The Road of Excess:
Writing Trauma in Sentimental and Gothic Texts 1745-1810

A dissertation submitted by

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on way in which telling stories of traumatic suffering causes narratological excess in British gothic and sentimental literature from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Informed by theories of trauma from Freud to LaCapra and incorporating contemporary psychological practice-based literature, my argument explores how these texts exceed formal and stylistic boundaries in three specific ways: narrative repetition, dark humor, and the role of narrators. My interest lies in the way that trauma marks these texts in formal and structural ways. Putting sentimental and gothic literature together for this project reveals both a surprising similarity between these often-opposed genres. Furthermore, it reveals the way that the formal qualities of narratives of suffering are similar across texts with apparently very different explicit political or social messages.

The introduction, "The Narrative Effects of Traumatic Suffering," provides a theoretical and historical context for my dissertation and outlines my argument. Chapter One, "Telling it Over, Over Again: Repetition Compulsion, The Uncanny, and the Problem of Closure," reads Eliza Parsons' gothic novel *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and Fanny Burney's sentimental novel *Evelina* as texts structured by the repetitions and doublings symptomatic of trauma, and suggests that these repetitions are not fully resolved within the texts. My second chapter is entitled "Excessive Sorrow Laughs: Violent Humor, Pain, and Tonal Hybridity" and reads Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, focusing on the presence of humor as a narrative effect of psychological suffering and sexual threat. The third chapter, "Moralizing Among Ruins: Christianity, Patriarchy, and the Struggle for

Narrative Authority," focuses on narrative voices in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*, and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* as a location for inevitably incomplete attempts at explaining trauma. My conclusion "The Sublime Pleasures of Trauma Narratives" explores the fact that while all of the narratives I discuss are focused on pain and suffering, as imaginative (rather than biographical or personal) narratives, they also provide pleasure for the reader.

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Ultimately, however, this dissertation is for Nathan Paquet, my partner, husband, and best friend, without whom none of this would be possible. And for my soon-to-be-born son, whom I greatly look forward to meeting.

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Introduction:
The Narrative Effects of Traumatic Suffering

The inspiration for my dissertation is my reading of Samuel Richardson's monstrously long novel *Clarissa.* Clarissa, the eponymous tragic heroine, is subject to a series of traumatic assaults and events, from her (quasi-consensual) abduction from her father's home to her imprisonment in a brothel to her rape to being thrown in debtors' prison. One of her primary responses to these events is to write about them at great length, expressing herself to anyone who will listen. Given this, concerns about the status of writing and control over writing are central to the critical conversation about *Clarissa*, due both to its status as the epistolary novel par excellence and the text's own concern with the relationship between writing and power.[1]

Much of the critical work concerned with the intersection of the text's representation of Clarissa's suffering and her writing has centered on the rape, arguably the central trauma of the text. This moment, which is not explicitly described in any letters in the text, including Clarissa's, has traditionally been read as an act of traumatic silencing, as a linguistic hole in the text. Terry Eagleton writes that "the 'real' of *Clarissa* – the point around which this elaborate two thousand page text pivots – is the rape; yet the rape goes wholly unrepresented, as the hole at the centre of the novel" (61). In a similar vein, Terry Castle describes the rape as "a primal act of silencing," a moment when the text "become[s] uncommunicative" and "the real reader experiences a gap in the information" (*Clarissa's Ciphers* 115). This reading of the rape as incommunicable

[1] See work by Terry Eagleton, Terry Castle, and Helen Moglen, among others, for examples of readings of *Clarissa* that focus on the circulation of texts.

(or at least uncommunicated) is an important observation. However, what struck my attention was the abundance of language that both leads up to and proceeds from this moment. While Clarissa may be unable to narrate her rape, at least in a literal or referential way, she is far from silenced for the rest of the text. Instead the text continues with heightened versions of the compulsive retellings, performative writing, melodrama, and long-windedness that characterize the early parts of the novel.

This compulsive and extensive writing that both the character Clarissa and the text itself engage in is one example of the way that traumatic suffering can lead to excessive linguistic and literary production. It is my contention that this relationship between trauma and narrative excess is under-theorized within literary studies. Much of contemporary cultural trauma theory generally follows the model set by Elaine Scarry in her 1985 text *The Body in Pain.*[2] In this text, she claims that "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it" (Scarry 4). Following Scarry, concern with the way trauma threatens, silences, or renders incoherent language itself continues to be a focus in trauma theory, so much so that Michelle Balaev writes that one of the "central claims" of contemporary literary trauma theory is the assertion "that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity." For example, Giorgio Agamben, writing in 2002 about Holocaust testimony, writes that "it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna" (13). This model, while useful in its insight that trauma impacts language use in profound ways, has limitations, as it fails to recognize the other possible forms that the relationship between language and trauma can

[2] I am using the term "cultural trauma theory" to refer to the body of literature that is indebted to Freud and more or less begins with Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, and includes work by Shoshana Felman, Cathy Caruth, Kali Tal, Dominick LaCapra, and others. I describe this body of work as "cultural trauma theory" to distinguish it from theoretical work done within the social sciences that directly addresses living individuals' experiences with trauma.

take. Returning to the *Clarissa* example, my interest in that text lies not in the moments when a reading of the "unspeakable" aspect of trauma is sufficient, but in the myriad other moments where the excesses of the text belie such a reading and instead demand a different understanding of the way that language can express trauma.

One significant exception to the absence of theorizing excess in cultural trauma theory is Dominick LaCapra's discussion of hyperbole in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. He briefly notes in this first chapter, "Hyperbole enacts stylistically the fact that one is affected by excess and trauma, but one can be excessive in many ways" (35). [3] While LaCapra is mainly concerned with historical writing rather than literature, his recognition of a relationship between trauma and excess is crucial to my understanding of the way that attempts to represent trauma are inextricably linked to their stylistic and formal excess.

Cultural trauma theory, including LaCapra's work, is an important theoretical starting point for my inquiries into the way that trauma is written out in literature because it explicitly explores the relationship of pain and suffering to language. However, the fact that literary or cultural trauma theory has not thoroughly explored the role of excess is remarkable to me partly because the presence of excesses of various kinds, including narrative and affective, is acknowledged in psychological accounts of the results of and treatments for trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In this dissertation, I will call on the insights into excess found in contemporary psychological work on trauma, including discussions of narrative construction as coping mechanism by Rivka Tuval-Maschiach and other scholars, Thomas Kuhlman's writing on gallows humor in

[3] However, LaCapra's main concerns lie elsewhere, and he does not follow up this point at length.

traumatic environments, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman's assumptive world theory. I will also make use of more popular resources on PTSD, including CDC fact sheets and hospital websites, in order to consider generally-held clinical facts about the kinds of excess that characterize responses to trauma.

There are some clear challenges when applying practice-based writing on psychological conditions to literary studies, especially to literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Texts are, after all, not structurally or affectively the same as individual human beings. Nor are our current psychological understandings of the functioning of the human mind the same as the understandings that were contemporaneous with the texts that I will be writing about. Samuel Richardson had certainly never read a definition of, or treatment plan for, PTSD suffered by rape victims.

However, it is my contention that the literary forms that arise from writing about suffering are not entirely divorced from the lived realities of individuals who are suffering. I am deeply interested in the connection between lived experiences of trauma and the structural and formal aspects of texts that are representing trauma. I want to take the knowledge that is found in a practical, therapeutic model of studying trauma and use it to think about the ways that texts about trauma work, both within themselves and, at times, in relationship to the reader. I will use the insights that practical and theoretical psychological studies give us into the nature of traumatic suffering to supplement the insights of psychoanalytic and literary theory. In doing so, I hope to bring together different sources of knowledge in order to create a more complete picture of what happens when a text attempts to tell a story of traumatic suffering. Furthermore, the choice to include these "ground-up" theories, theories that are directly built on the lived

experiences of individuals, is a feminist choice, rooted in my belief in the value of individual experience as a form of knowledge that can be used to complement more theoretical bodies of knowledge.

I believe that literary texts present a unique opportunity for comprehending how trauma is processed, because, while the text is in many ways subject to the structural effects of trauma in a way analogous to individuals, it is free of the need for a cure. Literary texts do not need to be "fixed" and they do not have the pressure of having to become "functional." Instead, they can exist in the state of traumatic disruption, exploring the consequences of such disruption through language. We, as readers of literature, can also exist in this liminal space of disruption without harm to ourselves. At the same time, literary texts demonstrate many of the same structural effects as traumatized individuals. Fictional narratives that represent trauma are marked by many of the same structural and linguistic effects as the speech or writing of a trauma survivor. Like trauma survivors, not all of them are marked in exactly the same way. However, these markers bear similarities, both across texts and among survivors. My claim in this dissertation is that the mark of trauma is as evident in the excesses of such writing and speech as it is in the silences and lacunae that have typically been identified as both part of trauma survivors' testimony and as evidence of trauma in literary texts. My project in this dissertation is to explore previously under-theorized structural effects of trauma on literary texts in order to open up a new way of looking at the excessive features of texts that grapple with trauma – specifically gothic and sentimental texts from 1745 to 1810.

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Up to this point, I have been taking for granted the use of the term "trauma." However, within trauma theory, particularly cultural and literary trauma theory, the term itself, and what is included in it, is a matter of much debate. Questions about whether trauma can be collective, vicarious, suffered by perpetrators as well as victims, and so on, are an important thread in scholarship about trauma. I am, for the most part, going to put aside those questions. Trauma theorists, including notably LaCapra and Felman, have written extensively on these issues, often in relation to the ethics of historical trauma narrative and the way that we understand claims to trauma. While I am not going to explore these important questions in depth in my dissertation, I do want to be clear about what I mean when I use the word trauma. The definition of trauma that I am working with is based on the writings of Sigmund Freud.

Freud explains, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that "we describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield...." and that at such a moment "there is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus" (33-34). He connects trauma to "fright," which he describes as what happens when an individual is unprepared for anxiety, writing that "in the case of quite a number of traumas, the difference between systems that are unprepared and systems that are well prepared...may be a decisive factor in determining the outcome" but adding the caveat that if the strength of the trauma is great enough, preparation will not prevent a traumatic neurosis from developing (Freud 36). This basic understanding of trauma as an event that is both emotionally and cognitively disruptive for the individual and which breaks through the boundaries that delineate our sense of a coherent self continues to undergird many

contemporary understandings of trauma, including many definitions of PTSD. Following Freud and the many theorists who have built on his writings about trauma, I understand trauma to be an experience of suffering that is unassimilable, cognitively and linguistically. I am, therefore, working with a definition that is based on the *effect* that the trauma creates.[4] Representations of suffering that cause linguistic, stylistic, or formal disruptions within the text (either within characters' speech or within the structure of the text itself) are, for my purposes, representations of trauma.

Much (even most) of the suffering that is represented in the texts that I am covering in this dissertation is gendered suffering. Female bodies are under the greatest threat; female social standing is generally at stake. The historical context of the production of texts that I am reading dictates this to a large degree – after all, as I will make clear below, the question of female readership and the female role in the family were at stake in Great Britain in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Female personhood was precarious, and thus much of the trauma that I am discussing is gendered female.

Of particular interest to me as I make my argument is the extent to which hysteria and affective excess have been associated with the female. The idea of the "hysterical woman," the woman whose emotions are too much, or out of control according to a male observer, has resonance with the affective and stylistic excess that I am tracing through

[4] This definition has a number of weaknesses and poses some potential problems. For one, it has the potential to collapse various types and magnitudes of trauma, and even to allow equivalence between trauma suffered by a victim and trauma suffered by a perpetrator. For another, there is a certain troubling circularity to it – the cause is defined only by the effect, after all. However, it is consistent with my interest in focusing on the effects of trauma rather than its causes (and with the realities of diagnosing and treating individuals with trauma).

this dissertation.[5] Both gothic and especially sentimental fictions were associated with femininity, and their affective excesses align with the cultural understanding of emotion as female. While sentimentality opened up certain aspects of female affect to the male population, the association of the feminine with affective excess remained, and remains to this day. Furthermore, women who talked "too much" were also (and are also) considered threatening or unseemly.[6]

This dissertation will attempt to consider affective and linguistic excess in non-pejorative terms. Instead of considering excess as an attribute that needs to be apologized for or excused, I will treat excess as a central and valuable aspect of the experience of recovering from trauma *and* of texts that deal with trauma. Excess, seen from this perspective, becomes a valuable aesthetic strategy with potentially far-reaching consequences. Rather than being an accidental by-product of the popular or feminine nature of these novels, an attribute that needs to be overlooked in order to take the works seriously, excess allows these texts to represent the unrepresentability of trauma. It opens up new expressive possibilities and allows us to consider gothic and sentimental texts in a new light. Taking excessive forms of expression seriously is a feminist choice.

As the previous sections make clear, there are a number of theoretical strands running through this dissertation. As I have discussed above, I am indebted to trauma theory and psychoanalysis, deeply connected fields of theory both of which provide many insights about the structural and linguistic nature of trauma and trauma narratives. To complement those theoretical models, I will be using contemporary psychological

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[5] Anne Digby's chapter "Women's Biological Straitjacket", in *Sexuality and Subordination, Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century* does a great job of providing an overview of the history of the medical understanding of hysteria as a gendered condition.

[6] See the first chapter of Michelle Cohen's *Fashioning Masculinity* for an exploration of the role of gender in the norms of conversation and the policing of spoken language.

literature, which provides practical observations about trauma's effects on individuals and a range of approaches to treating such individuals.[7] Finally, while feminist theory is a less explicit presence, questions of gender and its impact on the trauma narratives that I am discussing underlie all of my readings.

* * *

Many of these theoretical issues, including my central question – what happens to literary form and style when you are telling a narrative of trauma? – could be applied to a wide variety of literature. This raises the question – why have I chosen this particular body of literature? Why gothic and sentimental literature? Why texts from the British eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

These are particularly fruitful texts in which to consider the impacts of trauma because they are bodies of literature that are centrally concerned with traumatic suffering. In addition, they have not usually been understood within the context of theoretical conceptions of trauma. Though the roles of violence and fear in gothic literature are often discussed and theorized and the roles of suffering and exploitation in sentimental literature are often considered, neither genre is generally theorized as being comprised of trauma narratives per se. So these two genres are a new site in which to look at trauma's impacts on narrative. The texts that I consider in this dissertation range from Richardson's publication of *Clarissa* in 1748 to Charlotte Dacre's publication of *Zofloya* in 1806. I will be looking at sentimental texts from 1748 to 1778 and at gothic texts from 1793 to 1817. The texts written in this time period are foundational for both the sentimental and gothic

[7] In contrast to nineteenth century psychoanalysis, this literature is informed by a century's worth of thinking about the role of gender and race, as well as some major revisions to the understanding of the role of the psychological/psychiatric professions.

genres.[8] Their historical position makes these texts a natural starting point for an exploration of these two genres.

My purpose in this dissertation is not to conflate the gothic and the sentimental. After all, while there are important generic overlaps between the two genres, they emerged at different times and the conventions of each are unique. And, as I will elaborate on below, the major threads of the critical conversations about them have also been significantly different, and have often represented them as having opposing political valences. However, I argue that they are also deeply connected in important ways. I will consider the areas of overlap between the two genres, including their thematic and structural similarities. Specifically, I am interested in what we can learn from considering sentimental and gothic texts together in light of the emotional and stylistic excess that is associated with both of them.

Each of the chapters of this dissertation will include both gothic and sentimental texts and will focus on one specific aspect of excess that can be seen in the form and/or style of the texts. I will cover repetitions, humor, and the ineffectiveness of explanatory frameworks. However, the excess of gothic and sentimental texts reveals itself in many other ways as well. The excess of these texts can be seen in their compulsive repetitions, their dark humor and their conflicted relationship to moralistic claims, but also in their exuberant language, their descriptions of violence, their formal irregularities, and sometimes even simply in their length. It is my contention that their excess, in all its

[8] While there are certainly precursors, including early eighteenth century romances such as Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*, the first works that are clearly identifiable as British sentimental novels emerge in the 1740s, and the 1760s and 1770s bring the first works that are clearly identifiable as British gothic novels.

forms, opens up certain kinds of expression that are otherwise not available to the texts, and that it is the result of their attempts to represent trauma and unspeakable suffering.

I have chosen these genres for precisely this reason – that they are centrally interested in suffering. Both sentimental texts and gothic texts concern themselves with fear and violence (usually identified as elements in gothic literature) as well as suffering and exploitation (usually identified as elements in sentimental literature). Furthermore, they often represent gendered sexual trauma. Some of these concerns - and the effects they have on the form and style of the narrative - are often easier to see in gothic texts, whose excesses are frequently obvious. However, placing sentimental and gothic texts side by side make it clear that the excesses that I am exploring in this project are not exclusive to the conventions of gothic novels. Instead, they are symptomatic of the texts' attempts to represent suffering and trauma. In addition, looking at these genres together allows us to see more clearly the ways in which eighteenth century sentimental novels and gothic texts from the early nineteenth century are in conversation with each other, coming out of similar historical and cultural conversations and using many of the same literary conventions.

One of the historical contexts that influences both sentimental and gothic texts from this era is anxiety about readership and the novel. Both sentimental and gothic texts (particularly novels) were the locus for a great deal of critical and social anxiety as well as readerly pleasure in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Conservative commentators in the eighteenth century feared the emerging literary form of the novel because of a perceived "danger of moral degeneration" (Botting 26). This sense of threat arose partly because of the expansion of access to fiction. Novels achieved commercial

success, and the literary establishment worried, according to E.J. Clery, that "their direct appeal, to young women in particular, subverted the rulings of pedagogy; their easy availability at cheap rates through the [circulating] libraries contravened parental control" (88). Clery's phrase "young women in particular" points to a cultural concern about what young women were reading. The eighteenth century image of "the typical novel-reader [is] a young woman, the blankest *tabula rasa*, her mind a passive, soft, unresisting medium for external impressions" (Clery 95). Richard Cumberland, an eighteenth-century critic, argued that "The anxiety about the popularity of novels is justified...because 'young minds are so apt to be tinctured by what they read' that even if novelists have no 'immoral designs' of 'corrupting the youthful mind by pictures of immorality,' they may in any case 'be apt to lead young female readers into affectation and false character' " (Ellis 207). According to Cumberland and others like him, young female readers were the litmus test for the morality of any given text. The question a critic (or parent) must ask is: should my daughter read this?

The answer, when it comes to sentimental novels, was mixed. The popularity of novels and the anxiety about their influence were so closely intertwined that they often existed side by side. Ellis points out that "*The Lady's Magazine* launched repeated attacks on the pernicious influence of novels on the virtue of young women, but...they did so alongside their own examples of sentimental fictions, excerpted and serial novels and enthusiastic reviews of fiction" (47). In addition, eighteenth-century critics repeatedly pointed to Samuel Richardson's work as a site of moral, Christian novel writing. When conduct books disparaged novel reading and "sought to limit reading to a restricted list of texts," those lists often included *Clarissa* and Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (Ellis 33).

Because of their perceived suitability for impressionable young readers, “sentimental representations were often considered to redeem an otherwise suspect new form” (Mullan 237). While there was a significant amount of anxiety around the reading of sentimental novels, sentiment and sensibility were also “understood throughout the eighteenth century itself to be a constitutive element of ‘polite culture’ ” and thus were a component of a genteel education for young women (Johnson 13). So, perhaps, if the books were part of a careful pedagogical program, your daughter could read these popular sentimental novels.

Gothic novels, on the other hand, were more universally understood to be unsuitable (even while many critics admitted to being entertained by them). Fred Botting writes of the reception of the early gothic novels that “the challenge [they were thought to pose] to aesthetic values was framed in terms of social transgression: virtue, propriety and domestic order were considered to be under threat” (22). The anonymous author of a letter to a public journal in 1798 wrote:

> 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.... Can a young lady be taught nothing more necessary in life, than to sleep in a dungeon with venomous reptiles, walk through a ward [wood] with assassins, and carry bloody daggers in their pockets, instead of pin-cushions and needle-books? (Clery and Miles 184)

The letter, which attacks the gothic genre as a whole, repeats yet again the premise that novels need to be vehicles of instruction, and invokes the figure of the young woman to mock the conventions of the gothic novel. In his review of *The Monk* in a 1797 *Critical Review*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's final value judgment of the work is: "we declare it to be our opinion, that the Monk is a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale" (Clery and Miles 188). This emphasis on the importance of moral instruction in literary criticism continues to be felt in the nineteenth century. An 1818 review of *Frankenstein* in *Quarterly Review* includes the line, "Our taste and our judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing, and the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is – it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality." It is clear, then, that your daughter should *not* read gothic novels.

Contemporary critical conversations about these genres reflect, in some ways, the contemporaneous reactions to sentimental and gothic texts. To begin with, their places in the canon have historically been different. The early nineteenth-century gothic has often been on the margins of the canon, and criticism covering this literature has had to fight for its place in the field.[9] The eighteenth-century sentimental novel has been understood

[9] In the 1941 edition of *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature,* George Sampson wrote: "The 'tale of terror' had a great run of popularity ... at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Some of them were trash of the most abject kind ... [Only] three fairly considerable figures [emerged from the gothic] ... Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis, and Charles Robert Maturin" (qtd. in Otto). However, even these three "considerable figures" have needed to be defended against critical dismissal, a fact that is made all too clear by Terry Castle's 1998 introduction to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which opens with the line: "Perhaps no work in the history of English fiction has been more often caricatured – trivialized, misread, remade as hearsay – than Ann Radcliffe's late eighteenth-century Gothic classic *The Mysteries of Udolpho*" (vii). As with eighteenth-century critics, twentieth-century scholars were quicker to dismiss the gothic than the sentimental. The revaluation of the gothic that leads to defenses of Radcliffe and other gothic authors is a phenomenon that dates really only from the last decades of the twentieth century, when, according to Peter Otto, "some of the features that had previously relegated Gothic to the margins now attracted readers to the genre" and "increasing numbers of critics [were] drawn to the Gothic." As a result of the shifting interests of

to be central to our understanding of the history of the novel. Sentimental novels have a more secure place in the canon, if not always totally secure.[10]

This difference has also been reflected in contemporary criticism. As conservative parents considered letting their daughters read sentimental texts but not gothic texts, contemporary criticism has generally also identified sentimental literature as more conservative and less excessive than gothic literature. While some critics have connected these two genres, as I will discuss, the critical conversation about these genres has most frequently seen sentimental conventions as conservative, as part of the construction of a restrictive genteel culture, and gothic as transgressive, as part of a rebellious impulse against genteel culture. Both conversations have tended to center around questions of gender and sexuality. So the general picture that is created by critics is one of a gothic literature that allows for female and sexual rebellion and a sentimental literature that restricts such rebellion.

This characterization of the critical conversations about the sentimental and the gothic is obviously an oversimplification, and I will point to some of the ways that critics have complicated the understanding of these political valences. However, it is also an accurate description of the thrust of much critical work on these genres in the last couple

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the literary critical community in the last thirty years, studying the gothic is now not just acceptable but quite trendy.

[10] Markman Ellis complicates sentimentality's role in academic literary circles when he writes that the sentimental was, until recently, "perceived as of marginal interest and negligible importance, a topic for literary history, not criticism" (Ellis 3). However, it *was* a topic for literary history, and Ian Watt, Michael McKeon, and Nancy Armstrong all feature the sentimental novel prominently in their seminal studies of the "rise of the novel." Admittedly, the texts discussed tend to be limited to Richardson, Sterne, and Fielding, but the sentimental novel has been a staple of our understanding of both eighteenth-century literature and the history of the novel ever since the novels themselves were published. As with the eighteenth-century reception, more recent contemporary critical responses have a conflicted and sometimes contradictory relationship to sentimental texts.

of decades. Major critics Diane Hoeveler and George Haggerty, for example, see the gothic as essentially transgressive. Hoeveler writes, in *The Female Gothic*, that it is "accurate to see the female gothic novel functioning as a coded and veiled critique of all of those public institutions that have been erected to displace, contain, or commodify women" (xii-xiii). Haggerty, in *Queer Gothic*, writes:

> I attempt to show the ways in which all…heteronormative …configurations of human interaction are insistently challenged and in some cases significantly undermined in these fictions…Gothic fiction offered the one semirespectable area of literary endeavor in which modes of sexual and social transgression were discursively addressed on a regular basis." (3)

Even critics who disagree with this analysis acknowledge its prevalence. For example, James Watt, in *Contesting the Gothic*, writes, "Despite the aura of subversion that still surrounds the genre as a whole, nearly all of the romances which actually called themselves 'Gothic' were unambiguously conservative" (8). He then goes on to explore why gothic works were considered transgressive and scandalous, despite what he sees as the actual conservative streak in the works. He argues directly against the general understanding, established in the eighteenth century, that gothic texts are sites of gendered and sexual transgression.

Sentimental novels are most often seen as part of the cultural construction of a conservative middle class morality that restricts female sexuality and behavior. Markman Ellis, in *The Politics of Sensibility*, writes:

> Sensibility was endemic amongst women of the middle station of life: yet such women also had to exercise constant vigilance in order to maintain this sensibility. To inculcate this vigilance, moralists sought to instruct young women how to learn or reinforce a proper, sincere and virtuous sensibility. (27)

Laura Hinton, in her exploration of the role of sadism and masochism in sentimentality, identifies this as a question of a gendered power dynamic: "The reproduction of sentiment calls forth images of femininity, sympathy, and virtuous moral feeling. But the reproduction of sentiment also relies upon a visual power structure gendered male" (2). As with the gothic critical conversation, there are critics who disagree or complicate the dominant understandings of the genre. While she sees danger in the "conservative insistence upon the urgency of chivalric sentimentality," Claudia Johnson also identifies female writers who rebel while participating in sentimental rhetoric: "Crowded with outrageous and rigidly gendered contests over the dignity of meaningful suffering, the works of Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, and Burney culminate as well as assail the sentimental tradition at precisely that moment when it is reasserted in extreme forms as a political imperative" (11, 14). And Marianne Noble disagrees with Laura Hinton on the implications of masochism for female sentimentality. She writes in *The Masochistic Pleasure of Sentimentality* that, "In this book, I argue that the masochism in nineteenth-century American women's sentimentality can be seen as an opportunity for agency that presented itself to authors *within* the ideological constraints of the culture" (5). However, these arguments, like James Watts' argument about the gothic, are required to grapple

with the understanding of the sentimental as in collaboration with the construction of a dominant, heteronormative middle class culture.

Despite this major opposition in the critical understanding of the political valences of these genres, there are also a number of striking similarities (often, although not always, unacknowledged) in the critical conversations about these two genres. These similarities can help us see how positioning these genres as opposed to each other does not fully acknowledge their similarities and overlaps. The similarities between these bodies of texts – discussions about affective excess, stylistic excess, and the representations of suffering – are the threads that I will be following in this dissertation. Placing these two genres – one apparently transgressive, the other apparently conservative – together and looking at their representations of traumatic suffering and those representations' impacts on the texts' styles allows me to explore them in a different light. First, I will understand them as deeply related to each other and as tackling many of the same questions about suffering, form, and gender. Understood together rather than in opposition, new insights about their representations of suffering emerge. Second, I will consider these two genres as trauma narratives – applying a new theoretical framework to both bodies of work.

