaker" (252). This presents mourners with a pleasant final picture of the deceased while erecting a physical barrier between them, their world of the living and the dead. Adding to the aura of comfort, it certainly seems that this man had a painless death, looks okay, and is having a decent funeral—nothing is amiss. Everything *looks* right at this point.

Sight is again highlighted once the coffin is broken and the boundaries of life and death shattered alongside the glass plate. Whereas it was first deemed important that the coffin is glass-plated and John Mortonson's face "was not disagreeable," now that very coffin reveals unspeakable horrors to viewers (and readers who begin imagining a face partially eaten by a cat). Indeed, it is the *sight* that makes Mortonson's widow faint and inspires the terror that leads to the coffin being knocked over and broken. While Bierce describes the cat and the mourners, readers cannot help but mentally picture the defiled if undescribed corpse.

Bierce, like Poe and Gilman, ends his story with a shock. The cat emerges from the coffin, fur covered with blood and perhaps bits of meat and other gore, revealing to the reader the disgusting sight that so upsets the funeral-goers. Egæus spills Berenice's teeth onto the floor, revealing that he has been engaged in tortuous late-night pseudo-dentistry. The workmen uncover the young mother's body in the roots of the wistaria plant, revealing the source of the haunting to the visitors and the unhappy ending of her and her child's life to the readers. In this way, undeadness is mobile and mutable, from Poe's Berenice crawling toothless from her early

grave to Bierce's cat emerging from his inappropriate enclosure in his owner's coffin. We see, again and again, bodies that do not belong there put in spaces meant for the dead; they thus assume an undeadness that renders them both horrifying and monstrous in our inability to clearly understand and classify them.

Gothic Ambiguities: Hermeneutic Gaps and the Act of Storytelling

In these three stories, confinements, then, are caused by and result in liminality. Egæus locks himself in a library that fosters monomania and fuels his loss of sanity. For Egæus, the library serves as a liminal space between sanity and madness, reality and fiction. Inside this room, his perception of typical binaries becomes reversed: "The realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn,—not the material of my every-day existence—but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself" (17). He uses the library as a form of escape from the outside world and isolates himself within it, but in doing so, he confines himself in an unchanging environment—the very room where he was born. If the library can be thought of as the equivalent to a womb because of Egæus's birth there, then he can be said to have confined himself in a permanently infantilized condition of irreality and asexuality. Within the library, he is notably surrounded by mysterious books that belonged to his ancestors and that contain content "of a peculiar nature" of which he "will say no more" (17). The very environment of Egæus's confinement—the room in which he was born that contains books he purposefully avoids explaining—negatively affects his perceptions of reality and heightens his psychological alienation from others. His psychological breakdown ultimately occurs as a result of his confinement, monomania, and liminality. Halliburton points out that Egæus does not seem conscious of his actions even at the end of the

story; the servant must enter the library and interpret the scene. Instead of Egæus demonstrating remembrance, Halliburton claims that “[w]hat we are given is an enclosed state of being in which consciousness is alienated from everything, including the intentionality of its own acts. The muteness of Egæus preserves this hermetic state and prevents the boundaries of the story from extending beyond the boundaries of consciousness through which it came to be” (206). The liminal state in which Egæus is confined has limited even his ability to consciously perceive his own actions and successfully tell a complete story.

For the confined women in “Berenice” and “The Giant Wistaria,” their liminality becomes linked to sexuality in the stories’ treatment (or avoidance of) motherhood, pregnancy, and the role of the female as a potentially reproductive being. In various stages of confinement, the women struggle with defining themselves and being defined by others as innocent or experienced, child-like or child-bearing, and, at the utmost ends of the spectrum, alive or dead. Though it obviously appears more explicitly in Gilman’s story, both of these stories treat the failure of expectations of motherhood. Egæus’s conflation of Berenice’s identity between innocent young cousin and potentially sexual fiancée fosters his misinterpretation of her “disease” and changing identity while driving him to his final act of mutilation/sterilization. Giving birth to a child out of wedlock places the young woman in “The Giant Wistaria” in an anomalous zone between child and mother—her father allows her to exist as neither child nor mother because he perceives her as tainted by her past sexuality and, further, forbids her interaction with her child.

In seemingly stark contrast, an animal is the confined, undead figure in “John Mortonson’s Funeral.” With these three stories, we see the same Gothic trope working, then, on men, women, and even animals. The cat in “John Mortonson’s Funeral” exists in a liminal space

when it is enclosed in its owner's coffin. Here a living cat is placed in a space meant for (and inhabited by) the dead. Sealed in and almost buried, it gnaws on its owner, becoming, because of its confinement, a monstrous undead figure who consumes the dead, perhaps in order to live. The cat thus physically inhabits a liminal space—the coffin—between life and death and, in its consumption of the dead, becomes a physical and appalling representative of the merging of the two states. The cat, made out of living flesh but with a stomach full of dead flesh, existing in a space meant for the dead, blurs the distinctions between life and death. In this example of my larger argument, this ambiguity of states paired with the visceral disgust evoked by the desecrated corpse creates a Gothic horror for both characters and readers as they work to make sense of what they are experiencing.

Strikingly, in all of these stories, the entombed figures do not stay buried—they ultimately achieve “release” from their confinements and emerge from their graves. These releases, however, fall far short of the ideal. At the end of “Berenice,” the title character still lives, but the effect of her multiple ordeals is horrific, and, as critical misreadings suggest, may lead to her actual death. In “The Giant Wistaria,” the summer visitors discover the bodies of the young mother and her child, releasing them from confinement under the porch and in the well. However, their story remains full of gaps and uncertainties. Though there is a step toward closure, it remains unclear whether the young mother hid herself under the porch or whether someone else concealed her body there after killing her and whether it was the mother or someone else who put the baby in the well. Mortonson's cat crawls out of the broken coffin, resurfacing from the space for the dead back into the space for the living. However, it has transgressed the supposed boundaries between life and death, and it has, further, consumed human flesh. While this might not hugely concern the cat, it does the human witnesses. From

having teeth pulled while buried alive to ending up as a 100-year-old pile of bones underneath a porch, these “releases” in both Poe and Gilman result in less-than-desirable positions—ranging from misery to death—for the female characters and a peculiar kind of undeadness for both. Similarly, Bierce’s “release” transforms a nice, calm funeral into a mess of broken glass and a partially-eaten corpse. Poe leaves Berenice lying on the edge of her grave, and the reader must write her fate. Gilman develops the theme of liminality and uncertainty by gesturing towards, though ultimately denying, closure with her young mother. Bierce similarly develops the theme of liminality, but in a different direction than Gilman; his cat becomes the undead monster and the readers (and mourners) the horrified witnesses uncertain of how to conceive of this man-eating feline and the horrors it literally embodies.

While these three authors manipulate the Gothic trope of confinement, specifically in terms of the failed grave and undeadness, they do so for different purposes. Because of Gilman’s known didactic nature, critics often analyze her works in terms of their larger social context and purpose in attempts to assign meaning to her fiction.⁷³ Gilman perceived writing as necessitating a social purpose; this purpose can clearly be seen in “The Giant Wistaria” in terms of its depiction of the oppressed Victorian woman confined in and by a tyrannical patriarchy.⁷⁴ Scharnhorst aptly names it “a chilling if rather transparent indictment of sexual oppression” (157). Poe, conversely, famously eschewed didacticism, and his writing indicates a movement away from overt moralization; while he thought writing should have an effect, he created art for

⁷³ See Denise D. Knight’s chapter “Writing with a Purpose” in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Study of the Short Fiction* for more detail about Gilman’s didacticism and social critiques.

⁷⁴ Gilman’s similar didactic purpose perhaps becomes even clearer in her later and much more well-known story “The Yellow Wall-paper.” She explains this purpose in “Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper” (1913). Jill Rudd examines how Gilman’s aims for social reform are somewhat complicated by her use of the Gothic, a genre that “revels in the unexplained and unresolved” (78).

the sake of art (and money and fame) rather than in an attempt to enact social change. Indeed, in his preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), a collection in which “Berenice” was included, he names terror “not of Germany, but of the soul” as his thesis (6). However, the previous analysis of Poe’s story suggests at least a partial social purpose—he, perhaps unintentionally, indicts the male who confines a woman by having him ultimately confine himself and effect his own downfall. Bierce similarly believed that it was more important for literature to provide pleasure rather than moral instruction (Grenander, *Ambrose Bierce* 33). In the fourth iteration of “Grizzly Papers”⁷⁵ in *The Overland Monthly*, Bierce addresses the topic of didacticism in art, revealing a similar perspective as Poe’s:

Somebody, whose name is of not the slightest consequence, inasmuch as I have forgotten it, has said, with equal truth and boldness, that, in art, the question of morality is a question of the second rank. Rightly understood, the same is true in equal degree of literature, the test of excellence in which is the pleasure it carries to the more cultivated and discerning of the class to which it is addressed. (378)

While Gilman may have overt social purpose, Poe and Bierce focus on effect rather than moral edification.

Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock claims that some women writers in the latter half of the nineteenth century not only “us[ed] supernatural fiction as a strategic means to articulate anxieties related to the positions, roles, and expectations for women in American culture” but also “turned the Gothic genre back on itself and used the conventions of the supernatural implicitly—and in some cases explicitly—to engage with and in some instances rewrite the male

⁷⁵ Bierce signed the articles “Ursus,” and Bret Harte, then editor of the magazine, published them as “Grizzly Papers” (Grenander, *Ambrose Bierce* 32). Five “Grizzly Papers” total were published in January through June of 1871.

Gothic tradition in order to highlight its inadequacy for representing female anxieties” (173). Accordingly, Weinstock reads “The Giant Wistaria” as “rewriting *The Scarlet Letter* with a decidedly more ominous outcome,” which I think is a compelling argument, as there are certainly several interesting parallels between the stories (173).⁷⁶ However, as I am focusing on bodies that reemerge from graves, I think Poe should be examined as another earlier male Gothic writer who influenced Gilman and this story. Reading Poe’s story with Gilman’s in mind, and Gilman’s with Poe’s in mind, allows for a more sympathetic and perhaps more feminist view of Poe’s dead (or undead) beautiful woman and for a better understanding of how this overwhelming (and some might say overused) trope of confinement is repurposed and moved from the world of grotesque mutilation in Poe to a haunting ghost story in Gilman. Indeed, Weinstock’s claim about women’s revisions of the male Gothic can similarly be applied to Poe as we consider his treatment of confinement and undead women reemerging in a new form in Gilman’s story.

Similarly, it is helpful to read Poe and Bierce together with their nearly identical theories of focusing on effect rather than on moral. Both stories do achieve an intense effect, largely through their final shock to readers, though the lead-up to the final shocks are strikingly different in tempo. In this way, Bierce reworks Poe’s treatment of grotesque acts of confinement, presenting a new and still shocking version several decades later.

⁷⁶ Parallels between Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and the first half of Gilman’s story include, for example, the colonial setting, the punishment of illegitimate childbirth, and the wearing of a red ornamental object (Hester Prynne’s infamous scarlet letter and Gilman’s young mother’s carnelian cross). Catherine A. Lundie calls the carnelian cross the young mother wears “Gilman’s reinterpretation of Hawthorne’s scarlet letter” (10). J. Samaine Lockwood also notes similarities between Gilman’s fiction and *The Scarlet Letter* in “Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Colonial Revival” (101). Charles L. Crow also briefly mentions the connections between the two works, calling “The Giant Wistaria” “a miniature rewriting” of *The Scarlet Letter* (119).

Like the confined and undead characters, meaning itself remains somewhat hidden in these stories. According to Donald A. Ringe, in most of Poe's work, "The meanings lurk beneath the surface of the action, as much concealed as revealed by the symbolic expression. The stories thus invite the reader to look behind the fantastic settings and bizarre events to their fundamental significance" (141). This reading of Poe's ambiguities, which Ringe expands to include linkages between settings and protagonists, proves easily applicable to Gilman as well. Like Poe, Gilman buries meaning below the surface level of her texts. While Ringe claims that Poe's readers can obtain understanding and meaning by looking deeper than plot in order to examine links between characters and their settings (the latter of which are, in these cases, confinements), I maintain that the radical uncertainty of this meaning or these meanings cannot be ignored. Probing what "lurk[s] beneath the surface of the action" moves readers *closer* to a meaning they can never quite obtain. Though the linkage Ringe discusses certainly helps suggest deeper understandings of these texts, "Berenice" and "The Giant Wistaria" ultimately resist definitive readings or meanings. In the case of both stories, readers must work in order to discover the multiplicity of meanings hidden within the text.

How do we come to terms, for example, with Berenice's teeth? They seem to represent abstract ideas to Egæus, but what do they signify to readers? Freedman rightly claims that "interpretation meets its thickest wall in the meaning of Berenice's teeth and their ghoulish removal from her still-living frame" (71). Not only Egæus but also the readers of the tale become fixated on these teeth. Freedman reads this as an attempt to control and understand: "To remove the teeth from the mouth of the dying woman to a closed box on the library table is, like changing them into mere ideas, to possess the real world as manageable text" (72). Although Egæus attempts to confine these teeth to a box, thereby both possessing and defining them while

removing power from Berenice, he ultimately fails, as they end up scattered across the library floor. The teeth, then, are what Freedman calls “the hidden text within the text” (73), the fragmented, confusing, and disgusting culmination of a story full of gaps and evasions.⁷⁷

Gilman’s titular giant wistaria is similarly elusive though not as viscerally horrifying. Jill Rudd points out that ambiguity in the story not only surrounds what happens to the young mother and her child but also the wistaria itself:

How are we to interpret this? Is this a patriarchal vine destroying the house that still contains evidence of the ‘shame’ that sent the family back to England, or is the vine female, wreaking vengeance on the patriarchal, colonial house that consigned both girl and baby to death, ignoring the older mother’s ineffectual half-attempts to help her daughter? (80)

The wistaria vine that begins the story as a “tender shoot” (480) the young mother is instructed to leave alone ultimately, as Scharnhorst points out, becomes “grotesque” as it “takes root in her corpse” and “even figures as a tree of knowledge” or “botanical cousin to Beatrice’s flowery shrub in Hawthorne’s ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’” (159). It holds up the house and porch and, while doing so, conceals the young woman’s body; it is thus both “strangling” (485) and structural.

Bierce notably differs from Poe and Gilman in his treatment of ambiguities and elusive symbols. “John Mortonson’s Funeral,” comparably, is much more straightforward than

⁷⁷ It is worth noting that readers have to work even to identify the “thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances” (26) as teeth at the end of the tale, as Egæus does not use the word in the final section of the tale. Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet points out that this is an “absurdly indirect description” and one that “involves the reader more directly in the surprise ending and presumably creates a more powerful effect, as she must make the gruesome connections in her own mind rather than being told by the text” (36).

“Berenice” or “The Giant Wistaria.” Bierce’s description of the cat leaving Mortonson’s coffin and wiping its “crimson muzzle” (254) leaves no question as to what happened and why the mourners are horrified. He does not, however, describe what they see—he leaves to the reader’s imagination what the cat has done and what widow Mortonson has seen. In this way, instead of making readers work to piece together gaps left in the narrative as Poe and Gilman do, Bierce tells the reader exactly as it happens but leaves the extent of the full horror up to his interlocutor.