Turning back to the literary works themselves, we can begin to see some of the similarities that can be obscured by the dominant critical conversations that focus on difference. One thing that is striking is the extent to which they share a vocabulary of excess, tropes of affective and stylistic hyperbole, and a concern with suffering. Looking at one moment from a popular sentimental novel (*Evelina*) and one moment from a popular gothic novel (*The Monk*), these similarities can come into focus:

> What a moment for your Evelina! - an involuntary scream escaped me, and covering my face with my hands, I sunk on the floor.
> He had, however, seen me first; for in a voice scarce articulate he exclaimed, “My God! Does Caroline Evelyn still live!” (Burney 372)

> As Lorenzo stooped to raise her, the beams of the Lamp struck full upon his face. “Almighty God!” She exclaimed; “Is it possible! That look! Those features! Oh! Yes, it is, it is . . . .” She extended her arms to throw them round him; But her enfeebled frame was unable to sustain the emotions, which agitated her bosom. She fainted, and again sank upon the bed of straw. (Lewis 372)

The encounter with the long-lost relative, the fainting woman, dashes and ellipses and exclamation points – these are tropes common to *both* sentimental and gothic genres. In Fanny Burney's 1778 novel, the eponymous Evelina faces her unknown father, whose recognition of her mother's features in her own creates an exemplary sentimental moment. After Evelina prostrates herself in front of him, and he recognizes her as his daughter, her father tears himself away from her, frantically running from the room, unable to look at her again because of the extremity of his emotion. Twenty years after the publication of *Evelina*, Matthew Lewis published *The Monk*, which includes a similar scene of familial recognition. In this case, Agnes, a nun who has been punished for a sexual transgression by being locked in a dungeon, is found by her brother Lorenzo, cradling her dead and decaying infant. Agnes' recognition of her brother leads her to

attempt to throw herself on him, but her overwhelming emotions (and her physical frailty) cause her to faint instead. Both the overwhelming pathos of these moments and the drama with which they are described represent the emotional and stylistic excess that is central to both sentimental and gothic texts.

A number of contemporary critics have acknowledged a relationship between the gothic and the sentimental that points towards the important similarities between the two genres and that can ultimately lead us to see both genres as narrating trauma. Jeanne DeWaard observes correctly that "sentimental and gothic conventions have long been intertwined...." As she continues, identifying "a heroine beset by forces intent on her ruin, a heightened attention to bodily sensations, [and] a setting in interior domains" as "elements common to both genres," it becomes clear that these common elements are related to the representation of fear and suffering (4).[11] Many critics see the relationship between these genres as teleological, reading the gothic as a "feminist revision of sentimental domesticity" or as taking sentimental tropes and leveraging them for "disruptive" political ends (DeWaard 6). Marianne Noble, on the other hand, sees gothic horror as present in sentimental fiction. She writes that "sentimental fiction bears a striking resemblance to gothic fiction, which also stimulates pleasure by exploiting the terror of tortured victims. Indeed, I propose that the core of horror in sentimentality is a gothic image" ("An Ecstasy of Apprehension" 164). This argument places suffering at the center of the discussion in a more complicated way than DeWaard's observation that both genres feature threatened heroines. Noble's concerns about sadism and masochism

[11] Ann Radcliffe's novels, in particular, are frequently mentioned as a site for the confluence of these genres. Terry Castle refers to Emily as a "victim of 'sensibility' " and writes that "Radcliffe heroines seem like they would be equally comfortable in a sentimental novel, fainting at family drama or impending penury rather than running away from counts in gloomy castles" ("Introduction" vii).

in sentimental texts point to the important relationship that *both* gothic and sentimental fictions have to trauma theory and the representation of suffering. Her reading of the horror in sentimentality as being a "gothic" horror doesn't indicate that both genres are "about" the same thing, but that there is, underlying both of them, an attempt at representing suffering. This is one of the primary connections that I want to draw between these two genres – that despite their different (if overlapping) conventions and forms, they are often exploring similar questions about suffering.

Along with this mutual concern with suffering, I will be looking at their shared stylistic and formal excesses. In fact, I will be considering these intertwined genres as being fundamentally "writing[s] of excess."[12] Many critical attempts at defining both gothic and sentimental texts cite a quality of excess, often with some apology, criticism, or at least discomfort. Below, I will provide an overview both of the literature covering the stylistic excess of both sentimental and gothic works and some critical observations about the ways that this excess is connected to emotional excess found in these texts. Ultimately, this connection between emotional and stylistic excess points towards the importance of the emotional content of the stories told in these texts and the way that that content informs their form and structure. In fact, I argue that it is the very attempts to represent suffering that create the stylistic and formal excesses that characterize these genres.

Literary critics have described these characteristic excesses in a variety of ways. Barbara Benedict identifies sentimentalism as a "hybrid form that includes prose, poetry,

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[12] This is how Fred Botting describes the gothic in the opening line of *Gothic*. The Oxford English Dictionary similarly defines sentimentalism as "the tendency to excessive indulgence in or insincere display of sentiment." In particular, sentimental responses are frequently understood as being emotion in excess of the object. Laura Hinton writes of the sentimental novel that "literary scholars have viewed sentiment as an 'excessive' mode of fiction" (3).

and fiction" that "transgress[es] the generic restriction of th[e] book" (7). She also identifies "tonal instability" as a product of the genre's "interruptions, digressions, and narrative fractures; the tonal combination of pathos and humor; and highly stylized, exclamatory rhetoric" (Benedict 12). Markman Ellis makes a similar point very succinctly when he writes, "Sentimentalism remains polyphonic" (3). These descriptions of sentimental literature point towards the ways that the language and form of these texts are unrestrained, digressive, and multiple.

Similar claims are made about gothic texts; Avril Horner and Susan Zlosnik claim that the gothic is "a mode of writing that has been hybrid since its very inception" (4). In a similar vein, Jerrold Hogle writes of the gothic that it is concerned with crossing boundaries. He writes that the gothic includes "threats of and longings for gender-crossing, homosexuality or bisexuality, racial mixture, class fluidity, the child in the adult, timeless timeliness, and simultaneous evolution and devolution" and that these motifs are presented as being "possibly evil *and* desirable" (Hogle 11). This denial of easy categorization and crossing of boundaries is one important aspect (or result) of the kinds of excess that characterize gothic and sentimental texts. In my work, I will build on his observations about the ambiguities and contradictions that these texts present through their interest in crossing boundaries as well as Ellis' and Benedict's observations about the polyphonic and unstable nature of sentimentality.

In this dissertation, I will focus on the links between the stylistic excess and emotional excess that characterize these genres. Claudia Johnson writes of the discomfort that critics have historically expressed about the emotional excess of both sentimental and gothic texts:

> …during the 1790s in particular, sentimentalism and gothicism converged to produce a body of novels distinctive first and foremost for their egregious affectivity. In works by Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Godwin, Lewis, and Burney (to name only a few), emotions are saturated in turbulent and disfiguring excess; not simply patently disruptive emotions – such as ambition, greed, anger, lust – but ostensibly gentler ones as well – such as reverence, sorrow, even filial devotion – are always and obviously over the top, and then some. (1)

Johnson explicitly connects this emotional excess to stylistic excess, claiming that these authors don't have the "stylistic control" of a Jane Austen, but instead their texts are characterized by "grotesqueness, their flaunted strain, [and] incoherence" (18). However, while I agree with her observations about both emotional and stylistic excess, I do not see these elements as the result of a lack of control, but instead as the result of attempting to represent trauma.

Julian Wolfreys' description of the gothic also connects the excesses of gothic writing with its sensibilities and emotional content. He writes that the "gothic is clearly always already excessive, grotesque, overspilling its own boundaries and limits. The impropriety of gothic sensibility is such that…it leaves its traces in its audience, to return again and again" (8). Both sentimental and gothic texts are characterized by emotional and affective excess, a spilling over of conventional boundaries of emotional propriety. This affective excess is expressed within the text as formal and stylistic excess.

I argue in this dissertation that both gothic and sentimental texts' affective excess and the stylistic excess that accompanies it are reflective of the texts' attempts to

represent trauma. As cultural trauma theory teaches us, trauma causes disruptions in language and narrative. And as psychological theory shows, one of trauma's effects on individuals' linguistic and cognitive behaviors is a tendency towards excessive behaviors – including multiple retellings and linguistic repetitions, outbursts of hysterical laughter, and an inability to make singular meaning out of the traumatic event among them.

* * *

My dissertation is comprised of three chapters that are organized thematically around three types of narrative excess that are caused by telling a story of trauma. The first chapter will focus on the role of compulsive repetition in trauma narratives through readings of Eliza Parsons' *Castle of Wolfenbach* and Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, two novels that have significant structural and thematic similarities despite being categorized as gothic and sentimental, respectively. I will look primarily at the ways that doubles and retellings function in these works. Through this analysis, I will show that, despite the promise of closure that the clinical model of "working through" repetition compulsion holds out, traumatic repetition can lead to the proliferation of literary narratives of trauma rather than the end of such narratives.

In this chapter, I begin with an exploration of the centrality of narrative repetition to the experience of traumatic suffering, both as a symptom and as a part of a therapeutic model. To do this, I will turn to contemporary psychology's descriptions of narrative repetition, of retelling, as a part of therapeutic practice that attempts to cure patients of their traumatic symptoms. I then read both *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and *Evelina* in light of the relationship between narrative repetition and attempts to cope with the female main characters' traumatic suffering. I argue that the structure of the texts themselves reflects

the way in which repetitions and uncanny doubles are the marks of trauma in the text. These repetitions within these texts (of both character and plot) do not resolve themselves comfortably. Instead, the boundaries that conventional plots put in place (e.g. the resolution of the marriage plot) are exceeded by these texts and their refusal of closure. These repetitions point to the way that trauma resists closure in favor of a proliferation of language and emotion.

The second chapter will focus on another way that these texts exceed their boundaries: generic and tonal boundary-crossing. I will consider the tonal hybridity of gothic and sentimental texts caused by the presence of humor in these texts. My goal in this chapter is to bring these two constellations of ideas together: first, that humor is a way to cope with suffering and second, that humor can be disruptive and productive in literary texts by pushing the boundaries of rationality and genre. To establish the first claim, I will provide a brief overview of current psychological literature that discusses the role of humor in relationship to trauma and suffering, establishing the relationship between excessive or transgressive humor and extreme psychological states. It is my contention that the humor in the texts I am considering is a comedy of excess that is a response to circumstances of excess, and that the root of the comedy is the experience of fear and horror.

In particular, in the texts I will analyze in this chapter, the fear and horror being depicted comes from anxieties about sexuality, sexual violence, and gendered family systems. I will read Matthew Lewis' *The Monk,* Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*. In connecting these texts, I move from the "male gothic," which is often understood to include grotesque humor, to the "female gothic,"

which is generally understood to be too contained and realistic to be funny, to the sentimental, whose non-satirical forms are thought to be opposed to humor. Instead, I argue that these different genres or subgenres actually have much more in common than it would appear when it comes to humor. In all three of the texts that I explore in this chapter, I identify a hybrid tone – one that combines the more obvious fear and grief with traumatic laughter, the type of humor that is the one result of encounters with trauma and attempts to narrative trauma. Humor, then, is a mark of trauma in each of the three texts, despite their apparent differences, and is a way of expressing the extra-rational nature of trauma.

The third chapter looks at the elements of gothic and sentimental texts that attempt to apply explanatory frameworks to the trauma narrated by the text. In this chapter, I focus on the tensions between the excessive traumatic narratives and the explanatory frameworks that attempt to contain them. It is my contention in this chapter that traumatic suffering threatens our philosophical and cognitive understandings of the world, causing both a drive for a clear, singular explanatory framework and the realization that any such framework is doomed to inadequacy. In order to elucidate this dynamic, I will outline the general principles of assumptive world theory, a psychological theory put forth by Ronnie Janoff-Bulman in the early 1990s. This theory uses the phrase "assumptive world" to describe the conceptual systems that people use to understand the world, and then argues that the underlying assumptions that make up those conceptual systems are disrupted by experiences of trauma.

In this chapter, I look at the way that novels narrating trauma mirror this crisis at a structural level. I begin by discussing Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", a

text that serves as a useful model, since it has long been critically understood as being invested in the tension between the main narrative poem (which is excessive and concerned with disruptive suffering) and the glosses (which purport to provide explanations of and for the main poem). I will then turn to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*.

In both of these texts, a voice within the text makes moral pronouncements and provides explanations that lead (or purport to lead) the reader to a singular patriarchal interpretation of events, an explanation that centers around the failings of the female characters. The narratives themselves, however, escape or exceed these voices, refusing to be reduced to a singular explanation. Identifying a single (female) culprit or one, identifiable original sin would produce an ideologically coherent explanation for the trauma. Instead, each of these texts reflects the way that trauma makes that kind of singular interpretation impossible.

While most of my dissertation focuses on expressions of suffering, the impossibility of singular interpretation, the hybridity of tone that includes humor, and the lack of narrative closure in favor of repetition and proliferation in these texts also make them pleasurable to read. As Dominick LaCapra points out, there is the possibility, even tendency, to "convert trauma into the occasion for sublimity," allowing for "the excess of trauma [to become] an uncanny source of elation or ecstasy" (23). In my conclusion I will consider the possibility of literary representations of trauma being (among other things) sublime. The sublime does have much in common with trauma – it invokes an experience that is beyond the rational, that exceeds the boundaries of human understanding, and it both based in fear and productive of pleasure. Drawing on Barbara Claire Freeman's

work in *The Feminine Sublime*, I will conclude my dissertation with a consideration of the relationship between gender and the sublime, and the possibility that traumatic narratives can allow us a new understanding of the sublime possibilities inherent in depiction of the losses and absences of trauma in literature.

Chapter 1:
Telling it Over, Over Again
Repetition Compulsion, the Uncanny, and the Problem of Closure

In less than a fortnight after their arrival in Paris, the Count De Bouville, who had been indefatigable in his endeavours to hasten all the elegant arrangements he had projected for the reception of his bride, had the pleasure of seeing every thing in proper order, and by the approbation of all their joint relations and friends, received the hand and heart of his Matilda, who all acknowledged was the only one deserving the entire affection of the accomplished and respectable Count De Bouville.

- Eliza Parsons, *The Castle of Wolfenbach*

ALL is over, my dearest Sir; and the fate of your Evelina is decided! This morning, with fearful joy and trembling gratitude, she united herself for ever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection.

- Fanny Burney, *Evelina*

Both Eliza Parsons' 1793 gothic novel *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and Fanny Burney's 1778 sentimental novel *Evelina* appear to conclude with a happy ending. The second-to-last paragraph of *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and the beginning of the final letter of *Evelina* both present the inevitable end of the marriage plot – the happy marriage between the heroine and the hero, with the approval of family and friends. As Parsons writes, everything appears to be "in proper order" (202). The marriage in each novel solves the primary problem: the heroine's uncertain and precarious social and financial situation. And it meets generic expectations for novels of the period. However, in each novel this satisfying closure is called into question by the narrative excesses and repetitions of the surrounding text. The novels contain narrative repetitions that persist until (and perhaps past) the final page of the text, complicating the ostensible completeness of the happy ending.[1]

[1] Even the quotations in the epigraph suggest some complications to the happy ending. Matilda, after all, can only get married with the "approbation of all their joint relations and friends," while

In *Evelina*, Evelina's final letter to her guardian Mr. Villars, quoted above, ends with a reference to the dying Mr. Villars himself rather than to Orville, her new husband. In the line following the announcement of her marriage, she calls the dying Villars, not Orville, "the best of men" (437). By placing Villars in the position of Evelina's most-beloved, this letter points towards the doublings between her problematic father figures and her new husband, suggesting that Evelina's struggles with and threats from men in her family may continue beyond her marriage. In *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, Matilda is socially ostracized throughout the novel, but her marriage is supposed to create an end to the ostracism. However, immediately before the description of Matilda's marriage that is quoted above, the narrator describes a community of women gossiping cruelly about Matilda, and editorializes, "Such is the progress of envy, such the hatred of virtue, in bad minds, and such you meet with in all public circles" (202). In this case, the idea that Matilda's marriage will end her social ostracism is undermined by the continuation of patterns of exclusion beyond her engagement. In both novels, the closure promised by the happy ending to the marriage plot is thrown in question by other aspects of the final pages of text.

These complications are representative of a larger pattern in the texts – a pattern of narrative excess through multiplication that overflows conventional boundaries, including the closure of endings. *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, along with many other gothic and sentimental novels, are full of repetitions; individual elements of the plot are repeated, similar relationships appear in multiple places and between multiple

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Evelina describes her marriage as deciding her fate and as containing fear and trembling as well as joy and gratitude.

characters, and the main characters have multiple uncanny doubles.[2] These repetitions and doubles create a sense of the multiplication of narrative, of being in a kind of hall of mirrors in which the stories repeat with a difference throughout the text. Focusing on the role of these retellings and doublings illuminates one unique way that telling a narrative of trauma impacts literary and narrative form. In each of these novels, because they are telling a story of traumatic female persecution, a structure of repetition is generated.

Michelle Massé observes that "repetition in the Gothic functions as it does for certain other traumas: the reactivation of trauma is an attempt to recognize…the incredible and unspeakable that nonetheless happened" (681). Following this observation, I will explore how Gothic and sentimental novels' shared concern with the subject of trauma provokes and shapes these texts' excessive narrative repetitions. The repetitions—formal manifestations of the difficulty of narrating trauma—are not exiled from the texts at the end, despite the novels' apparent happy endings. Instead, the novels hold out the promise of more narratives created by further repetitions of the central conflicts they represent. By suggesting the possibility of a continuation of conflict beyond the ostensible closure of the marriage plot, these texts overspill their formal boundaries and call attention to the way that trauma produces excess in literary narratives.

Repetitions of gendered assault and threat (including plot points, characterizations, and social situations) are the mark of trauma in the text. As I have

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[2] Critics often describe gothic and sentimental texts as being characterized by fragments, and, as I establish in my introduction, trauma's relationship to narrative is often described in terms of absence, lack, incompleteness, and fragmentation. For explorations of the role of fragments in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic and sentimental works, see, among others: Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime*; E. W. Pitcher, "Eighteenth-Century Gothic Fragments and the Paradigm of Violation and Repair," in *Studies in Short Fiction* 33.1; Elizabeth W. Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century*; and Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of Form*. However, as I discuss in this chapter, gothic and sentimental texts consist as much of retellings and doublings as of fragments.

shown in the introduction, traumatic experience can create a proliferation of language and emotion, a hall of mirrors with receding but persistent images of the trauma. The structure of literary works, and particularly of the gothic and sentimental novels I study here, allows us to see this repetition clearly as a feature of trauma. Literary texts can retell with a difference the story of trauma but without the necessity of following a path of improvement or clarification. At the same time, psychological theories can shine an important light on the nature of trauma's relationship to narrative and repetition. They can help identify patterns and structures in literature about trauma, including the role of repetition, that have not been looked at in depth up to this point.

Starting as early as Freud's identification of repetition compulsion as a sign of the trauma of war neuroses suffered by soldiers returning from World War I, psychological understandings of trauma's effects have identified compulsive narrative repetition as a crucial part of the experience of trauma and its aftermath for many individuals. Many prevailing current therapeutic models suggest that by repeating a narrative of trauma, that narrative can be controlled and made orderly, so that it becomes "a detailed coherent narrative with a beginning, middle, and end" rather than a chaotic and compulsive narrative ("Treatment Process"). This reworking of narrative is part of the process of therapeutic "working-through" (a term with Freudian origins). Working-through is the process of repeating and refining psychological or psychoanalytical interpretations in order to finally resolve problematic psychological conflicts and to allow an individual to gain control over her life. However, the novels I will consider in this chapter resist such resolution. Instead, they present fictional worlds and narrative structures that continue to

exist in liminal spaces and explore the impossibility of complete closure in the face of trauma.

In their representation of a potentially endless repetition and doubling, these texts differ from the therapeutic model that focuses on resolution, recovery, or even cure. Novels are uniquely able to represent this traumatic hall of mirrors because they are able to structurally mirror the process that traumatized individuals go through, reflecting symptomatic repetition compulsion and evoking a kind of talking cure, or a working-through of trauma. Importantly, however, novels do not have the pressure to achieve recovery that exists for an individual in psychological distress. Psychological studies suggest that individuals who have experienced trauma need to attempt to regain a mental stability that is often understood as "closure." When applied to narrative repetition, the goal of this closure is an end to repetition compulsion and its on-going creation of narrative in favor of a closed, orderly narrative that reduces the power of trauma's after-effects. However, literary works can more easily continue to exist in the tension between the desire for closure and the impulse towards narrative creation. In fact, in the gothic and sentimental novels I am reading here, repetition can lead to the proliferation of narratives of trauma rather than the end of such narratives. As a result, these texts show us a little-discussed aspect of trauma: the way that trauma creates and supports multiple and proliferating narratives.

In this chapter, I will look at the way that repetition and doubling function in *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and the conclusions about the relationship between trauma and excessive narrative that can be drawn from such readings. Specifically, as novels that are focused around the social difficulties of a single young woman, these two

novels can allow us to see how the trauma of sexual violence is not fully resolved by marriage, because each novel contains elements that complicate the finality of the marriage plot, and thus its status as closure in relationship to trauma. The trauma at stake in these novels is primarily sexual violation, and the marriage plot is the ostensible resolution to the trauma of the texts, the promised end to sexual violence and social vulnerability. However, despite the fact that both texts end with a marriage, these novels undermine the status of marriage as a solution for the familial or sexual trauma women experience. *Evelina*'s final pages conflate her father figure with her new husband, suggesting the continuation of Evelina's familial cycle of gendered trauma rather than an end to the trauma. *The Castle of Wolfenbach*'s final pages allude to the continuation of a gendered cycle of exclusion through the mention of community condemnation of Matilda and other women. In both novels, trauma is not eradicated on the final page.

I have chosen these two texts for both their similarities and their differences. While written within a fifteen-year span, these two novels are dramatically different in tone, are generally identified as belonging to two different genres, and have distinctly different reception histories. *Evelina* was written in 1778 by a well-established author, is acknowledged as humorous as well as emotional, and is described as a sentimental novel in the current canon. *The Castle of Wolfenbach* was written in 1793 by a popular but little-respected author, is described as a gothic novel in the German tradition, and is a non-canonical work. However, despite these differences, I will argue that they are in fact very similar to each other, and that both can be considered to be "gendered persecution novels." Rather than looking at them as examples of the distinct gothic and sentimental traditions, or as one canonical and one non-canonical novel, I will consider the deep

similarities between the two texts in terms of both their structure and content. Considering these similarities allows us to see the overlapping concerns that many gothic and sentimental texts share despite the differences between them. Gendered persecution novels, which can be found among gothic and sentimental texts alike, focus on individual female characters who experience certain kinds of traumatic suffering, and as a result have many formal (as well as thematic) similarities.

In each novel, the trauma of the main character (who is pursued, threatened, disowned, and/or assaulted by men within her close social circle) is the primary, foregrounded example of gendered trauma, but the pattern is repeated throughout each novel through the stories of other female characters. Matilda and Evelina's traumas are one repetition of a trauma that is collective and thematic, a trauma that, the texts suggest, is suffered by women more generally. In attempting to express this common and repeated trauma in written narrative, these novels both model and ask us to question the process of working through trauma to a clear resolution. They also throw into question the socially acceptable resolution for such gendered trauma: marriage.

As a result, the texts suggest the possibility of traumatic fictional narrative that proliferates beyond the confines of the text through the excess repetition of the trauma narrative. Given that the marriage plots do not fully resolve the cyclical trauma presented in the novels, a reader can easily project further traumatic conflict into the imaginary future of the text, a future that is far from the promised "happily ever after." At the same time, these texts also indicate that the sense of mastery that narrative closure can provide for the reader is elusive. One of the manifestations of this repetitive narration caused by the gendered trauma in *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* is the presence of uncanny

doubles. The presence of these uncanny doubles is particularly important because the presence of the uncanny in these texts illuminates the link between repetition compulsion and the instability of boundaries - and the related impossibility of closure - in these novels. Theorists of the uncanny, including Neil Hertz, Nicholas Royle, and John Jervis, point out that uncanny narratives are by necessity non-teleological and at odds with boundaries. Therefore, examining the uses that the novels make of the uncanny as a form of repetition provides a theoretical framework within which to understand the way that that repetition compulsion caused by trauma pushes against the apparent closure of the marriage plot.

Due to the nature of traumatic narrative, the repetition in both of these novels does not work through the trauma in a way that leads to the definitive end of trauma or of narrative. Instead, the novels evince a tension between the drive for closure and the impossibility thereof. They manifest the way that telling a story of traumatic suffering causes compulsively repeating narratives. Without the pressure of needing to be completely cured, they are able to represent traumatized identity and its relationship to compulsive language that exceeds and overflows conventional boundaries. In these texts we see not just the pain of traumatic experience, but also the cyclical and generative nature of the repetition compulsion created by trauma – a potentially horrifying but also multiplying hall of mirrors, with trauma narratives being generated at every turn.

Gothic *and* Sentimental: Gendered Persecution Novels

Evelina and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* focus on individual female characters who experience traumatic suffering, attempt to avoid harassment and assault throughout the

novel, and end up married at the end. While the novels are generally understood to be part of two different literary genres (sentimental and gothic, respectively) and hold very different positions in the canon, it is my contention that they actually have a great deal in common. I will argue that they are in fact part of a group of texts that have as much in common with each other as they do with the other gothic and sentimental to which they are typically linked. These overlapping generic boundaries between *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* allow us to see more clearly the overlapping concerns that gothic and sentimental texts share, especially concerns with gendered suffering and the effects with which such traumatic suffering marks literary narrative.

Evelina and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* tell fundamentally similar stories and include classic elements of both the gothic and sentimental traditions. Both have heroines who are socially disadvantaged due to not having acknowledged, genteel parents. They are both pursued sexually by men within their close social circle, and have little recourse due to their precarious social position. They both call upon female friends in attempts to gain some measure of protection for themselves. And they both respond to their difficulties by expressing excessive, bodily emotion. Furthermore, the texts themselves have structural similarities, despite their significantly different tones. They are both structured around a series of sexual and social obstacles that stand in the way of the heroine's ultimate marriage. Furthermore, they are also both full of repetitions and mirrors of the heroine's story, and uncanny doubles for the heroine. It is these similarities that I want to bring to the fore as I look at *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and *Evelina* together and consider the way that they complicate any understanding of gothic and sentimental novels as exclusive categories without overlap. In each novel, elements commonly

associated with the gothic (fear, threat, entrapment) are combined with elements commonly associated with the sentimental (physical manifestations of female emotion, affectively-charged encounters).

The Castle of Wolfenbach follows the trials of a virtuous young woman named Matilda who is persecuted by various men in her life. The novel is informed by the sentimental novels of the eighteenth century. Matilda's suffering consists primarily of sexual pursuits and threats of rape by an older man she considers a family member. This precarious position of being threatened by someone within her family is made worse by her financial and social vulnerability as a woman with an obscure background and no living parents.

Relatively little has been written about the novel since it was rediscovered in the 1960s.[3] In the last twenty years, the novel has mainly been mentioned in passing in essays about the gothic genre.[4] Only one book-length work has been devoted to Parsons: Karen Morton's *A Life Marketed as Fiction: An Analysis of the Works of Eliza Parsons* published in 2011 by Valancourt Press. As there is little scholarship on *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, there is also little discussion of its relationship to genre, or of its relationship to the sentimental novel. No critics have explicitly claimed that the text has a close relationship to the sentimental, despite the major overlaps in theme and form between it and many sentimental novels. In what little scholarship there is, the novel is often

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[3] Until recently, the only significant writing on Eliza Parsons' work was found in Montague Summers' posthumously published autobiography *The Galanty Show* (1980) and the introductions to the few twentieth-century editions of *The Castle of Wolfenbach* that existed (Devendra Varma's 1968 Folio edition and Diane Hoeveler's 2006 Valancourt edition).

[4] Notably, *The Castle of Wolfenbach* is used as an example in Stefan Andriopoulos' "The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel" in *ELH* 66.3 (1999) in a discussion about supernatural agency and the role of providence in gothic novels, and in Deidre Lynch's "Gothic Libraries and National Subjects" in *Studies in Romanticism* 40 (2001) in a discussion of the representation of libraries in gothic novels.

considered to be generically gothic. For example, Michael Sadleir has claimed that it was "an imitation German gothic novel" and Montague Summers has connected it closely to Ann Radcliffe's work (Hoeveler "Introduction" x). In contrast, in her chapter on Parsons' gothic novels, Karen Morton argues that Parsons' novels are more different from Ann Radcliffe's than they seem at first glance, and claims that Parsons' novels are in fact "fundamentally realist" despite being full of "recognizably Gothic elements" (161). The only other mention of the novel's relationship to genre comes from Hoeveler's introduction to the Valancourt Press edition, in which she writes that "Parsons was engaged in writing to the gothic formula that had been established already: part sentimental virtue in distress, part novel of manners, part melodramatic confrontation between good and evil" (x).

While I do not disagree that the novel uses many prototypically gothic tropes, Morton's claim that it has a fundamental difference to (and greater commitment to realism than) the Radcliffean gothic suggests that it can be understood as positioned on the edge of the gothic, or as including elements of other genres as well as the gothic. Similarly, in Hoeveler's description of what makes up the "gothic formula" that Parsons is following, she includes "sentimental virtue in distress" and the "novel of manners," suggesting that *The Castle of Wolfenbach's* gothic-ness actually includes significant aspects of the sentimental.

The most striking evidence of *The Castle of Wolfenbach*'s significant relationship to sentimentality is the behavior of the two main female characters, who swoon, faint and weep repeatedly in response to sexual threats but also to empathetic strangers. In an example of both the novel's excess and its sentimentality, in this 200-page novel the

word "tears" appears 82 times, "tremble" 27 times, and "faint" 24 times (plus 7 instances of "senseless" and 2 of "swoon"). Such extreme and embodied emotional response is a definitive feature of the sentimental novel. Another defining feature of sentimental novels is the representation of female suffering, often sexualized or gendered suffering witnessed by men. Matilda's position as a young vulnerable woman threatened by men mirrors that of countless sentimental heroines, and her responses are equally sentimental.

Evelina, Burney's 1778 sentimental novel, follows one of these sentimental heroines: an innocent, harassed young woman. Like Matilda's, Evelina's suffering consists primarily of a series of close calls with sexually aggressive young men. Her vulnerability, like Matilda's, is caused by her gender and by her status as a motherless young woman. While *Evelina* engages with themes that are also present in the emerging gothic tradition, an engagement that can clearly be seen in the terror that Evelina (and other female characters) experiences throughout the novel, many of Burney's critics have taken Burney's own denunciation of "the fantastic regions of Romance" and her positioning of herself in the tradition of Richardson, Smollett, and others at face value and understood *Evelina* to be far from (or opposed to) the gothic.[5] While there is critical recognition that Burney's work contains isolated gothic moments (such as Camilla's dream about the iron pen in the eponymous novel) and Burney is regularly evoked as part of the historical context from which the gothic emerges, especially in relationship to "feminist Gothic literature," *Evelina* is almost never considered to *be* a gothic novel (Rintoul 704).

[5] See David Oakleaf's "The Name of the Father: Social Identity and the Ambition of Evelina" in *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 3.4 (1991) or Edward Jacob's "Anonymous Signatures: Circulating Libraries, Conventionality, and the Production of Gothic Romances" in *ELH* 62.3 (1995) for examples of such claims.

In contrast to critics who consider Burney's work to be related to the gothic only in minor ways, Julia Epstein claims in her 1989 book *The Iron Pen* that despite the fact that "Burney's later work is usually compared to the Richardsonian model into which *Evelina* has been critically assimilated," it actually makes more sense to read Burney's later novels as gothic texts (6). She writes that "Burney practiced an especially sophisticated version of this Gothicism in her social fictions, if we accept a definition of the 'Gothic' as a literature of entrapment and engulfment" (Epstein 6-7). Epstein stops short of applying this reading to *Evelina*, but she argues that the eighteenth century critical practice of identifying Burney as being untouched by the trend of gothic writing is incorrect.[6] In her view, *Evelina* is also related to, and reflective of, the gothic mode that is emerging at the time of its publication, and is a text that is rife with fear and entrapment.

While I want to stop short of claiming that *Evelina* is a gothic novel, as Julia Epstein does with Burney's other novels, it is important to consider the similarities between *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, and to bring those similarities to the forefront. Looking at the overlaps between *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* allows us to see the way that these shared features highlight the specific ways in which trauma marks both genres in terms of both themes and narrative structure, including their central interest in trauma in the form of narratives centered around persecuted young women and their responses to that persecution. However, I want to take my observations about the similarities between these texts even further. *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and *Evelina* exist in a space that is simultaneously the sentimental edge of gothic and the gothic edge of

[6] Interestingly, two recent undergraduate theses, one by Lauren Gerhart at Ohio State University and one by Brittany Taylor at the University of Richmond, have suggested that Burney is essentially a gothic author.

sentimental. I want to consider them as part of a body of texts that are described variously as gothic and sentimental but that are at least as similar to each other as they are to the texts in their respective genres. This set of novels features female protagonists who are in danger because of men whose threat stems from their sexual or familial power. They are centered around besieged protagonists who are saved by marriage or die as martyrs, and they focus on the emotional and moral aspects of the male persecution and the female protagonists' resistance. These qualities define these texts as what I am terming "gendered persecution novels."[7] Unlike Julia Epstein, I resist collapsing this entire group of texts into either the gothic or the sentimental (by, for example, considering Burney's work to be gothic or Parsons' work to be sentimental). Instead, I want to emphasize the importance of recognizing the influence of *both* genres on these texts. This frees us from the limits of understanding these texts solely within the conventions of their established generic labels, and suggests a greater continuity between gothic and sentimental novels than is generally accepted.

One of the similarities between gothic and sentimental novels that can be seen by looking at texts as gendered persecution novels is the centrality of the trauma experienced by their female characters to the novels' narratives and structures. This theme can be seen equally in sentimental and gothic texts. For example, both Matilda and Evelina are

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[7] Some other examples of this type of text include Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela* and Burney's *Camilla* as well as less-known works such as Hugh Kelly's *Memoirs of a Magdalen*. This group of texts influenced Mackenzie in *Julia de Roubigne* and can be seen as including or influencing American texts such as Foster's *The Coquette* and Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*. The gothic examples of these gendered persecution novels generally come from the subset of gothic novels described as the "female gothic" (a term coined by Ellen Moers to describe the unique characteristics she saw in Gothic writing by women) and include Ann Radcliffe's novels and Regina Maria Roche's *Clermont*. Their conventions serve as the generic underpinning for many of Charlotte Smith's works and inspired both Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and, as Tamar Heller has argued, elements of Wilkie Collins' novels.

sexually threatened by men in their social and familial worlds. This trauma is manifested not just in the narratives of individual characters but in the form of the novels themselves. The novels structurally take on the characteristics and symptoms of traumatic narratives, including repetition compulsion. Both novels tell their stories (and the very similar stories of other female characters) over and over, manifesting the repetition compulsion. This repetition compulsion is rooted in the trauma at the heart of gendered persecution novels' narratives. In addition, both novels *appear* to resolve this sexual trauma with a marriage at the end of the novel, but do not in fact represent complete closure or resolution.

The Castle of Wolfenbach and *Evelina* are both gendered persecution novels. In comparing these two texts across their differences, we can see clearly the ways that gendered persecution novels' focus on narrative trauma affects their form and structure. In addition, there are characteristics of each novel that are illuminated by their contrast with the other. Through comparison with Burney's well-established and well-respected text, it becomes easier to see the value and weight of the relatively obscure Parsons text more clearly. At the same time, through comparison with Parsons, the excess, uncanniness, and fear that are easily legible in Parsons' gothic novel become more legible in Burney's sentimental novel. It is through the juxtaposition of two unlike texts that certain common threads become clear. Focusing on the ways that repetition and the uncanny function so similarly in these different texts allows us to see more clearly the ways that trauma functions in gendered persecution novels across generally accepted categorical differences such as gothic/sentimental and canonical/non-canonical. In all of these novels, repetition is a major formal or structural consequence of their engagement with trauma.

Telling One's Own Story: Repetition Compulsion as Symptom and Cure

Repetition compulsion has been identified with trauma since its inception as a concept in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In this text, Freud names what he observes as the tendency for traumatized individuals to repeat the traumatic event, either in dreams or in their waking lives, "repetition compulsion." For Freud, repetition compulsion is a symptom of the experience of trauma as well as an attempt to restore the psyche's condition before the disruptive event.[8] Contemporary understandings of the relationships between trauma and narrative also identify repetition both as a symptom of trauma and as part of a process of recovery. Theorists and philosophers have consistently identified retelling as an element of survivors' responses to trauma; they identify a compulsion to narrate the trauma, often multiple times, as a symptom of having experienced trauma. In fact, a compulsion to tell and re-tell one's story of trauma has been integrated into contemporary understandings of the effects and treatment of traumatic experience, as its inclusion on lists of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suggests.[9] Philosophy scholar and rape survivor Susan Brison focuses on the repetitive and out-of-control nature of this process, claiming that "the telling itself may be out of control, compulsively repeated" (47). In all of these accounts, repetitive

[8] This ultimately futile attempt to return to the past is echoed in assumptive world theory, which I will discuss in Chapter 3, and supports the idea that the disruption of established psychological (or real-world) norms is central to the problem posed by trauma.

[9] A blog on the Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital website claims that "Fatigue, difficulties with sleep, flashbacks, anxiety when returning to the scenes of the experience…, *the need to tell and retell the story*, thinking too much about it – all these 'symptoms' are classic for PTSD and are the situation for many women after completing treatment." ("PTSD After Cancer"; italics mine) Even more common is the claim that adolescents and children show this symptom.

narration is a symptom of the traumatized individual, a compulsive response to an experience of trauma.

In his essay "Trauma, Narrative, and Two Forms of Death," Amos Goldberg, a scholar who specializes in Holocaust studies, identifies three different general approaches to the way in which the relationship between trauma and narrative is understood. One approach he describes is that "a traumatic experience produces an immediate need to tell a story and to reformulate one's life story." In addition, he writes that "a trauma narrative, in its form and mode of narration, reenacts the original traumatic event" (122). The third framework that Goldberg describes is "that trauma can be seen as opposed to narrative, in that stories are a mode of symbolic structure that constructs identity, while trauma is the effect of that which evades structure and shatters identity," an idea that I will return to in my third chapter (122). These three frameworks importantly suggest the way that narrative repetition, or the compulsive telling and retelling of a story of trauma, is a form of repetition compulsion.[10]

Despite what Brison identifies as the sometimes "out of control" nature of this need to tell and re-tell the traumatic narrative, contemporary trauma theorists and psychiatric professionals also understand retelling to be an important part of a process of recovery. Eva Hoffman writes, in her 1989 memoir, "Those who don't understand the past may be condemned to repeat it, but those who never repeat it are condemned not to understand it" (278). This idea that repetition leads to understanding comes up repeatedly in both academic and popular writing about trauma. The emphasis on narrative in trauma recovery has been particularly emphasized in the scholarship of the past

[10] Goldberg acknowledges that these three approaches are not mutually exclusive, and in fact cites Dominick LaCapra, who is important to the theoretical framework of this dissertation, as a theorist who integrates all three in his theory of trauma (122-23).

twenty-five years, as psychology scholar Debra Kaminer establishes: "The need for trauma survivors to re-tell or reconstruct their trauma story in order to recover from post-trauma psychological sequelae is a principle that is common to most trauma intervention models (Eagle, 2000; Herman, 1992; Schwartz & Prout, 1991)" (481). Psychologist and scholar Rivka Tuval-Maschiach states that "several studies have shown that the ability to write a coherent story after experiencing traumatic events is positively correlated with better recovery and coping" (281).[11] Many of these studies suggest that gaining control over the narrative is key to its efficacy. For example, scholars Elizabeth Hembree and Edna Foa write that "the degree to which the victim is able to organize the trauma narrative" is an important factor for recovery (34). In the same vein, Susan Brison explains how the "repeated telling of one's own story" aids in the "process of 'mastering the trauma'" by suggesting that while "traumatic memories...feel as though they are passively endured, narratives are the result of certain obvious choices" allowing the traumatized individual to gain "greater control over the memories themselves" (47).

This process of taking control of narrative retellings is therapeutically distinguished from compulsive repetition. Compulsive repetition is a symptom, while repetition that moves towards great coherence and mastery is understood to be an important step towards recovery. This process is supposed to help the traumatized person gain mastery over what one clinic specializing in intensive psychotherapy for trauma

[11] Similarly, Michele Crossley writes: "In recent years numerous studies have looked at how people cope with the disruptive processes of pain, illness and traumatizing events through story-telling and processes of 'narrative reconfiguration' (Brody, 1987; Crossley, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b; Delvecchio-Good, Munakata, Kobayishi, Mattingly, & Good, 1994; Early, 1982; Farmer, 1994; Frank, 1993, 1995; Garro, 1994; Good & Delvecchio-Good, 1994; Kleinman, 1988; Radley, 1994; Robinson, 1990; Viney & Bousfield, 1991). Such narrative reconfiguration consists of a process through and by which the individual attempts to re-establish a moderate degree of 'ontological security' and a renewed sense of meaning, order and connection to his or her life" (541-42).

survivors describes as "the fragmented images of the trauma" in order to create "a detailed coherent narrative with a beginning, middle, and end" ("Treatment Process"). In this model, then, creating a coherent, linear, and teleological narrative is the process by which one gains a sense of mastery over traumatic memory.

However, in the literary narratives I am considering in this chapter, this kind of mastery is not definitively achieved at the end of the text. Therapeutic models suggest that compulsive repetition should be turned into repetitions that progress towards mastery and closure, a suggestion mirrored in some ways by the novels' drive towards the marriage plot. In reading these texts, however, I want to show that the excess of ongoing compulsive repetition and doubling marks these narratives to their very ends, despite their ostensibly happy endings, which suggest some kind of mastery or closure. The different needs and capabilities of literary narrative, including its lack of need to be "cured" of its "symptoms," allows for this difference. At the same time, placing these literary texts next to psychological theories of trauma repetition shows clearly the way that repetition functions as a mark of trauma in the narrative.

Over and Over Again: Repetition Compulsion as Narrative Structure

I will now turn to *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* as examples of gendered persecution novels that manifest gendered trauma, repetition, the uncanny, and ultimately incomplete closure provided by the marriage plot. Eliza Parsons' *The Castle of Wolfenbach* was published in 1793 by the Minerva Press, a popular if not critically respected press that mainly published gothic romances. Headed by William Lane, the press was extremely successful in the 1790s and his texts had a wide distribution (Varma

"Introduction" xiv). Despite the Minerva Press' popularity, and the fact that Eliza Parsons was a well-known author of gothic novels (Morton 166), after her death her work disappeared from the literary landscape for over a century.[12]

But eighteenth-century critics who did review her work recognized that in this work "the terrible prevails," that the novel was representing fear and violence (Morton 261). Certainly, trauma and suffering are centrally represented in this novel. The two main plots, following the heroine Matilda and her unfortunate friend the Countess of Wolfenbach, are both centered around domestic violence; Matilda is subject to unwanted sexual advances and stalking from her uncle who raised her, and the Countess is locked up in a castle by her jealous husband, who kills people in front of her. The text's descriptions of the women's responses are often made up of the expected emotions and sensations created by trauma, including the representation of traumatic silencing. The characters frequently express an inability to describe their experiences and/or emotions, a commonly cited narrative symptom of trauma, along the lines of the conventional understanding of the traumatic destruction of language described in the introduction.

Matilda is frequently overcome with emotion, either positive or negative, and thus unable to speak. In one moment, the text tells us that her "grateful heart overflowed; speech indeed was not lent her but her tears, her expressive looks forcibly conveyed the language she could not utter" (79). Her account of seeing her husband kill her would-be lover provides an even starker vision of the silenced victim of trauma: "Great God! (cried she) here the scene never will be absent from my remembrance. I sat like one petrified; I neither spoke, shrieked, or groaned, but with my eyes fixed on the closet I appeared

[12] In the early twentieth century, there was an extensive discussion in *Notes & Queries* about whether *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and many of the other "Northanger horrid" novels were in fact real texts at all, or simply parodies of gothic titles.

insensible to everything" (98). This pattern also occurs at the level of form, as the novel itself remains tantalizingly silent at moments. In particular, the Countess's story is repeatedly and explicitly not told.[13] Her story is alluded to at least seven times before it is told, with the absence of the narration explained by circumstances (the Countess is carried off before she can tell Matilda), by claims that vows or promises demand silence (Joseph and the Countess herself both make this claim), and for no apparent reason (as when the Countess's sister the Marchioness simply tells Matilda that she will tell her the story "another time"), before it is finally told one hundred pages into the novel. This traumatic silencing is in line with the conventional understanding of trauma's inverse relationship to narrative described in the introduction – the idea that trauma fragments or silences narrative because pain and suffering cannot be fully expressed in language.

However, along with these moments of non-telling – the silencing of the female characters and of the text that represents their struggles – there are also numerous moments of too much telling, reflecting trauma's potential to provoke excessive narrative repetitions. Hoeveler writes of the multiple and proliferating narratives:

> The Count and Countess of Wolfenbach form one of the inset narratives here...the other inset narratives are equally extreme.... We also have the central narratives, the story of Matilda, her uncle, her parents, and the Count de Bouville, but this story splinters into the stories of Matilda's protectors, the Marquis and Marchioness de Melfort, and de Bouville's

[13] Many of these moments fall into what Robyn Warhol calls "unnarration," when the narrative that is left out becomes a "vividly *present absence*" due to a textual indication (often from a narrator) that something is not being said. She identifies one of the "thresholds of narratability" that can cause unnarration (or the related concept of disnarration) as the "antinarratable (what should not be told because of trauma or taboo)" (Warhol-Down 448-9). Certainly some of the refusals of narration in this text are due to the traumatic or taboo nature of the subject matter – but I argue that many of the (excessive) acts of narration are also the result of trauma and taboo.

> female suitors, Mademoiselle De Fontelle and Mrs. Courtney. In short, these narratives spin in and out of contact with one another and at one point we hear Victoria Wolfenbach's story told from three different points of view. ("Introduction" xi)[14]

Perhaps even more striking than the three retellings of the Countess' story is the number of times characters recount Matilda's story. There are eight documented moments of a character relating a significant portion of Matilda's life history, starting with her own five-page account of her childhood and why she ran away from home and ending with her uncle's four-page account of her origin story. In between, her uncle fabricates another version of her history that puts him in a better light, the petty villain Mademoiselle de Fontelle makes up rumors based on some of the facts of her background, her friend the Marquis tells her story two different times, the Count of Wolfenbach describes her time at the castle from his perspective, and Matilda herself retells the first half of the novel to Mrs. Courtney and two-thirds of the novel to Mother Magdalene. If, as Hoeveler asserts, we hear the Countess' story from three different perspectives, we get Matilda's in yet more voices.

So while Matilda and the Countess experience many moments of silencing, the novel also tells their stories over and over, enacting narrative repetition at the level of the novel's form. These excesses are not simply signs of the novel's weakness or poor structuring. Instead, I claim that this excessive repetition of narrative is an effect of

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[14] Beatriz Sanchez Santos also observes the novel's tendency towards repetition in her introduction to an online edition of *The Castle of Wolfenbach*: "How many times do the characters in Wolfenbach 'burst into a flood of tears'? And how many characters can be described as 'an amiable woman'? The repetition of words or phrases is a pervasive feature of the language of this novel, which adds further complexity to the repetition of situations, characters, plot turns, etc. that is also characteristic of it" (xii).

telling a story of trauma, a little-discussed narrative effect of trauma. The repetitive excesses of this narrative, also found in other (more well-respected) gendered persecution novels, are reflective of the pain and suffering it is attempting to represent.

Another way that the novel is marked by repetition is through the many examples of characters who serve as doubles for Matilda. Many of the multiple narratives that Hoeveler identifies are stories of female suffering that serve as mirrors for Matilda's own story of suffering. The most obvious examples of doubling are the many parallels between Matilda and the Countess. Both women are threatened by the male family member closest to them. They are both involved in a love triangle, with their familial persecutor as one of the men. They both have reliable male servants who take care of them in their moments of crisis. They are both taken in by women who refer to them as "sisters." They both hear deathbed (or near-deathbed) declarations from their persecutors that involve confessions of guilt. In both cases, the men confess to stabbing someone they were jealous of and in both cases, the women readily forgive them. These deathbed declarations lead to the women inheriting money and being reunited with immediate family members. Matilda is reunited with her mother, who she thought was dead, and the Countess with her son, who she thought was dead. In terms of plot structure, Matilda and the Countess have almost the same story.

Not only do their overarching plots have many similarities, some of the details of their narratives are strikingly parallel, and cause an intense sense that their stories are essentially the same. One notable example of this occurs when the Marquis goes to meet with the German Minister about Matilda's legal status. After resolving her legal issues, he tells the Ambassador that he "shall in all probability have to trouble you again soon, on a

still more extraordinary affair," at which the minister smiles at him and calls him a "knight-errant, to protect distressed damsels" (113). The "still more extraordinary affair" is the Countess' problems with her abusive husband. In this case, the Marquis is intervening on behalf of both Matilda and the Countess in order to resolve the legal issues that they each have due to the men who threaten them, placing them in a virtually identical position in relation to the Marquis and to the Ambassador. The Countess becomes a double for Matilda, while her narrative is a repetition of Matilda's central story of trauma.

The Countess is not Matilda's only double in the novel, just the most obvious and prominent one. There are also other threatened women who double for both of them. The Count, we learn, had a first wife, who was "of good family, but small fortune" and whom he treated "so ill as to cause her death, and left her two children who were put to nurse, afterwards taken from thence, without any one's knowing what became of them" (52). In addition to being yet another story of familial violence, this story continues the echo chamber of references to mothers being separated from their children, and specifically foreshadows the Count taking the Countess' child from her. Matilda's mother, the Countess Berniti, has a similar history. Unknown to her, her homicidal brother-in-law switches her live baby for a servant's dead baby, leaving her believing that she is childless until Matilda is revealed to her towards the end of the novel. Not only does the Countess' narrative repeat Matilda's, but so do many of the smaller inset narratives.[15]

[15] Possibly the strangest narrative double for Matilda is the Mother Magdalene, who lives at the convent Matilda flees to. She hears Matilda's story and then tells her that she herself has had a *worse* life and has been *more* "wretched" (141). Mother Magdalene tells a story about poverty, becoming an orphan, and being pursued sexually by a man who doesn't have the correct morals and thus doesn't want to marry her, but instead "keep" her, much as Matilda's uncle's interest in her is not appropriately focused on marriage. Perhaps because she is not of noble birth, or because

The novel, through the stories of the Count's first wife and Matilda's mother and other women, repeats multiple versions of Matilda's traumatic narrative.

In all of these ways, the text of *Castle of Wolfenbach* works out through repetition the trauma of Matilda's victimization at the hands of a sexually predatory father figure. Matilda's own story is told and alluded to multiple times, the Countess' narrative is also told multiple times and echoes Matilda's in both overall plot and narrative detail, and echoes of Matilda's story can be heard in allusions to the backstories of many other female characters. The novel does not stop telling the same story, evincing repetition compulsion at the level of its structure. The novel remains in the moment of traumatized compulsive retelling, generating similar narratives of domestic abusive and sexual violence over and over again without discernable progress through much of the narrative.

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From its historical and cultural position, Burney's 1778 novel *Evelina* appears to be a distinctly different novel from *The Castle of Wolfenbach*. Burney positioned it very carefully as a text in the sentimental lineage of Richardson, even mentioning Richardson and Smollett (among others) in the preface. Burney's first novel, it was both very popular when it was published and a critical success. It made her famous, and was frequently mentioned in criticism alongside other major sentimental works of the time, including novels by Richardson.

However, despite these differences, Fanny Burney's *Evelina* is, like *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, rife with the repetition that is the mark of its central preoccupation with gendered trauma. Evelina, like Matilda, is persecuted by some of the men in her life and

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she is French, Mother Magdalene is the only double for Matilda whose story does not end with the supposed resolution of marriage.

not adequately protected by others. She is thrown into London society with little instruction or protection, and without the security of a clear location in the stratified class system. As a result, she spends much of the novel in anxiety and fear. These experiences of fear are repeated through the novel, sometimes in nearly identical form. Furthermore, her family system is itself full of repetitions and doubles. These two forms of narrative repetition compulsion – repeating scenes of Evelina's harassment and the doubles within her family – are two of the primary structural marks of trauma in the text.

Burney's novels, with their current (if hard-won) place in the canon, have received much more critical attention than Parsons' and some of this criticism has acknowledged the presence of repetition in her work. Repetition is acknowledged as a key element more often in Burney's later novels than in *Evelina*; both Claudia Johnson and Helen Thompson write extensively about repetition in *The Wanderer*, and Francesca Saggini mentions repetitions (which she calls isotopies) in *Cecilia*.[16] While Margaret Doody does briefly mention that *Evelina*'s plot includes a "chain of farcical repetition," in her seminal work *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (64), Julia Park provides the only major exploration of repetition that meaningfully includes a reading of *Evelina*. Park discusses the "daily repetitiveness" of the process of coming out along with its "perils," pointing out that "as the seemingly endless outings in each novel attest, no single appearance at a given ball, resort town, opera house, or pump-room can complete the act of coming out" ("Pains and Pleasures" 28). She connects this gendered repetition with the mechanical and the monstrous through the figure of the automaton, focusing on the abject

[16] Claudia Johnson specifically invokes repetition compulsion in *The Wanderer* in *Equivocal Beings* (179). Helen Thompson similarly discusses the "structure of redundant discovery [which] is manifest, quite literally, as repetition" in the novel in her essay "How the Wanderer Works: Reading Burney and Bourdieu" (971). Francesca Saggini writes about isotopies in *Cecilia* in her 2012 book *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theatre Arts*.

position of young women coming out. While her insights are important and apt, especially in the way that she connects repetition to the internal and social struggles of the young female characters in Burney's argument, the terms of her argument are importantly different from mine. For me, trauma, not the abject, is the defining category for analysis, and the structure of the text is of central concern.

However, I do want to begin my reading of *Evelina* by elaborating on the way that what Park identifies as the "perils" of Evelina's "seemingly endless outings" are repeated through the novel, creating a structural repetition compulsion of stories of sexual assault in the novel. Evelina is threatened with sexual assault repeatedly after she makes the journey from a secluded life in the country to the social scene of London with an eligible marriage as her unspoken goal. Like Matilda, Evelina struggles with not knowing her biological father. As a result, her social status is precarious and she is especially vulnerable to the sexual and social threats posed by the men that she meets in London.

As the novel explores themes of gendered violence and the social dangers of eighteenth-century city life, Evelina engages in a repetitive set of behaviors and is surrounded by characters who are either doubles of her or of each other. One of the more striking examples of these repetitions and doubles is the parallel between two balls that Evelina attends at different points in the novel. When she first arrives in London, she is taken to a "private ball" where she is pressured to dance and embarrassed by a Mr. Lovel and, to a lesser extent, her future husband Lord Orville (74-79). Mr. Lovel pushes her to dance with him and accuses her of bad manners. She finally escapes the pressure from the men by finding her chaperone, Mrs. Mirvan, in another room and sitting with her while she plays cards. Later in the novel, she is taken by her new chaperone, Madame Duval,

to a ball at the "long room at Hampstead" where she is pressured to dance and embarrassed by a Mr. Smith (263). She finally escapes from him by "plac[ing] herself behind the chair of Madame Duval" (265). The logic of the narrative of development that guides the novel suggests that the second ball should go much more smoothly. After all, Evelina has learned the rules about how to behave at a ball between these two events, and she attends the ball with a radically different group of people. However, despite the fact that she does not make any social gaffes at this second ball, and appears to have learned appropriate behaviors, her position is nevertheless virtually identical. She is sexually pressured by a man who insists that she dance with him, is forced to repeat her refusal over and over, and ultimately must take refuge with her older female chaperone in order to be rid of the harassing man. Despite the promise of progress suggested by the novel's commitment to documenting Evelina's education, less has actually changed in her position than might seem at first glance. Instead, the narrative is repeating the same scenarios with only minor differences.

This pattern of sexual threat and narrow escape is repeated multiple times in *Evelina*, often more explicitly than at the balls. For example, she is threatened twice by being trapped in carriages; she is aggressively propositioned by Sir Clement Willoughby while trapped in his carriage against her will, and then later trapped in Lady Howard's carriage with Madame Duval as Captain Mirvan carries out his "prank" of robbery and assault with the help of Sir Clement (142, 188). Similarly, she experiences two threats at outdoor entertainments in London. She is accosted and grabbed by men at Vauxhall, only to be rescued by Sir Clement, who then fails to be chivalrous, instead insulting her and making love to her (237-239). She is separated from her friends and grabbed by a

stranger at Marybone-gardens[sic], only to be rescued by women she soon discovers to be prostitutes (273-74). This list of moments when Evelina is sexually threatened goes on and on.