Egæus refers to the story he narrates as “a tale which should not be told” (18), and Gilman’s Jenny remains “convinced there is a story, if we could only find it” (482). The way that Poe and Gilman play with the unburied and the uncertain, leaving questions unanswered for both characters and readers, makes these horrible scenes even more ghastly, or, as Egæus describes his memory of pulling Berenice’s teeth, “horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity” (25). In the end, Egæus *seems* recovered enough to write down the story, but his pointed evasions and psychological meltdown into metaphor at the end leave little room for any certainties or truths about his motives or credibility. The young mother in “The Giant Wistaria” dies—that much remains certain because 100 years pass—and readers assume that her body is the corpse found under the porch and her baby is in the well, but the text actually lacks any certain identifying markers other than jewelry worn by a ghost seen in a dream. Bierce is more explicit—readers understand what happened—but one still wonders what happens next. Does the widow take the cat that ate her husband back home with her? Is the cat killed and buried with the John Mortonson since it has part of him in its stomach? Does the undertaker who originally did such a great job attempt to put John Mortonson’s face back together, and will anyone ever trust him again with a beloved’s body? Are any of these possibilities even feasible?

Bierce forces us to look at the horrific face of death, albeit in sardonic fashion, just as do Poe and Gilman.

Liminality and undeadness thus provide space for fear to fester and for possibilities of meaning to multiply as readers work to address hermeneutic gaps. Further, when absolute meaning cannot be obtained, readers themselves become stuck in the liminal spaces of uncertain interpretations that they struggle to escape. Perhaps what is most horrifying about these stories is precisely the questions they leave unanswered and the openings they leave for the readers to address. Just as Egæus cannot resist pulling out all thirty-two of Berenice's teeth, readers might not be able to stop reflexively thinking she would have been better off dead and then probably recoiling from this thought, pulling out, as it were, the root of evil in the text. Similarly, when considering "The Giant Wistaria," readers are able to immediately come up with multiple versions of how the young mother and her child could have died and then, perhaps, be horrified at themselves for being able so quickly to do so, suggesting their world and that of one hundred years ago might not be so different. Readers picture John Mortonson's half-eaten face as they piece together why the widow fainted and the cat has a crimson muzzle. Bierce insists on unmasking Death's horror, no matter how hard we try to veil it from ourselves. These authors create horror by leaving it to their readers to piece together stories and generate disturbing conclusions, making readers consider, whether they like it or not, how horrifying it can be when a body just will not die and stay buried.

Conclusion

In "The Premature Burial," Poe writes, "The boundaries which divide Life from Death, are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?"

(256). Dead bodies, bodies that appear dead but actually are not, and living bodies in spaces meant for the dead bother us profoundly. The claustrophobic enclosure that accompanies death and entombment is intensely unsettling. Confinements are ubiquitous in Gothic literature, and their failure frightens just as much as their success. Berenice climbing out of her grave, Gilman's narrator haunting the scene of her death as a ghost, and Bierce's cat leaping from his owner's coffin after feasting on his body all elicit a deep unease: things are not as they should be, death is not clearly defined, and the dead and undead are not properly contained and separated. These stories exploit anxieties about death and burial, and, even more so, the uncomfortably unclear line between life and death. As rituals and expectations surrounding death are upset, an undead liminality takes hold and refuses to end—a postliminal state is never achieved. With the intended comfort from rituals removed, Gothic horror grows and eliminates any sense of control, however false, one might have about his or her own existence and mortality.

Fears surrounding death and burial are by no means limited to the nineteenth century. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how undeadness moves between certain American authors in different regions from earlier to later in the nineteenth century, but this same undeadness also permeates other times and places in different ways. Indeed, bodies that refuse to stay buried continue resurfacing in modern horror. Jason Voorhees dies and comes back over and over again in the *Friday the 13th* series (1980-2009), perhaps most notably in *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives* (1986), when his body is dug up from its grave and impaled with a piece of cemetery fence that gets struck by lightning and thus brings him back to life in a manner reminiscent to the use of electricity in various conceptions of *Frankenstein* following Mary Shelley's original.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ It is worth noting that in Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein specifically does not explain how exactly he created the monster: "I see by your eagerness and the wonder and hope

The haunting in *The Poltergeist* (1982) (at least the original, as the sequels seem to suggest another cause) occurs because of a disturbed cemetery under the family's home, and one of the most horrifying scenes is arguably when Dana struggles to get out of the dig site for her family's backyard pool that is quickly filling with rainwater, mud, and half-decomposed corpses emerging from their newly-surfaced coffins. Bodies emerging from their graves continue to shock, horrify, and disgust audiences, preying on fears regarding the uncertainty of the distinction between life and death.

In this chapter, I have argued that spaces meant for the dead—graves, tombs, coffins, and so forth—become liminal spaces when they fail to successfully confine the bodies within them. This liminality, in turn, calls into question clear distinctions between states of life and death and contributes to the ambiguity on which these stories (and, indeed, the Gothic genre as a whole) depend. I have linked historical contexts such as medical research, coffin patents, and real-life anxieties to fictional horrors all related to the transgression of the boundaries of the grave. In doing so, I have demonstrated how three canonical American authors, spanning from earlier to later in the nineteenth century, manipulate the Gothic trope of confinement in their presentations of undead bodies. This chapter contributes to the larger argument of this dissertation—that physical confinements, a recurring trope in Gothic works, function as liminal spaces that build the ambiguity and uncertainty necessary for the genre to function as intended. The following

which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject” (54). There are, however, key scenes with lightning strikes and storms, and he has an interest in galvanism. This perhaps led to the explicit use of electricity in bringing the monster to life in versions such as James Whale's well-known *Frankenstein* (1931) film. Other iterations of the monster appearing in media from Mel Brooks's parody *Young Frankenstein* (1974) to Showtime's *Penny Dreadful* series (2014-2016) similarly rely on lightning strikes in the creation process.

chapter similarly deals with the (un)dead, but in a different confining space: the haunted house. Here, again, the Gothic provides a location-specific horror that depends upon the ambiguities and uncertainties regarding states of life and death.

CHAPTER THREE

The Ghost in the Window: Locking Out Spirits in *Wuthering Heights*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and “The Old Nurse’s Story”

“As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child’s face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes: still it wailed, “Let me in!” and maintained its tenacious gripe [sic], almost maddening me with fear.” (Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 21)

Ghosts are inherently liminal figures, residing in the realm between life and death. Ghosts are no longer confined by their physical bodies (and often, as we have seen in the previous chapter, they refuse to stay confined in their graves), but they remain on earth. Nevertheless, they are confined in several other senses, stuck between life and death, heaven (or hell?) and earth, and, usually (and key here), bound to a physical location. While other menaces are often depicted as external—we can lock the door to keep out the werewolves, axe murderers, and other monsters—as figures that haunt others, ghosts are different. They are typically linked to a physical place, often trapped inside the house or other edifice that they haunt. They usually have a particular connection to that location; perhaps it is where they died or where their remains are not properly buried. Most frighteningly, they often are already inside.

The threshold between inside and outside is important in Gothic texts. These physical divisions form boundaries where definitions mix and realities change. To explore this idea, in this chapter I focus on three key scenes from Gothic texts: the ghosts at the windows in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Old Nurse’s Story” (1852). I do this for two reasons. First, focusing on the window narrows down a specific form of threshold, and discussing more than one locale would be beyond the scope of this chapter. Second, I find these particular examples interesting because

the ghosts occupy unusual physical locations: they are outside of a window rather than inside the house. They have flipped the expectation I previously mentioned. The ghost of Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* goes as far as to entreat “Let me in—let me in!” (20), indicating her desire to cross the threshold of the window and come inside the house. As I will argue, the threshold of the window functions as a liminal space where the undead interact with the living, eliciting horror due to the confusion of boundary stability at this location.

Windows are interesting structures in that one can look through them, out of them, into them, but also one can see a reflection in them. They can show the outside and inside at the same time. They are boundaries in that they form part of the structure separating outside from inside, but they are transparent and serve the purpose of letting in light and sometimes being opened to allow air to circulate. Windows are thus a sort of semipermeable membrane, as they function as a boundary but also a passage. Windows also provide view: they allow those inside to look out and sometimes, as we will see in the examples I discuss, allow those outside to look in. Again, they separate the realm of inside from outside, as in these cases the ghost outside the window interacts with a character inside the house, but this cross-window interaction also threatens the boundaries between inside and outside, life and death, natural and supernatural, and human and ghost.

In this chapter, I begin by defining my focus on the haunted house as a confining Gothic space. I briefly outline previous connections between Brontë, James, and Gaskell in order to highlight my critical intervention. I then examine each of these three stories and their hauntings, specifically focusing on the figure of the ghost at the window. I analyze ghosts as liminal figures stuck between states of life and death and examine the window as a critical threshold. Finally, I discuss the ultimate ambiguities inherent in each of these stories due to their framing, connect their form to the symbol of the window, and demonstrate how these elements fit into my overall

argument in this dissertation that these confining spaces function as liminal spaces that prompt a search for understanding, creating a Gothic experience for both characters and readers. I argue that the ghostly confinements evident in these window scenes function as liminal spaces, and this liminality builds a Gothic effect for readers as they struggle to make sense of uncertainties in the works. In the same way that the ghosts stay slightly removed from the characters with whom they interact, the meaning in these narratives remains removed from its readers; we can glimpse its shadow lurking in the edge of the woods, but when we walk outside to get a closer look, it disappears.

Locking Down the Haunted House

There are such a variety of haunted houses and ghosts that a bit of definition and specification is necessary. The most simple form, perhaps, is the haunted house inhabited by the ghost or ghosts of previous occupants, usually due to some sort of unfinished business such as unburied remains (as was the case with the Bleeding Nun from *The Monk* mentioned in Chapter 1 and the ghost in “The Giant Wistaria” in the previous chapter), or, perhaps, an ancestral curse or prophecy (such as in *The Castle of Otranto*). In these cases, ghosts exist as a response to something that happened in their lives or is happening currently on the property. They can be positive or negative forces, but they have an agenda—wanting their remains properly buried, their story told, or inheritances corrected. In another form of haunted house stories, there is something strange about the house itself that lends itself to haunting: the physical structure is the menace and contains some sort of power. There are not even necessarily ghosts in these types of stories, as the supernatural evil comes from the edifice itself. This type is more common in more

recent haunted house stories with places becoming terrifying because of the power inherently present—houses such as Hill House and the Amityville house.⁷⁹

This chapter bridges this gap in many ways by focusing on the former type of ghost story while keeping in mind the importance of the physical haunted house. In *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Culture* (1999), Dale Bailey distinguishes modern haunted house stories from psychological ghost stories such as those by Henry James and Edith Wharton. Bailey, and other critics, tends to assign the marker “psychological” to these ghost stories in opposition to “physical” for haunted house stories. Ghost stories are ambiguous while haunted house stories are supernatural. The former have “psychological ambiguity” while the latter have “visceral physicality” (Bailey 21). In this chapter, I argue for a slightly new angle. I focus on the physical in what Bailey and others would call the psychological ghost story. Bailey’s ghost story versus haunted house distinction hinges on what is supernatural, the house or the ghosts, and this leads him to claim that Bly, for example, “is of secondary importance” to the ghosts themselves in *The Turn of the Screw* (21). Certainly some haunted houses are more evil than others; Shirley Jackson’s Hill House and Stephen King’s Overlook Hotel loom over us inherently more sinister than Hawthorne’s House of Seven Gables or Toni Morrison’s 124, but I would not necessarily want to spend the night in any of them.

Ultimately, though, I disagree with Bailey’s assertion of the unimportance of Bly and other haunted houses in “psychological ghost stories.” I think the house, the physicality, the

⁷⁹ Bailey focuses *American Nightmares* (1999) on this phenomenon. I would add, though, that haunted places rather than always haunting people are also evident in some earlier literature. Emma Frances Dawson’s “An Itinerant House” (1896), for example, features a cursed boarding house that follows characters from place to place, ultimately causing their deaths. Dara Downey calls this house “terrifying precisely because it is *not* inhabited by a ghost” (*American Women’s Ghost Stories* 89).

location of the haunting, is key. Yes, there is ambiguity about events and interpretations of these events, but I argue that the effectiveness of the haunted house as a confining Gothic space actually depends on this ambiguity. The ghosts existing at Bly would not be found anywhere else. The governess could leave Bly and no longer see them. Indeed, Flora is sent away and presumed to be safe. Catherine appears outside the window of her room at Wuthering Heights, not at Thrushcross Grange, the other main setting of the novel, or even elsewhere in the house. Physical location is, then, key in hauntings.

Henry James himself makes an interestingly similar point about distinctions between physical and psychological ghost stories. In his 1908 Preface to the New York edition of *The Turn of the Screw*, he explains his own interpretation of the work. He describes the “starting-point” of the story—a winter afternoon’s fireside discussion about the lack of good ghost stories:

The good, the really effective and heart-shaking ghost-stories (roughly so to term them) appeared to all have been told, and neither new crop nor new type in any quarter awaited us. The new type indeed, the mere modern “psychical” case, washed clean of all queerness as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap, and equipped with credentials vouching for this—the new type clearly promised little, for the more it was respectably certified the less it seemed of a nature to rouse the dear old sacred terror. (“Preface” 226)

The “psychical” cases that James mentions here refer to those treated by the Society for Psychical Research, an organization formed in the United Kingdom in 1882 that scientifically investigates psychical or supernatural phenomena such as reports of ghosts.⁸⁰ This organization was partially a response to the rise of spiritualism in both America and the United Kingdom.

⁸⁰ Its American counterpart was formed in 1885, and Henry James’s brother William was a founding member (Elbert and Ryden 45).

Interest in science and the paranormal both coincided in this society's research and, more broadly, in what Monika Elbert and Wendy Ryden call "the impulse to study and catalogue ghostly and other supernatural phenomena as subjects of scientific investigation" (45). While James is often accused of writing "psychological" ghost stories, as I mentioned above, he apparently did not think of them as "psychical." This corresponds with my own focus in this chapter, as I focus on the physical manifestations of ghosts and the spaces they inhabit in my aim to demonstrate the value of analyzing the physical aspects of what are generally viewed as psychological tales.

Authorial Connections

In a brief article from 1961, Miriam Allott connects the three texts under study, claiming that *Wuthering Heights* influenced "The Old Nurse's Story," which, in turn, influenced *The Turn of the Screw*. She briefly mentions historical evidence: Gaskell obviously read *Wuthering Heights*,⁸¹ and James was familiar with Gaskell's work.⁸² Allot then links common elements of the stories. "The Old Nurse's Story" and *Wuthering Heights* share a child ghost crying at a window, branches scratching a house, and the more general themes of "pain," "savagery," and "wildness" (102). "The Old Nurse's Story" and *The Turn of the Screw*, in turn, share a governess's struggle for the soul of a child lured by ghosts, including her physically grappling with the child in a climactic scene, and both were stories for Christmas entertainment.⁸³ Allott

⁸¹ Allott provides evidence that Charlotte Brontë sent Gaskell a copy of the novel in 1850.

⁸² She mentions his review of *Wives and Daughters* discussed below.

⁸³ Interestingly, both *The Turn of the Screw* and "The Old Nurse's Story" are Christmas ghost stories, part of an old tradition that has fallen out of practice. Indeed, perhaps one of the most well-know Christmas stories, Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), is, in fact, a ghost story.

treats “The Old Nurse’s Story” solely as a link between *Wuthering Heights* and *The Turn of the Screw*, not mentioning any connections these two works might otherwise share. Interestingly, I came to select this collection of texts for this chapter in the reverse manner, first seeing similarities between Brontë’s and James’s ghosts in windows and then discovering Gaskell’s similar tale. I thus view the three as a more interconnected triangle rather than reflecting Allott’s linear model that keeps Brontë and James separated.