In addition to this repetition of sexual threat, Evelina is also part of a family system rife with doubles and repetitions. Evelina is being raised by the man who raised her mother; Mr. Villars was Evelina's mother's guardian and in charge of her education, just as he is Evelina's. Mr. Villars was also Evelina's grandfather's tutor. Her grandfather's name, Mr. Evelyn, is the derivation of her name. She is thus, in a certain way, a repetition of her mother, and perhaps of her grandfather as well. Mr. Villars has taught – and over-protected – three generations of this family, three individuals named Mr. Evelyn, Miss Evelyn, and Evelina. This repetition makes the sexual threat she faces in the novel all the more anxiety-producing, given that both her grandfather and her mother made choices in their personal/sexual lives that led to their deaths, and Mr. Villars' attempts at protecting them failed.

Within the time frame of the novel, Evelina also has two fathers, who are both incomplete patriarchs, unable or unwilling to pass on their name and status to Evelina. Mr. Villars has raised Evelina as "Evelina Anville," almost but not quite naming her after himself. On the other hand, Sir John Belmont, her biological father, has bestowed his name and title on another young woman who has been passing as Evelina. This false Lady Belmont, Evelina's sororal double, is in a romantic relationship with her fraternal double, her unknown half-brother Mr. Macartney. Like Evelina, Mr. Macartney does not know his own parentage, has been abandoned by a father of significant social status, and betrays his own high social class identity through his delicacy and intellect. These two

doubles – the false Lady Belmont and Mr. Macartney – are married on the same day that Evelina is married. Evelina's family creates a kind of traumatic, familial hall of mirrors. Stories of abandonment, social dislocation, and sexual threat repeat throughout the novel, often through doubles of the main character.

The Uncanny: Repetition and Liminality

The myriad doubles in both *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and *Evelina* take on a clearly uncanny character at points during the novel. These uncanny doubles are one form that the narrative repetition in these novels takes, an important aspect of the repetition compulsion brought on by telling a story of trauma. Understanding the doubles as uncanny rather than simply more repetitions is important because the uncanny is, unlike repetition compulsion, a force that is definitionally at odds with closure and boundaries. The close relationship between repetition compulsion and the uncanny is important to my argument because the uncanny provides a link between the concept of repetition compulsion, the disruption of boundaries, and the forestalling of closure. By connecting these dots, we can see that repetition compulsion is a force that pushes against closure, despite the way that repetitive narratives are positioned as part of a cure for post-traumatic symptoms.

Freud, in the essay in which he establishes the term, understands the uncanny to be closely related to repetition and repetition compulsion.[17] Freud not only discusses

[17] Freud writes in "The Uncanny," "there is the constant recurrence of the same thing — the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names" (234). Thus the repetition of certain elements throughout a story or across different characters' or individuals' experience can be experienced as uncanny. He goes on to describe the repetition of a single number as provoking a sense of the uncanny, claiming that "it is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with

doubles as uncanny, he also identifies repetition itself as an uncanny feature ("The Uncanny" 234). He claims that the repetition of certain elements throughout a story or across different characters' or individuals' experience can be experienced as uncanny. According to Freud, the repetitions in *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* can be seen as uncanny on their own terms, not only when mediated by uncanny doubles. Furthermore, the idea that repetition compulsion and the uncanny have a close relationship does not stop with Freud; contemporary writers about the uncanny also emphasize the relationship.

Nicholas Royle, in his book *The Uncanny: An Introduction,* writes that the uncanny is "indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or 'coming back' – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat" (2). Neil Hertz goes even further, claiming that "the feeling of the uncanny would seem to be generated by being reminded of the repetition compulsion, not by being reminded of whatever it is that is repeated" (117). For Hertz, the repetition compulsion itself is what causes the uncanny sensation. And in all of these formulations, repetition compulsion – and thus traumatic experience – is closely connected to the sensation of the uncanny. For these theorists as well, then, narrative repetitions of all kinds, perhaps especially those that include doubled characters, are potentially uncanny.

The uncanny is thus closely related to repetition, and to repetition compulsion. In addition, the uncanny is a force that works against boundaries, teleology, and closure. Many contemporary critics and theorists bring questions of boundaries and liminality to the very center of the idea of the uncanny, even defining the uncanny by the way that it

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an uncanny atmosphere" (237). So for Freud the fact of repetition can, in and of itself, create an "uncanny atmosphere," at least in certain contexts.

breaks down distinctions and troubles established epistemological boundaries.[18] Nicholas Royle writes that "the uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality" (2). One of the most commonly cited borders that is disturbed by the uncanny is the boundary between what is real and what is not. However, according to John Jervis' essay "Uncanny Presences," that list can also include the boundaries between depth and surface, inside and outside, self and other, result and source. Jervis writes that the uncanny entails "a troubling that brings into play that dimension of experience that does not recognize boundaries, hence does not acknowledge the boundary-defining aspect of thought" (12). Importantly, he emphasizes the way in which the uncanny causes a crisis through its refusal to recognize boundaries, writing that "the uncanny shakes fundamental categories of knowledge and experience" (Jervis 11). The uncanny, then, enacts an epistemological crisis that functions in the same way as the epistemological crisis caused by trauma, breaking down the categories and distinctions that structure our thinking.

One of the important narratological and literary implications of the disruption of boundaries is the way in which the uncanny forecloses, or at least undermines, the possibility of closure. After all, the most significant and final boundary for a text is its ending. If this boundary is porous as a result of the uncanniness of the text, then the closure promised by the final page is destabilized. Jervis writes, "The only promise the

[18] Freud, in "The Uncanny," is less clear about the uncanny's relationship to boundaries. He begins the essay by considering the possibility that "intellectual uncertainty" is the root cause of the uncanny. He ultimately rejects this idea. However, he returns to the idea of intellectual uncertainty (only to undermine it), writing at the end of the essay, "And are we after all justified in entirely ignoring intellectual uncertainty as a factor, seeing that we have admitted its importance in relation to death?" (247) He turns the reader's attention to the problem that people, in his view, have with understanding the reality of death and the distinction between life and death. In this moment and others, Freud suggests a kind of breakdown of boundaries.

uncanny can offer, then, is the promise of irresolution" (46). He explains that specific uncanny experiences send us to "broader reflexive concerns" that are unresolvable, and then return us to the specific moment of uncanny disruption (Jervis 46). This cyclical process – jarring uncanny encounter, overwhelming epistemological concern, jarring uncanny encounter, etc. – does not lead to closure or resolution, but instead to a cyclical "irresolution," a potentially narratively productive but unsettling cycle of inquiry and experience.

Gendered persecution novels exhibit this lack of resolution brought on by an encounter with the uncanny as they explore questions about trauma. Both novels end with uncanny episodes that cast doubt on the apparent closure of their endings. The expected boundary, the expected resolution, for eighteenth-century novels featuring a female protagonist is a marriage plot that ends the heroine's difficulties and provides a happy ending. Gendered persecution novels such as *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and *Evelina* trouble that possibility through their presentation of marriage as an imperfect institution that may not provide the heroine with an end to her experience of sexual trauma, an ambiguous presentation that is signaled by the presence of the uncanny. This type of ending suggests that marriage may be a "broader concern" that cannot be fully resolved, a suggestion of some "irresolution" despite the heroine's marriage to the hero. Therefore, the mark of trauma is not eradicated from the text, since the uncanny elements and repetitions within these novels are, after all, not fully eliminated at the end of the text.

Earning a Husband: The Uncanny, Repetition, and Closure in the Marriage Plot

As discussed in the opening pages of this chapter, *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and *Evelina* certainly seem to end with the decisive conclusion of a "happy ending." However, their central concern with trauma as expressed in the doublings and repetitions leads to an on-going tension between the proliferating, almost circular logic of repetition compulsion and the conservative impulses inherent in the marriage plot. Most importantly, the sexual threats posed to the female characters and the familial violence that permeate both *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and *Evelina* do not disappear at the end of the novel. The novels' central uncanny and traumatic elements lead to endings that leave open possibilities of continued repetition, of liminal spaces and unanswered questions, throwing into question marriage's status as a source of resolution of trauma in women's lives. As Michelle Massé writes of the ending of gothic novels,

> Returning to benign reality, earning a husband, and erasing horror are the wages promised for virtuous passivity at the novel's end. The momentum created by the repetition of ordeals within individual works overcomes the ending, however. The ending's reassurances have specious weight when balanced against the body's mass of suffering: there is a surplus of anxiety still unaccounted for. (689)

This surplus of anxiety is manifested in these novels through the presence of the uncanny throughout the texts, including at the very end, when the "reassurances" should be most compelling.

Building on Massé's observations, I want to specifically highlight the connection between the presence of the uncanny in gendered persecution novels and the ways these texts undermine the idea that marriage necessarily provides an ending to suffering.

Because of the uncanny and the instability of the marriage plot, these novels fail to fully resolve their central trauma, even at the very end of the text. To begin, I will consider how Matilda's marriage in *The Castle of Wolfenbach* neither fully protects her from social aggression nor guarantees her safety from sexual or familial violence. Instead, the gendered violence and threat she has experienced throughout the novel is not fully resolved.

To see this clearly, I will turn to the final moments of *The Castle of Wolfenbach*. The final instance of doubling between Matilda and her primary uncanny double (the Countess of Wolfenbach) is their double marriage. While Matilda's courtship with de Bouville has been consistently referenced through the second half of the novel, Lord Delby's proposal to the Countess six pages before the end of the novel comes out of the blue. The proposal feels perfunctory. The engagement happens in public, and is framed as an anonymous question to the group about the appropriateness of second marriages. The Countess, when everyone has stated that they approve of a second marriage, is congratulated (without her having actually said "yes"), and then she says, "I have a very preferable regard to Lord Delby, and am, in all probability, indebted to him for my life and present happiness; it shall henceforth be my study to return those obligations" (196). Placed in between the Count de Bouville's proposal to Matilda and her mother's approval of their marriage, this strange and awkward proposal and acceptance diminishes the romance of Matilda's engagement by casting doubt on the process in general, on the necessity of public approval, and on the possibility of marrying because of a sense of obligation rather than love or compatibility. In addition, the uncanny similarities between

the Countess of Wolfenbach and Matilda suggest that this tepid narrative of love and marriage may be her story as well.[19]

In addition to the way that Matilda and the Countess of Wolfenbach's doubled marriages create skepticism about Matilda's marriage, the treatment of Matilda's social rival Mademoiselle de Fontelle casts a shadow over the ending of the novel because it undermines the idea that Matilda's marriage will guarantee her social stability and safety, and instead introduces a new uncanny double for Matilda. The final scene of the novel takes place at a party thrown by the Countess of Wolfenbach's sister, the Marchioness. At this party, the Marchioness publicly shames Mademoiselle De Fontelle for spreading rumors about Matilda, calling her a "despicable young woman" who is now meeting "with that contempt and mortification worthless and censorious characters like her's [sic] deserve" (201). Fontelle, apparently being restrained, attempts "to free her hand from the Marchioness" and then is thrown out of the party. The large crowd that has gathered "expressed their satisfaction" (201-2). Fontelle thus becomes another uncanny double for Matilda, who has been socially ostracized earlier in the novel. The cruelty of the Marchioness in this scene and her position as Matilda's ally cast a pall over the happy familial community that has been presented the page before, with promises of visits and mutual support. Instead of full resolution, the novel ends with a suggestion of Jervis'

[19] Nor has the novel presented positive images of marriage, generally. In addition to the Countess of Wolfenbach's first marriage resulting in her being locked in a castle and abducted, Matilda's mother's marriage ended in her brother-in-law killing her husband in jealousy, and Matilda's first proposal of marriage is from her uncle. Matilda's uncanny doubles throughout the novel have disastrous marriages. Only the Marquis and Marchioness have a functional marriage. In a novel whose plot is centered around repeated experiences of violence suffered by women at the hands of husbands and fathers, and in which mothers are frequently separated from children, marriage is not presented as a safe space or an escape from violence and trauma.

"irresolution" – the possibility of continued encounters with social exclusion and with the uncanny itself, of further narrative in the same vein beyond Matilda's marriage.

Matilda herself is uncomfortable with the treatment of Fontelle and all it represents: "Matilda, who had not expected this denouement, was extremely confused" (202). Interestingly, the word used here to describe the event is "denouement," which suggests an ending to the narrative. But this moment is neither the denouement of the novel, which is Matilda's uncanny reunion with her mother and her ensuing marriage to the Count de Bouville, nor even the denouement of Fontelle's minor narrative within the novel. Indeed, Matilda's observation on seeing Fontelle cast out of the party that "there was little dependence on the applauses of the multitude" proves to be correct, since "many of [the party-goers] called on Mademoiselle De Fontelle the following morning, expressed their sorrow for the ill treatment she suffered, and assured her it was the most horrid entertainment" (202). This reversal of fortune, editorialized by the narrator as a moral about "those who are not capable of discriminating," also suggests that denouements may not be what they seem.[20] The vagaries of fortune as well as social position are laid out in this small incident and cast doubt on the claim that Matilda and the Count de Bouville will live "happily ever after." The possibility of further reversals of fortune remains present even at the close of the novel. Repetition compulsion, including its uncanny forms, has not been fully mastered or worked through within the novel – neither the central questions around the safety and security of marriage and immediate

[20] The narrator ends with a strong moralizing tone, which can also be found throughout the novel. The final paragraph begins, "Thus, after a variety of strange and melancholy incidents, Matilda received the reward of her steadiness, fortitude, and virtuous self-denial. A consciousness of performing her several duties ensured her happiness…" (202). See Chapter 3 for an analysis of this rhetorical strategy and its relationship to the excesses of narratives of trauma and the problems of closure.

family nor the issue of Matilda's social position is completely settled. As a result, the seeds of her traumatic experiences are still present and the possibility of further sexual exploitation or pursuit is not eliminated. The marks of trauma in this text remain to (and perhaps beyond) the end of the book.

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Sentimental novels are less commonly connected to the concept of the uncanny than gothic novels are. Unsurprisingly, then, *Evelina* is not generally considered to be a fundamentally uncanny novel. However, there has been some critical attention paid to the specifically uncanny relationship between Evelina and her mother. As Susan Greenfield observes, it is only "through her uncanny resemblance to her mother that Evelina is able to correct the injustices perpetrated against both of them" and regain the identity and agency that she has lost (42). In other words, she can only escape the problem of an uncanny double claiming her identity by being the uncanny double of her disgraced mother. Like Matilda, Evelina's uncanny resemblance to her mother is the fact that allows her to claim her familial identity, although it also ultimately casts doubt on the security of her position. When Sir John, her father, finally agrees to see Evelina, "in a voice scarce articulate he exclaimed, 'My God! Does Caroline Evelyn still live!'" (404) He continues in that vein, asking the overwrought Evelina to lift her head, calling her "thou image of my long-lost Caroline!" (404) The resemblance is too great for him, and he sends Evelina out of the room, declaring, "she has set my brain on fire, and I can see her no more!" (404) Evelina's biological father acknowledges her as his daughter based on her uncanny resemblance to her mother through an excruciating scene of painful emotion.

While this particular uncanny moment is widely recognized as such, the uncanny's more pervasive presence in the novel and its effect on the novel's ending have not been discussed. I claim that even after these scenes of familial trauma and uncanny resemblances are over and are ostensibly finished – when the novel is laying out its happy ending in the form of Evelina's engagement to Lord Orville – there are traces of the uncanny (and thus of repetition compulsion) that prevent the ending from being fully resolved. The irresolvable nature of the uncanny persists as a presence in the novel through and beyond the resolution of the marriage plot. Specifically, Evelina's final letters show us the limitations of the closure provided by novel's happy ending, and point towards the possible shortcomings of marriage as a resolution for sexual and familial trauma.

In the third-to-last letter of the novel, Evelina recounts how Captain Mirvan introduces a monkey into the party at Clifton. This episode suggests that the genteel society that Evelina is entering via her marriage to Lord Orville is not as contained and orderly as it promises to be. The monkey serves to demonstrate the uncanny similarities between the human and the animal. Orville's inability to prevent the chaos of this uncanny scene also suggests that he may not be different from the threatening and difficult men who have surrounded Evelina throughout the novel. Instead, it suggests that Orville may be a double or repetition of other male characters in the novel and that Evelina's marriage to Orville may be a repetition of her mother's mistake and traumatic suffering rather than a fresh start.

In a move that further destabilizes the happy ending of the novel, the next two letters – and the final two letters of the novel – are not concerned with Evelina's marriage

to Orville or their future together, despite the fact that the marriage plot has appeared to be the driving force of the novel's narrative. Instead, their marriage is glossed over in favor of an exchange of letters between Villars and Evelina concerning Villars' death. He writes to her of his dream of "closing these joy-streaming eyes in her presence, and breathing my last faint sighs in her loved arms!" (436). In return, she writes to him, on the day of her marriage, this letter:

> All is over, my dearest Sir, and the fate of your Evelina is decided! This morning, with fearful joy, and trembling gratitude, she united herself for ever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection! I have time for no more; the chaise now waits which is to conduct me to dear Berry Hill, and to the arms of the best of men. EVELINA (437)

As I described at the beginning of the chapter, Evelina ends by describing her father figure, not her new husband, as "the best of men," and ends with a reference to that father figure's death, not her own happy future. These final letters leave Evelina's relationship with Villars as the privileged relationship of the novel.

This placement makes Orville and Villars uncanny doubles for each other. Evelina herself makes this connection multiple times in the novel. She writes to Villars of Orville, "I sometimes imagine, that, when his youth is flown…he will, perhaps, resemble him whom I most love and honour. His present sweetness, politeness, and diffidence, seem to promise in the future the same benevolence, dignity, and goodness" (118).[21] Evelina is marrying Orville because he may turn into Villars, the man she loves the most. Mrs. Selwyn also remarks on Orville's similarities to Villars, although in a more sarcastic

[21] See also Evelina's statement that "Once, indeed, I thought there existed another, - who, when *time had winterd o'er his locks*, would have shone forth among his fellow-creatures, with the same brightness of worth which dignifies my honoured Mr. Villars" (300).

tone, telling Evelina that "Lord Orville is almost as romantic as if he had been born and bred at Berry Hill" (402).[22] This parallel between them influences the characterization not only of the father figure whose relationship with his daughter is potentially sexually charged but also of the husband/lover who resembles his romantic object's father.

Evelina is more commonly read as having a happy ending than Burney's other novels.[23] However, the possibility that Orville is an uncanny repetition of Evelina's fathers (Villars and Belmont) undercuts the happy ending. As Julia Park writes,

> For all [of Burney's] heroines, complete and triumphant metamorphosis is questionable as their marriages either leave them, in circular fashion, with husbands who resume the roles of paternal mentor figures, as with Evelina and Camilla, or with a husband who demands financial loss and psychic unease, as with Cecilia. (*The Self and It* 133)

Beyond the repetition compulsion demonstrated by the presence of a husband who "resume[s] the roles of paternal mentor figures," the conflation of Orville with Evelina's fathers threatens the happy ending because Evelina's "paternal mentor" figures are problematic. Obviously Belmont's refusal to acknowledge Evelina as his daughter makes him an obstacle to her happiness. However, even the apparently benign Villars is an ambiguous force in Evelina's life. His protectiveness does not keep her safe, nor did it keep her mother safe before her. (Her mother, after all, dies giving birth to an illegitimate child.) Instead, Villars' behavior places her at greater risk. Henderson argues that the father figures of the novel are threats to Evelina because they wish to "limit desire" and

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[22] Berry Hill is Villars' home, where Evelina was raised.

[23] Kristina Straub reads *Evelina* as a Cinderella story, and writes that Orville, like Villars, is able to give Evelina "comfort and order" (75). Julia Epstein allows for ambiguity but writes that "Evelina and Lady Juliet [from *The Wanderer*] move beyond their novels' closure into an ambiguous but apparently satisfactory married life" ("Marginality" 199).

"punish women for practicing it," writing specifically about Villars that his "quiet efforts to limit the play of desire find an aggressive, nasty counterpart in Captain Mirvan's disdain for feminine amusements and punishment of female appetite" (70). Susan Greenfield further points out that Villars' public withholding of Evelina's familial history has "interfered with Evelina's claims to a respectable heritage" because it facilitated Belmont's mistaken identification of the wet nurse's child as his own (41). Villars has controlled the flow of public information about Evelina in a way that prevents her from being accurately located within family and society. If Villars is a repressive force and an obstacle to Evelina's ultimate happiness and independence, and Villars and Orville are positioned as uncanny mirrors of each other, then Orville may be a less positive or unique figure than he appears at first glance.[24]

The fact that Lord Orville serves as a double for Mr. Villars (and at times for Sir Clement Willoughby) shows how repetitions of sexual threat and patriarchal oppression may continue despite the apparent resolution of Evelina's story. If Evelina is an uncanny reincarnation of her mother, does she really want to marry a repetition of her father figure? Or someone who engages in the same behaviors as the men who have victimized her and her mother? Not only does the possibility of their marriage rely on Evelina's

[24] In addition, as with Matilda in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, the likelihood of Evelina having a happy marriage is also undermined by the sheer repetition of the unhappy results of marriage throughout the novel. Even Kristina Straub, who describes Evelina's narrative as a Cinderella story, recognizes that "*Evelina* is not, however, committed to the *probability* of happy marriage as a way out" (53). She points to the marriages in Evelina's family history (her grandfather's marriage to Madame Duval and her mother's marriage to Lord Belmont) as examples of troubled and unhappy marriages. Moreover, she emphasizes the Mirvans' marriage as a portrait of the unhappiness that comes with marriage in the novel. She writes, "Mrs. Mirvan's life, especially, is seen by Evelina and the reader as a respectable hell of pained silences and strained, polite smiles" (Straub 57). If Evelina's story has been, throughout the novel, a repetitive narrative of assault and threat that mirrors the stories of her female relatives, can we with any confidence claim that her marriage will be a departure from those stories rather than another return to trauma?

uncanny reflection of dead and disowned women, not only does the novel end with men being compared to monkeys, not only does the novel end with a sexually-charged exclamation of intimacy between father and daughter in the face of death, but Orville himself is suspiciously similar to the men who stand in Evelina's way throughout the novel. The promise of social stability is undermined by an uncanny monkey; the promise of a stable husband-father is undermined by his uncanny resemblances to unstable husband-father-rapist figures throughout the work. *Evelina*, like *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, does not conclude with confidence that its repetition of traumatic narratives is over. Instead, the cycles of doubles and repetitions seem to be continuing – suggesting that the texts have not been cured of their traumatic symptoms, but continue to work through the trauma at the heart of their narratives until the last page. This suggests that, were we to be able to peer into their futures, to project a fictional future beyond the confines of the novels, more narratives of the same kind – rife with threat, assault, and social instability – would be the result. As a result, we can see that the mark of trauma in these texts is not eliminated at their end, but instead remain, casting doubt on the ostensible progress found in both novels.

This Can't Be A Conclusion

Evelina and Matilda are no more assured of a safe marriage or stable social status or a relief from sexual threat than their mothers were. However, because Matilda and Evelina are fictional, we do not have to try to make an intervention into their marriages. Nor are their novels attempting to create a curative or therapeutic space within which to solve, resolve, or cure the traumas depicted in gendered persecution novels. However,

what the novels do make clear is that marriage does not lose its link to the trauma that it is supposed to resolve, and that, as a result, marriage is no guarantee that trauma will not be repeated. More generally, the novels demonstrate the way that the excess of repetition compulsion as a mark of trauma can be found in literary works – and that this mark is not eradicated in the course of the narrative, but remains to the end.

In the psychological literature on trauma, retellings, as they move from repetition compulsion to repetition with a difference, are often thought of as a kind of therapy that leads to closure. Through repetition, the anxieties underlying a given narrative can be laid to rest. However, gendered persecution novels function differently. Rather than leading to the end of repetition, the retellings in these texts suggest that repetition can cause an open-ended proliferation of traumatic narratives. The repetition compulsion in evidence in these texts does not disappear, but remains to the end in the form of traces that destabilize the sense of closure. Specifically, the repetition of sexual and familial trauma is not guaranteed to have ended, as traces of it remain in both Matilda's and Evelina's marriages and in their familial structures.

As fictional texts, these novels are able to explore the dynamics of repetition compulsion, trauma, and the resulting proliferation of narratives without danger. Of course, the texts themselves end, and so there is an end to the written narrative. However, the end of a text does not mean a conclusion to the stories begun within the text. Instead, the trauma continues to create an excess of narrative. Trauma is not resolved in these texts through repetition, but instead continues to haunt the texts through continued retellings. Of course, it is possible, within a fictional world, to exist endlessly such a liminal spaces and to contemplate the impossibility of complete closure in the face

of trauma. It is possible to explore the idea that working-through might not always "work," – that is, might not always lead to resolution and conclusion – and to represent the cyclical nature of the uncanny and repetition compulsion, free from the pressure of a cure. As a result, we can see in these novels one way that trauma creates narrative and formal excess in these texts. Repetition compulsion and uncanny doubles mark these texts. In the next chapter, I will consider another mark of trauma that can be seen in gothic and sentimental texts that are centrally concerned with trauma – traumatic laughter.

Chapter 2:
Excessive Sorrow Laughs:
Violent Humor, Pain, and Tonal Hybridity

In the 1886 edition of Henry Mackenzie's 1771 novel *The Man of Feeling*, an "Index to Tears" was added to the novel. This index continued the dynamic of mocking, while participating in, the sentimental response. It is a literal index of all the times that tears appear in the text, including listings such as "Tears, bust into," "Tears, sobbing and shedding," and "Sweet girl (here she swept)" with pages number for each example. This index is funny; even the sub-heading "Choking, &c, not counted" under "Index to Tears" is amusing. Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave claim that the index suggests "the closeness of the sentimental effect to camp" (xv). I agree that the self-conscious excess of this moment gives it a close relationship to camp, but I want to emphasize that this index presupposes *both* the centrality of sentimental moments to the text – that those are the moments one would want to find – *and* a refusal to take them entirely seriously. The humorous presentation of sentimental responses does not suggest that they do not have serious emotional weight, as well. In fact, my argument in this chapter is that the traumatic content of these narratives provokes the presence of humor in the text, a humor that is a textual effect of trauma.

In this chapter, I will consider narratives that are centrally concerned with traumatic suffering and that are therefore tonally hybrid: Matthew Lewis' 1796 gothic novel *The Monk*, Ann Radcliffe's 1797 gothic novel *The Italian*, and Henry Mackenzie's 1771 sentimental novel *The Man of Feeling*. All three have tones that are both dark and serious in their representations of suffering and also

are suffused with moments of surprising humor, often at the same time. I identify this type of humor as "traumatic laughter" – a compulsive, reactive, and excessive humor that emerges unbidden as the result of trauma. Traumatic laughter is reflective of what Thomas Kuhlman describes as the "close physiological kinship [between laughter and] fear and anxiety" (*Humor and Psychotherapy* 46). It results from something being too terrible to be easily expressed in other, more rational, modes. It is the kind of humor that leads to the cliché about not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

This kind of humor is symptomatic of being in a place – or trying to describe a situation – in which rational thought fails to be able to account for the horror of what is happening. As Ute Berns writes, "There are moments…when we find ourselves incapable of an adequate response. This is when our body foregrounds itself. Laughter sweeps control away" (84). She argues that laughter is a form of expression that functions when we are beyond the limits of rational communication. My particular interest is in the way that telling a story of trauma creates this disruption in the rational, univocal logic of a text and creates a tonal hybridity, even in texts that purport to be quite serious.

The trauma at the center of the novels I am reading in this chapter causes this type of excess, as it pushes the narrative of the text beyond the boundaries of the rational and into a liminal space. Dominick LaCapra's writing about "hyperbole" provides one way to think about this kind of humor. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, he defends the value of what he defines as "hyperbole" in response to a trauma, "as a stylistic indication of one's involvement in the

excess of an excessive or extreme (indeed, at times traumatic) context or situation" (8, n. 10). This hyperbole in response to "an excessive or extreme…context or situation" manifests as traumatic laughter in the texts I will discuss. As LaCapra points out, this traumatic laughter is one stylistic (or tonal) result of narrating an extreme, traumatic situation.