James’s familiarity with the Brontës’ work is well documented, and I shall not recount it here.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, aside from Allott’s article, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Turn of the Screw* have not often been linked in previous criticism. Clayton Carlyle Tarr’s *Gothic Stories Within Stories: Frame Narratives and Realism in the Genre, 1790-1900* (2017) discusses both novels, but separately. Interestingly, critics tend to link Henry James’s work with work by Charlotte and Anne rather than Emily. A notable number of critics have linked *The Turn of the Screw* to *Jane Eyre* (1847), mainly because of their depictions of an isolated governess infatuated with a master and plagued by some secret. Leon Edel refers to James’s story as “in the Brontë tradition” (433),

James wrote *The Turn of the Screw* for a Christmas installment of *Collier’s Weekly*. Additionally, in the frame story, people are telling ghost stories at the fireside “on Christmas Eve in an old house,” and Douglas’s tale of the governess at Bly is one of these (1). “The Old Nurse’s Story” was published in Dickens’s 1852 Christmas edition of *Household Words* as a portion of a section called “A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire.” Within the text, the critical ghost in the window scene that I discuss in this chapter occurs “not long before Christmas-day” (24). *Wuthering Heights* was not published at Christmastime, but Nelly’s storytelling to Lockwood begins by the fire at some point in November and continues until the second week of January, for the duration of his winter illness.

⁸⁴ James demonstrates his knowledge of the Brontës by referring to the sisters and their works in various reviews and autobiographical writing. See, for one example among many, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), where he describes Anne King as reminiscent of “some employed little Brontë heroine[.]—though more indeed a Lucy Snowe than a Jane Eyre, and with no shade of a Brontë hero within sight” (311).

and various other critics have made versions of the same claim.⁸⁵ Interestingly, Alice Hall Petry reads *The Turn of the Screw* as a parody of *Jane Eyre*. She claims that James's governess "has been unduly influenced by her reading of one of the most popular books of the nineteenth century, *Jane Eyre*; more specifically, . . . the tragic events which occur at Bly are the direct result of her perceptions of herself, her employer, her situation, and of Bly itself having been hopelessly distorted by her pathetic attempt to emulate Charlotte Brontë's famous heroine" (61). Jacqueline Banerjee accepts the "specific and obvious references to *Jane Eyre*" but argues that behind these lurk connections with the work of another Brontë sister: Anne Brontë's novel about a governess, *Agnes Grey* (1847) (533). I find the links between *The Turn of the Screw* and *Jane Eyre*, and even *Agnes Grey*, compelling, but I think that there is a previously unexplored connection between James's novella and Emily Brontë's novel in terms of isolated narrators experiencing ghosts at windows in child-related hauntings.

Similarly, Gaskell is well known as the personal friend and eventual biographer of Charlotte Brontë and, as such, rather intimately familiar with the Brontë family.⁸⁶ Accordingly, her work has frequently been linked to Charlotte's but, strangely, not with that of the other Brontë sisters. In one exception, Jean Fernandez devotes a chapter of *Victorian Servants, Class, and the Politics of Literacy* (2010) to *Wuthering Heights* and "The Old Nurse's Story," where she explores "the embourgeoisement of the serving classes" as illustrated by Nelly Dean and Hester (54). James was also familiar with Gaskell's work, as evinced by his review of her novel

⁸⁵ See also, for example, Adeline R. Tinter's "Henry James's use of 'Jane Eyre' in 'The Turn of the Screw,'" Millicent Bell's chapter "The Turn of the Screw" in *Meaning in Henry James*, Oscar Cargill's "*The Turn of the Screw* and Alice James," and Max Duperray's "*Déjà Vu*" in "The Turn of the Screw."

⁸⁶ See *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), published two years after her death. It is worth noting that many, including James, have questioned the accuracy of Gaskell's depiction of Charlotte and her family members.

Wives and Daughters (1866) that mentions several other works, including her biography of Charlotte Brontë, which he critiques as one of “several little literary indiscretions” (“Mrs. Gaskell” 155).

Aside from Miriam Allott’s two-page article in 1961, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and “The Old Nurse’s Story” have not been discussed together, and as I have just demonstrated, links between James, Gaskell, and this particular Brontë sister are also lacking. It is therefore a partial goal of this chapter to address this gap in critical commentary.

Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*

I want to focus on the scene from *Wuthering Heights* that I included as this chapter’s epigraph, which scene might be the most gruesome in the novel. It is disturbing, violent, bloody, and both literally and figuratively haunting. At this point in the novel, Lockwood has walked over to visit Wuthering Heights and needs to spend the night due to a snowstorm. Zillah puts him in a room that she notes Heathcliff does not let people use, and she also mentions “so many queer goings on” (15) that prevent her from knowing exactly why. Besides this general strangeness, the room is also odd inside, with “a large oak case, with squares cut out near the top, resembling coach windows” (15), containing “a singular sort of old-fashioned couch” (15) and a window with a ledge containing “a few mildewed books” and covered in scratches which read “*Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*” (15-16). This odd box is Lockwood’s bed for the night. We thus begin with an enclosed setting wherein things and boundaries are not quite clearly defined. Lockwood discovers that he is going to spend the night in a bed that is not quite a bed; it is, instead, an old-fashioned couch in a closet that looks like a coach, and there is a window inside this box.

In Catherine's books/diaries on the ledge of this window, we first see the overlapping of past and present, or, in this case, past and further past. She has created a palimpsest: "Catherine's library was select, and its state of dilapidation proved it to have been well used, though not all together for a legitimate purpose; scarcely one chapter had escaped a pen and ink commentary—at least, the appearance of one—covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left" (16). She has used the blank spaces in her books for notes, doodles, and diary accounts of her days. There is one layer of unidentified text—Lockwood distinguishes one book as "a Testament, in lean type" (16), and another apparently contains a sermon, but the others are unnamed. The printed text is superimposed with Catherine's "unformed, childish hand" (16) recounting specifics of an unpleasant childhood Sunday. At the time of her writing, her present overlaps with the past of the book's text. At the time of Lockwood's reading, both texts are overlapping pasts that he works to understand.

This overlapping of times and texts continues outside of the books and on the furniture: "The ledge, where I placed my candle . . . was covered with writing scratched on the paint. This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small—*Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*" (15-16). Catherine has here inscribed her own multiple potential identities into the physical structure of her window ledge. These scratches were made in the past, possibly at the same time she wrote her diary entries as marginalia, but they represent future potential Catherines—perhaps Catherine Earnshaw if she does not marry, Catherine Heathcliff or

Catherine Linton if she marries Heathcliff or Edgar.⁸⁷ Catherine has thus carved her liminal potentialities into her window ledge, marking down potential postliminal states.

Ghost Catherine appears in Lockwood's second dream of the night. He hears a tree branch scratching the window next to him, and he tries to open the window to make the noise stop. However, "[t]he hook was soldered into the staple" (20), which prohibits him from doing so. Discovering this, or rather, remembering that he discovered this when awake, Lockwood resolves to stop the noise regardless of this barrier and "knock[s] [his] knuckles through the glass," a rather surprising act of property destruction by our narrator (20). Lockwood has thus encountered a blocked barrier—the window should form part of the boundaries of the box/coach/bed/closet thing in which he sleeps—but he transgresses it. The proper way to open it is soldered shut, so he moves through it improperly, shoving his hand *through* the glass in order to reach outside his bed, his room, and the larger construction of Wuthering Heights.

So far we have encountered several things that are strange and unexpected, or somehow do not function as they should—a bed in a closet that looks like a coach and a window that does not open. The most shocking and unexpected discovery comes next, as Lockwood reaches out to grab the tree branch that has been scratching the window and disturbing him, but he touches something unexpectedly human instead, as he grabs what he identifies as "the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand" (20). There are several layers of confusion here: not only is the tree branch actually a child's hand, but it is a hand that is not quite right—it is ice cold. The scratching thing quickly moves from the realm of inanimate object to living thing to thing-that-should-be-living but is not—the apparently dead hand of a child that is somehow still animate. These fluctuating

⁸⁷ At this time, readers do not know that Catherine married Edgar Linton. The only Catherine in the text at this point is her daughter, who Lockwood (and, by extension, the reader) knows only as Mrs. Heathcliff.

and confusing definitions demonstrate the heightened sense of liminalities in this confining Gothic space and enhance the terror for both Lockwood and the reader.

Expectations continue to be upset as ghost Catherine wants to transgress the same boundary that Lockwood already has and come inside *Wuthering Heights* through the window he has broken. However, he violently denies her, actually using the window boundary as a weapon: “Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes: still it wailed, ‘Let me in!’ and maintained its tenacious gripe [sic], almost maddening me with fear” (20-21). Again, expectations are upset: the ghost strangely has a physical presence, and she even bleeds.

Simon Avery calls Lockwood’s actions in this scene “arguably the most violent and sickening act in the novel” (129). Our bumbling, timid narrator, here commits the “most violent and sickening act,” a superlative we would assume would be reserved for a character known to be volatile, violent, and abusive, such as Heathcliff or even Hindley. But what makes it so? Is it the bloodiness? The fact that the ghost is a child? Somewhat similarly, Ian M. Emberson calls Lockwood’s dream—and by extension, his actions therein—“one of the most terrifying passages in English literature” (234). I argue that the layers of liminality experienced here contribute to the shock and horror elicited by this event. Lockwood and Catherine’s interaction marks a physical grappling of two confined, liminal figures over the boundary separating the inside and outside of the house and separating the realm of the living from that of the dead. As child-ghost and human violently collide, the instability of definitions and understanding becomes apparent.

Ghost Catherine is a remarkably liminal figure in her ghostliness, for lack of a better word. As a ghost, she is confined between life and death. In this scene, we can see past and

present overlap, as the child version of an adult who died twenty years previously physically grapples with Lockwood, a newcomer to the house. Additionally, the form she takes and the name by which she identifies herself also demonstrate her liminal status. As Amy Billone points out, “Although Catherine returns to childhood at the end of her life, she does not tell Lockwood her name is ‘Catherine Earnshaw,’ as it *was* when she was a child, but ‘Catherine Linton,’ which is her name only after childhood has been lost due to marriage” (Billone 27). Even Lockwood questions her name—she identifies herself as “Catherine Linton” (Brontë 20), and he wonders, “why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton” (20). Additionally, she’s a child. Nelly later tells him Mrs. Heathcliff was originally Catherine Linton, but this does not affect Lockwood’s interpretation: “But a minute’s reflection convinced me it was not my ghostly Catherine” (27).

Let us take a moment to break down the different names of our two Catherines in this novel: First-generation Catherine was originally Catherine Earnshaw, and she became Catherine Linton in marriage. Second-generation Cathy was originally Catherine Linton, and she became Catherine Heathcliff in marriage, and at the end of the novel, she is set to become Catherine Earnshaw—Catherine Linton Heathcliff Earnshaw, possibly, if she keeps all of her previous names. So, both Catherines are Catherine Linton at some point—the older has that as her married name, and the younger as her maiden name—but the one who was Catherine Linton as a child is *not* the one Lockwood identifies as the ghost at the window. This somewhat makes sense because younger Cathy is still alive, sleeping in some other part of the house at this point, and one probably needs to be dead to become a ghost. But it also calls into question why the ghost identifies herself with Catherine’s adult, married name but appears in her child form. As not just a ghost but a ghost in child form with her adult name, Catherine avoids clear definitions.

As I stress throughout this chapter, location is also key here. As I previously mentioned, this particular ghost would not be encountered at Thrushcross Grange; Lockwood runs no risk of her showing up outside his bedroom window there, even though it is where she spent her adult life and even died. It is not the haunted location. Still, outside the window of her childhood room is an interesting and somewhat odd location for a ghost, which we typically think of as inhabiting houses which are then marked as haunted. Instead of being confined inside a haunted house, Catherine is stuck right outside of it, desperately trying to gain entry.

The window here serves not only as a physical boundary of the house but also as a boundary between humanity and the “other.” In Dorothy Van Ghent’s words, “The treachery of the window is that Catherine, lost now in the ‘other,’ can look through the transparent membrane that separates her from humanity, can scratch on the pane, but cannot get ‘in,’ while Heathcliff, though he forces the window open and howls into the night, cannot get ‘out’” (162). Viewed in this way, the window’s transparency is taunting, showing Catherine an inside she cannot access as a ghost, though she certainly grabs Lockwood’s arm in a valiant attempt. And as Van Ghent points out, Heathcliff also attempts to transgress this boundary by opening the window to let Catherine inside: “He got on to the bed and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. ‘Come in! come in!’ he sobbed” (Brontë 23). He also fails, confined to the world of the living as he is at this time.

In this scene, we have, then, two confined characters, Catherine and Lockwood, interacting across a dangerous threshold—the sharp, broken window. Lockwood is confined at Wuthering Heights for the night because of the weather (and the dogs that attacked him), confined in a room that they do not use, and, further, in a bed/box/coach/closet-like apparatus in that room. However, as soon as he transgresses this confinement by basically putting his fist

through the window in annoyance, he encounters the supernatural, the uncanny, the spectral. He then attempts to recreate his boundaries, shoving books in front of the hole he has created to block out the ghost. Ghost Catherine, similarly, is trapped in the space between life and death, and physically confined, it seems, to the moors where she has been wandering for twenty years, attempting to gain entry back into Wuthering Heights. Though she is outside, she is still physically bound: she appears at her old window and is linked to Wuthering Heights and its surrounding grounds. She is also confined, oddly, in her childhood body but with her adult name. These confinements, both physical and temporal, I argue, serve as liminal spaces, and this liminality enhances the horror or terror inspired in the reader. We are not quite sure how to define various aspects of this scene, from the bed that is not quite a bed to the ghost with blurred and complicated identities, and the struggle to make sense of it all is profoundly uncomfortable.

Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*

For the next ghost-in-the-window scene, we will move away from Wuthering Heights and briefly visit Bly, the country manor in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. In this section, I focus on the scene in which the infamous governess sees the ghost of Peter Quint for the second time, looking through a window in the dining room. She walks into the house to retrieve her gloves for church, and she sees that there is "a person on the other side of the window and looking straight in" (19). She realizes that he is the same person she previously saw once before, although she does not know him as Peter Quint yet. She remembers, "He was the same—he was the same, and seen, this time, as he had been seen before, from the waist up, the window, though the dining-room was on the ground floor, not going down to the terrace on which he stood. His face was close to the glass, yet the effect of this better view was, strangely, just to show me how

intense the former had been” (20). Here, once again, the narrator (and living character) is inside, the ghost is outside, and a window divides them. As in *Wuthering Heights*, the window serves as a barrier separating the natural from the supernatural, human from ghost, and present from past.

There is a key difference in this scene, however, as the ghost does not attempt to transgress the boundary of the window as Catherine does in *Wuthering Heights*. The governess recounts that “his stare into my face, through the glass and across the room, was as deep and hard as then, but it quitted me for a moment during which I could still watch it, see it fix successively several other things. On the spot there came to me the added shock of a certitude that it was not for me he had come. He had come for some one else” (20). He is looking, then, for something or someone instead of wanting to gain entrance. While Ghost Catherine is clear about what she wants, Peter Quint seems to still be searching. Catherine and Lockwood physically grapple, while the governess and Quint lock eyes. In this instance, then, the supernatural figure does not transgress or attempt to transgress the boundary of the window, but the living person does, as I discuss later. The governess, then, is the active agent as she moves outside of the room to where she sees the ghost, and this action, among others, links the governess to the ghosts and highlights the confusing nature of her relationship with them.