The trauma narratives in *The Monk, The Italian,* and *The Man of Feeling* center around female sexuality and the suffering caused by sexually violent encounters. The sexualized violence done to women's bodies, or sometimes simply the threat of such violence, prompts a kind of quasi-hysterical, deeply troubled humor in all three texts. Traumatic laughter, provoked by sexual trauma, seems a more obvious feature of gothic literature than of the sentimental novel. Virtually from the beginning of the genre, many Gothic novels have been acknowledged to have their tongues firmly in their cheeks, to be on the verge of self-parody through their grotesque and often surrealistic depictions of suffering. But it is my contention that even Gothic texts that are considered to be less parodic and grotesque, such as Ann Radcliffe's novels, also have traces of humorous excess and seemingly inappropriate levity. Sentimental novels (many of which have much in common with, and are indebted to, Radcliffe's novels) are even less commonly understood as humorous, with the exception of outright parodies of the genre. However, they are also characterized by excess emotion, and depictions of gendered and sexualized suffering. Because of this excess emotion and the representation of trauma, I contend that non-parodic sentimental novels are also often marked by traumatic laughter.

I will look at three texts, one from each category. Lewis' *The Monk* is generally acknowledged, as a part of the school of "horror gothic," to include grotesque humor and to be parodic at moments. Radcliffe's *The Italian* is often labeled "female gothic" or "terror gothic," and is generally seen to be less grotesque and more restrained. In addition, Radcliffe's work is often seen as having overlap with sentimental novels. For these reasons, the humor present in Radcliffe's work is often overlooked. Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* is in many ways a classically sentimental novel, and as such is part of a genre whose relationship to humor is generally limited to outright parodies. Placing these three texts together allows us to see the underlying similarities among the texts in terms of their representations of trauma and the resulting presence of humor in them. After all, both gothic and sentimental novels are, as I have claimed, centrally concerned with trauma and can thus be considered trauma narratives. Furthermore, the specific similarities that I am identifying begin to break down the clear distinctions between these genres (or subgenres), suggesting that they may have more fundamental similarities.

In all three texts, traumatic laughter is present but does not replace the more "serious" feelings. Instead, it coexists with and complicates them. In the end, neither gothic nor sentimental texts are able to remain univocal or tonally stable in the face of trauma. To explore how humor functions as a mark of trauma in these texts, I will begin with a brief overview of current psychological literature that discusses the role of humor in relationship to trauma and suffering, establishing the relationship between excessive or transgressive humor and the

extreme psychological states provoked by trauma. With this theoretical background established, I will turn to readings of Lewis' *The Monk*, Radcliffe's *The Italian*, and Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* to explore the ways humor functions in these texts as a narrative response to their stories of psychological suffering and sexual threat.

Traumatic Laughter: Laughing to Try to Stay Sane

Traumatic experiences often provoke dark forms of humor – and not only in the form of gallows humor or traditional jokes. Much post-traumatic laughter happens as an uncalculated and often unmediated response to trauma, rather than as a calculated coping strategy or a post-mortem stand-up act. This compulsive, hyperbolic, often hysterical response of laughter or inappropriate humor is what I am defining as traumatic laughter. Traumatic laughter is excessive, out of control, bodily, and immediate. Traumatic laughter has rarely been theorized in literary studies, but it does appear in psychological accounts of responses to trauma. Psychological scholarship suggests that trauma and excessive laughter are intimately connected, and provides an important context through which to see these connections clearly.

Excessive laughter is often identified in both popular and scholarly psychological writing as part of the constellation of symptoms associated with the aftermath of a traumatic event. As psychology scholar Carmen Moran notes, "In highly charged and stressful situations, excessive humor can be a sign of distress" (148). Psychotherapist Chris Purnell writes that one of the models of difficulty for children post-trauma involves "an inhibition of negative affect – particularly

anger and fear, and an emphasis on false positive affect. For example, a client talking about some traumatic event in therapy may laugh, even though the event has been distressing" (11). Both Purnell and Moran point out the way in which this post-traumatic laughter can is aligned not with amusement or pleasure, but with distress. Similarly, neurologist and scholar Jean Askenasy writes that "hysterical" laughter can be identified as a response to "trauma, shock, and anxiety states" (323). For all of these authors, laughter is a potentially uncomfortable response to a traumatic experience. In particular, all three scholars suggest that the laughter is too much, or not appropriate. Moran describes it as "excessive," Purnell as "false," and Askenasy as "hysterical." These adjectives all suggest a kind of excessive, jarring emotional state, a sense that the laughter is out of control or seems inappropriate in the context. The use of the word "hysterical" also calls to mind a gendered excess – a response that is particularly female as well as excessive or hyperbolic.

Indicating a general consensus about the way that laughter can function as an unwanted response to trauma, the claim of a link between "excessive" laughter and trauma is also present in many popular sources available to individuals with trauma. The CDC fact sheet entitled "Helping Patients Cope With A Traumatic Event" has a list of "Common Responses to a Traumatic Event" that includes "inappropriate laughter" (CDC).[1] As with the scholarly sources, all of these descriptions of laughter as a symptom of trauma include an adjective that suggests

[1] The University of California at Irvine Campus Assault Resources and Education department describes the range of behaviors seen in individuals experiencing the "Crisis or Acute Stage" of Rape Trauma Syndrome in the following way: "A victim may cry, shake or appear to be agitated and restless, or seem calm, controlled, 'spacey,' or *laugh hysterically*" (University of California, Irvine; italics mine).

that the laughter is out of control – the laughter is "inappropriate" or "hysterical." The general psychological understanding of this laughter is that it is neither a reflection of pleasure or amusement nor is it under an individual's control. Instead, it is a compulsive and excessive response to the excessive psychological disruption of trauma. Notably, many of these sources deal specifically with the gendered and embodied trauma of rape, which suggests a particularly strong connection between the particular experience of sexual trauma and traumatic laughter.

One first-hand account of the way that this traumatic laughter can exist in response to the horror of a traumatic event was written by Megan Carpentier on the feminist website Jezebel.[2] In an article about rape jokes, she describes the aftermath of being sexually assaulted: "Of course, I spent a good part of the hours after my most recent assault alternating between hysterical crying and compulsive vomiting — and cracking jokes…I told jokes... jokes that descended deeper into 'inappropriate' territory." This account of the experience of humor in the face of trauma expresses some of the excess of traumatic laughter. The list of behaviors that Carpentier describes include "hysterical crying," "compulsive vomiting" and making "inappropriate" jokes. All of these are excessive bodily reactions. In writing about them, she expresses, in her first person account of the immediate aftermath of trauma, the way that laughter caused by trauma is excessive laughter born of being outside the bounds of a controlled, rational world. It is this type of

[2] Similarly, user Sinpoa2 on www.healthboards.com writes: "This is something that has always disturbed me a bit - I got sexually assaulted a few years back, and my reaction (starting from immediately afterward through at least the first month) was laughter…I knew I wasn't happy (I mean, no way!) and I knew the laughter was wrong... but I just couldn't make it stop."

laughter – an embodied, out-of-control laughter that is provoked by an experience of trauma – that I am calling traumatic laughter.

Traumatic laughter is sometimes a source of anxiety or shame, as it exists beyond the bounds of what is socially acceptable. However, Thomas Kuhlman defends the function of humor in the face of great suffering as proposing a "response to irresolvable dilemmas" and as "offer[ing] a way of being sane in an insane place" ("Gallows humor" 1085). In his analysis of the use of humor by individuals who work with violently mentally ill patients, he argues that the use of humor in response to a traumatic workplace is a functional and perhaps inevitable response to the "insane" nature of the environment and the "irresolvable dilemmas" presented by it. Trauma is by its very definition a condition that is, at least initially, "irresolvable" and outside of the bounds of the expected, the rational, or the comprehensible. Traumatic laughter is one common response to this profound disruption, to the experience of loss of control and disruption of boundaries that comes with traumatic experiences.

Post-traumatic laughter is also often considered a coping mechanism for individuals who have survived trauma – as a response with benefits, or at least as a response that is understandable and, in opposition to conventional responses, actually appropriate to the extremity of the situation.[3] Social worker and suicide

[3] Sometimes the way that laughter works as a coping mechanism is framed as positive. Researchers have found that humor helps individuals cope with trauma. Psychiatrists Vesti and Kastrup write, "Individuals with well-developed coping mechanisms….stand a better chance of getting through the ordeal without major functional impairment. From the psycho-dynamic perspective, such individuals will typically use defense mechanisms of a mature level, such a humor and sublimation, and be capable of gaining a subjective meaning and making sense of the event" (223). On the other hand, sometimes such coping is framed as negative. Laughter as a response to trauma is sometimes linked to

prevention expert Jacqueline Garrick writes of traumatized veterans, "therapists can aid veterans in understanding that their sense of humor is very often a vital part of their ability to cope with emotionally stressful, and sometimes horrific, events given their frame of reference" (179). However, even this view of humor as a way of successfully coping with a traumatic experience is tinged with the possibility that such humor is excessive. Garrick points out that veterans often feel that their "sick sense of humor" will alienate them. Traumatic laughter, even when conceived of as a coping strategy, is still a liminal and fraught experience, one that connects the excesses of trauma with excesses of affect.

Considering the insights of writers who are concerned with the real-world responses and coping mechanisms of traumatized individuals allows us to see the connection between traumatic experiences and the way that such suffering provokes compulsive, hyperbolic, and excessive moments of humor. As I turn to the role of humor in gothic and sentimental texts, I want to consider the way that excessive humor is a narrative result of telling a story about trauma; it is one example of the excess that can (and often does) arise as trauma is narrated. This excessive humor occurs in both traumatized individuals and texts that centrally represent traumatic suffering. However, the way that such humor manifests in literary texts is not necessarily through the representation of individual humorous responses of individual characters. Instead, the traumatic laughter permeates the text, creating a hybrid tone to the work as a whole. It is my contention that

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dissociation and Moran acknowledges that laughter can be used as an avoidance technique (Keltner et al; Moran 148). Merwin and Smith-Kurtz write that "humor may be used as a means of denying or avoiding feelings too frightening to face. Often the trauma of victimization is overwhelming, and painful emotion may be deferred through the use of humor" (72).

narrating a story that is about great suffering often results in a story whose tone is unstable and hybrid, a story that incorporates humor without undermining the other affective realities of suffering. This humor is what I'm defining as traumatic laughter – a dark humor that emerges unbidden as a result of an encounter with trauma and that becomes a key element in gothic and sentimental novels that tell the stories of women under threat. This humor appears in "horror" gothic novels like *The Monk*, in "terror" gothic novels like *The Italian*, and in sentimental novels like *The Man of Feeling* as a result of their representations of sexual trauma.

Comedy and the Gothic Turn

Gothic literature is often described as a literature about fear and horror or terror. My claim is that it is also a genre that has produced a lot of humor, and not just in satires like Austen's *Northanger Abbey* or Barrett's *The Heroine*. I assert that there is humor in even the most canonical eighteenth and nineteenth century gothic novels, humor that the explicit satires pick up on and reflect back in a different mode. Many critics of the gothic have identified this strand in the genre, although different critics have different explanations for their observation of the presence of humor in the gothic. George Haggerty understands it as resulting from a "confusion of intention" and the pressure of realism; Diane Hoeveler identifies the source of the extravagance of these texts as being the potency of "maternal ideology"; and Kelly Hurley points towards Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism and

the carnivalesque to account for the "admixture" of tone in the Gothic.[4] However, all of these critics observe the potentially confusing mixture of tone and mode that is present in gothic works – the presence of both horror and humor.

The most extensive exploration of the role of humor in the Gothic is found in Avril Horner and Susan Zlosnik's *Gothic and the Comic Turn*, in which they, like Hurley, rely on an understanding of the gothic as hybrid and on Bakhtinian theory to explain the role of comedy in the gothic. They argue that what they call the "comic turn" is an essential part of the genre's make up: [5]

> The comic turn in Gothic, we claim, is not an aberration or a corruption of a 'serious' genre; rather, it is intrinsic to a mode of writing that has been hybrid since its very inception.… Rather than setting up a binary between 'serious' and 'comic' Gothic texts, it is perhaps best to think of Gothic writing as a spectrum (4)

They see gothic as a genre that is always "teetering on the edge of self-parody" and claim that the comic turn is a creative "exploitation of the styled theatricality of the Gothic device" (13).

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[4] Haggerty writes, "We find ourselves laughing again and again at the Gothic novel" and uses as examples canonical gothic authors such as Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin ("Fact and Fancy" 381). Hoeveler describes early female gothic literature as being full of "parody or camp, self-conscious deflation or hyperbolic ideological ruminations run amok" (*Gothic Feminism* 157). Hurley describes what she calls a "*gleeful excessiveness* of Gothic horror" (142).

[5] Victor Sage makes a similar observation in his essay "Gothic Laughter: Farce and Horror in Five Texts," writing "What I have been claiming, in this brief excursus into gothic laughter, is that the ambivalence of effect I have been examining is not a marginal, but a central feature of the gothic tradition. It is not simply polyphony I am describing, however, in the Bakhtinian sense; but rather a particular pattern of readerly doubt, unease, and horror, codified in bathos – in the staggeringly banal mechanisms of exaggeration, mistaken identity, misunderstanding and cross purposes which are the driving force of theatrical farce." (203)

They then turn to an exploration of the "modern condition" and the "modern subject" to explain this phenomenon. They argue that the "Gothic's tendency to hybridity makes possible a mixed response to the loss of transcendence that characterizes the modern condition" (3). I agree with them when they make the claim that the gothic's "turn" towards comedy is not at odds with its serious strands, and that considering the role of the comic *alongside* the role of horror in the gothic is crucial. However, I propose a different explanation of this phenomenon of gothic comedy than as a response to modernity. It is my contention that this humor is a humor of excess that is a response to circumstances of excess, and that the root of the comedy is the experience of fear and horror.[6] The humor in gothic (and sentimental) texts is traumatic laughter, laughter that arises as a result of grappling with or experiencing trauma. In particular, in the texts I will analyze in this chapter, the fear and horror being depicted comes from trauma related to sexuality and sexual violence.

Excess Fervor: Grotesque Comedy of Passion in *The Monk*

The Monk is an apt text to begin looking at the way that traumatic laughter functions in gothic and sentimental texts – and the way that this laughter is not at odds with horror or trauma – because *The Monk* is one of the gothic novels whose humor is most often acknowledged. Many critics agree that it is parodic or satirical or downright funny.[7] For example, Emma McEvoy, in her introduction to

[6] Horner and Zlosnik themselves point towards the aspects of gothic comedy that I want to emphasize when they write "its tendency to the sinister grotesque is easily converted to the comic flamboyance of the grotesque as excess" (17).

[7] Satire and parody are often invoked by critics. For example, Fred Botting writes that

the Oxford edition of *The Monk*, points out that, in the novel, "Gothic tones easily give way to comedy. Its bizarre sense of humour is one of *The Monk*'s most surprising aspects" (viii). Gareth Euridge, in his essay "Comic Function in *The Monk*," points out that *The Monk*'s humor comes in multiple forms, not just the brutal satire but also "sympathetic laughter at the petty vanities of humankind" (85), the "patently absurd" (88), and an irony that implicates the reader (87). The existence of humor in *The Monk* is widely accepted.

There is also general critical agreement that *The Monk's* humor makes it formally and/or tonally hybrid. This hybridity emerges from the fact that the humor does not take away from the fear or horror invoked by the novel. As Euridge points out, critics must pay attention to "the conscious humor, the playfulness, and the strong irony in *The Monk*, through which Lewis manages to undermine the strange suasiveness of his Gothic while yet rendering our sensation of horror vivid and disturbing" (84-5). And Ann Campbell, in her essay "Satire in *The Monk*: Exposure and Reformation," writes that "satire permeates the novel, obtruding into even the most gruesome scenes." Not only is the humor in *The Monk* multi-faceted, but it also co-exists with horror.

In fact, the novel's generic hybridity is even more commonly noted than its humor.[8] Robert Miles has written most extensively about hybridity in *The*

"*The Monk*…does not refrain from vividly invoking supernatural elements. It often does she in a satirical or brutally mocking manner" (49). Similarly, Emma McEvoy writes that the novel contains moments that are illustrative of a "dangerous sense of parody" (xxviii).

[8] Critical observations about the hybridity of the novel often take the form of implications that *The Monk* is disjointed, or that its relationship to its literary forebears and/or established generic conventions is complicated and muddled. Peter Brooks suggested that the novel often uses the "logic" that is "typical of melodrama" in its "nightmare world" ("Virtue and Terror" 251). George Haggerty also explains the contradictory nature of the

Monk, discussing the way that the novel borrows form a multitude of sources. He writes that "with nearly every feature of *The Monk*[,] one can find a precedent for everything, and yet *The Monk* was shockingly new, because it inverted, parodied, or exaggerated the features it cannibalized" ("The 1790s" 53). While he does not emphasize this in his reading, Miles's list suggests the many ways that humor is present in *The Monk* (through inversion, parody, and exaggeration, among others). And some of the humor in *The Monk* is clearly social satire or parody, an aspect of the novel that has been frequently discussed by critics.[9] However, I will focus on a different variety of humor: moments when the humor comes from an excess

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novel's form and genre by suggesting that it is attempting to use a novel form based in realism to express a nightmarish vision ("Fact and Fancy" 380). Mary Favret, exploring the presence of lyric poetry in novels of the time, including *The Monk*, writes that "if we recognize a "new species" of fiction in the romantic novel, we also recognize its Frankenstein-like gesture" ("Telling Tales"). Critics have also written about *The Monk*'s relationship to the sentimental (See Stephen Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities* and D.L. MacDonald 'A Dreadful Dreadful Dream'; Transvaluation, Realization, and Literalization of *Clarissa* in *The Monk*) and its relationship to the pornographic (see Michael Gamer, "Genres for the Prosecution" and Clara Tuite's "Cloistered Closets: Enlightenment Pornography, The Confessional State, Homosexual Persecution and *The Monk*") and its relation to German Gothic works (Sydney Conger's *Matthew G. Lewis, Charles Robert Maturin and the Germans: An Interpretive Study of the Influence of German Literature on Two Gothic Novels*) among other explorations of *The Monk*'s relationship to other generic conventions and histories.

[9] Satirical humor begins on the very first page of the novel, when the narrator expostulates the reader not to think that the crowd at the (Catholic) church was attending from "motives of piety or thirst of information," but rather that the church crowd was full of social climbers and people with "no better means of employing their time" (7). Some of the socially critical satire takes aim at gendered mores, however, including the description of Elvira's extreme prudery in terms of Antonia's reading. Ambrosio can't believe that a girl who reads the Bible could be as innocent about sex and desire as Antonia seems to be (a funny moment, in and of itself). However, he then discovers that Elvira believes that the Bible was full of "indecent expressions" and that she has copied out a version in which "all improper passages" have been "either altered or omitted" (259-260). While this passage was cited in arguments that Lewis' novel was blasphemous, its target is not the Bible, but individuals like Elvira whose fear of discussing sexual matters in any context leads young women like Antonia to be dangerously ignorant. As McEvoy writes, it "pokes fun at sacred cows…and the pomposities of overseers of education, prurient matrons, and critics who express horror at the decadence of romances" (viii).

of affect in the narrative or text. In these moments, the exaggeration comes from the excessive emotions that arise as a result of trauma. Specifically, the reality of female sexuality and female bodies, the threat that those bodies are under, and the violence they suffer become comedic at moments throughout this text. Sexuality, violence, and gender are the locus for the trauma of this text, and as a result, are the impulse behind the text's traumatic laughter.

Sexuality and sexual violence are among the central concerns of the *The Monk*. Ambrosio (the titular monk) is led to his downfall by his sexual desires, first for Matilda and then for Antonia. Ambrosio almost rapes Antonia, kills her mother, rapes her, and then kills her, all with the help of Matilda, with whom Ambrosio has had sex and who calls on the devil for help. To make his behavior even worse, we learn that Antonia is, unbeknownst to him, his younger sister. Ambrosio's sexual desires and his inability to control them lead to great suffering Antonia, who is fearful and/or grief-stricken through much of the novel, as well as for Ambrosio himself. In the secondary plot, Agnes, whose father has decided she should be a nun because of a deathbed promise made to her mother, meets a man who she wants to marry (Raymond) and tries to elope with him. However, due to a macabre plot twist, she ends up abandoned and joins a convent.[10] Raymond's attempts to rescue her result in the two of them having pre-marital sex, which leaves her pregnant. As a result, the prioress who is in charge of her convent

[10] Raymond mistakes the supposedly apocryphal "bleeding nun" ghost for her and thus misses meeting up with her.

sentences her to death. However, instead of being killed, she is drugged with opiates and put in a dungeon under a cemetery with her baby, who quickly dies.[11]

This threat of sexual violence that pervades the text provokes heightened emotional content, which in turn leads to surprising humor in the text. In one such moment, Matilda gives Ambrosio the enchanted mirror, where he sees Antonia undressing for the bath. The description is as follows:

> Though unconscious of being observed, an in-bred sense of modesty induced her to veil her charms; and She stood hesitating upon the brink, in the attitude of the Venus de Medicis. At this moment *a tame Linnet flew towards her, nestled its head between her breasts and nibbled them in wanton play.* The smiling Antonia strove in vain to shake off the Bird, and at length raised her hands to drive it from its delightful harbour. (271, italics mine)

The bird nestled between the breasts of the virtuous Antonia, "nibbling" them, is a ridiculous and humorous image, an excessive moment that is both harmlessly amusing *and* points to Antonia's vulnerability to physical assault. Needless to say, Ambrosio is overcome, his desire is "worked up to phrenzy," and the possibility of Antonia being assaulted immediately moves from the amusing tame bird to the threatening Ambrosio, who is aroused by the ridiculous scene of the bird (271). At another moment, even the narrator appears to find Matilda's breasts overwhelming in a moment of potential violence. As Matilda is threatening to stab herself, the narrator writes: "She had torn open her habit, and her bosom was

[11] Even the inset plot of the Bleeding Nun explores the possibility that sexual desire is dangerous, as the Bleeding Nun is a prostitute who is killed by her lover.

half exposed. The weapon's point rested upon her left breast: And *Oh! that was such a breast!*" (65). The illicit desire in *The Monk* and the possibility of sexual violence turn humorous in these moments, but without fully disarming the underlying sense of threat. After all, Ambrosio is a genuine sexual threat, and he is not amused by the scene but placed in a "phrenzy" by it. However, we as readers experience the excess of this scene as funny as well as unnerving. The possibility of sexual violence within the novel leads to depictions of sexuality that are extreme, unsettling, and, at times, quite funny.

The links between excessive sexual desire, trauma, and humor become even clearer if we trace the idea of the violence of passion through both comedic and seriously violent scenes. In one light-hearted moment in the novel, Donna Rodolpha, Agnes' mother, believes that Raymond is in love with her rather than with her young and beautiful daughter. When Raymond attempts to declare his love for Agnes, Donna Rodolpha misreads him, and exclaims, "At length I can no longer hide my weakness either from myself or from you. I yield to the violence of my passion, and own, that I adore you!" (135) Later we are told that she has in fact died because "in an excess of passion/ She broke a blood-vessel, and expired in the course of a few hours" (193).

This ridiculous version of passion and its dangerous effects is scarcely distinguishable, at least linguistically, from the descriptions of dangerous passion that the novel takes more seriously. Raymond describes the consummation of his affair with Agnes, which leads to her unwed pregnancy, her captivity, and the death of her child, with nearly the same language: "in an unguarded moment the

honour of Agnes was sacrificed to my passion" (186). In an even darker context, Ambrosio's continued desire to rape Antonia is also described in similar language: "his passion was too violent to permit his abandoning his design" (257). Lewis uses the same language to describe the burlesque scene with Donna Rodolpha that leads to nothing more than the disposal of a very minor character and to describe the violent sexual desires of Ambrosio that lead to rape and murder, thus suggesting that the emotional source of both the most brutally violent and most obviously funny scenes in the novel are closely related. Excessive passion is connected with the most awful and traumatic scenes in the novel – Ambrosio's assault of Antonia, for example. However, excessive passion is also the central attribute of one of the novel's least serious characters – the campy, embarrassing, ridiculous Donna Rodolpha. Through this comparison between Ambrosio and Donna Rodolpha, we can see that in *The Monk,* violent passion is *both* funny *and* a source of fear and suffering.

The affective, sexual, and reproductive traumas represented in this novel are presented as both seriously troubling and unsettlingly funny. *The Monk* tells a narrative with a great deal of sexual sadism and trauma, which provokes the darkly comic mood of the text. More surprisingly, perhaps, such moods can also be seen as operating in less obviously macabre gothic texts, including Ann Radcliffe's novels.

Terror and Horror: Similarities and Differences between Radcliffe and Lewis

Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis are typically set up as fundamentally opposed to each other, as the iconic figures in two divergent strands of Gothic literature. These strands are often called "terror Gothic" and "horror Gothic." Radcliffe herself, in her posthumously published essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," established definitions of terror and horror as fundamentally opposed terms.[12] In making these distinctions, Radcliffe does not invoke any gothic novelists (herself or others) but uses examples from Shakespeare, Milton, and other established major authors. However, literary critics in the 1960s, including Robert Hume, used these terms to define the difference between Radcliffe and Lewis, and to separate all Gothic novels into these two categories.[13] This distinction was taken up and mapped onto gender by critics such as Ellen Moers and Anne Williams. They suggested that "terror gothic" was a feminine genre and that "horror gothic" was a masculine genre. The potency of these dichotomies (terror/horror and female/male) as ways of distinguishing between disparate types of gothic literature and the use of Radcliffe and Lewis to represent these types continues to be seen in current literary criticism, despite attempts (as early as Robert Platzner's rejoinder to Robert Hume in *PMLA* in 1971) to undermine the

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[12] Radcliffe writes: "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton in their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one" (*Gothic Documents* 168).

[13] Robert Hume opposes Radcliffe and Walpole (terror authors) to Lewis, Beckford, Mary Shelley, and Maturin (horror authors) in his "Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel" published in *PMLA* in 1969. In addition, Devendra Varma wrote in his 1957 *The Gothic Flame*, "The contrast between the work and personalities of Mrs. Radcliffe and 'Monk' Lewis serves to illustrate the two distinct streams of the Gothic novel: the former representing the Craft of Terror, the latter and his followers comprising the chambers of Horror."

dichotomy.[14] For example, Robert Miles, in his chapter "Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis" in the 2012 *New Companion to the Gothic* writes that "where Radcliffe strove toward poetic realism, Lewis exulted in pastiche and irony" and connects that contrast to the fact that "Radcliffe looked back to the novel of sensibility, whereas Lewis opted for 'Sadean' sensationalism" (93). The nature of the contrast constructed between Lewis and Radcliffe suggests that Radcliffe, in being more restrained, more realistic, and more like sentimentality, should be less funny.

While Radcliffe's novels do, as Miles points out, often demonstrate a close relationship to the literature of sentimentality in both plot and tone, that does not foreclose the possibility of emotional excess, the grotesque, or humor. Indeed, I am arguing the opposite; I claim that sentimental literature, in its own way, is as excessive as gothic literature. Later in the chapter, I will explore this claim in relationship to Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, a sentimental novel that follows many of the conventions of the genre. Both gothic and sentimental novels engage in an exploration of suffering that leads to an excess of affect that creates humor. Certainly Radcliffe's *The Italian*, the text that I am going to explore in depth here,

[14] In the introduction to *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (2009), Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith write that by 1990, "Increasingly critics came to distinguish between Female Gothic and Male Gothic, initially identified by the gender of the writer. The Female Gothic plot, exemplified by Radcliffe, centralized the imprisoned and pursued heroine threatened by a tyrannical male figure, it explained the supernatural, and ended in the closure of marriage. In contrast, the Male Gothic plot, exemplified by Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), is one of masculine transgression of social taboos, charaterised by violent rape and/or murder, which tends to resist closure, frequently leaving the supernatural unexplained." While they continue by complicating the definitions of Female and Male gothic, they begin with the basic dichotomous approach.

has many moments of emotional and linguistic excess, and these are not at odds with either its sentimental moments or its gothic plot.