Interestingly, the governess—and, by extension, the reader—does not even know him as Peter Quint at this point. She just sees a person whom she identifies as “[a]n extraordinary man,” “a stranger” (21), “a horror” (22), and decidedly not a gentleman (23). Only after this experience does Mrs. Grose, who did not see the apparition, identify him as Peter Quint (and, thus, as a ghost because Quint, she explains, is dead). This explanation is a marked distinction from the scene in *Wuthering Heights* where Catherine names herself, and his lack of identity further complicates our understanding of the ghost at this point. Since someone else identifies the ghost

as Peter Quint, someone who did not even see it, this identity and name is also strangely uncertain but in a manner slightly different from Catherine's.

It is worth noting that the two main methods of interpreting *The Turn of the Screw*—viewing the ghosts as real or as hallucinations—largely hinge on Mrs. Grose's identification of the ghost as Peter Quint. Edmund Wilson's "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (1934) famously argues that the governess hallucinates the ghosts as a result of her sexual repression. The main rebuttal to this interpretation is Mrs. Grose's identification of the ghost—that is, if the governess hallucinates them, then how does Mrs. Grose identify Quint from her description? Critics have expanded on, explained away, and made more interpretive leaps than could possibly be listed here in order to address these two views of the narrative. I follow Shoshana Felman's famous claim in "Turning the Screw of Interpretation" (1977) against being able to draw a definitive conclusion: "the *reality of the debate*," she claims, "is in fact more significant for the impact of the text than the reality of the ghosts" (98). She suggests the work is a "trap" (185) designed to create this very interpretive confusion in readers. Regardless of this expansive confusion of previous interpretations, the governess clearly thinks she sees the ghosts, whether they are real or not, and the function of the window as a liminal space is my focus here.

As in *Wuthering Heights*, past and present interact in this scene as the governess and Quint function as doubles of each other. The present, living governess looks eyes through the window with the ghost of Peter Quint, a figure from the past. They are both looking for something: in her case, her gloves, and in his case, perhaps Miles. Furthering their connection, the governess physically assumes Quint's position. She transgresses the window boundary, but instead of going through the glass like Lockwood, she runs out the door and around the house to the part of the terrace where she saw Quint standing. It is, of course, empty. She, interestingly,

then assumes the place of the ghost: “It was confusedly present to me that I ought to place myself where he had stood. I did so; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had done, into the room” (20). Doing so, she scares Mrs. Grose, who has just walked into the room: “As if, at this moment, to show me exactly what his range had been, Mrs. Grose, as I had done for himself just before, came in from the hall. With this I had the full image of a repetition of what had already occurred. She saw me as I had seen my own visitant; she pulled up short as I had done; I gave her something of the shock that I had received” (20). Alan Williamson presents this scene as an example of doubling that links the governess and Quint. He notes that Quint’s appearance in the window “suggest[s] a reflected image,” a point supported by the fact that the governess runs outside to stand in the same place and scares Mrs. Grose just as she had been scared (326). Doing so, Williamson claims, the governess “is made to embody the horrifying power in her own person” (326). I agree with Williamson and argue that this scene also demonstrates how past and present overlap, not just in the figure of the ghost intruding into the world of the present but also in the present figure of the governess physically assuming the position, perspective, and even function of the ghost.

Widening our perspective from this scene demonstrates how this same overlapping of time permeates *The Turn of the Screw* in small and large ways. The gloves for which the governess returns, for example, are left in “the ‘grown-up’ dining-room” where the children have tea Sundays. The very space of this ghostly interaction is one marked for adults but used by the children. The governess thinks that Quint—and Miss Jessel, later—is after the children for an unstated purpose. Assuming this is the case, these two figures of the past are not only intruding into the present but also attempting “to get to” (47) Miles and Flora. As living children, Miles and Flora inhabit the present but also represent the future in their potential adulthoods; an

interaction between the ghosts and children would thus upset these bounds of time, and the threat of such an occurrence is at least partially what makes this possibility horrifying. In the outer frame, Douglas introduces this tale by asking, “If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children—?” (1). Ghosts and children are both liminal figures, and their interaction thus seems to heighten a Gothic effect.⁸⁸

The window, nonetheless, still serves as a barrier between the governess and the ghost. In this scene, two confined characters again interact across the threshold of a window, this time with sight rather than physical contact. The governess is, in a way, confined at Bly, strongly discouraged from contacting her employer for any reason. Additionally, the social role of a governess enhances her liminality. Williamson, among others, points out that “the governess is a liminal figure in terms of nineteenth-century social roles . . . [;] her social status was always ambiguous, somewhere in between an equal and a servant” (327). Indeed, as David McWhirter explains, she is “simultaneously a gentle-woman and a servant,” and she is “in charge of children who are socially and, in the case of Miles, sexually, her superiors” (131). Thus her very occupation as governess—which is notably the only title by which she is known—results in the indeterminacy of her social, class, and sexual definitions. The ghost of Peter Quint is also a liminal, confined figure. He is, as ghosts are, stuck between states of life and death and linked

⁸⁸ It is worth noting that the very form of the frame narrative also fosters a sense of overlapping times. While the inner story ends with Miles’s death and an uncertain fate (and mental status) of the governess, we remember that Douglas indicated in the framed opening that everything turned out all right for her. She apparently went on to continue her governess work despite her experiences at Bly, and readers know this before even beginning the inner story. Pollak notes that the governess’s “cultural fate” is curiously ambiguous (12) in that there seems to be no repercussions, at least none of which Douglas and the narrator are aware, for the events of the inner narrative. Indeed, Pollak notes, “For a story with such an elaborate preamble, the conclusion is remarkably absent” (12). However, while the story does not close its frame by circling back to the present, the knowledge provided in the opening frame remains important to all potential understandings of the story, and thus the present permeates the telling of the past.

physically, we can assume, to Bly. Neither a governess nor a ghost has any possibility of assuming a stable identity, as both are fundamentally liminal positions. Again, we are not sure how to define various aspects of this scene or the figures within it, and the liminality inherent in this location, these characters, and this interaction builds the uncertainty, and by extension, the horror of both the governess and the reader.

Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story"

Finally, we will move from Bly to Furnivall Manor House, the setting for the majority of Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story," for our third and last ghost in the window. The nurse-maid Hester is playing with her charge, Rosamond, when a ghost child appears at the window. Rosamond points her out, as she has seen her before: "Look, Hester! look! there is my poor little girl out in the snow!" (24). In this case, more than one character sees the ghost,⁸⁹ and Hester has no issue perceiving "a little girl, less than my Miss Rosamond—dressed all unfit to be out-of-doors such a bitter night—crying, and beating against the window-panes, as if she wanted to be let in" (24). As Allott noted, this image of a distressed child attempting to gain entrance at a window is certainly reminiscent of the scene from *Wuthering Heights*.

Once more, living characters are inside and the ghost is outside as a window divides the living from the undead and past from present. Rosamond, like Heathcliff, feels sympathy for the ghost, and she rushes to open the door and help the ghost transgress the barrier of the house. However, Hester prevents her from doing so because she recognizes the strangeness of the situation—a supernatural organ peal startles her into realizing that she "had heard no sound of

⁸⁹ This was apparently a contentious point between Gaskell and Dickens, as Dickens thought only Rosamond should be able to see the ghosts (Uglow 307).

little battering hands upon the window-glass, although the phantom child had seemed to put forth all its force; and, although I had seen it wail and cry, no faintest touch of sound had fallen upon my ears” (24). These uncanny noises and the lack thereof—a sound that should not exist coming from a broken organ and sounds that should exist but do not not coming from the ghost child—heighten the strangeness of the situation, and as in *Wuthering Heights*, things are not functioning as they should because of the supernatural bleeding into the natural world.

In this particular scene, the attempted boundary transgression is from the outside to the inside. It is worth noting, though, that when Rosamond saw the ghost previously, the transgression worked in the opposite direction. The ghost child beckoned to Rosamond through the window and lured her out into the snow where she almost froze to death (22). The ghost’s ultimate goal here, then, remains unclear; she potentially wants to kill Rosamond, but she also seems to want to gain entry to what we discover was once her house before she and her mother were evicted and she froze to death in the snow.⁹⁰ Carol A. Martin claims that “this phantom child seeks to re-enact Grace Furnivall’s betrayal of her sister by luring the innocent Rosamond out to become another victim” (35), which seems to be true in their first interaction but becomes more questionable in the second. So, while Catherine wants to regain her childhood room (and perhaps her childhood more generally, considering the form she takes) and Peter Quint searches for Miles for some ambiguous reason (at least, that is what the governess decides), this ghost child seems both dangerous and pathetic, potentially deadly in her first interaction with

⁹⁰ The coldness is another similarity between “The Old Nurse’s Story” and *Wuthering Heights*, though Catherine does not remark upon it bothering her like Rosamond assumes it does the ghost child. We do, however, remember that the reason Lockwood sleeps in this strange room at *Wuthering Heights* in the first place is because of a snowstorm. Kate Bush’s 1978 pop song about the novel fixates on the assumed cold, repeating: “Heathcliff, it’s me, I’m Cathy / I’ve come home, I’m so cold / Let me in through your window.”

Rosamond but also potentially, judging from the end of the narrative, only wanting her story told.

The telling of the story, the reenactment of the key scene that led to the ghost child's death, occurs at the end of the narrative as the past visually overlaps onto the present in a blurring of temporal boundaries such as those discussed previously in this chapter. The current inhabitants of Furnivall Manor House witness a spectral reenactment by the previous inhabitants. Not just the ghost child but also her mother, aunt, and grandfather reappear, and the grandfather strikes the child as he did in life. Importantly, Miss Furnivall appears twice in this scene: as her present form as an old woman and as she was at the time of this occurrence as a beautiful yet hateful young woman. There is a key distinction between the behaviors of the two Miss Furnivalls. The young, ghostly Miss Furnivall stands by with "triumphant scorn," as her machinations ultimately led to this event (31). The old Miss Furnivall, conversely, begs her ghost-father to "spare the little innocent child!" (31), but to no avail, and she collapses on the floor as the scene climaxes.⁹¹ Past and present clearly overlap here as a present living character exists alongside a spectral version⁹² of her previous self and attempts to interact with the ghost of her father in an unsuccessful attempt to change the past and atone for her previous actions.

Like the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, this nurse-maid also occupies a liminal social position.⁹³ Hester certainly feels more at home with the servants than with Miss Furnivall

⁹¹ She does not die yet, but her "death-stricken" collapse in many ways resembles Miles's death at the culmination of *The Turn of the Screw* (31).

⁹² I hesitate to call her a ghost, as one would seemingly need to be dead to be a ghost as I have previously defined it. However, this uncertainty of terminology highlights the liminality in this scene and the troubles one faces with clearly defining the figures interacting between the realms of past and present.

⁹³ Interestingly, Jean Fernandez positions Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights* as a liminal figure much, I argue, like Hester and the governess: "Benign or malevolent, honest or secretive,

and her companion, Mrs. Stark, but she remains mindful of the hierarchy among them. When trying to find out information about a broken organ, she meets resistance from servants James and Dorothy, so she asks Agnes, the kitchen-maid, instead: “So then I tried Agnes, though I had always held my head rather above her, as I was evened to James and Dorothy, and she was little better than their servant” (18). Additionally, Hester is confined to this location if she wants to help Rosamond. When she considers taking her charge and leaving for the safety of her father’s house, Dorothy reminds her, “she was my lord’s ward, and I had no right over her” (25). She, much like James’s governess, devotes herself to protecting Rosamond even if it means also enduring a haunting. Hester thus occupies a liminal confinement in her role as nurse-maid and protector at Furnivall Manor House.

The ghost child, of course, is also a liminal, confined figure. She is perpetually trapped in childhood, unable to grow or age, stuck in a sea of future potentialities she will never reach. She, like all ghosts, is trapped between life and death, and seems to be possibly revisiting or reliving the scenario of her own death because of her appearance in the snow. She is thus trapped in time as well as space, walking the grounds and re-experiencing the environment of her last hours alive. Like Catherine, this ghost child is confined outside rather than inside in a reversal of the haunted house expectation. While Catherine seems to want to regain her childhood with entry into Wuthering Heights, this ghost is continuously re-experiencing her death outside of Furnivall Manor House, which event occurred precisely because of her being locked out in the snow where she still remains.

hers is a narrative that could only be produced by the tantalizingly mobile servant who moves both in and out of the family, between public and private spaces of the home, refusing to be located as character” (65).

Thus both Hester and the ghost child both inhabit liminal confinements, and their interaction through the windowpane is a spectral overlapping of past and present, natural and supernatural. The shock and horror of this text, I argue, comes not only from the terrible events that led to the living child's death but also the problems that both characters and readers have making sense of past and present events; here the window in the haunted house functions as a liminal space in which definitions and understandings remain elusive. As in the previously discussed narratives, this window threshold is a key barrier dividing the realm of the living from the dead, serving as a physical wall of both of their confinements and location where things do not function exactly as they should and meanings become confused.

Making Sense of a Frame

All three of the works discussed in this chapter are frame narratives entrenched in ambiguities. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Gothic texts are often narratively framed. The framing of a narrative often serves an important role in that it situates and contextualizes the embedded story. Framing provides perspective, often aligning the reader with the narrator or the narrator's fictional audience. The frames in these three stories, I argue, enhance their Gothic effects. While they situate and contextualize the embedded stories, they also distance the reader, erecting a barrier between the immediate present of the text and the past of the story being told which builds up uncertainties and ambiguities due to the very nature of storytelling.

Wuthering Heights operates on multiple narrative levels. The ultimate outer frame is Lockwood's journal, with entries spanning from 1801 to 1802. While some of what he writes is current, or at least recounted on the day that it happened, the journal format prevents anything from being related *as* it happens and erects a temporal distance between reality, recording, and

reading. Perhaps more importantly, the vast majority of Lockwood's writing is his retelling of the story related to him by Nelly Dean. Arnold Krupat points out the importance of Nelly's voice in the frame: "All of the words not in quotation marks are Lockwood's; even those attributed to Nelly Dean come, finally, from him. But because he claims to pass Nelly's words along mostly as she herself spoke them, and on occasion 'only a little condensed,' we would do well to take Nelly into account as a narrator of the story" (272). To add another level to this narrative layering, in much of what Nelly relates, she uses quotes from other people, even going so far as to imitate Joseph's dialect—and Lockwood recreates all of this in his journal entries.

Additionally, Lockwood's account of Catherine's marginal diary entries provides another level of embedded narrative. Lockwood sets the entire section off with quotation marks, indicating the use of Catherine's words. However, it is highly unlikely that he remembers it verbatim for recording in his own journal the next day. Regardless, Catherine's diary is an interesting embedded narrative as it is a private written text being re-recorded in another private written text. Later, we see a similar occurrence with Isabella's letter to Nelly: Nelly reads from a physical letter in her possession, and Lockwood writes his account from her spoken version rather than copying the letter itself. Catherine's diary and Isabella's letter exist as sub-narratives within the larger text of *Wuthering Heights*, making them both temporary narrators, but with the caveat of speaking through Lockwood (and, in Isabella's case, through Nelly as well).

All of this is to say that readers are pushed to want to make sense of the tale. J. Hillis Miller claims that "Lockwood's 'ejaculation,' as Brontë calls it, when he tries to get back into the Heights a second time, might be taken as an emblem of the situation of the critic of *Wuthering Heights*" (42). The "ejaculation" in question is Lockwood's proclamation, "I don't care—I will get in!" (7), after he has jumped over a locked gate and stands beating upon a locked

door. Miller's link between Lockwood and the reader here is apt, as the work does seem to entice readers who become compelled to "get in" and understand it. I might link this tendency more with Catherine's entreaty—"Let me in—let me in!" (20)—than Lockwood's ejaculation, though, as Lockwood successfully gains entry while Catherine is ultimately repelled.