The hero of *The Italian*, Vivaldi, is described as having an "excess of grief" when faced with the loss of his love interest (124). His servant, Paulo, while telling his story of escaping from the Inquisition, is described as fluctuating between multiple excessive emotions: "he smiled and wept, and sobbed and laughed with such rapid transition, that Vivaldi began to be alarmed for him" (468). The heroine, Ellena, when faced with the mother she thought was dead "gaze[s] upon Olivia with an intenseness that partook of wildness" and is nearly "overwhelmed" with the intensity of her feelings (436). And this sense of excessive emotion also extends to the narrative voice – the descriptive passages themselves are sometimes overwritten or overwrought. A dramatic moment in the Inquisition trial (one of the climaxes of the novel) is described as follows: "The consternation was now general; the extraordinary appearance and conduct of the stranger seemed to strike the greater part of the tribunal, a tribunal of the inquisition itself! with dismay" (396).

While there are certainly fewer critical discussions that touch on the excess and humor in Radcliffe's works than in Lewis', I believe that there are fundamental similarities to be seen between the functions of humor in the two works (and between these gothic novels and sentimental texts like Mackenzie's). Both texts explore threats to women's bodies and the trauma of sexual assault. Both texts are, as a result, excessive in their own ways. Virginia Woolf, in her essay "Gothic Fiction," writes of Radcliffe's work that in it "the beauty and

absurdity of romance are both present, since Mrs. Radcliffe pushes the liberties of romance to the extreme." Both Lewis and Radcliffe push the possibilities of the gothic genre and embrace the extremity of the genre, albeit in very different ways, and as a result, the humor implicit in the gothic is clear in both authors' works. Making a firm distinction between the masculine/horror and female/terror strands of the gothic can prevent us from seeing just how similar the underlying impulses and formal or tonal styles of these novels are. Traumatic narratives focused on female sexuality provoke uncomfortable traumatic laughter in *The Italian*, as they do in *The Monk*.

The Bathetic Hero: Comedy of Passion and Fear in *The Italian*

The humor in *The Italian* mirrors the humor in *The Monk* in that it is often prompted by characters' excessive emotion, especially emotion that is prompted by threats to the female body. Having established the way that humor in *The Monk* is a response to trauma and potential trauma done to the female body, we can see the humor in *The Italian* functioning similarly as a response to sexualized female bodies. At the same time, the form of that humor is noticeably different; Radcliffe's humor is less blatantly grotesque than Lewis', and sometimes is less obviously connected to excessive, traumatic suffering. After all, much of the humor in Radcliffe's novels comes from bathos.

When used in relationship to Radcliffe, the definition of "bathos" is the second definition in the Oxford English Dictionary: "a ludicrous descent from the elevated to the commonplace in writing or speech; anticlimax." This definition

already has encoded in it a hint of humor; after all, it is a "*ludicrous* descent." Other definitions of bathos, such as the Encyclopedia Britannica's, emphasize the way in which this humor is related to both literary style and the narration of suffering: **"**Bathos may result from an inappropriately dignified treatment of the commonplace, the use of elevated language and imagery to describe trivial subject matter, or from such an exaggeration of pathos (emotion provoked by genuine suffering) as to become overly sentimental or ridiculous." This slippage from pathos to bathos points to the close relationship between traumatic suffering and humor that I established at the beginning of the chapter. The same moment can both provoke emotion "by genuine suffering" and then be made "overly sentimental and ridiculous" through the language used to describe it. So while moments of bathetic humor may seem to be opposed to true suffering, they are in fact closely related to suffering and its exaggeration, and in particular to the danger that the novel's heroine Ellena is in throughout the novel.

Many of the funniest moments in this text, including humorous scenes that rely on bathos, rely on the excessive passion of the hero Vivaldi for Ellena and the threat that Schedoni poses to her, much as *The Monk* derived humor from Ambrosio's excess passion for Antonia. Here, as in *The Monk*, female sexuality is presented as something that is both excessive and under threat, as always a potential site of trauma. This applies to the antagonist Schedoni's violent backstory of fratricide and marital rape but also to the less violent but still excessive lengths to which Vivaldi is driven by his desire for Ellena.[15]

[15] It turns out that Schedoni became a monk after fleeing from a scene of domestic violence in which he was the perpetrator. Schedoni (who is actually the Count di

One of the humorous passages related to Vivaldi's affection and desire for Ellena occurs early in the novel shortly after Ellena's aunt Bianchi has encouraged her to accept Vivaldi's proposal of marriage, offering as one reason that she (Bianchi) is dying. As Vivaldi returns to their home, he is stopped on the way by a mysterious monk who tells him not to go to the house, as "death is in the house" (50). Vivaldi immediately assumes that it is Ellena who died, even though the more logical conclusion would be that the sick, elderly Bianchi is the one who has died. In his mind, he "saw her ashy countenance, and her wasting eyes, from which the spirit of life was fast departing, turned piteously on himself, as if imploring him to save her from the fate that was dragging her to the grave" (51). The narrator explains his error as the result of his "ardent affection" (51). As Victor Sage points out in his reading of this passage, "we are invited to smile at Vivaldi as a young man whose judgement is clouded by passion, and therefore we read this whole description of his 'presentiment' with superior irony. Bathos, then, is already present" (191). We, as readers, already anticipate the bathetic reveal, in which Ellena will be fine. We are already aware of the ridiculousness of Vivaldi's genuine suffering, and are prepared for him to join in the joke, to learn that he is, in fact, "overly sentimental."

Radcliffe, however, drags out the scene, as she has Vivaldi reach the house and encounter the servant Beatrice, who naturally doesn't understand that when Vivaldi says "She *is* dead, then!" he is referring to Ellena rather than

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Marinella) murdered his brother because of his desire for his brother's wife and then forced her to marry him. When she showed no affection for him after the forced marriage, he kills her (or so he thinks) and leaves the family behind.

Bianchi (52). The Radcliffean bathos is forestalled, as Vivaldi continues to suffer. Eventually, Vivaldi is taken upstairs, and Ellena is revealed to be alive. Somewhat amazingly, Vivaldi makes this same mistake again, forty pages later, when the same mysterious monk says "she departed an hour ago" (86). Again in an agitated state, the narration explains that "he was in a mood for conjecturing the worst, that they not only alluded to Ellena, but that his saying 'she had departed an hour ago,' was a figurative manner of telling that she had died then" (93). His negativity and penchant for jumping to the worst possible conclusion as regards Ellena is both an amusing set up for a bathetic moment and also pathetic, in that Vivaldi's suffering is presented as very real. Furthermore, while he is wrong about Ellena being dead in these moments, she is very nearly murdered later on in the text. The threat to her is real and ever-present, and the intensity of Vivaldi's well-founded fear is the motivating force behind these humorous moments. This humorous moment may seem, at first glance, like light-hearted humor at Vivaldi's expense. However, when we look more closely we see that the stakes of this moment are very real, and that apparently excessive affective response that Vivaldi has is in fact in keeping with the threats to Ellena and Vivaldi's own overwrought relationship to her and her safety and chastity.

The bathos of Radcliffe is often understood as opposed to deep negative emotions like fear and horror. For example, Virginia Woolf wrote of Radcliffe's *Castle of Udolpho*: "Mysteries abound. Murdered bodies multiply; but she is incapable of creating the emotion to feel them by with the result that they lie there, unbelieved in; hence, ridiculous." However, I argue that the bathetic and

farcical nature of these scenes does not make fear irrelevant or diminish the trauma or violence of the narrative. In fact, the two modes are closely intertwined.

Two additional moments in the text illustrate clearly the ways that action that seems trivial and humorous can be in fact closely connected to the traumas and horrors of Radcliffe's work. First, as Ellena is planning her escape from the convent, she is trying to meet up with Vivaldi, who has come to rescue her. She sees a stranger who she thinks is Vivaldi. She puts herself in position to speak to him, and "ventured to lift her veil for one instance. The stranger, letting his cloak fall, thanked her with his eyes for her condescension, and she perceived, that he was not Vivaldi!" (155) She is so horrified at her behavior that she determines never to lift her veil again. As Yael Shapiro writes, this is a minor moment in the plot, one that is easily overlooked and has no real consequences. After all, "The stranger does not expose Ellena, and she and Vivaldi soon flee as planned. Her mistake remains only a social gaffe—embarrassing, but carrying no real consequences. Why, then, did Radcliffe include it?" (454) Comparing it to a moment in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* when Emily buys a hat while on the run, Shapiro writes that these moments "possess an odd hybridity" and that "their incongruity evokes puzzlement, if not laughter: how can anyone fret about a bare head or a misunderstood gesture while fleeing captivity, rape, and death? But the decorous management of the body is not a trivial matter, to the heroine or her creator." (454). Instead, this mildly humorous moment underscores a violent reality lurking in the text the whole time – the possibility of Ellena's body being vulnerable and out of her control. This moment is thus an example of the hybrid

tone that characterizes much of the novel, in which moments are often both trivially comedic and contain a threat of violence or traumatic suffering.

The threats against Ellena's body are real in the world of the novel, even if in this moment, no threat is realized. While the direct threat of rape is less obviously present in this novel than it is in *The Monk*, Schedoni's story of having killed his brother and then carried off his brother's wife as a way to make her marry him certainly raises the specter of sexual violence, which haunts the entire novel. And Ellena's ability to control her own bodily movement is almost always threatened; indeed, she spends much of the novel in one form of captivity or another. The veil presents a small if potentially vital layer of protection against the incursion of the threatening world.

One example of the importance of Ellena's veil is Vivaldi's first encounter with Ellena, which is focused around him getting her to lift her veil so that he can gain visual access to her face. When he finally sees her unveiled (through the window at night without her knowledge) the description of what he sees is unmistakably sexualized: "Her fine hair was negligently bound up in a silk net, and some tresses that had escaped it, played on her neck, and round her beautiful countenance, which now was not even partially concealed by a veil" (16). When Vivaldi reveals himself to have been watching her "her countenance changed to an ashy paleness; and then, with trembling haste closing the lattice, quitted the apartment" (17). Accidentally giving a strange man access to the unguarded and, within the context of this novel, sexually-charged view of her face is a dangerous act, and Ellena's fear of exposing herself accidentally demonstrates just how risky

a position she has put herself in in attempting to leave the convent with Vivaldi. And while Vivaldi's excessive desire for Ellena leads to humorous outbursts and moments of hyperbole and overreaction, it also potentially poses a real threat to Ellena, who cannot be sure, until the very end of the novel, that his intentions will lead to her protection within an approved marriage. In both of these veil-centric incidents, it is the threat surrounding Ellena's body and sexuality that creates the humorous moment. Her physical vulnerability and the threat that male characters pose to her, as made evident by the specter of rape that haunts the novel in the form of Schedoni, create the danger and potential for traumatic violation that prompts the uncomfortable humor of these moments.

The threat posed by Schedoni is made clear in another episode with darker undertones. This moment occurs when Schedoni is taking Ellena away from the house in which she was confined for the purpose of her murder. Schedoni, Ellena, and their guide encounter, along the way, a performance that is part of a fair. They stop briefly and watch: "The people above were acting what seemed to have been intended for a tragedy, but what their strange gestures, uncouth recitation, and incongruous countenances, had transformed into a comedy" (318).[16] Within the context of a fair that includes fireworks, jugglers, sherbet, and hot macaroni, this appears to be mainly an amusing if meta-textually resonant diversion on their journey. However, the scene takes a darker turn. The guide then stops, "not

[16] Horner and Zlosnik comment on this passage, "This episode clearly lends itself to a Bakhtinian reading in which the voices of the fair, or carnival, can be heard against the privileged voices of aristocratic authority that dominate the plot" (7-8). To them, it appears to be a passing moment of meta-textuality, in which something of the tone of the gothic is presented within the novel in a way that mingles "nightmare, farce, coincidence, comedy, and terror" (Horner and Zlosnik 9). However, I argue above that it has another resonance, in that it evokes the threat that Schedoni poses to Ellena in the narrative.

knowing whether he ought to laugh or cry," turns to Schedoni, and calls out, "Look! Signor, see! Signor, what a scoundrel! What a villain! See! He has murdered his own daughter!" (318) In this moment the possibility of dismissing the entertainment is eliminated because Schedoni, who now believes that Ellena is his daughter, has just come from attempting to murder her and being stopped short by his recognition of her as his daughter.[17] Suddenly the humorously grotesque play represents the horror that Schedoni is feeling about his own actions, and the threatened position that Ellena continues (unknowingly) to be in.

In fact, while listing the descriptions of the events of the fair a few paragraphs earlier, the guide exclaims, "See! He has turned a monk into a devil already, in the twinkling of an eye!" (318) We, as readers, know that the monk is already the devil of this narrative. The fact that Ellena does not know that, that she experiences the play in which a man murders his daughter as in stark *contrast* to her experience rather than as a parallel to it, does not make the danger she is in and has been in any less real or potent.[18] This moment is tonally hybrid in a way analogous to scenes in *The Monk* – expressing both the very real danger and fear that Ellena's position invokes and a comic irony that does not undermine that fear but rather adds a layer of traumatic laughter. In this moment, as in the other

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[17] This scene functions like a version of the play scene in *Hamlet* – with the important difference that the play is not put on with the purpose of revealing the "real" violence, but does so coincidentally.

[18] Ellena's ignorance of the threat posed by Schedoni and other monks in this novel is in and of itself a source of ironic humor in the novel, including a moment when she is locked up in the house she is supposed to be murdered in and she perceives "a monk" (Schedoni, the mastermind of her confinement who is currently planning her murder) "walking silently beneath the dark rocks that overbrowed the beach." She thinks, "His, no doubt, are worthy musings!...I may address myself, without fear, to one of his order." (255)

passages I've discussed here, it is the very danger that Ellena is in, and the threat of sexual violence against her, that creates the humorous moment. The humor arises out of the suffering, potential or realized, represented by the narrative.

Neither the fact that *The Italian* is classified as "female gothic" nor the connection between Radcliffe's work and sentimentality forecloses such moments of emotional or tonal excess; rather, as we will see in the next section, these connections may actually contribute both to the representation of extreme suffering and to the darkly humorous tone that occurs as a result of such suffering.

Surprised into Tears: Sentimental Comedy and *The Man of Feeling*

While Ann Radcliffe's gothic novels have aspects of sentimentality embedded in them, Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* is a sentimental novel par excellence. Sir Walter Scott certainly believed so, writing in 1824 of the text that

> the principal object of Mackenzie…has been to reach and sustain a tone of moral pathos, by representing the effect of incidents, whether important or trifling, upon the human mind, and especially on those which were not only just, honourable, and intelligent, but so framed as to be responsive to those finer feelings to which ordinary hearts are callous. (346)

Eschewing a linear narrative in favor of a fragmented series of affecting encounters, Mackenzie focuses on the emotional responses of the protagonist, and on the "finer feelings" that are evoked in a sentimental observer.

I am arguing in this chapter that embedded in sentimentality, as in the gothic, is traumatic laughter prompted by the suffering represented by sentimental narratives. Generally, however, sentimental literature, including *The Man of Feeling*, is seen in opposition to humor. For example, critic Simon Dickie contrasts what he calls "politeness and sentimentality" with "older freedoms" that allow for bawdiness and cruel humor (4). Oliver Goldsmith, the eighteenth century author of the humorous sentimental novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*, himself contrasts "the weeping sentimental comedy" that "want humor" but "have abundance of sentiment and feeling" with a traditional Aristotelian comedy, partly on the basis that sentimental comedies do not prompt laughter. He laments that "humor at present seems to be departing from the stage."

There is, of course, a strong history of sentimental satires, as there is a history of Gothic satires. Fielding's *Shamela* and Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* both send up the conventions of the genre, making implicit arguments about the often unspoken sexual desire that underlies the genre. Sterne's work, in particular, has prompted a large body of scholarship addressing his use of satirical humor. Importantly, much of it recognizes that way that his work blurs the line between sentimentality and satire. For example, Barbara Benedict writes that his work "balance[s] on the delicate line between parody and pathos" and that he "blends satire against literary consumerism, sex, and social mores into the very language of sentimentalism" (69, 92). Similarly, Thomas Keymer writes of *A Sentimental Journey* that "the novel fails, or refuses, to sustain any clear distinction between sentimental sincerity and Shandean satire" (90). Sterne's work pushes critics and

readers to understand the way that sentimentality and humor are not necessarily at odds, by making it difficult to tell when he is engaging in satire and when he is tugging on the reader's heartstrings. In fact, it is my contention that these modes are often happening simultaneously, and not just in Sterne or Sternean parodies.

The distinction made by many critics and authors between "parody" and "pathos," between "sentimental sincerity" and "satire" is in fact broken down in sentimental texts beyond Sterne's work, including texts that are not specifically characterized as parodies. A few critics have recognized these breakdowns and discussed the close relationship between sentimental literature and satire, including Stephen Ahern, in his book *Affected Sensibilities*. He describes sentimental literature as having the "potential for parody was built in, for sentimentalism was from the outset a contradictory cultural discourse rooted in an unstable complex of assumptions about the ontological status and political implications of social identity" (21). He identifies ambivalence as a key feature of the sentimental novel, using Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* as an example, and (mis)quotes Robert Alter's description of the early novel as "a self-parodying genre" (22).[19] I find these descriptions of sentimentalism as in some way inextricably linked to satire useful, in that they suggest that sentimentality is characterized as a kind of hybrid tone, and posit a connection between canonical sentimentality and humor.

In fact, Ahern directly addresses the way in which the style of sentimentality pushes the boundary between the serious and the comic. He

[19] While Robert Alter does extensively discuss parody in his work, his phrase is actually "self-conscious genre." See Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre.* Berkeley, University of Berkeley Press, 1975.

describes sentimental novels (as well as other texts in the "romantic mode," including gothic novels) as being characterized by "rhetorical and emotional excess" and points out that "critics (often with good reason, I might add) bemoaned the formulaic and melodramatic style, which threatens at every moment to turn pathos to bathos and the sublime to the ridiculous…" (27). Claudia Johnson makes a similar observation about the way that sentimental excess moves sentimental texts towards humor when she writes:

> Sentimentality, of course, is normatively excessive. And in the world of Burney's imagination, the already excessive stranglehold of sentimental propriety can be loosened only by excessive compliance. This makes her fiction campy where it is most dutiful, for norms here are so saturated with excess that they lose their sway as norms. (145)

And even Simon Dickie moves, at the end of his book, away from simply contrasting the sentimental and the comic. He writes that, having looked at the "cruel comedy" of much eighteenth-century literature, "one starts to notice odd comic traces in so much broadly sentimental writing" (280). All of these critics recognize that a strict distinction between what Johnson calls "sentimental propriety" and what Ahern calls the "ridiculousness" of "melodramatic style" cannot be upheld, and that humor is interwoven with other affective modes throughout sentimental fiction, whether it appears to be satirical or not.

In my view, it is the very nature of sentimentality leads to these "traces" of "cruel comedy" in sentimental texts. As Ahern and Johnson point out, it is the

conventions of the genre that cause the humor – the excess embedded in the genre's commitment to affect above all and prompted by the representation of trauma in sentimental texts. Sentimentality is, as I claimed in the introduction, centrally concerned with responses to suffering and trauma. As a result, traumatic laughter is also a central element of the genre. As Johnson points out, "norms here are…saturated with excess," excess that is provoked by the text's interest in trauma and manifested (among other ways) through the presence of traumatic laughter in the text.

The Man of Feeling includes moments of excess, sexual trauma, and traumatic laughter that is a response to trauma, which I will focus on for the remainder of this chapter. However, there are also clear moments of satirical humor within the text, moments when the text pokes fun at sentimentality itself in an almost Sternean way. The framing narrative of the introduction, in which the narrator and a curate go hunting, is quite funny. In addition to the fact that the curate describes the text that we're about to read as "excellent wadding" for his gun, and that we learn that the narrator is also using literature for wadding, the curate makes a comment about the text that skewers the fragmented nature of many sentimental narratives. Furthermore, the final passage of the introduction pokes fun at the culture of readership in general and sentimental readership specifically (4). The narrator says of the text that

> I was a good deal affected with some very trifling passages in it, and had the name of a Marmontel, or a Richardson, been on the title-page --- 'tis odds that I should have wept: But

> One is ashamed to be pleased with the works of one knows not whom (5)

This passage places the forthcoming narrative squarely within the sentimental tradition, but it also mocks the way that the cult of authorship determines a reader's pleasure in the text, and primes the reader for a certain emotional response. It certainly supports Barbara Benedict's claim that "through structural irony, puns, and parody, *The Man of Feeling* condemns the literary refinement of feeling that replaces judgment with a self-regarding emotion wrongly portrayed as sympathy" in that it places the authenticity of readers' feelings in doubt (118).

As a result of this tonal instability, critics in the 1980s, including Brian Vickers, Peter Burnham, and William Burling, debated the question of whether, in Burling's words, the novel is "sympathetic to sentimentalism or opposed to it" (136).[20] Most contemporary critics have come to agree that Mackenzie's relationship to a critique of sentimentality is more complicated, and that the question of satire can't be resolved with an either/or argument. Barbara Benedict, for example, writes in *Framing Feeling* that in fact "*The Man of Feeling* exemplifies the ambiguities of sentimental irony" (118). She focuses on the presence of satire, and other types of humor that skewer sentimentality, without denying the fact that Mackenzie takes the potential of sentimentality seriously.[21]

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[20] Burling himself concludes that "[Mackenzie] was in fact, contemptuous of the phenomenon of sentimentality" (136). Vickers, on the other, admits that there may be moments of satire, but claims that it is "never enough to disturb the non-ambiguous mood of pathos and sympathy" (xiv). Burnham admits that there is gentle irony, but, with Vickers, claims that "the tone never gets even remotely close to the point where the novel would be a satire against the sentimental mentality" (133).

[21] Maureen Harkin sees a similar ambiguity, which she terms a "contradiction," in Mackenzie's relationship to sentimentality. She writes of Harley's conversation with

For all of these critics, however, humor continues to be understood to be as distinct from the sentimentality of the novel.

As the critical arguments about Mackenzie's embrace of or rejection of sentimentality make clear, the "genuine" emotion of a sentimental response is usually understood to be at odds with (satirical) humor. However, I argue that the (extreme) emotion of a sentimental response is in fact the cause of certain types of humor. Traumatic laughter occurs as the result of extreme emotion, and is not incompatible with pain and suffering. Instead, the two are inextricably linked. Fanny Burney's 1768 response to reading another sentimental novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, offers a first-hand account of the way that tears and laughter are intermingled in sentimental novels. She writes:

> before I was half thro' the first volume, I was, as I may truly express myself, *surprised into* tears – and in the second volume, I really sobb'd. It appears to me, to be impossible any person could read this book thro' with a dry eye at the same time the best part of it is that which turns one's grief out of doors, to open them to laughter. (qtd in Rousseau 53)

While this observation is about a different eighteenth-century sentimental novel, I think the same dynamic applies to *The Man of Feeling*. What is important about

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Silton: "while the link made here between literary and philanthropic pleasure at first suggests that sensibility may confer some social benefits, Silton also claims that literary pursuits are not a spur to but a symptom of benevolence. Rather than encouraging or instilling virtue in readers (and authors), literary texts can only speak to those who already possess the right "inclination." Literature is thus denied any force in shaping social practice" (335). She continues by quoting Mackenzie's own writing about *The Man of Feeling* and demonstrating his own mixed feelings about the purpose of his work and of novels in general.

Burney's comment is the simultaneity of the production of tears and laughter, the fact that in one reading experience, one reader experiences both tears and laughter "at the same time."[22] The very grief and sadness that are prompted by a sentimental emotional connection can also tip over into, or, in Burney's words, "open" up to laughter through bringing grief out into the daylight. In fact, it is the sexual and emotional trauma present in this novel that becomes the humor; the intensity and extremity of the traumatic suffering produces the traumatic laughter.

Quivering Lips: Reading Humor in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*

Aside from the generic satire, much of the humor in *The Man of Feeling* is related to moments in which the extent of Harley's sentimental response is excessive, where the expressions of sympathy, as well as the suffering itself, become excessive. In these moments, the suffering of the object produces an absurd response in the sentimental viewer. As a result, such moments contain both an experience of trauma or great suffering *and* a narration of and response to that suffering that is humorous. The text's representation of the suffering is then both serious and funny, creating a hybrid tone analogous to, if structurally distinct from, that found in Radcliffe and Lewis. The structural difference here is a reflection of the structure of sentimentality, which relies on the sentimental viewer (the reader's proxy in the text) to respond to the suffering of the subject.

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[22] This challenges the claim, often based on a set of comments made by Lady Louisa Stuart about her different relationship to the novel between her first reading and her reading in 1826, that *The Man of Feeling* was funny in 1826 but not in the 1770s, and more generally that sentimental texts *became* funny in the nineteenth century where they had been serious in the eighteenth. While responses to these texts certainly did change over time, such a narrative oversimplifies the questions of tone and affect posed by sentimental texts.

However, underlying this difference, the basic structure of traumatic laughter still remains – a representation of genuine suffering and trauma causes humorous affective and linguistic excess and a hybrid tone.

Two scenes from *The Man of Feeling* provide a particularly potent illustration of this dynamic of intermingled humor and suffering. The first, an encounter that Harley has with a man whose dog has died, is a brief, clear example of the emotional excesses of sentimentality and how those excesses can lead to moments that are simultaneously expressive of genuine suffering and humorous. The second, a darker, more troubling scene, concerns the character Miss Atkins, whose narrative is one of sexual exploitation. In this incident, the novel's representation of Miss Atkins' history of sexual trauma and her fear of her father, combined with Harley and Miss Atkins' father's responses to her, result in a scene that is both troubling and humorous. The sexual trauma of Miss Atkins' story and the precariousness of her current position cause the narrative to veer into comic territory. One of the greatest causes of trauma in this book, as in *The Monk* and *The Italian*, is the representation of sexual violation and gendered trauma in an embodied female character.

The Man of Feeling, like many picaresque sentimental narratives, is in some ways an inventory of suffering, a list of encounters that the sentimental viewer (Harley) has with suffering individuals. About two-thirds of the way through the novel, he encounters an old man whom, it turns out, he remembers from his childhood. This old man, Mr. Edwards, tells the story of how he's fallen on hard times. Part of this story centrally concerns his dog:

> You remember Trusty, my shag house-dog; I shall never forget it while I live; the poor creature was blind with age, and could scarce crawl after us to the door; he went however as far as the gooseberry-bush; that you may remember stood on the left side of the yard…when he had reached that spot, he stopped; we went on: I called to him; he wagged his tail, but did not stir: I called again; he lay down: I whistled, and cried 'Trusty' ; he gave a short howl, and died! I could have lain down and died too; but God gave me strength to live for my children.
>
> --
>
> The old man now paused a moment to take breath. He eyed Harley's face; it was bathed in tears: the story was grown familiar to himself; he dropped one tear and no more. (66-67)

Without diminishing the grief of losing a pet, I want to argue that this depiction of the dog's death is a humorously excessive depiction of that grief and Harley's response to it.

The excruciating detail with which the dog's death is detailed, its too-accurate name "Trusty," the way in which Edwards reluctantly agrees to live beyond his dog's death for his children's sake, and the moment's placement in a litany of tragic scenes that involve human death and destruction – all of these elements serve make this moment humorous as well as sad. The reader is likely to find not only the death of the dog to be humorous, but also Harley's response. Harley is, after all, crying much more than Edwards about the death of Edwards'

dog. Not only the sentimental narrative, with its assignment of high tragic status to the story of an old dog dying of natural causes, but also the sentimental response becomes a source of humor here. This moment is as bathetic as it is pathetic.[23] While the old man's affection for his dog is never in doubt, his narrative and Harley's response to it are represented as clearly excessive while not (as in Sterne) clearly disingenuous. The sentimental response can be both "real" and too much at the same time. In fact, it is the intensity of the grief that Edwards and Harley feel that creates the comic moment.

The excessive emotion here resembles Vivaldi's excessive fear about Ellena's well-being in *The Italian* in that it causes what might be a touching scene to tip over into humor. The underlying emotion is a serious one – grief – but the expression is over the top. This moment of grief also occurs, structurally, at the moment when *The Man of Feeling* begins to focus on Harley's apparent loss of his beloved, Miss Walton, and his pursuit of her, which ultimately leads to a deathbed confession of love and Miss Walton's grief at Harley's death. The grief that he and Edwards express at the loss of the dog foreshadows the final romantic scenes between the dying Miss Walton and Harley, but does so in a way that undercuts the grief with humor.

The episode that brings sexual trauma to the forefront of the narrative (and in doing so, also throws into question the supposedly pure nature of the romantic

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[23] This moment also refers back to the frame narrative. The opening line of the novel is about a dog: "My dog had made a point on a piece of fallow-ground" (3). It turn turns out that "it was a false point, and our labour was vain; yet to do Rover justice, (for he's an excellent dog, though I have lost his pedigree) the fault was none of his…" (3). The claim of the lost pedigree and the affection the narrator espouses for his dog as well as the misdirection that is provided by the dog suggest that the dog is a site of satirical humor and sentimental feeling as well as a kind of narrative instability.

reunion) is Harley's attempt to help Miss Atkins reunite with her father and escape prostitution and prison. Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave, in their introduction to the 2001 Oxford edition of *The Man of Feeling*, identify the scene in which the sexually disgraced Miss Atkins is reunited with her father as a scene that is both "paradigmatic of sensibility" and "close to farce," writing that "we are as likely to find this scene comic as affecting" (xv). This scene includes both a representation of the sexual disgrace and exploitation of a young woman and a depiction of the way that that disgrace and her vulnerability are (sexually) arousing to the male onlookers. As a result the emotions in this scene are inappropriate as well as excessive. The multiple types of suffering depicted in this passage (Miss Atkins' shame, her fear of her father, her father's anger, and Harley's sentimental response) cause the scene to be "comic as [well as] affecting."

In this passage, the young Miss Atkins prostrates herself in front of her father in order to gain his forgiveness and reconciliation. The description has a breathless quality:

> Her hair had fallen on her shoulders! Her look had the horrid calmness of outbreathed despair! Her father would have spoken; his lip quivered, his cheek grew pale! His eyes lost the lightening of their fury! there was a reproach in them, but with a mingling of pity! He turned them up to heaven – then on his daughter. – He laid his left hand on his heart – the sword dropped from his right – he burst into tears. (50)

The number of exclamation points (four) and em dashes (four) give this passage a breathless and overwrought character that results in a tone that is both potentially affecting and potentially funny. The extremity of the emotions and the overly dramatic way that those emotions are presented in this scene mean that laughter at the melodrama is a reasonable and likely response to it. At the same time, the story of Miss Atkins and her father represents a narrative which, if clichéd, represents significant traumatic suffering; Miss Atkins, a motherless adolescent, is seduced by an attractive man named Mr. Winbrooke who refuses to marry her, flees to London in distress, is placed by Mr. Winbrooke in the home of a madame who attempts to turn her into a prostitute, becomes pregnant, is thrown in debtors' prison, and has a miscarriage.[24]

At the moment that Harley is attempting to help her, she is still in a precarious position, and the possibility that her life will continue to be ruled by threatening men via either seduction or prostitution is very real. Her father's response to her – whether he remains angry or is moved to pity and sympathy – is a deciding moment. He holds control over her social position, her bodily integrity, and possibly her very life. To complicate the moment further, the sexual and social trauma that she undergoes before she is reunited with her father (and is presumably reintegrated into polite society at least to some extent) is reflected in the language of the reunion. While her sexual trauma is not denied, the excessive language of the reunion evokes troubling sexual undertones of the moment. She is in a compromised position, found with a strange man, and ends up lying at the

[24] Her story is remarkably similar to Richardson's *Clarissa*, among other sentimental narratives.

feet of her father with her "hair…fallen on her shoulders." The breathless nature of the narration is matched by the physically aroused descriptions of both Harley and the father. Harley's response to being threatened by the father's sword is that: "the blood ran quicker to his cheek, his pulse beat one." The father is described as having a "furious" look and raising his sword; then, when he relents, "his lip quivered, his cheek grew pale" and the "sword dropped from his right" hand (50). After this scene is over, Miss Atkins has to retire "to her chamber, to take some rest from the violence of the emotions she had suffered" (52). In the context of her story of being victimized as a result of male sexual desire, the language of this scene is unsettling.

The violence of these emotions is presented as real, and certainly the danger that the male gaze and power over female sexuality pose to Miss Atkins has proven to be very real within the narrative. But the excessive, comically staged nature of the descriptions is also real and gives the scene a humorous as well as a threatening edge. For example, the description of the father's actions at the very end of the chapter: "He turned [his eyes] up to heaven – then on his daughter. – He laid his left hand on his heart – the sword dropped from his right – he burst into tears" (50). The em dashes between each one of these actions creates the impression of a jerky set of melodramatic poses. Reading this passage, we can be both relieved that Miss Atkins has been reunited with her family and amused at the extravagance of the reconciliation scene itself. The scene is heart wrenching and funny at the same time. The intense pain of Miss Atkins and her father, compounded by Harley's voyeuristically sentimental response to it, creates a

moment that is so emotional that it is also funny. Miss Atkins' trauma causes excessive emotions in all three participants in this scene, and the scene is thus infused with traumatic laughter as well as pain and fear. The sentimental feelings of this passage are present and affecting, but so is the humor of excess.

Conclusion

As I have shown earlier in this chapter, *The Monk* and *The Italian* are similarly invested in and infused with stories of trauma. In all of these texts, and in many other sentimental and gothic texts, humor is present as a result of the texts' grappling with traumatic events and how to narrate them. While sentimental novels (and "female gothic" novels) are often seen as less extreme and less humorous than novels like *The Monk*, traumatic laughter is present in all three types of novels.

This type of humor is one mark of the excess of trauma within the texts. This humor does not displace the other, more "serious" affective tones of the texts – often fear in the gothic and empathy in the sentimental. Instead, it coexists with and complicates those primary affective modes. As a result, traumatic laughter intermingles with genuine fear, campy farce intermingles with genuine grief, and bathos intermingles with pathos. In the end, despite their significant differences in content, form, and tone, neither *The Monk, The Italian*, nor *The Man of Feeling* are able to remain univocal or tonally stable. Instead, they are hybrid texts as a result of their attempts to tell stories of great suffering – of sexual violence and

threat. Humor is a textual mark of trauma, a trace of the excess and disruption present in these narratives.

Chapter 3:
Moralizing Among Ruins:
Christianity, Patriarchy, and the Struggle for Narrative Authority

Gothic and sentimental texts are full of excesses – including repetitions, doublings, and humor. They excesses are the marks of trauma in these texts and reflect the way that telling a story of trauma provoke narrative, tonal, and structural excesses in literary narratives (as well as the accounts of individual trauma survivors). However, these excesses do not stand on their own in these texts. They are often accompanied by attempts to explain their excesses, by explanatory frameworks that attempt to account for the excesses of the text.

For example, William Beckford's novel *Vathek* ends with a clear declaration of a moral framework that should explain the text and its ending:

> Such was, and such should be, the punishment of unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds! Such shall be, the chastisement of that blind curiosity, which would transgress those bounds the wisdom of the Creator has prescribed to human knowledge. (120)

However, as Roger Lonsdale points out, "The official moral framework is in practice constantly subverted by the conduct of the tale" (xxviii). And he is correct that the narrative itself is more complicated, more pleasurable, more humorous, and more tragic than the final moral allows. However, the text does not ultimately abandon the explanatory impulse of its ending, nor does this impulse subsume the text altogether. Instead, the two exist in uneasy tension throughout *Vathek*.

The texts that I will discuss in this chapter, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya,* and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, all feature at least one voice that demands the reader's attention and attempts to govern or control how the reader understands the narrative. These voices make moral pronouncements and provide glosses that lead (or purport to lead) the reader to a certain interpretation. The narratives themselves, however, escape or exceed the interpretations offered by these voices and their morals, refusing to be reduced to a singular explanation. At the same time, these voices cannot be ignored. Instead, the "moral" is too integral to the text to be disregarded, and too complicated to be considered simply in terms of its consistency with the narrative. The ambiguity of this gesture demands more careful attention.

In this chapter, then, I want to focus on the tensions between traumatic narratives and explanatory moral frameworks by focusing on a number of texts that include the voice of an author, editor, or narrator who attempts to provide a consistent, coherent framework of meaning for the narrative. In particular, they ask questions about the role of blame and responsibility – asking who or what is at fault for the trauma and suffering represented in the text. This often, but not always, involves blaming individual characters for the trauma represented in the narrative. Each narrative revolves around an instance of traumatic rupture - the killing of a symbolically loaded albatross, the rape of a young girl, a mother's abandonment. I assert that in each text, the trauma at the heart of the narrative threatens the possibility of a complete explanation for suffering. Each of the

systems that the narrator or editor's voice relies on for these explanations – all culturally contingent and ideologically infused systems, all based in Christianity, often based in patriarchy – attempts to be universally applicable and effective at single-handedly making sense of the world. Instead, their universal power of explanation is shown to be imperfect and insufficient to the task of making sense of trauma.

To explore the dynamic between the fundamentally excessive and disruptive nature of gothic and sentimental trauma narratives and the voices in these texts that attempt to make clear sense of the excesses of the texts, I will consider both psychological trauma theory and the structures of the texts themselves. I will argue that *both* the excesses of these texts *and* the ultimately insufficient attempts to use an explanatory framework to contain the excesses are marks of trauma in the text.

The impulse to make sense of trauma is often a part of the psychological process of grappling with trauma for traumatized individuals, because trauma by definition threatens our sense of understanding the world. To elucidate this dynamic, I will turn to psychological trauma theory and in particular assumptive world theory. Assumptive world theory was established by Ronnie Janoff-Bulman in 1992 and uses the idea of "assumptive worlds" to describe the conceptual systems that we use to understand the world. Assumptive world theory offers a way of understanding the threat that trauma poses to systems of meaning. Applying this to literary works, including "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *Zofloya,* and *Clarissa*, can help us elucidate the dynamics at work in them, and

especially to clarify why the impulse towards moralizing, explanatory frameworks is both central to the texts and why such frameworks are ultimately unable to fully explain them. At the same time, assumptive world theory suggests that new assumptive worlds (perhaps more accurate or flexible ones) are ultimately necessary for an individual to function. For the literary texts I will consider in this chapter, there is no such necessity. Instead, the uncertainty about how to understand traumatic events lingers throughout the works, continuing to cause tension between the voices in the texts that claim understanding and the excesses in the texts that point to the power of traumatic disruption.

In my discussions of the texts, I will explore the uneasy relationship between ideological clarity and the narrative excess created by the trauma at the heart of the narrative. I will begin by examining Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a canonical poem which many critics have understood as focusing the reader's attention on both the process of attempting to make meaning and the ways in which the text exceeds any such attempts. The poem, despite the gesture towards clarity contained in the gloss, refuses to establish a clear cause and effect relationship between the mariner's act and the ensuing catastrophes. The text wrestles with questions of blame and responsibility, and ultimately comes to no clear conclusion on those questions. The clarity with which this poem demonstrates the conflicting effects of trauma allows it to serve as a literary model for this dynamic.

Both *Clarissa* and *Zofloya*, novels centered around women and written in genres long associated with women, are also deeply concerned with blame, and

also fail to come to a clear, univocal conclusion. Unlike Coleridge's "Rime," however, the stakes of the question of blame are directly related to the embodied realities of women's lives. Rather than being quasi-abstract and allegorical, as Coleridge's poem is, these novels engage with questions about women's bodies and safety. Similar to the "Rime," however, they also reflect the impossibility of assigning clear blame for trauma. *Zofloya* never fully resolves the question of whether the terrible events of the novel are all the fault of the protagonist Victoria's mother, who is indicted with failing to raise her children morally and with failing to live up to the sexual standards set for women, or whether some other force, possibly the devil himself, is at work. Instead, the novel's extravagant narrative and overdrawn characters refuse to be explained into something coherent and unified.

In *Clarissa*, Clarissa's family and friends largely blame her for her own fate, while an authorial postscript and Clarissa's own declarations of self-recrimination suggest that her suffering is warranted. However, at the same time, Clarissa herself complains of the unfairness and arbitrariness of her fate, subtly asserting her blamelessness along with her faith through her practice of rewriting Biblical scripture. These two threads – one which suggests explanations for trauma that work within a given ideological system and the other which claims that such explanations are not sufficient explanations for the events in the novel – continue to co-exist uneasily in *Clarissa* through the end of the novel.

In both of these novels, the assumptive world is founded on patriarchal Christianity. The stakes of who to blame for the sexual traumas experienced by

women, or for the moral downfall of women, are very high for female characters and female readers. Identifying a culprit or an original sin would allow for an ideologically coherent explanation for the trauma and a claim that women themselves are responsible because of their sexual "misbehavior." Instead, each of these texts reflects the way that trauma makes that kind of clarity impossible.

Meaningless Suffering: Assumptive World Theory

From its beginnings, trauma theory has asserted that the difficulty of making meaning out of trauma is central to the psychological and cognitive problems posed by trauma. In her landmark book *Unclaimed Experience,* Cathy Caruth writes:

> Ever since its emergence at the turn of the century in the work of Freud and Pierre Janet, the notion of trauma has confronted us not only with a simple pathology but also with a fundamental enigma concerning the psyche's relation to reality. In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events *that are not fully grasped as they occur.* (91, italics mine)

Pierre Janet, even more than Freud, was concerned with the way that traumatic experiences could not be assimilated into "existing cognitive schemes" and the fact that, "under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences" (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 160). Psychiatrists from many areas of study have discussed the relationship

between trauma and systems of meaning.[1] The anxiety that trauma creates for an individual because it cannot be integrated into existing structures of meaning sometimes becomes the very definition of trauma, as when Caruth writes, "The trauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" ("Introduction" 153). It is this crisis – the problem that trauma poses to systems of meaning – that I want to explore more thoroughly through the lens of assumptive world theory.

Ronnie Janoff-Bulman lays out assumptive world theory in *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma,* a theory that she formulated in response to her observation of "our utter lack of psychological preparedness in the face of traumatic life events" ("Forward" xi). Her theory focuses on the way in which trauma threatens or shatters established assumptive worlds and on ways for individual survivors to build new assumptive worlds. In *Shattered Assumptions,* Janoff-Bulman writes that an assumptive world is "a conceptual

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[1] Irene Landsman writes that "there is an extensive literature in social psychology regarding the schemas, assumptions, illusions, or meanings that operate in ordinary lives and that are called into question or even shattered by extremely traumatic events. When we experience events that don't fit our schemas, violate our assumptions, or shatter our illusions, we experience a crisis of meaning" (Landsman 18). Landsman mentions Piaget and psychological theorists from many different perspectives have addressed this crisis. Van der Kolk and Van der Hart write of Pierre Janet that he "thought that the ease with which current experience is integrated into existing mental structures depends on the subjective assessment of what is happening; familiar and expectable experiences are automatically assimilated without much conscious awareness of details of the particulars, while frightening or novel experiences may not easily fit into existing cognitive schemes and either may be remembered with particular vividness or may totally resist integration. Under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences" (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 160). Patrick Bracken includes a list of late twentieth-century studies that also support this, writing, "Many practitioners in this area [mental health and therapy] understand post-traumatic problems as arising from a destabilizing effect on the meaningfulness of the victim's world (Meichenbaum 1997; Epstein 1991; Janoff-Bulman 1992; McCann and Pearlman 1990; Lifton 1988; Magomed-Eminov 1997)" (9).

system, developed over time, that provides us with expectations about the world and ourselves. This conceptual system is best represented by a set of assumptions or internal representations that reflect and guide our interactions in the world" (5). These systems consist of specific beliefs about ourselves ("I am good at baseball") as well as more general, fundamental assumptions ("My life has meaning"). While Janoff-Bulman specifies what she sees as our most fundamental assumptions, I am more interested in the structure that Janoff-Bulman lays out than in the specific claim she makes about what these fundamental assumptions are, especially as she herself recognizes that these assumptions are culturally inflected.

According to Janoff-Bulman's argument, one of the key qualities of these fundamental assumptions is that they are very difficult to change. Indeed, a fundamental assumption is "such a familiar aspect of one's sense of reality that its disruption is hard to conceive, the loss of confidence in its truth putting one's sense of identity at risk" (Kauffman 1). Of course, some change is inevitable. Janoff-Bulman argues that when this changed is normal rather than traumatic, it happens "slowly and gradually" but that "the core of the system is nevertheless likely to stay intact" (*Shattered Assumptions* 43).[2] In contrast, experiences of trauma mean that our assumptive worlds are threatened, shattered, and forced to change dramatically rather than incrementally over time.

[2] This reflects the theory of cognitive conservatism, the idea that individuals are motivated "to maintain cognitive consistency" (26-7). Our attachment to cognitive consistency, to retaining and supporting our existing systems of meaning helps to explain the disruption that trauma causes.

Trauma causes this rupture because it is by definition cognitively inassimilable, at odds with pre-existing cognitive schemas. Therefore, traumatic experiences often require a re-evaluation of our meaning-making systems. And they can threaten the very possibility of such a system, because the loss of individual assumptions can provoke a sense of existential meaninglessness. Trauma does not only force us to question or abandon our more superficial assumptions about ourselves and the world, it threatens our core assumptions as well. Because these assumptions "organize our experience of ourselves, relationships, the world, and the human condition itself," "the subjective experience of trauma not infrequently includes a crisis of meaning at a deep level of experience" (Landsman 13). Our system(s) of meaning making are thrown into question, prompting reconsiderations of our understanding of the world at a profound level.

The individual survivor is thus faced with the daunting task of changing his or her fundamental assumptions. The ideal outcome of this difficult process is a new set of assumptions, which will still be partly illusory, but which have been adjusted to be less "naïve," to include an awareness of the possibility of events such as the trauma the victim experienced. Irene Landsman writes that, ideally, survivors rebuild their assumptions not "to a pretrauma configuration, but [to] leave room for an engagement with life and with the future" (28). Thus an individual whose trauma and recovery follow this trajectory experiences a profound adjustment in her system of meaning-making but does not abandon the possibility of, or need for, such a system.

In the literary texts I am looking at, this new equilibrium, this balance of knowing what can happen but still holding an essentially hopeful belief in a relatively safe world, never appears. Instead, the texts explore the moment in which the reality of trauma confronts a closed system of meaning and the disruption of that confrontation. The aspects of the texts that give voice to the system of meaning – in these cases, religious and moral systems – attempt to interpret the traumatic events or reactions so that those events will fit within the existing system. These ongoing attempts exist in uncomfortable tension with the rest of the text.

Psychology is, quite rightly, invested in re-establishing systems of meaning, albeit ones with more resiliency, accuracy and/or flexibility. However, literature doesn't need to create an adaptive individual. As such, it creates a more flexible space in which to explore issues around coherence and meaning in the face of trauma. I am turning to gothic and sentimental literature to look at these questions because they are genres centrally concerned with trauma. Pervading these texts is a tension that mirrors one of the central difficulties that trauma survivors face and that is structurally central to the dynamics of trauma. There is a conflict within these texts between the presentation of an assumptive world – an ideologically coherent system of meaning – and the representation of trauma that disrupts assumptive worlds. These two impulses struggle to occupy the same space, and cause a disruption of the coherence of the text. Therefore, in each we see the way in which the traumas represented these texts create both the difficulty (perhaps impossibility) of writing a coherent narrative that both explains and

makes moral sense of trauma, and also the inescapability of the impulse to try. This impulse can be seen within the structure of the text, a structure that mirrors and reflects the structure of the individual trauma victim, while at the same time opening up a space of exploration that is uniquely possible within fictional narrative, since narratives an continue to exist in a world without stable meaning.

I will begin by discussing Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a text that serves as a useful model for looking at the way the tensions between narratives of trauma and attempts to make coherent assumptive worlds that account for the disruption of trauma play out in literature. Coleridge's poem is critically understood as being invested in the irreconcilable tension between the main narrative poem and the glosses. I will examine the ways that this tension is provoked by the work's narrative of trauma. Its refusals of clear assignment of blame establish dynamics that are also present, albeit with important differences, in *Clarissa* and *Zofloya*.

Preaching from the Marginalia: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

According to Coleridge's account, Anna Letitia Barbauld once told him that "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was "improbable and had no moral." To this Coleridge replied that he thought that "the chief fault of the poem was that it had too much moral, and too openly obtruded on the reader" (98). Like the other texts I will discuss in this chapter, the "Rime" does in fact have both no moral and too much moral. There is a clear moralizing voice, both in moments in the main

text of the poem, and most notably in the glosses of the 1817 version.[3] However, the narrative of the poem refuses this kind of clarity, evoking an ambiguous mythology and then withholding explanations for the behaviors of the characters or the natural world. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" provides a productive model for exploring the tension between the impulse to make sense of the world and the epistemologically disruptive nature of trauma because the poem presents both a moralizing voice that attempts to establish an ideologically coherent assumptive world and a traumatic narrative that refuses such moral or cognitive clarity.

Scholars have largely noted this disjunction in the poem as existing between the marginal gloss and the main narrative poem. As Steven Jones notes, "It is by now a critical commonplace that the gloss offers a kind of enfolded dialectical or ironic perspective on the main text of the ballad" and that "the gloss opens up an ironic counter-voice on the main action of the ballad."[4] The marginal gloss that purport to provide such explanations in the later versions of the poem have an uncomfortable relationship with the "main" text of the poem and create more ambiguity rather than less, causing on-going tension between the different voices within the poem.

While I am going to focus primarily on the gloss as a site of ideological explanation that coexists uncomfortably with the narrative of the poem, this tension exists even in the earlier versions of the poem that do not contain the

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[3] The Norton edition that I'm quoting from uses the 1834 text, which is fundamentally the same as the 1817 text but includes a revision by Coleridge.

[4] Critics who have made arguments in this vein about the gloss and the poem's interpretive instability include (among others) Jerome McGann, Joseph Sitterton, Frances Ferguson, Lawrence Lipking, Tilottama Rajan, and Anne Williams.

gloss. In fact, in the 1798 version of the poem, one of the final stanzas contains such a straightforward religious message that it was used as the inspiration for a popular Anglican hymn. The lines from the "Rime" are:

> He prayeth well who loveth well,
> Both man and bird and beast
> He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small:
> For the dear God, who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all. (lines 645-50)

In 1848, Cecil F. Alexander wrote a now-beloved Anglican hymn entitled "All Things Bright and Beautiful," probably inspired by the Coleridge lines.[5] This echo is unsurprising given the simple, clear moral of this stanza. As a hymn often sung by children, these lines are appropriate. As an explanation of the story of a mariner who kills an albatross for some unknown reason, sees Death play dice, watches his fellow sailors drop dead, encounters a phantom ship and shiny water-snakes, is navigated home by the re-animated corpses of the dead sailors, talks to a hermit, and now wanders the earth re-telling his strange story, it is clearly inadequate. As Anne Williams argues, "the Mariner's cognitive conclusion -'He prayeth best, who loveth best' – concludes nothing…. [and] curiously elides the material horrors of his experience" (1115).

The conclusion's inadequacy stems from the traumatic nature of the story itself. The attempt of the final moral, and of the moralizing in the gloss, to create

[5] The chorus to this hymn is: "All things bright and beautiful, / All creatures great and small, / All things wise and wonderful, / The Lord God made them all."

a theological or philosophical explanation, an assumptive world rooted in Christian morality that could contain the events recounted in the mariner's narrative, is doomed to be an inadequate explanation because the traumatic narrative itself is too excessive to be contained in such a system. By almost any definition of trauma, the events recounted in the "Rime" are traumatic. Janoff-Bulman describes "traumatic events – those that are most apt to produce a traumatic response" as "out of the ordinary" and "directly experienced as threats to survival and self-preservation" (*Shattered Assumptions* 53). Certainly, the killing of the albatross and the events that follow are unexpected, and describe a confrontation with mortality and survival.

As a result of the traumatic nature of these events and the hyperbolic plot, the mariner's moral cannot possibly encompass the experience.[6] The mariner's invocation of a system of coherent if simplistic Christian moral sits in tension with the rest of his narrative. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" enacts at a structural level the inevitable tension between an assumptive world and an experience of trauma. Coleridge represents both the attempt to sustain a coherent worldview that makes sense of trauma *and* points towards the difficulty of that attempt. The assumptive world that suggests that "He prayeth best who loveth best" and "And to teach, by his own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth" (gloss to lines 610-614) loses its credibility in the face of "a thousand thousand slimy things" and "Nightmare Life-in-Death" (lines 238,

[6] Anne Williams describes the narrative in this way: "The Mariner's dreamlike tale, though told and heard, is virtually nonsensical, almost failing to mesh with the structures that impart meaning to experience" (1115).

193). As a result, the theological framework cannot make sense of the traumatic narrative.

Despite the inability of the moral to explain or sum up the traumatic narrative of the poem, the strength of the impulse towards moral explanation in this work should not be underestimated. The archetype for the marginal gloss is, after all, the glosses printed in the margins of the Bible, designed to lead readers to the correct theological interpretation of scripture. Like most contemporary critics, Joseph Sitterton argues that the text's invitation to allegorical interpretation is "deceptive," but that it is also "deliberate" (16). He writes that

> the incommensurability of the Mariner's moral to his tale . . . results from the Mariner's only partly successful attempt to understand his own experience. This gap between experience and understanding becomes emphasized when Coleridge presents a second character struggling with the same problem vicariously, namely the glossist struggling to understand the Mariner's experience. (23-4)

These struggles lead the reader to consider the ways that interpretation can struggle and fall short of satisfying explanations or conclusions. The tension between the main text and the gloss in the 1817 version of the poem is indeed the place where both the impulse towards explanatory frameworks and the poem's essential narrative incoherence become most evident.

The gloss is a unique if often discordant voice within the poem. Sitterton identifies the "glossist" as a distinct character, but whether or not we want to

identify a "glossist," the gloss is certainly a voice separate from the Mariner, the wedding guest, or Coleridge himself. The gloss exhibits an assumptive world constructed of Neoplatonic philosophy and intellectualism that is absent from the other voices in the poem. Instead of explaining the text, it complicates it further, demonstrating the way that systems of meaning-making are shattered by trauma through its inability to account for the primary narrative.

Some of the glosses echo the moralistic ending of the poem itself, adding to the confusion caused by that moral. Others of them are tongue-in-cheek in the way that they draw connections between different aspects of the text, creating tonal hybridity within the poem.[7] For example, next to the description of Life-in-Death in lines 190-194 is the gloss "Like vessel, like crew!" a surprisingly concise and flippant analysis of the lengthy and eerie descriptions of the ghost ship and Life-in-Death. Still other glosses are so lengthy and over-the-top that they escape the margin and graphically invade the text, becoming a mark of the excess of trauma in the text.

Even when the gloss seems most helpfully explanatory, it is often at odds with the main narrative. Frances Ferguson, in her essay, "Coleridge and the Deluded Reader," analyzes the problems with the gloss' moral explanations through a reading of the images of the albatross. Within the poem, Ferguson argues, "the Albatross seems good, then bad, then good, because the death of the Albatross causes first fog and mist (bad), then clearing (good), and finally the lure of the breeze (bad)" (699). In contrast, a "striking feature of the Gloss is the

[7] See Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of the way that trauma creates tonal hybridity and the presence of humor in works that are not generally understood to be comedic.

attribution of unambiguous moral qualities to the bird" (Ferguson 700). She cites as an example of this in the description of the shooting of the albatross. The poem itself simply records the act: "With my cross-bow/I shot the ALBATROSS" (lines 79-82). The gloss comments: "The ancient Mariner inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen." Ferguson writes that, " 'Inhospitably,' 'pious' and 'good omen' bespeak conclusions that do not echo the main text because the main text never reaches such value judgments" (699). As a result, while the gloss assigns blame to the ancient Mariner, the narrative poem does not allow such a clear assignment of responsibility, because it refuses the black-and-white judgments that allow such an assignment of blame.