The Turn of the Screw is also a frame story with several levels of narrative.⁹⁴ It opens, as previously mentioned, with a group of people trading ghost stories around a fire on Christmas Eve. The first-person narrator recounts that a person named Douglas decides to tell what he considers a better story than the one just told. Importantly, Douglas does not recount this ghost story from memory but sends for the written version of it, which he claims his sister's past governess told him orally and later wrote down, both long after the time of the events. Thus we begin with three narrators—the first-person narrator who then describes Douglas as narrator reading the story written by the governess as narrator. Before Douglas's death, presumably many years later, he gives this manuscript to the frame narrator. Thus the version of the story that readers encounter is a copy of this manuscript, not Douglas's oral version: "Let me say here distinctly, to have done with it, that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own made much later, is what I shall presently give" (4). This allows less room for potential narrative embellishment on the part of the frame narrator or Douglas, but still erects layers of time and texts between the events themselves and this telling of them, distancing the reality from the story and building potential confusion, unreliability, and ambiguity.

⁹⁴ In addition to the intratextual levels I discuss here, Pollak argues that James's preface adds another layer to the framing of this narrative: "Like James's other statements of authorial intention, the prefaces deepen though they do not solve the mystery of the Governess's history and motivation. . . . James was determined to thwart ready access to the secrets at Bly, and he succeeded" (13).

Like *Wuthering Heights* and *The Turn of the Screw*, “The Old Nurse’s Story” is also a frame story. The narrative begins, “You know, my dears, that your mother was an orphan, and an only child” (11) and continues with the nurse as narrator telling the children a story of their mother’s childhood. The beginning of the story contains interjections reminding the reader of this, such as the narrator remarking, “I see you don’t care so much for this part of my story” (11), but this tendency tapers off by the end. Vicky Simpson argues that this story “may be read as a metafictional exploration of the ghost story form” because of the way that it is “self-reflexively framed *as a tale*” (86). The ghosts, she highlights, are “initially presented as entertainment,” and Hester assumes the role of both “imaginative storyteller” and “entertainer” (87). It is also important that though Hester is the narrator in “The Old Nurse’s Story,” much of the narrative is pieced together from the stories of others, not her own direct experience, such as the family history she gets from Dorothy, who, in turn, heard it from townspeople.

Wuthering Heights and *The Turn of the Screw* similarly call attention to themselves as entertainment. Douglas tells the story to amuse his friends, and Lockwood gets Nelly to tell him the majority of the inner narrative to entertain him while he is sick. There are several voices, then, in all of these stories. These narrative frames build a sort of ontological uncertainty, as readers are left grappling with doubts: did that really happen? Was that part a dream or a hallucination or perhaps a narrative embellishment? Bailey aptly claims that these levels of frames in *The Turn of the Screw* build “a central thematic ambiguity” (18):

The story is like a stone cast into a pool of placid water. The stone—the “truth” of the events that occurred at the country estate of Bly during the governess’s tenure—is irrevocably lost. Our only indication that the water was ever disturbed is the series of concentric rings rippling outward from the point of impact, rings of interpretation—the

governess's, Douglas's, the narrator's, even our own—growing progressively vaguer in proportion to their distance from the center. (19)

I agree with Bailey, and I argue that the same applies to *Wuthering Heights* and “The Old Nurse’s Story.” The frames and narrators in the former are even more complicated than in James’s novella, and Hester’s storytelling takes place much after the fact of the events. In all of these stories, then, the reader remains several ripples away from the “truth.”

I would be remiss if I did not note the connection between the narrative form—a frame—with the framed windows focused on in this chapter. In these texts, the narrative form parallels the object of focus, as both are framed, surrounded by boundaries of either outer narrative or house wall. Indeed, Tarr argues that frame narratives in the Gothic provide a point where the reality of the outer story encounters the monstrosities of the central narrative (2). Frames thus “seem to serve as boundaries, [but] they in fact function as thresholds between the central narrative and the reader’s reality” (Tarr 3). In Tarr’s estimation, then, narrative frames function similarly to how I have shown windows working, dividing the natural from supernatural while still allowing the possibility (threat?) of transgression. The struggle with meaning in these situations creates the Gothic effect of the text. Try as they might, readers are unable to reach an ultimate meaning or even solid interpretation of the events of these texts largely due to their narrative forms. Much like Heathcliff sensing Catherine until he opens his eyes, meaning disappears as soon as we attempt to look directly at it.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ “When I went from home, I hastened to return: she *must* be somewhere at the Heights, I was certain! And when I slept in her chamber—I was beaten out of that—I couldn’t lie there; for the moment I closed my eyes, she was either outside the window, or sliding back the panels, or entering the room, or even resting her darling head on the same pillow as she did when a child. And I must open my lids to see. And so I opened and closed them a hundred times a night—to always be disappointed!” (221)

Conclusion

These three works, and especially these scenes I have focused on, are especially noteworthy in their ambiguity. Does Catherine's ghost only exist in Lockwood's dream? How much of the story as a whole can we believe with its layers of frames? Some have referred to this scene as the only supernatural event in the novel, but is it? Or is it even supernatural? Similarly, is James's governess hallucinating? Is she a commendable heroine or a sexually repressed madwoman? Are the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel really wandering around Bly? Can the children see them, and, if so, are they complicit or resistant? What about the layers of frame story here? Do they matter? How realistically does Hester relate her story, and what is her motive for telling these children of their ancestor's sins? Is she entertaining or moralizing, and how much would she embellish either way? Criticism has addressed, over and over, how to answer these questions or, perhaps more importantly, how these questions are not really answerable in any solid sort of way. These stories hinge on indeterminacy, and these window scenes, I argue, add another layer to this indeterminacy as the ghosts themselves inhabit liminal spaces. Focusing on the physical space inhabited by the ghosts can help us move closer to a better understanding of them, real or not.

In these three examples, the ghosts are outside looking in, reversed from the typical expectation we have of ghosts. Countless haunted house stories of the Victorian period depict people spending the night in a haunted house and being frightened off by the ghost inside—the ghost with the power to open and close, lock and unlock, snuff candles and creak floorboards, who is avoided only by leaving the property. On the other hand, the ghosts in this chapter, while clearly attached to Wuthering Heights, Bly, and Furnivall Manor House, are not, in these instances, *inside* the house. As I have shown, thresholds are important in these scenes. The

window serves as a division between outside and inside, but it also marks the point where boundaries blur as ghosts and humans interact and inhabit this liminal, haunted space together. This convergence, in turn, builds the larger ambiguities of the stories as a whole that readers are compelled to try to piece together. As Henry James put it in his Preface to the 1908 New York Edition, this tactic “make[s] [the reader] *think* the evil . . . for himself” rather than providing “weak specifications” (“Preface” 232) which sharply enhances the effect of the story, I argue, in *Wuthering Heights*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and “The Old Nurse’s Story.”

In this chapter, I have argued that haunted houses can function as confining liminal spaces where the line between the dead and the living blurs. More specifically, in the works discussed above, the physical boundary of a window highlights the liminality of these haunted houses, haunting ghosts, and haunted narrators. In doing so, I have bridged the gap between “physical” and “psychological” ghost stories, offering a new way to understand the importance of the physicality of the haunted house as it is linked to the psychological of ghostly sightings. Further, I have demonstrated how a specific type of bounded confinement functions as a liminal space and builds the uncertainties and ambiguities necessary for the Gothic genre itself to elicit horror or terror in its characters and readers as they struggle to understand and make meaning. This chapter examines the haunted house as one form of spatial confinement treated in this dissertation. Interestingly, questions of reality and sanity haunt this chapter—does James’s governess hallucinate, and does Catherine exist as a ghost outside of Lockwood’s dream? The following chapter takes up this issue of uncertain sanity as it moves to a different confining location, asylums.

CHAPTER FOUR

Managing Madness: The Confining Asylum in *Lady Audley's Secret*, "A Whisper in the Dark," and "The Yellow Wall-paper"

"When a madman appears *thoroughly* sane, indeed, it is high time to put him in a straightjacket."
(Poe, "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether" 198)

In nineteenth-century Gothic literature, the line between sanity and insanity often becomes blurred. This chapter analyzes the asylum as the final form of physical confining spaces treated in this dissertation. I revisit my distinction from Chapter 1 that views confinements as forms of protection or persecution. I examine the asylum as a space that can protect the confined characters from themselves, protect those on the outside from those on the inside, or serve as a means of persecution and unwilling confinement, especially for those who may not actually belong there. In ways oddly similar to the Catholic cloister, the asylum can serve as both a form of protection and persecution, sometimes protecting characters and other times fostering persecution as characters who do not belong in such a place are locked away for more nefarious reasons. This chapter thus circles back to a version of my argument in Chapter 1 but also investigates the troubled distinction between states of sanity and insanity that can contribute to or sometimes result from these confinements. In Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Louisa May Alcott's "A Whisper in the Dark" (1863), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" (1892),⁹⁶ confinement in an asylum or in an asylum-like location

⁹⁶ Gilman published "The Yellow Wall-paper" while she was married to Charles Walter Stetson. Her name appears as Charlotte Perkins Stetson on the original publication and is listed as such in the bibliography of this dissertation. Additionally, various publications of the story punctuate the word wallpaper with a hyphen as I have done here or print it as a single word: "The Yellow Wall-paper" or "The Yellow Wallpaper." I have chosen to use the hyphenated version since that is how the story was originally published in *The New England Magazine*.

creates a liminal space similar to the previously discussed cloisters as the distinctions between sanity and insanity and protection and persecution are called into question.

A word about terminology is necessary. I have used “asylum” as an umbrella term for edifices that share a similar function, such as a (mental or lunatic or insane) asylum, psychiatric hospital, mental institution, state hospital (in certain cases), *maison de santé*, or what might more colloquially be referred to as a “madhouse.” I use “asylum” because its paradoxical connotations provide a parallel to the liminality discussed in this chapter. The word asylum is meant to signify safety, sanctuary, refuge, and protection, but it is also associated with imprisonment, restriction, maltreatment, and persecution. To gain asylum suggests protection but to be placed in an asylum suggests persecution. Thus this single term contains the same ambiguity that permeates the literary depictions of this structure investigated in this chapter.

In this chapter, I briefly discuss the treatment of madness and confinement in asylums in literature. I explain how the three texts treated here fit into this chapter and this dissertation, and then I focus on the depiction of confinement in an asylum in each of these works. As in the previous chapters, I explain how this confinement fosters a liminality that builds ambiguity for both characters and readers as we often do not know who is sane or insane, other characters do not know who is sane or insane, and sometimes even those confined either begin questioning their own sanity or insisting upon it.

There is a loss of clear boundaries between the states of sanity and insanity, and this lack of easy definition and categorization leads readers to an uncomfortable and fearful state similar to Kristevan abjection, which is ambiguous to the point of horrific disgust. This liminality experienced by characters—this lack of clear boundaries and definition—results in chaotic ambiguities that build the very sensation of horror imperative to the Gothic genre. In this chapter,

I argue that these confinements in asylums do more than metaphorically represent oppressed social positions such as womanhood and marriage, although that is certainly a valid reading and authors many times explicitly operate with this purpose in mind. However, I claim that these confinements move beyond that symbolism and actually provide insight into the ambiguities and lack of clear definitions that elicit the horror in readers and characters alike in order to fulfill the function of the Gothic. Examining these moments of confinement in asylums when the lines between protection and persecution and between sanity and insanity are called into question is necessary in order to better understand the characters in these spaces, the liminality they inhabit there, and, by extension, how the genre depends on this liminality and ambiguity for its Gothic effect.

Insanity and Asylums in Literature, Briefly

I cannot and will not attempt to provide a history of mental illness, psychiatry, psychiatric institutions, or various waves of treatment and institutional reform. Such coverage is not only beyond the scope but also beyond the purpose of this chapter.⁹⁷ Rather, I will remain focused on depictions of confinement in asylums in Gothic literature of the long nineteenth century.

⁹⁷ For such, see Michel Foucault's chapter "The Great Confinement" in *History of Madness* (1961), where he explores the creation of the category of madness and the related construction of walls to separate and contain individuals designated as such. Other chapters in Foucault's work and various responses to Foucault's ideas may also be of interest. Joseph Melling and Bill Forsythe's edited collection of essays *Insanity, Institutions and Society, 1800-1914: A Social History of Madness in Comparative Perspective* (1999) summarizes and analyzes nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates about insanity and institutionalization from historical, legal, medical and sociological perspectives. See also Erving Goffman's *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situations of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (1961), Edward Shorter's *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (1997) and Roy Porter's *Madness: A Brief History* (2002).

There is a long history of asylum confinement in literature dating back perhaps most importantly to Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria* (1789), a seminal feminist text depicting a sane woman falsely imprisoned in an asylum by her husband. Maria's imprisonment clearly represents her social position and (lack of) rights, as she overtly compares marriage to a prison; in an oft-quoted line, she states, "marriage had bastilled me for life" (154-55). This theme shows up again and again in Gothic literature throughout the nineteenth century in more texts than I could list here. At times the confinement is, as in *The Wrongs of Woman*, solely a form of persecution against a sane person. Other times, such as in John Neal's "Idiosyncrasies" (1843), the confined figure is clearly insane.⁹⁸ In still other cases, such as Charlotte Brontë's infamous madwoman in the attic in *Jane Eyre* (1847), Bertha Mason, the confined figure is clearly insane, but how she got that way remains ambiguous: was she doomed from some hereditary predisposition, or did she become mad after her husband locked her away (or *because* her husband locked her away)?⁹⁹

It is also important to discuss what previous criticism about this topic has said. Most notably, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's foundational text *The Madwoman in the Attic*:

⁹⁸ Gender has been a key part of this trope from Wollstonecraft's *Maria* forward, as authors again and again use this particular form of physical imprisonment and mental punishment to represent the position of women. "Idiosyncrasies" provides an interesting reversal in its focus on a male character unwillingly confined in an asylum by his daughter. Neal's narrator spends the duration of the story pontificating about his sanity (which the reader rightfully grows to question) and espousing generally misogynistic views in detailing his history as a rather tyrannical and abusive husband and father. Thus Neal, like the women writers discussed in this chapter, presents a story that remains driven by an exploration of patriarchal expectations.

⁹⁹ Literary critics and other authors have debated Bertha Mason's madness at length. Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) provides a revisioning of this story from Bertha's perspective before she is Bertha. Though the character (here named Antoinette) clearly loses her sanity over the course of the narrative, her mental state is at least in part a product of her husband's treatment of her, and she is ultimately presented much more sympathetically than is Brontë's Bertha.

The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (1979) clearly, even from its title, is concerned with madness and confinement. Gilbert and Gubar's title references Brontë's Bertha Mason, who serves as the central example for their larger argument and metaphorically represents, on a larger scale, the female condition and, on a smaller scale, the confining expectations of women authors to write female characters into an angel/monster dichotomy. This work has led to subsequent criticism such as Annette R. Federico's edited collection *Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic after Thirty Years* (2009). Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980* (1985) more specifically explores the history of insanity by focusing on cultural representations of women as mad. Showalter examines how nonconformative female behavior is likened to and treated as insanity in both history and literature.

The link between insanity and the Gothic also has a long history; for example, Ruth Bienstock Anolik discusses the "venerable literary tradition of husband-induced or -imputed madness in the Gothic" (58), including victims such as Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White* (Anolik's main focus here), Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, and Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman*. Helen Small names a subgenre of the Gothic "asylum fiction," which she claims focuses on "the high incidence of wrongful incarceration in mid-Victorian Britain" and "use[s] Gothic forms loosely and, often, irreverently" (201). While, as the texts and criticism discussed above suggest, gender clearly remains a key component in reading the texts discussed in this chapter—indeed, all of the confined women discussed here are locked away at least in part due to a failure to meet patriarchal expectations—my focus here is not on the gendered issues that lead to these confinements but rather on the liminality that occurs as a result of these confinements. This liminality, I argue, heightens the Gothic horror and terror elicited by the text

as readers and characters alike struggle to find distinctions between spaces of protection and persecution and states of sanity and insanity.

Textual Justifications

One work featured in this chapter—Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*—perhaps needs slightly more justification than the others as a Gothic text. When discussing sensation fiction, three novels are often named as exemplars of the genre: Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859-60), Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862). Interestingly, sensation fiction seems to be as hard for critics to define as Gothic fiction. Michael Arntfield notes that “it has been generally accepted in literary studies that the sensation novel, while appearing concurrently in the Victorian Era, was spawned from the Gothic novel as both its antecedent and its referent” (xi). Arntfield accepts that some works can fall into both categories but ultimately limits his study to exclude sensation fiction. I do the opposite, as I view sensation fiction as a specific subgenre of the Gothic that is still, at its heart, Gothic, although clearly different from its Radcliffean and Lewisite ancestors.

As I explained in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, my conception of the Gothic is based on its repetition of certain themes, tropes, and conventions, including but not limited to confinement, which is my focus here. Many of these themes, tropes, and conventions overlap in many ways with sensation fiction. The sensation novel is, as Arntfield describes, concerned with “crime and *scandal*” (x), both of which, I would argue, are also Gothic tropes.¹⁰⁰ Because of its focus on scandal, however, other Gothic tropes—the decaying ruins, the

¹⁰⁰ Other common Gothic tropes appearing in sensation literature include confinement (key here), insanity (also key here), secrets, doubling, seduction, and murder.

grotesque, even supernatural aspects such as curses and ghosts (at least real ghosts)—get left aside while some aspects from other genres such as melodrama and detective fiction get included. Although *Lady Audley's Secret* is clearly a sensation novel, I also view it as Gothic. Other critics similarly merge the Gothic and sensation genres. For example, Patrick R. O'Malley views sensation novels as updating the Gothic by moving it from the geographical and temporal past into familiar, present-day domestic locations (*Catholicism* 104). With this in mind, we can understand this chapter as a similar move from those distanced Gothic novels discussed in Chapter 1 to those more uncomfortably present (at least for the Victorian readers) works discussed here.

Interestingly, Alcott's "A Whisper in the Dark" has also been called both a sensation story and a Gothic tale. While Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Louisa May Alcott have both been discussed as authors of sensation fiction, Braddon is much more famous for it. Readers and critics alike have tended to focus on Alcott's juvenile fiction. Thus, with my focus in this chapter on "A Whisper in the Dark," I deal with a slightly different Alcott than the one in the wealth of criticism about *Little Women* (1868-1869), *Little Men* (1871), and *Jo's Boys* (1886). I therefore join the small rank of critics discussing Alcott's little-discussed work, and I place it within a larger framework of Gothic confinement dating back, as I have shown over the course of this dissertation, to the beginning of the Gothic genre.

A different sort of justification about the inclusion of Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" is also necessary. The room in which the narrator of the story is confined is not necessarily an asylum. The narrator herself and several critics discuss it as a former nursery, which I explore in more detail later in this chapter. However, I have included this text for two reasons. First, I chose it over other stories with clear, definitive asylums because of its important status in literature

about madness and confinement. Second, I argue that the confining space is ambiguous, and this room could be a room in an asylum, albeit a very private one, just as easily as it could be a nursery. Ultimately, regardless of its previous or present designation, in this text it clearly functions as an asylum.

Finally, it is important to note that this chapter offers new critical perspectives in its treatment and selection of authors and text. To the best of my knowledge, Braddon, Alcott, and Gilman have never been discussed together. Sometimes in a discussion of one work, another is mentioned. For example, Elizabeth Lennox Keyser notes that Alcott may have been inspired by a scene from *Lady Audley's Secret* in *Behind a Mask* (198n2). She similarly notes, "In her defacement of the asylum walls, Sybil anticipates the heroine of 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' who, deprived of other forms of self-expression, resorts to interpreting, recreating, and finally destroying the wallpaper's grotesque pattern" (194n10). However, these comments are brief endnotes with no additional analysis, and other critics do not go much further. My treatment of the three authors here addresses, then, a gap in criticism by examining the asylum-based confinements in these three works.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*

Lady Audley's Secret traces Robert Audley's investigations of his suspicions about his new aunt, the young and beautiful Lady Audley, and her mysterious past. Over the course of the novel, he discovers that Lady Audley used to be Helen Talboys née Maldon.¹⁰¹ After her

¹⁰¹ This character has many names over the course of this novel: Helen Maldon, Helen Talboys, Lucy Graham, Lady Audley, and Madame Taylor. For clarity and simplicity, I generally refer to her as Lady Audley since that name is not only in the title of the novel but also the one used to refer to her most often.

husband disappeared to Australia for three and a half years, she left her son, assumed the identity of Lucy Graham, and married Michael Audley. When she finds out that her original husband, George Talboys, is returning from Australia, she takes measures to fake her own death. George, however, happens to be good friends with Robert Audley, and he soon discovers his presumed-dead wife remarried under a new identity. To protect her new life, she attempts to murder him by causing him to fall down a well in the garden at Audley Court.¹⁰² She also attempts the murder of Robert Audley by setting his hotel on fire. This is a much-simplified version of a complex narrative full of deferrals and disclosures. The novel ends with Lady Audley's confinement in an asylum—a Belgian *maison de santé*—which is the focus here.

Like the cloisters discussed in Chapter 1, this asylum serves as both a space of persecution and protection. And in an interested parallel to ideas from Chapter 3, confinement in this asylum is described as a live burial. After recommending Lady Audley's confinement in this asylum, Dr. Mosgrave explicitly likens it to a live burial: "If you were to dig a grave for her in the nearest churchyard and bury her alive in it, you could not more safely shut her from the world and all worldly associations" (386). Accordingly, the following chapter is titled "Buried Alive," and it refers to Lady Audley's confinement under the false name of Madame Taylor. Thus, Madame Taylor/Lady Audley/Lucy Graham/Helen Talboys moves into a confinement meant to separate her from society and keep her secrets—all possible iterations of them—hidden away with her. Lady Audley tells Robert as he is leaving her at the *maison de santé*, "you have

¹⁰² In an interesting connection to the cloisters discussed in Chapter 1, Audley Court used to be a convent. Audley Court, however, is where Lady Audley experiences the most freedom, especially in financial terms, and it is not necessarily a confining space at this time. See Patrick R. O'Malley's chapter "Domestic Gothic: Unveiling *Lady Audley's Secret*" in *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* (2006) for a discussion of how Braddon links Catholicism and sexual deviancy in this novel.

used your power basely and cruelly, and have brought me to a living grave” (396). For Lady Audley, this confinement places her in a liminal state between life and death. She is alive but dead to the outside world with no hope of reentering it and living any sort of self-directed life.

While this confinement is clearly viewed as a persecution by Lady Audley, Robert alternately presents the asylum as a peaceful place of protection. He tells Lady Audley, now known as Madame Taylor, that here she will be able to “lead a quiet and peaceful life” in this “tranquil” house where “nobody will assail you, nobody will torment you” (396). Schroeder and Schroeder call attention to Robert’s hypocrisy here as he “piously represents her confinement as an opportunity for atonement, and not the punitive alternative that it is in fact” (59). His request for “some kind and benevolent Protestant clergyman” (394) for Lady Audley and his encouragement for her to “[l]ive here and repent” (396) link this asylum to more religious forms of confinement such as the convent, where characters in earlier Gothic literature were often similarly confined against their will. Lady Audley thus assumes a position similar to Victoria in Dacre’s *Zofloya*, discussed in Chapter 1; now the convent becomes an asylum and the Catholic becomes a Protestant, but both are punished under the guise of being guided towards religious salvation.

The eponymous secret of *Lady Audley’s Secret* could be several things. Lady Audley is Helen Talboys. Lady Audley was already married before marrying Michael Audley. Lady Audley made her first husband fall down a well in a failed attempt to murder him. Rachel Bowser, however, points out that these details “do not function as revelations within the narrative” (76). Rather than with the false identity, bigamy, or attempted murder, Bowser locates the novel’s secret in Lady’s Audley’s mental stability: “The novel instead presents Lady Audley’s secret as her climactic declaration that occasionally she is temporarily insane” (76).

While many do accept that Lady Audley's titular secret is her madness, some disagree. D. A. Miller points out that "the text leaves ample room for doubt on the score of Lady Audley's 'madness.' Her acts, including bigamy, arson, and attempted murder, qualify as crimes in a strict legal sense, and they are motivated . . . by impeccably rational considerations of self-interest" (121). Miller ultimately claims, "The 'secret' let out at the end of the novel is not, therefore, that Lady Audley is a madwoman but rather that, *whether she is one or not*, she must be treated as such" (131). I argue that the novel ultimately offers no clear answer about Lady's Audley's secret or her sanity. She behaves in ways that could be interpreted as insane or as criminal or even as self-preservation taken to the extreme.

Critics disagree, then, on Lady Audley's sanity (or lack thereof) and interestingly seem to assume others naturally read the text the same way, discussing her mental status as an assumption rather than an argument. Judy Cornes claims that "like many of the tortured, demented creations of Ambrose Bierce, Lady Audley is irrevocably mad: a woman existing in a twilight miasma of dark duplicity, outright lies, and attempted murder" (189-90). Elaine Showalter alternately identifies her as sane, asserting, "Braddon teases the reader with the explanation that Lady Audley's insanity is latent and intermittent, coming on her only in moments of stress: the aftermath of childbirth, the desertion of her husband, and his return to haul her out of happiness and prosperity. As every woman reader must have sensed, Lady Audley's real secret is that she is *sane* and, moreover, representative" (*A Literature of Their Own* 167). Rachel Bowser also calls her sane, noting that the end of the novel is dissatisfying at least in part because "the villainess is not particularly villainous. . . . Moreover, we cannot feel that Lady Audley's insanity merits her banishment, as we cannot feel persuaded that she is insane" (92). Similarly, Schroeder and Schroeder view Lady Audley as sane and thus call her

imprisonment “the ultimate in preventative medicine” (53). Sally Shuttleworth, in turn, claims, “To try to determine . . . whether Lady Audley was really mad, is to misunderstand the radical workings of the text—its challenge of certainty” (196). Ultimately, ambiguity reigns supreme, and it is impossible for readers to definitively define Lady Audley as either sane or insane.

Even the use of the word “mad” highlights the ambiguity surrounding the term and its definition. Natalie M. Houston notes that causal use of the word “mad” increases in the chapters around Lady Audley’s revelation of her life and her mother’s insanity. This use, Houston claims, “destabilize[s] both Helen’s claims of hereditary insanity and the doctor’s evaluation of her” (27). As the characters in the novel have used “madness” loosely to designate nonstandard or nonconforming behavior, Lady Audley’s ultimate diagnosis as mad rings questionable: is she actually insane, or is she just scandalous?

It is worth noting that Lady Audley herself does consider—or at least pretends to consider—herself intermittently insane. When ultimately confronted by Robert Audley, she exclaims, “You have conquered—a MADWOMAN!” (354). She goes on to explain:

When you say that I killed George Talboys, you say the truth. When you say that I murdered him treacherously and foully, you lie. I killed him because I AM MAD! because my intellect is a little way upon the wrong side of that narrow boundary-line between sanity and insanity; because when George Talboys goaded me, as you have goaded me; and reproached me, and threatened me; my mind, never properly balanced, utterly lost its balance; and *I was mad!* (55)

Lady Audley here uses her insanity as an excuse for her nonconformative behavior. She outlines three times her mind “lost its balance” (361) and crossed the line referred to in the above quote: after giving birth and being deserted by her husband, after finding out her husband was returning

from Australia, and after being confronted by her husband about her new identity and bigamy. In each of these instances, she has acted in a manner not socially or even legally acceptable: she first left her child and assumed a new identity, then she used a dying woman to fake her own death, and, finally, she caused her original husband to fall down a well in the garden to his presumed death. However, while these actions are certainly morally questionable, one could argue that they are also highly rational, and they demonstrate a woman attempting to make the best out of a series of bad situations.¹⁰³ Lady Audley's declaration of her madness can be understood as either merely an act or as her own actual belief and fear about the way her mind functions driven by the knowledge of her mother's insanity that has haunted her throughout her life. Neither of these options makes it clear whether she actually *is* insane.

In relating her history, Lady Audley reveals that her mother is a madwoman confined in an asylum, and her description of how she expected her mother to appear versus the reality of her mother's appearance further demonstrates the unstable definition and understanding of sanity. Lady Audley claims that she inherited her insanity and its related violence from her mother. She refers to it as "the hidden taint that I had sucked in with my mother's milk" (398). Her mother is in an asylum, but she does not look insane, and the failure of reality to match expectations

¹⁰³ Even Dr. Mosgrave, who ultimately confines her to the asylum, originally has this opinion. Robert tells him about Lady Audley's behavior but not her attempted murders—he withholds information about his suspicions regarding George Talboys's death and the fire at the hotel. With just this knowledge, the doctor explains, "[T]here is no evidence of madness in anything she has done. She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and she left it in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and position. There is no madness there. When she found herself in a desperate position, she did not grow desperate. She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that" (383).

complicates any clear understanding of insanity. As a child, Lady Audley imagined her mother and her confinement as horrific:

I was always picturing to myself this madwoman pacing up and down some prison cell, in a hideous garment that bound her tortured limbs. I had exaggerated ideas about the horror of the situation. I had no knowledge of the different degrees of madness; and the image that haunted me was that of a distraught and violent creature, who would fall upon me and kill me if I came within her reach. (357)

While she imagines a Bertha Mason-like figure, her mother is the opposite: a beautiful, happy, child-like woman, “a golden-haired, blue-eyed, girlish creature, who seemed as frivolous as a butterfly, and who skipped towards us with her yellow curls decorated with natural flowers, and saluted us with radiant smiles, and gay, ceaseless chatter” (358). Lady Audley’s expectations are upset as instead of presenting as a monstrous figure, the madwoman in question looks and acts like the ideal Victorian angel of the house. Insanity is represented as not visually detectable, and this confusion of definitions—expecting a monster but finding an angel—highlights why Lady Audley spent her life worrying about insanity lurking in herself and, on a larger scale, how the very definition of the term remains amorphous and confusing.

Ultimately, whether Lady Audley is locked away because of insanity or scandal remains a debatable point. What is important is that the asylum, here a *maison de santé*, functions as a liminal space where the lines between protection and persecution are blurred. To Robert Audley, her confinement is protective: it gives her the opportunity to repent for her sins, it protects his uncle and the entire Audley family from scandal, and it protects society as a whole from her possibly future violent acts. For Lady Audley, however, it is clearly a persecution, and it takes

the shape of what Schroeder and Schroeder call “her most abject fear” (62): following in the footsteps of her mother and dying in an asylum that doubles as a live burial.

Louisa May Alcott’s “A Whisper in the Dark”

Emily Dickinson noted, “Assent, and you are sane; / Demur,—you’re straightway dangerous, / And handled with a chain” (“Much madness is divinest sense” 15). Louisa May Alcott’s “A Whisper in the Dark” chronicles the latter situation, as the orphaned Sybil narrates her history, including her time wrongfully confined in an asylum after she rather forcefully “demurs.” Shortly before her eighteenth birthday, she travels to her family estate with her uncle and discovers that she is to marry his son, Guy, according to a promise made by her dead father. This marriage will ensure that when she comes into her fortune at eighteen, Guy and her uncle will be able to share it. Sybil goes through somewhat strange flirtations with both the son and father (who is quick to tell her he is not related by blood), and this odd not-quite-love triangle continues until Sybil resists marrying either Guy or his father. An angry outburst paired with the history of her mother’s madness results in Sybil’s confinement in an asylum by a doctor perhaps too overzealous and an uncle eager to solidify his financial situation. Here, another inmate who turns out to be her presumed-dead mother tries to communicate Sybil’s need to leave via keyhole whispers and messages hidden in a dog’s collar. Sybil ultimately does escape and ends up marrying Guy in what could possibly be interpreted as a happy but haunting ending, as the years since have been “serenely prosperous” yet haunted by “that spectral whisper in the dark” (350).

This story highlights the multiple meanings of the word “mad,” which can be used to represent both anger and insanity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides several definitions for this term, including “angry, irate, cross” and “insane, crazy; mentally unbalanced or

deranged” (“mad, adj.”). These two versions are linked by a sense of being uncontrollable, lacking rationality or reason. Interestingly for this story, though, Sybil’s appropriate and rightful anger manifests in an outburst deemed inappropriate and deranged. She takes the engagement ring her uncle offers her and throws it across the room, shattering a large mirror. Dr. Karnac interprets her exhibition of the first definitional type of madness as belonging to the second type. By being passionate, displaying emotion, and turning her anger into a physical act, Sybil steps outside the bounds of what is deemed proper female behavior and is thus designated as potentially insane.

Further, she continues to not meet expectations, laughing “hysterically,” crying, and then running outside into the rain. These behaviors, which Sybil attributes to her rightful anger, again, are viewed by others as signs of insanity. She calls herself “a girl in a pet” (326) and wonders, “did they never see any one angry before?” (325). She continues to assert her rights, declaring that her uncle “deserves neither respect nor obedience,” that she is a better judge of her own health than Dr. Karnac, and that, as heiress, even the house that they currently occupy belongs to her (326). She then demands the key to her room and to “be mistress in my own house” (328). Elizabeth Lennox Keyser rightly points out the importance of Sybil’s actions here: “In one passionate outburst, Sybil denies that gender is sufficient to compel respect or obedience, asserts her identity as a rational being, and insists on her rights to property, privacy, and her own person. But such claims are considered further proof of madness, and the room of her own that Sybil has claimed promptly becomes a cell” (7).

Waking up in a room not her own, Sybil slowly realizes that she has been confined in an asylum: she has been placed in a room with a grated window, a locked door, and has had her “beautiful, abundant hair” cut off (330). This enclosure has several layers: upon escaping from

her room, Sybil is blocked by “the great bolt of the gate” and a garden surrounded by a high wall (333). Unable to escape, the room she is relegated to serves as her “prison-house,” and she is forced (similar to Jane Eyre) to listen to strange sounds from the room above hers (334). This room and its sounds fixate Sybil, and she fantasizes about who or what is inside it. She eventually begins pacing back and forth in imitation of its inmate. Her repetitive behavior is ultimately writ upon the room as evidence of her growing madness, with the carpet “worn to shreds by my weary march” and the walls “covered with weird, grotesque, or tragic figures to while away the heavy hours” (339).

As in *Lady Audley's Secret*, insanity has a hereditary component in this story. The eponymous whisper in the dark comes from the patient confined in the room above Sybil's who turns out to be her mother. Indeed, it is because of her mother's madness that Sybil's father's will contains “a clause decreeing that, if it should appear I inherited my mother's malady, the fortune should revert to my cousin” (348). Sybil's mother's situation interestingly parallels Lady Audley's. Helen Talboys's husband left her for three and a half years, abandoning her and their infant in the middle of the night and never sending any sort of correspondence; she began a new life with the thought that “I have a right to think that he is dead, or that he wishes me to believe him dead, and his shadow shall not stand between me and prosperity” (Braddon 362). Sybil's mother reportedly became “melancholy mad” (348) when her husband's name erroneously appeared in a list of missing passengers after a boat accident. Presuming him dead, “the shock destroyed her” (312), and she was thus confined in an asylum. While the presumed spousal death in *Lady Audley's Secret* led to Helen Talboys's assuming a new identity and beginning a new life, in “A Whisper in the Dark,” it drove the wife mad. Both of these changes in identity, then, were fostered by false deaths. Helen Talboys faked her own death to maintain her life as Lady

Audley. The wife in Alcott's story was similarly represented as dead due to her confinement, with Sybil growing up believing herself an orphan. One wonders if the same was said of Sybil and how her "return from the dead" was then viewed.

Throughout her resulting confinement in the asylum, Sybil maintains that she is sane, but she is aware that this confinement could result in her becoming insane. In her first interactions with her caretaker, Hannah, she asks, "How can I be ill and not know or feel it?" (332). She is bewildered by her situation and her lack of power as her attempts to assert her sanity and her rights to freedom are refused. As previously mentioned, she begins to take on traits of her mother confined above her by pacing in her room. She notes, "I felt that my health was going, my mind growing confused and weak, my thoughts wandered vaguely, memory began to fail, and idiocy or madness seemed my inevitable fate" (338). This confinement ostensibly intended to protect her actually pushes her towards insanity. In the hidden note, her mother states, "If you are not already mad, you will be; I suspect you were sent here to be made so; for the air is poison, the solitude is fatal, and Karnac remorseless in his mania for prying into the mysteries of human minds" (344). These words are surprisingly rational from one believed to be insane, and this communication calls the mother's diagnosis into question as well—was she really driven mad by false news of her husband's death, or was she driven to this state by her confinement? Karolina Korycka claims that this story shows "repeated trauma . . . [;] Sybil and her mother represent two generations of women undergoing the same injustice" (70). Lynette Carpenter suggests that Sybil's mother may have similarly been confined not from going insane at the news of her husband's death but from reacting angrily at his brother's proposal (36). This is one possible version of the story that neither Sybil nor readers will ever completely know.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper"

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" presents perhaps one of the most famous literary "madwomen." This short story provides a first-person account, in the form of diary entries, from an unnamed narrator¹⁰⁴ kept in a room by her husband/physician as treatment¹⁰⁵ for her mental condition, which her husband defines as "a slight hysterical tendency" (Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-paper" 648). The narrator, a woman ostensibly suffering from postpartum depression (and general patriarchal oppression) receives "treatment" modeled after misinformed medical practices and enforced by a misguided husband. Denied any creative or emotional outlet, she develops a monomaniacal fixation on the wallpaper in the room, seeing a woman (or sometimes multiple women) creeping behind it. She ultimately rips off the wallpaper in an attempt to set the woman, and herself, free; this destruction (and her mental state) makes her husband faint, and she is forced to "creep over him" while completing her obsessive enchainment circles around the room (656).

The room where Gilman's narrator is confined remains somewhat of a puzzle to her and to readers. The narrator hypothesizes that the room used to be used for children as a nursery, gymnasium, and/or school for boys at different times: "It was nursery first and then playroom, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls. The paint and paper look as if a boys' school has used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in

¹⁰⁴ Critical controversy exists about whether the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-paper" is unnamed or named Jane. The former view is followed here. In "Another thing/Something else about that paper . . .": Deconstructing Texts," Shawn St. Jean provides an insightful analysis of three different potential referents for "Jane" with reference to changing punctuation between Gilman's original manuscript and various printed editions.

¹⁰⁵ As mentioned in chapter 2, extensive explanations of Silas Weir Mitchell's "rest cure" and Gilman's own negative experience with this treatment, as well as other biographical connections between Gilman and her narrator, can be found in any Gilman biography, and most critical works about her fiction, nonfiction, and poetry at least mention the topic.

great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach” (“The Yellow Wallpaper” 648). Critics often take her word for it and discuss the room as a nursery. However, some have noted the threatening suggestions lurking behind the narrator’s descriptions. For example, Jana M. Tigchelaar calls the room “perhaps a former nursery, perhaps something more sinister” (34). Similarly, Allan Lloyd-Smith first refers to the narrator’s confinement as “an upstairs nursery in an old house” (94). However, he goes on to note that “[t]he windows of the room are ominously barred, as those of a nursery might be—or the chamber of a confined lunatic” (94-95). I find the second part of Lloyd-Smith’s statement important and compelling. The evidence that leads the narrator to assume the room used to be a nursery could just as easily be interpreted as evidence that it used to be (and certainly currently is) functioning as an asylum. The barred windows prevent escape, the rings and things in the walls could be used for a system of restraint, and the wallpaper could have been ripped off by someone previously confined in that room rather than a group of misbehaving boys. Pairing this description with John’s refusal to allow her to occupy a different room (648), the gated stairway (649), and the “great immovable bed” nailed to the floor (650) demonstrates the extent of her physical confinement. The wide range of possible previous and current functions of the room demonstrates the liminality inherent in this confining space that neither reader nor inhabitant can quite identify or understand.

This confinement is not only physical but also mental, as the narrator is under the restraints of the “rest cure” and not allowed to do much of anything. John places limitations on her social interactions: “he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people around now” (649); her emotional outlets: “John says the very worst thing I can do is think about my condition” (648); and her general mental stimulation: “[He] hardly lets me stir without special direction. . . . [:] he takes all care from me” (648).

Additionally, John forbids her to write, effectively mentally and emotionally confining her by eliminating her desired creative outlet. As Lisa Kasmer claims, “his prescription of complete rest, not only overrules her desire to write and to have company, but on a symbolic level, takes away her ability to communicate” (6). The narrator shows resistance to these ideas by secretly keeping the diary that ostensibly serves as the text of the story and by voicing opinions in the diary such as “[p]ersonally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good” (648). She uses her diary as a means of coping, but the confinement undermines her from the outset, and she is left wondering, “what is one to do?” (648).¹⁰⁶ This inability to *do* something represents both her mental and situational limitations: she cannot have excitement or work or writing, according to John’s prescription, and she also cannot change her situation, according to social and cultural expectations.

Confined against her will in this ambiguous space, the narrator grows increasingly deranged over the course of the story, but, as Lloyd-Smith points out, maintains “an underlying rationality” (95). As in the previously discussed stories, the line between sanity and insanity is blurred here. Is the narrator sane or insane, and at which moments of the story? Are the figures she sees lurking and creeping in the wallpaper hallucinations and madness or actual ghosts? When and where is she writing the last entry? There are no clear answers.

This confinement, like the others discussed in this chapter, functions in both the realms of protection and persecution, which becomes evident in examining the narrator’s infantilization.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ The narrator makes this remark several times in different forms: “And what can one do?” (647), “what is one to do?” (648), “But what is one to do?” (648).

¹⁰⁷ Infantilization of the confined figure is also present in “A Whisper in the Dark” and *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Sybil’s purposeful flirting with her uncle places her in a confusing situation between niece and lover, between a child for whom he acts as guardian and a potential future bride. Once she has been confined, Sybil’s infantilization continues in a manner similar to

Here, the narrator is confined in a room she interprets as a former nursery and where her previous identity as a wife and mother becomes suppressed. This suppression fosters her husband's infantilizing her and her own infantilization of herself. In the room, since nothing else is made available to her, she reads the wallpaper, which she first treats with disgust and hate, as a linking point between herself and the children she imagines used to occupy this room. Noting that the wallpaper has been removed "in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach" (648), she presents the condition of the wallpaper as evidence that boys who would tear the paper used to occupy the room. The story later gives readers reason to question her reliability as a narrator and assume that the paper is missing as far as she could reach because she herself has already ripped it down, which further links her to the children on whom she first blamed the destruction. Adding to this infantilization, her husband continuously refers to her with condescending pet names; he calls her "blessed little goose" (649) and "little girl" (652). When the narrator attempts to tell him that her health is not improving with his "cure," he replies, "Bless her little heart! . . . she shall be as sick as she pleases!" (652). The narrator repeatedly feels at a loss, repeatedly asking (in different forms), "But what is one to do?" (648).

For John, this confinement and its resulting infantilization is a form of protection. He ostensibly thinks that removing all responsibilities, occupations, and entertainment from the narrator will help her improve mentally. Additionally, if the narrator is insane at the beginning of the story (I do not think so, but an argument for this interpretation could be made), then this confinement protects the outside world and especially her child from her, and perhaps her from

that experienced by Gilman's narrator. Hannah speaks to her in a "tone such as one uses to a refractory child, half-soothing, half-commanding" (332-33). Similarly, Lady Audley is also depicted as child-like and repeatedly referred to in diminutive terms by George such as "pretty little wife," "gentle, innocent, loving, little wife," and "poor little girl" (59).

herself. However, for the narrator, this confinement and infantilization is clearly a persecution, and she again and again voices her desire to write and exercise and visit with family and be exposed to “more society and stimulus” (648) rather than isolated from all interactions.

The above reading assumes that readers can believe that John is an honorable man. However, our only knowledge of him comes through the lens of the narrator, and it is worth noting that she could be wrong about her husband’s character and intentions. Indeed, John may have had his wife confined for malicious, self-serving purposes about which readers know nothing. His character is rather ambiguous, and he remains strangely absent for parts of the story, as he spends all day and even many nights in town “when his cases are serious” (649). Additionally, we know that the narrator has a baby: someone named Mary cares for him because the narrator “*cannot* be with him” due to her nervousness (649). This child, though, also remains conspicuously absent. Both John and the baby are ultimately ambiguous figures in that readers do not know where they are or what they are doing for the majority of the story.

The ambiguous interpretations possible in this story, ranging from the purpose of the confining space to the narrator’s mental state to the function of her confinement, demonstrate the room’s inherently liminal condition. The ending, similarly, is notoriously hard to nail down. The narrator suffers a mental decline throughout the tale until the story ends with her “creeping” over the fallen figure of her fainting husband, believing herself free but actually still confined—if not even more so than before because of the consequences of her mania when he awakens—and her story so remains ostensibly open-ended but ultimately quite closed. Readers can certainly view the increasing mental deterioration of the narrator of “Wall-paper” as a release from societal norms and expectations, but one must also consider the consequences of her actions when her husband finally revives from his faint. Gilbert and Gubar interpret the story’s ending as a

success: “John’s unmasculine swoon of surprise is the least of the triumphs Gilman imagines for her madwoman. More significant are the madwoman’s own imaginings and creations, mirages of health and freedom with which her author endows her like a fairy godmother showering gold on a sleeping heroine” (91). Gilbert and Gubar correctly identify the ending as liberating, but this liberation must exist only temporarily, and the consequences of the method the narrator used to achieve this liberation necessitate accounting. Her ironic “freedom”—symbolically set loose from behind the wallpaper yet literally tied with a rope and locked in a room by her own accord—will be short-lived, as John is certain to reinstate literal confinement—possibly to a greater extent than that to which she has already been subjected—because of his perception her madness, in both senses of the term.

Conclusion

These three texts all raise questions of identity. Who is Lady Audley, Lucy Graham, Helen Talboys, Helen Maldon, and Madame Taylor? Who is Gilman’s narrator—Jane? The lady in the wallpaper? Neither or both? Who are Sybil and her mother? Readers, and in the case of Lady Audley, many people including her new husband, do not know them. Do they recognize themselves as themselves? Identity, social roles, and in some cases class are all destabilized here. Gilman’s narrator is removed from her position as a wife and as a mother. Lucy Graham removes herself from these positions and in the process transcends class boundaries, moving from being a poor, abandoned wife to a surgeon’s governess to becoming the Lady of Audley Court. Sybil is removed from her position as heiress, losing her fortune and family connections. The familial, social, and economic positions by which these characters could be defined are removed just as the characters are moved into confinements that function as liminal spaces.

Not only identity but also death is treated ambiguously in these stories. All three stories discussed in this chapter feature some sort of ambiguity concerning death. As previously mentioned, confinement in these asylums functions as a sort of living death for these women, placing them in a liminal space between life and death. The women themselves sometimes take advantage of confusion surrounding death, such as Helen Talboys's faking her own death in order to maintain her position as Lady Audley, going as far as to produce a dying woman who looks like her. As the living Lady Audley, then, she is also the dead Helen Talboys. In "A Whisper in the Dark," Sybil's mother is represented as dead although she is actually in an asylum. For her, like Lady Audley at the end of the novel, the asylum exists as a live burial. While confined, Sybil plans to commit suicide—to enact a real death to remove herself from this liminal live burial. She fashions a noose out of braided strips of clothes but never uses it. This noose interestingly brings to mind the rope that the narrator of "The Yellow Wall-paper" hides away in her room: "I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!" (655). She ends up using this rope to tie herself, saying that she is "securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope" (656) during her last creep around the room as John bangs on the door. Reading "The Yellow Wall-paper" through the lens of "A Whisper in the Dark" suggests one of many possibly interpretations of the story's ending: the narrator might have committed suicide, and the discovery of her hanging body causes John to faint upon entering the room.

The liminality inherent in the physical confinements in these stories thus calls into question ideas such as identity and death. Further, unlike the novels discussed in Chapter 1, there is no geographic or temporal distance erected between the reader and text to provide a sense of safety. Here, the threat has moved into a more familiar space, into the nineteenth-century home.

Part of the horror in these texts, then, lies in the possibility that this incarceration could happen to anyone inhabiting a position not at the top of a power hierarchy. Such anxieties continue into more modern works even outside the Gothic genre, such as one sees with Blanche at the end of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), who is basically driven crazy and then committed to an asylum, or Luisa in the satirical TV series *Jane the Virgin* (2014 –), whose lover has her committed to an asylum.

This particular location of spatial confinement continues to be contentious in works produced in the present day. Contemporary examples such as *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012 – 2013) demonstrate the anxiety associated with asylums, their conditions, and the fear, similar to that of live burial, of the possibility of being confined in a space where one does not belong. In this particular season of *American Horror Story*, the asylum in question is operated by nuns, which demonstrates how this type of confinement also continues to have strange connections to the Catholic cloister discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

The fear and horror in these texts arises ultimately from lack of control. This lack of control can be over one's own mind in the case of insanity or over one's own body in the case of being wrongly institutionalized. Thus people can be scared of what might happen to them—they might lose their minds—and of what might be done to them—they might have their autonomy taken away. Even worse, it could happen to any of us. The narrator of *Lady Audley's Secret* comments on the hazy line dividing a sane person from an insane person: "Madhouses are large and only too numerous; yet surely it is strange they are not larger, when we think of how many helpless wretches must beat their brains against this hopeless persistency of the orderly outward world, as compared with the storm and tempest, the riot and confusion within:—when we remember how many minds must tremble on the narrow boundary between reason and unreason,

mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day” (227). Like Lady Audley, everyone deals with trying to balance his or her mind; these texts underscore the dangers of failing to properly do so.

Helen Small points out that “the Gothic fascination with dramatising the production of madness” is connected to concerns about “the difficulties of interpretation”: “Its heroes and heroines, driven to madness (or close to it) in their desperate attempts to make sense of contradictory signs and patterns, can seem comparable to the readers of Gothic fiction, trying to make sense of a disorienting text” (203). These bolted doors, barred windows, straightjackets, and violent Nurse Ratched-esque figures elicit visceral horror at the idea of a lack of personal control but also highlight anxieties about the ability to make sense in general, which, I argue, ultimately feeds into the function of the Gothic genre as a whole. These works maintain key ambiguities—from character names and identities to their histories to suppositions about what comes after the text ends¹⁰⁸—with which readers wrestle. The narrator of “The Yellow Wall-paper” loses her mind while trying to “follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion” (650). Making sense, creating order out of confusion, is a natural tendency, but when certain puzzle pieces are missing or warped, readers are left uncomfortably trying to fill in the gaps. It is in this struggle that the Gothic effect takes place, as the ambiguities created or enhanced by these liminal confinements create questions that are simply not answerable.

¹⁰⁸ For example, is the ending of “The Yellow Wall-paper” redemptive, as many critics have posited? Perhaps, or perhaps only for a moment, as the narrator is likely to be subjected to increased confinement when John awakes. How did Sybil’s mother end up in the asylum? And what exactly is Lady Audley’s secret—is it that she is insane, or could it be that she is actually sane?

CONCLUSION

“To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings.” (Burke 41)

In *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke notes the effect that obscurity can have on the perception of one’s environment. He explains that being able to clearly see a thing lessens the danger it seems to potentially possess. While he goes on to discuss this concept as it applies to governments and religions, I argue that a similar effect occurs in the Gothic literature I have discussed over the course of this dissertation. That which we cannot quite see, understand, make sense of, or clearly define can indeed seem dangerous and terrible, and, as Burke points out, monsters such as ghosts and goblins inhabit this obscure zone that increases the terror of those struggling to identify and define them.¹⁰⁹

This project has investigated confinement and liminality, two major and repeating characteristics of Gothic literature. Somewhat paradoxically, confinement seems inherently limiting, and liminality seems inherently limitless; the former deals with fixedness, rigidity, and a lack of movement, while the latter suggests potentiality, fluctuation, and destabilization. Although confinement and liminality at first seem at odds, I have demonstrated how they can actually work together to create a Gothic effect. The confining spaces abundant throughout

¹⁰⁹ I would include other monsters in addition to ghosts and goblins here as well, especially those liminal undead figures such as vampires, zombies, draugar, and mummies. In “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s third thesis is “The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis” (6). He explains that the monster “refuses easy categorization” which leads to an uneasy “ontological liminality” (6).

Gothic literature function as liminal spaces for those confined inside, and this liminality creates an ambiguity for both characters and readers who struggle to make sense of the chaotic potentiality. Ultimately, however, as Burke's quote demonstrates, the obscurity is terrible, and the uncertainties and ambiguities in these liminal confinements instill a form of horror or terror into the hermeneutic experience.

In this dissertation, I have investigated how certain Gothic texts utilize spaces, places, and, more specifically, architectural structures—cloisters, graves, haunted house windows, and asylums—in ways that go beyond setting and plot. I have selected well-known and neglected British and American writers and works, ranging from James's *The Turn of the Screw*, about which more criticism has been penned than a single person could probably read and remain sane, to Bierce's "John Mortonson's Funeral," a very little-discussed work by an author most have encountered in American literature anthologies, to Dacre's *Zofloya*, an author and a novel with very little critical or popular discussion.

In this conclusion, I would like to take a moment to look forward past the arch of the long nineteenth century to a mid-twentieth century work in which a confining structure serves as a liminal space for those inside it. Doing so, I will briefly demonstrate how my argument still functions in later Gothic works. In Shirley Jackson's "The Lovely House" (1952),¹¹⁰ the eponymous house is presented from the first as something special: "The house in itself was, even before anything had happened there, as lovely a thing as she had ever seen" (204). It is not only "lovely," it is isolated—"as though it were something too precious to be seen by everyone"—and somewhat difficult to access, necessitating, for Margaret at least, "such elaborate arrangement,

¹¹⁰ This story has also been published under the title "A Visit" in *Come Along With Me* (1968), a posthumous collection of some of Jackson's works.

and such letters to and fro, and such meetings and hopings and wishings” (204). This house, then, is hard to access in many ways.

In this house, objects are hard to see and interpret. Upon walking in the front door, Margaret notices a tapestry, but she is too close to it to figure out what it depicts: “She could see the fine threads of the weave, and the light colors, but she could not have told the picture unless she went far away, perhaps as far away as the staircase, and looked at it from there” (205). Exploring the house further, she moves “across the rose and white tiles which made a pattern too large to be seen from the floor” (206). Both this tapestry and the tiles are difficult to interpret at least in part because of the viewer’s close perspective. Carla gives Margaret a tour of the house, showing her rooms full of tapestries and decorated according to specific themes: a room decorated in gold, a room decorated in silver, and “a room where everything grew smaller as they looked at it” (206). This final room, full of objects nesting in smaller versions of themselves, is also full of mirrors reflecting both the multitude of objects and the tapestries on the walls that, interestingly, depict the house itself reflected in the lake.

In this room, Margaret first becomes aware of the unpleasantness associated with not being able to clearly and correctly interpret her surroundings: “This room frightened Margaret rather, because it was so difficult for her to tell what was in it and what was not, and how far in any direction she might easily move, and she backed out hastily” (207). Here, Margaret brings to mind Alice attempting to understand her environment in Wonderland, partially amazed but also perplexed and frightened as she, for example, drinks a concoction that makes her grow so large she completely fills up the White Rabbit’s house, unable to move except to awkwardly stick an arm out of a window and a foot up the chimney (Carroll 28). Margaret, similarly, is unsure of

where and how she can physically move in this mirrored room and which parts of what she sees are real and which are reflections.

Other rooms in the Montagues' house also call the line between perception and reality into question. For example, the tiled room, "which was not exactly a room at all" (209), consists of tiles that depict the house, made from the same materials that make up the house. While constituting a part of the house, this room-that-is-not-a-room is also a stylized depiction of the house, made out of the same material of the house. As such, it is another image of the house much like the tapestries that hang throughout it. The house itself additionally seems unreal, as the descriptions of its corridors and rooms and the sheer number of rooms that Margaret has seen and has yet to see seem architecturally impossible.

Over time, Margaret becomes fixated on the tower, one aspect of the house that she has yet to be shown, although Carla and her mother give her tours of new places and differently themed rooms almost daily. Outside the door to the tower, there is a set of tiles forming "a curiously made picture of a girl's face, with blue chip eyes and a red chip mouth, staring blindly from the floor, with long light braids made of yellow stone chips going down evenly on either side of her round cheeks" (210). The lines that end Part I, however, make the tiled girl seem like a sort of clue: "'Here was Margaret,' it said, 'who died for love'" (210). Asking Paul about the tower, Margaret tells him, "I know someone lives there, because I saw someone moving at the window once" (214). This figure in the window brings to mind the ghosts discussed in chapter three, and the idea of a family member—Paul says she is "an aunt, or a great-aunt, or perhaps even a great-great-great-aunt" (214)—living in this tower apart from the family brings to mind the confinements discussed in chapters one and four. Readers begin to wonder if this person could be a disobedient family member or a hidden madwoman in the attic. Paul claims this

relative remains there of her own will, though, choosing to live away from all of the tapestries in the rest of the house.

Things get even stranger when Margaret gives in to her compulsion to know more about the tower and its inhabitant, and she finally climbs the long stairway and finds an old woman who shares her name. Older Margaret and her cat reside at the top of the tower in a round room full of open windows—windows that she calls her tapestries, seeming to suggest that she prefers looking outside at reality rather than at depictions of reality inside. The Margarets have a rather confusing interaction that leaves younger Margaret “feeling somehow that there might be a thin thread of reason tangling the old lady and the cat and the tower and the rain, and even, with abrupt clarity, defining Margaret herself and the strange hesitation which had caught at her here in the tower” (217). Older Margaret says confusing things about Paul, and when the Margarets’ hands touch, younger Margaret “heard through the sounds of the wind the equal sounds of all the voices in the world” saying the same words and phrases that we later see younger Margaret and Paul say to each other in what is presumably their last meeting (218).

This interaction between two characters who share a name (and most likely an identity, the ending of the story suggests) resembles previously discussed instances that occurred in *Wuthering Heights* and “The Old Nurse’s Story.” Lockwood sees the “air swarmed with Catherines” (Brontë 16) in *Wuthering Heights* when the different spelling of Catherine’s different possible names blur together in the air before him as he tries to go to sleep. In “The Old Nurse’s Story,” present old Miss Furnivall sees past young Miss Furnivall reenact a ghostly vision from her history. In all three of these cases—those of the Margarets, the Catherines, and the Miss Furnivalls—the liminality of the characters becomes evident as they exist, whether in writing or spectrally or physically, in multiple versions in the same moment in the text.

Ultimately, “The Lovely House” culminates in questions in Part III. It is revealed that the captain is Carla’s brother, although Margaret has assumed that Paul was Carla’s brother throughout the story. This revelation builds on previous hints that suggest no one but Margaret can even see Paul, and readers discover that they have actually been reading a ghost story this entire time. Older Margaret, too, might be visible only to younger Margaret; this suspicion arises when the captain asks younger Margaret to dance because he says he saw her sitting alone, but she, in turn, thought she was with Paul and older Margaret. Other differences between appearances and reality also become evident, particularly relating to the house itself. As the captain is leaving, he points out several examples of the house’s disrepair: worn carpet, dying fish, a broken statue, and more. His criticisms, which Mr. and Mrs. Montague tell him consist of problems he should not have noticed, call into question the status of the entire house, which heretofore has been presented through Margaret’s eyes as the pinnacle of luxury.

With this in mind, Mrs. Montague’s reference to seeing Margaret “try the door of the ruined tower” (224) becomes important: is the tower ruined and locked, or does older Margaret live there with her cat? Perhaps the answer is both because, as Paul says, “What could replace anything in this house? . . . All we can do is add to it” (223). And add to it they have, as it seems that Paul and older Margaret exist as ghostly iterations of the captain and younger Margaret. Margaret questions, “Surely there will be an end to my visit?” But there does not appear to be an end in sight, as readers assume that younger Margaret somehow becomes older Margaret in the tower, who may be alive but is probably dead according to the words in the tile outside the tower door. Regardless, she is now an addition to this lovely house, and she cannot leave or be replaced. Indeed, the story ends with Carla and Margaret becoming “models of stillness” on the lawn for Mrs. Montague to work into her new tapestry, another of countless depictions of the

house inside the house, and, thus, they will be forever trapped in this artwork (225). The house in all its versions—in sunlight, in moonlight, reflected in the lake, and more—exists in the tapestries filling the house, and so do its occupants, and these repetitions and replications make the house a liminal space that confines multiple iterations of its inhabitants.

This analysis of Jackson’s “The Lovely House” demonstrates how the arguments I have made over the course of this dissertation can be moved out of the nineteenth century. Characters and readers alike struggle to make sense of this work, and this attempt leaves us all feeling a bit like Margaret in the mirrored room, frightened and unsure of what is real and what is not. Left with this feeling, we have circled back to the quote from Burke beginning this conclusion: we are unable to step far enough back to see the entire tapestry, and, squint as we might, we cannot form clear readings of such obscurity. Crucially, then, this story and the others discussed in this dissertation demonstrate how confinement creates liminal spaces that allow the Gothic to function as it should as a carnivalesque site¹¹¹ of destabilized expectations where terror, horror, disgust, and fascination all arise from attempts to make sense of the text.

¹¹¹ See Robert Miles’s *Gothic Writing, 1750-1820: A Genealogy* (2002) for more about the Gothic as carnivalesque.

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