Rather than allowing us to judge the mariner (or any of the events of the poem) clearly, the gloss' attempts to create a symbolic universe that would explain the events of the poem in fact create a complicated and contradictory reading experience. The reader is asked to constantly negotiate the opacity of the main poem and the explanatory misdirection of the gloss. Even when the gloss does not illuminate the poem, the reader is forced to consider it seriously and to follow its often-tortured attempts at coherent explanations, before returning to the narrative. Instead of creating a system within which to understand the traumatic, mystical events of the poem's narrative, the gloss (and the explanations within the poem itself) draws attention to the difficulty of understanding.[8] In reading the "Rime," the reader is forced to confront the epistemological impossibility of

[8] Sitterton writes, "Although the poem does not question the reality of sin and spiritual suffering, it does question the accessibility of such mysteries to human understanding" (23) while Ferguson argues that "some of the major revisions of the poem, at least in retrospect, seem designed to make not the moral but the process of arriving at morals the major issue" (704).

explaining the excess and trauma of the mariners' voyage through reading the explanatory attempts of the gloss and negotiating the incoherence and tension that it creates.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a model for the way that different voices or narrative threads within a text can play out this tension, and a text for which readings along these lines are generally accepted. As such, the narrative poem is a useful example of the way in which the dynamic of the trauma's disruption of assumptive worlds plays out in literary works. However, the terms in which this dynamic are presented are largely allegorical and abstract, and the form of the poem with a gloss attached is unique and different from the other texts I am reading in this dissertation. I want to turn now to two novels, one sentimental and one gothic, to explore the complexities of this dynamic as it plays out in novels focused on gendered sexual trauma, novels that were written in genres associated with and often written for women. In both of these novels, the terms of the trauma and its disruption are embodied and gendered.

Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806) are formally very different. *Clarissa*, perhaps the longest novel in the English language, is an epistolary novel with four primary "narrators" who write the bulk of the letters (including Clarissa herself). *Zofloya* is a more conventional length and features a third-person omniscient narrator who editorializes as s/he tells the story. *Clarissa* is sentimental as well as epistolary, and was released serially – all aspects of the novel designed to provoke strong emotion in its readers, who responded by understanding the characters of the novel, particularly

Clarissa, as having an existence beyond the boundaries of the work. *Zofloya* is a florid and distinctly unrealistic gothic novel featuring the actual devil and a landscape peppered by banditti and cliffs and assassins and incestuous relationships. And while it sold well, it was also widely panned by critics as being morally depraved and terribly written.

However, both novels prominently feature women who are endangered due to their position outside of the social mainstream, a position they have because of their sexual experiences and/or choices. They are also both centrally concerned with the role of Christianity in explaining the punishments meted out to such women. Patriarchal versions of Christianity form the building blocks of each text's assumptive world, and each text also contains voices that undermine the validity of clear, theologically grounded justifications for trauma and pain.

Zofloya, in particular, brings the question of blame to the fore but ultimately refuses to provide a satisfying conclusion. Why does Zofloya behave as immorally as she does? Is her mother to blame? Is Original Sin to blame? We never know for sure. Instead, the excessive repetitions of blame serve only to undermine the certainty of conclusions. As in the "Rime," we can't know for sure why so many terrible things happen in this text, despite voices within the text that attempt to provide explanations. And as in the "Rime," the text ends with different impulses (the chaos of a narrative of trauma and competing explanations for that chaos) held in tension rather than resolved. Unlike the "Rime," the power of patriarchy is felt throughout the novel, and the repercussions for Victoria and Laurina, while hyperbolic in their presentation, are serious and grounded in

questions about women's roles as mothers and about the threat posed by women's sexuality.

Clarissa is also structured within a framework of Christianity and situated in a patriarchal discussion about young women that suggests they are responsible for their own fate if they in any way disobey their fathers or express interest in men as love interests. The character Clarissa, however, ultimately questions many of the conclusions of these structures. Through subtle manipulation of Biblical texts, the very building blocks of the assumptive world she's working within, she refuses to accept blame. Instead, she invokes the story of Job, which itself ends without resolution.[9] Ultimately, she refuses to be married to her abuser, to resolve her narrative with a heteronormative symbol of closure,[10] choosing instead to die and leave behind ambiguous texts behind that demand interpretation. Despite the apparent confidence of the first edition's postscript's claims that just rewards are forthcoming for all involved, Richardson's text contains, like the "Rime," an on-going tension between the clarity of a theologically-grounded assumptive world and an assertion of the essential inability of such a moral framework to explain the realities of sexual trauma. Unlike the "Rime," in *Clarissa*, Clarissa's very bodily and spiritual existences are at stake in this impasse.

Clarissa and the Problem of the Pedagogical Novel of Trauma

[9] In the Book of Job, no clear cause and effect or reliable theological framework is accepted by God as an appropriate response to inexplicable suffering.
[10] See Chapter 1 for a fuller exploration of the impact that trauma has on closure, and on the marriage plot in particular.

Sentimental novels were a site of a great deal of critical and social anxiety as well as readerly pleasure in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As I established in the introduction, much of the anxiety about these texts revolved around the question: should my daughter read this? The answer for sentimental novels (as opposed to gothic novels, which were generally condemned on moral grounds) was mixed, but critics repeatedly pointed to Samuel Richardson's work as an example of moral, Christian novel writing that would instruct rather than corrupt a young woman reader.

Clarissa must be understood within the context of this larger conversation about novels, young women, and morality. The novel presents itself explicitly as an instructional novel; Richardson writes at some length about which passages of the novel might be "instructive" and addresses "such as may apprehend hurt to the morals of youth" from the text (35). Richardson himself was committed to exerting control over the interpretations of his novel, both within the text and in correspondence with readers. Richardson answered reviews (notably Albrecht von Haller's in *Gentleman's Magazine*), added prefaces and postscripts, and generally did his best to guide his readers to the "correct" conclusions. Richardson's extensive correspondence with Lady Bradshaigh included many admonishments and attempts to re-direct her reading, and he made adjustments to the text in response to such "mis"readings. He revised the third edition of *Clarissa* to make the moral clearer, adding editorial footnotes that interpret the characters' actions and motivations, a table of contents that summarizes each letter, and a "Collection of Moral Sentiments." Even within the text of the first edition, which I will quote

from here, the moral authorial voice is present. In this edition, it is most obviously and overtly present in the postscript, where Richardson, in the voice of an author or editor, writes a response to moral and religious difficulties posed by his text. Essentially, his postscript attempts to retroactively establish a coherent assumptive world that answers the complaints and questions of his readers, a project that he continues to elaborate on through the third edition.

In potential conflict with his declared moral program and attempts to control readings of the text, Richardson also creates a psychologically realistic portrait of Clarissa, and gives her a complex response to her own situation and the myriad injustices that she suffers. The tension between his explicit ideological project and some of his character's language (especially towards the end of the novel) is of particular interest to me here, as it exposes the instability of the assumptive world presented in the text – a world governed by patriarchy and Christianity.

Importantly, the character Clarissa herself works within the same ideological framework that Richardson lays out. Clarissa's own theological framework mirrors Richardson's and through much of the novel she accepts blame for her own errors. When Mrs. Norton writes to Clarissa about her family's discussion about whether or not to reconcile with her, Mrs. Norton recounts that Clarissa's mother says that a reconciliation is made difficult by the fact that "it was too well known that it was [Clarissa's] own fault that [Clarissa] ever were in the power of so great a profligate" (1326). In this scene, Colonel Morden and Mrs. Norton are unable to convince Clarissa's family to get them to forgive her

and give her a "blessing." Instead, they continue to cut her off and refuse any contact with her. Clarissa's response to this account begins with "As to my friends, and as to the sad breakfasting, I cannot help being afflicted for *them*. What, alas! has not my mother, in particular, suffered by my rashness!" (1339) She continues to assert her own fault and the fact that her actions led to both her suffering and her family's, suggesting that her imminent death, without any forgiveness from her family, is an appropriate ending to her story.

However, the novel's central concern with representing trauma doesn't allow for this framework to hold. Instead, Clarissa's written allusions to the Bible, especially her invocation of the Book of Job, reveal the problems inherent in attempting to explain suffering through an ideologically coherent assumptive world. In this novel, the conflict between Clarissa's invocation of Job and the explicit messages of the text (both in Clarissa's writing and in the postscript) demonstrate the impossibility of maintaining a stable conception of the world in the face of trauma.

Readers of all varieties have experienced Clarissa as existing in opposition to or separate from Richardson, giving the character a kind of reality status. The epistolary nature of the novel, its serial publication, Richardson's correspondence, and the framing textual apparatus of Introduction and Postscript all contribute to that effect. And there are ways, some of which I will elaborate, that Clarissa's writing within the novel seems to be at odds with the declared authorial intent. However, the tension between a patriarchal, Christian assumptive world and a rejection of that world's explanations for Clarissa's narrative is present both

within Clarissa's perspective and within the novel as a whole. Therefore, instead of pitting Clarissa against Richardson, I will use the tensions between the declarations of a single, correct interpretation of Clarissa's plot and the content of Clarissa's Biblical writings and funeral preparations to show how this novel demonstrates the insufficiency of a single ideological interpretation in the face of trauma.

Addressing the incoherence of meaning that I identify as being a result of these struggles, Terry Castle maintains that the reader of the novel "ends up as helplessly benighted as Clarissa herself – lost in a logic-defying world where things repeatedly become their opposites and the truth remains a simulacrum" ("Female Thermometer" 16). Castle connects the disorientation that the reader can feel with the "sexual metamorphoses, doublings, disguises, and psychic exchanges" that make up the sexual trauma at the center of the novel (16). She writes that in the episode of the rape, "the [reader's] quest for enlightenment ends in nightmare" and "the rational underpinnings of Richardson's fictional world seem to fly loose" (16). Instead of clarity, or "enlightenment," the moment of heightened trauma creates a moment of ideological disorder. As Castle argues, *Clarissa* often complicates its ostensible moral agenda.[11]

One of the central tenets of Richardson's moral agenda is the question of just rewards. Richardson directly addresses this question in the postscript to the

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[11] Carol Houlihan Flynn makes a similar argument that Richardson creates a tension or ambivalence in his novels due to the fact that "while ostensibly promoting principles of absolute morality" he creates "a world of infinite complexity and ambiguity where common place maxims" are not adequate (x). She goes on to write that the "fictional characters and situations" in his novels "threaten to burst the moral framework of his novels" (xi).

first edition, in response to complaints from his readers that Clarissa is treated unfairly by the novel (and by Richardson himself).[12] His response is composed of two distinct arguments. First, he defends the justice at work in his novel, pointing out that the worst sinners meet with punishment. He asks the reader,

> For, is not Mr *Lovelace*, who could persevere in his vilainous views, against the strongest and most frequent convictions and remorses that ever were sent to awaken and reclaim a wicked man – is not this great, this wilful transgessor, condignly *punished*…are not the *whole Harlowe family* – is not the vile *Tomlinson* – are not the infamous *Sinclair*, and her *wretched partners* – and even the wicked *servants* who with their eyes open contributed their parts to the carrying on of the vile schemes of their respective principals – *are they not all likewise exemplarily punished*?" (1498)

There is, Richardson says, a grand scheme in which the villains are punished appropriately for their actions. In making this argument, Richardson also positions himself as God, handing out punishment and reward with confidence and moral authority. He draws a direct line between the immorality of his individual characters and the fates they meet by the end of the novel. "Even" the servants, he says, who "with their eyes open" participated in "vile schemes" are punished. Basically, he says that they got what they deserved. This passage lays out a clear ideological framework that relies on Christianity and the power of the

[12] The accusations against Richardson of unfairness to Clarissa are an example of the way that Clarissa has been experienced as a "real" person by readers since the novel's publication.

author/father, a fictional universe in which those who do wrong are appropriately (and *exemplarily*) punished.

At the same time, however, Clarissa dies a painful death, estranged from her family and wasting away, an inappropriately extreme "punishment" from either Richardson or God for any mistakes she has made within the novel. In order to justify this seeming disparity between Clarissa's actions and her fate, Richardson looks to the idea of future rewards rather than earthly ones. While the other characters in the novel are punished or rewarded within their life (or in the moment of their death), Clarissa is asked to wait until the afterlife to receive justice. Richardson is far from apologetic about this. He writes, again in the postscript, "And who that are in earnest in their profession of Christianity but will rather envy than regret the triumphant death of Clarissa, whose piety from her early childhood; whose diffusive charity; whose steady virtue; whose Christian humility; whose forgiving spirit; whose meekness, whose resignation, HEAVEN *only* could reward?" (1498) He denies responsibility for rewarding her, leaving it up to her future in heaven.[13] Clarissa herself, within the main text of the novel, expresses a similar relationship to her own death. On September 4, she writes to Mrs. Norton, "I am entering upon a better tour than to France or Italy either! – or even than to settle at my once beloved dairy-house! … Indeed, indeed, my dear mamma Norton, I shall be happy! I *know* I shall! … Tell all my dear friends, for their comfort, that I shall! – Who would not bear the punishments I have borne to have the prospects and assurances I rejoice in!" (1338). She seems, in moments

[13] One interesting possible implication of this argument is the way that it points to Richardson himself imagining Clarissa existing outside of the bounds of the novel.

like this one, to be rejoicing in her own death and to assert that her "punishments" have indeed been worth it for her saintly demise and future reward.

Critic Lois Chaber sees danger in this apparent acceptance of and participation in a martyred death on Clarissa's part. She writes that

> Clarissa makes a dangerous and misleading model for women – in her own century or ours. Her deathbed declaration, 'Most happy has been to me my punishment *here*!' (7 September; 8:5), is both an epitome of Christian heroism – redemption achieved through suffering – and of classic female masochism – an internalization through guilt of society's misogyny. (Chaber 537)

While Chaber points out a dangerously gendered masochism that is present in Clarissa's long death, I believe that her use of scripture, specifically her insistent references to Job, create a vehicle for resistance and transgression that complicates her relationship to her own suffering and death, so that both Clarissa's and the novel's final relationship to her death is conflicted and inconsistent.

Clarissa, as Richardson has created her, is a religiously devoted individual, who naturally turns to her religious upbringing in the crises she experiences during the novel. This religious upbringing includes an emphasis on the reading of the Bible and the writing of meditations as an element of the religious search for meaning.[14] While the form of this reading and writing falls squarely within the

[14] Robert Erickson describes this action as part of Richardson's (and Clarissa's) Christian belief system, writing that "Richardson's religious sensibility was especially attuned to the Puritan emphasis on the primacy of the word of God in scripture and the necessity for the Christian 'professor' to read the Bible properly and to write out his or her relationship

ideological bounds of the patriarchal Christianity espoused by the author of and the characters in this novel, the substance of her "spiritual autobiography" is decidedly more rebellious and complicated. Clarissa uses the exercise of copying scripture, along with other socially and culturally sanctioned uses of biblical text including writing letters to her family and writing a funeral service, in order to express her pain and frustration. This pain and frustration quickly turn into complaints, into an expression of the injustice of what has happened to her, complaints that do not emerge in the rest of her writing. These expressions, from a character lauded as morally and ideologically correct, de-stabilize the ostensible ideological message of the novel and point to the way that the assumptive world cannot hold.

In effect, Clarissa argues against the claims made in the postscript and the claims she makes herself in her letters; she rejects the idea that her suffering is worthwhile, that it will be adequately compensated for by rewards in the afterlife, that it is acceptable for other individuals to be punished or rewarded now, when she is doomed to suffer while innocent. She does all of this while remaining within Christian terminology and turning to Biblical scripture.

One of the major ways that Clarissa uses scriptural writing and re-writing to highlight the injustices she experiences is through her use of the story of Job. Clarissa returns to Job again and again, making the Book of Job an overwhelming textual presence in the latter part of the novel. Job's story profoundly questions the project of theodicy and undermines human attempts to understand the justice

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with God, from the simple activity of copying in a journal passages in scripture particularly relevant to one's sense of one's own spiritual needs (or those of others) to the writing of extensive spiritual autobiographies…" (17).

of God or the cause of suffering. Job asserts his own righteousness in the face of the unknowable nature of divine justice, arguing with those who would claim that he is suffering because he has done something wrong. Through Job, Clarissa attempts to make the same claims for herself: a claim of blamelessness and a complaint against those around her who attempt to assign moral value to her suffering or to participate in her punishment.

The lesson of Job, presented in *Clarissa* through Clarissa's writings, is that trying to make clear moral sense of earthly suffering is both impossible and an affront to God. The Book of Job suggests that attempts at unilateral interpretation of suffering based on a closed, coherent system of meaning are bound to fail. Job's friends claim that the cause for Job's suffering lies in his own failure, and that this suffering is a just reward for some past fault that could be identified by comparing his behavior to existing theological systems that constitute a ideological framework that serves as an assumptive world. Job, on the other hand, maintains his own innocence before God, and insists that the pain he is suffering is not a punishment for sin and that he is being treated unfairly. God ultimately condemns Job's friends, saying, "My wrath is kindled against thee…for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath" (Job 42:7). At the same time, God returns to Job his health and family and gives him twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10). Job is rewarded for his complaints and his friends are criticized for their attempts to explain Job's suffering.

Job's story ends with the love and sympathy of his restored family and increased wealth and prosperity. He lives one hundred and forty years longer. Clarissa, on the other hand, dies as these conversations are happening in her family, and without any reconciliation with her family. She has a verse from Job engraved on her coffin: "HERE the wicked cease from troubling: and HERE the weary be at rest. JOB iii.17" (1306). This appears to be a statement about the consolation of death. Job 3:17, however, actually reads, "*There* the wicked cease from troubling: and *there* the weary be at rest" (italics mine).[15] Unlike Clarissa, Job does not face death as part of his suffering. For him, Death continues to exist only in the distance, rather than in the present "HERE." The story of Job comes full circle; he recovers everything that he had before and then lives in that restoration for many years. Clarissa comes home only as a dead body. She fails to regain a good relationship with her family, and the pity that she wants from them is unavailable to her until after her death.

During her life, Clarissa's family reads her letters that describe her suffering but fail to be moved to pity. As a Christian woman creating for herself a sainthood or martyrdom, she is unable to explicitly withhold love and forgiveness from her family, and instead continues to apologize to them and accept blame for the situation. However, there is another thread in her writing; she asserts her complaints against her family by couching them in religious language and Biblical quotation. She speaks Job's words rather than her own, and is thus able to voice her resentment. For example, on July 30, Clarissa writes to Anna Howe:

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[15] All quotations from the Bible are from the King James Version.

> When I consider [my mother's sadness], and added to these the pangs that tear in pieces my FATHER's stronger heart… the dishonour I have brought upon TWO UNCLES who each contended which should most favour their then happy niece. When, I say, I reflect upon my fault in these strong, yet just lights, what room can there be to censure anybody but my unhappy self? And how much reason have I to say: *If I justify myself, mine own heart shall condemn me: If I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse?*" (1163)

On the surface, this quotation from Job is an admission of guilt and shame, a claim that her family shouldn't be blamed for their behavior towards her, because of her "fault." However, the verse that she quotes from Job is followed by the lines, "Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life. This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked" (Job 9:21-22). These lines assert Clarissa's blamelessness and the lack of justice present in her suffering. Clarissa's extensive knowledge of the Biblical text brings these into play. A similarly educated reader would be able to discern that she is aligning herself with the "perfect" who are destroyed anyway, and asserting a lack of correspondence between moral behavior and happy outcomes. Despite her apparent statement of guilt, her use of Job reflects both her underlying confidence in her innocence and her anger at the censure she has received.

Clarissa also chooses Job as the text she wishes to have read at her own funeral. She writes in her will:

> I think the following will be suitable to my case. I hope the alteration of the words her and she, for him and her [sic] may be allowable. 'Let not her that is deceived trust in vanity; for vanity shall be her recompense. She shall be accomplished before her time; and her branch shall not be green. She shall shake off her unripe grape as the vine and shall cast off her flower as the blighted olive' (1419)

Like the quotation she uses in her letter to Anna, this appears to be an indictment of Clarissa herself, and her susceptibility to deception. However, put in the context of its place in Job, it becomes another indictment of her family and friends. The passage she wants read is Job 15:31-33. This passage contains the words of Eliphaz, one of the three friends condemned by God for their false words against him. The actual pronouns in this passage, rather than "him" and "he," are "they" and "their," and their antecedent is "the wicked." These verses are a reiteration of the claim that Job refutes so vehemently, the claim that Job is only suffering as much as he deserves. In fact, three verses later, Job says, "I have heard many things like these; miserable comforters are you all" (Job 16:2). In this context, Clarissa places words of false comfort in the mouth of the minister who will be preaching to her friends. These friends are condemned by the very words that the preacher will speak.

The great mistake, made by the Harlowes and Job's friends alike and exposed by Clarissa's use of the story of Job, is their attempt to make clear moral sense out of earthly suffering. The tension between Clarissa's use of Job and the explicit moral framework laid out by Richardson in the postscript and by Clarissa

in her explicit claims is a tension that mirrors one of the central difficulties that trauma survivors face and one of the central structures of trauma – the problem of assumptive worlds. Any attempts to explain what happens to Clarissa within existing ideological frameworks do not fully account for the experience and incomprehensibility of trauma. Clarissa's use of Job shows the problematic nature of applying a single, coherent explanatory structure (in this case, a patriarchal form of Christianity) to trauma.

Richardson's readers demanded an explanation of the moral structure guiding the book as a way of understanding why the character Clarissa endured so much suffering, but ultimately, Richardson's explicit theological explanation in the postscript does not account for the complex narrative of suffering and trauma present in *Clarissa*. As a result of attempting to be consistent and provide a clear explanation, he ends up taking a position similar to the Harlowes – indeed, similar to the condemned friends of Job. Neither the novel, however, nor Clarissa herself, fully accepts these types of explanations. As a result, instead of clarifying or making clear moral sense of *Clarissa*, Richardson's attempts at post-hoc explanations make clearer the lesson to be learned from Job – that clear, satisfactory explanations of trauma are impossible to create but that at the same time people feel compelled to apply organized systems of belief to experiences of inexplicable suffering. Through her use of Job, Clarissa refuses to fully accept blame for her traumatic experiences, pushing back against socially accepted victim-blaming. Instead, she subtly complains about the characters who attempt to justify such expressions of blame or hold her responsible for her trauma. As a

result, the novel as a whole presents both the impulse to make sense of suffering, to make a story of trauma fit a certain ideological system, and the inherent inexplicability of trauma, held in perpetual tension.

Blaming it on the Mother: Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*

Charlotte Dacre's 1806 novel *Zofloya* features a less subtle tension between the novel's plot and the explanations provided by a moralizing voice within the novel. Instead, in this works, there is an obtrusive narrator that is fundamentally in conflict with the events of the narrative. *Zofloya*'s plot does seem to require explanation, however. The plot is composed of seemingly endless and strangely unrelated incidents, the main character is both viciously violent and curiously appealing, the political implications are opaque at best, and, depending on your perspective, the writing is either intriguingly florid or frustratingly over the top. *Zofloya* is the story of a young lady named Victoria whose mother runs off with an unscrupulous nobleman. This elopement initiates an improbable series of events that are excessive and often traumatic: it leads to Victoria being unsuccessfully seduced, imprisoned in a country home, becoming a nobleman's mistress, being stabbed in the arm by an assassin who turns out to be her long-lost brother, getting married, falling in love with her husband's brother, meeting the devil in the form of a moor named Zofloya, asking his help in poisoning her husband, tying up her husband's brother's love interest, eventually stabbing her and throwing her off a cliff, being seduced and possibly possessed by Zofloya, living among "savages," encountering her dying mother and her guilt-ridden

brother, learning that Zofloya is the devil, and being sent to hell. This mere plot summary shows that the novel is full of depictions of trauma, including stabbings and imprisonments and familial conflict. Unlike *Clarissa*, the anxiety and trauma in this novel is remarkably free-floating, not attached to any one particular character or to any one particular event. Instead, each new episode in Victoria's life (or her mother's or brother's) brings with it a new terror, a new inexplicable experience, a new sexual or familial trauma. In this novel, the excess of trauma is made manifest in the text in clear and unmistakable ways – the structure and plot of the novel is *defined* by excess and attempts to contain or explain that excess are unable to fully account for that excess.

There is a relatively small body of criticism about *Zofloya*, but much of the recent critical energy that has been put into this novel since its rediscovery in the 1990s has been primarily focused on trying to make sense of Dacre's social "project" in writing *Zofloya*. Debates about this novel have focused on whether or not Dacre is racist or feminist, conservative or progressive, or something in between.[16] There are a number of reasons for this critical impulse, but I argue that one of the major reasons for the prevalence of politically and morally inflected

[16] See, among others: Diane Long Hoeveler's "Hyperbolic Femininity: Jane Austen, 'Rosa Matilda,' and Mary Shelley" in *Gothic Feminism* (1998), Robert Miles' "Avatars of Matthew Lewis' The Monk: Ann Radcliffe's The Italian and Charlotte Dacre's Zofloya: Or, The Moor" in *Gothic Writing 1750-1820* (1993), Donna Heiland's "The Aesthetic of the Sublime in the Work of Matthew Lewis, Charlotte Dacre, and Charles Maturin" in *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (2004), Kim Ian Michasiw's "Charlotte Dacre's Postcolonial Moor" in *Empire and the Gothic* (2003), Anne Mellor's "Interracial Sexual Desire in Charlotte Dacre's Zofloya" in *European Romantic Review* 13 (2002), and George Haggerty's "Gothic Fiction and the Erotics of Loss" in *Queer Gothic* (2006). Orrin Wang's reading of *Zofloya* in *Romantic Sobriety: Sensation, Revolution, Commodification, History* (2013) is one major exception to this trend, as he reads the novel next to *Jane Eyre* and in the context of exploring the Brontë novel's relationship to idolatry and ideology.

readings is that the text itself encourages these types of readings, readings that rely on a series of ideologically determined binaries. Within the body of critical work about the text, those ideologies tend to be social and political – is the text conservative or progressive? However, these ideological frameworks have moral implications for the critics (and the readers of criticism).

The text encourages such readings by offering its *own* moral interpretations grounded in its own ideological frameworks: Christianity and patriarchy. The moral ideology at work in *Zofloya* is different from the ideological frameworks used by twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics, but the underlying concern about the moral impulse of the text is a parallel one. The novel raises these questions – what is the moral of the text? and, more specifically, who is to blame in this novel? – but then forecloses the possibility of certainty by offering multiple and often contradictory interpretations. The novel refuses to allow us to definitely map it onto a single totalizing or dualistic moral framework, instead leaving us without a clear answer due to its internal contradictions. The novel provides us with a possible assumptive world – one which is organized around patriarchy and Christianity – and then undermines its stability throughout the novel.

The textual encouragement of reading in order to discover a message consistent with a single ideology begins on the very first page. Dacre opens her novel:

> The historian who would wish his lessons to sink deep into the heart, thereby essaying to render mankind virtuous and

> more happy, must not content himself with simply detailing a series of events – he must ascertain causes, and follow progressively their effects; he must draw deductions from incidents as they arise, and ever revert to the actuating principle. (3)

The narrator here suggests that there is a single "actuating principle," and that it is the job of the historian, who stands in for the reader, to learn moral "lessons" by drawing deductions from the events of the novel in order to find that one underlying principle. This call to the reader frames the work explicitly as a quest to discover the moral. The answer to this riddle is apparently provided at the end; we are told in the postscript to the novel: "Reader – consider not this as romance merely," an exhortation that is followed by the "lesson" we are supposed to have learned (267). The lesson turns out to be the assertion, grounded in Christianity and a patriarchal fear of sexuality, that the devil is always looking to take advantage of human passion, and that therefore we "cannot keep a curb too strong" over those passions (267). In between this opening and closing, there are repeated appeals to a similar kind of moralism.

In the middle of the novel we are told of Victoria that "*ennui* began to take possession of her ill-organized and resourceless mind; for it is the pure, *intellectual* soul alone, that can receive delight from solitude," which establishes a clear sense of individual moral failure in stark contrast to the desired religious virtues of purity and intellectualism (116). On a more abstract level, the narrator editorializes while telling us of the death of Ardolph at the hands of Leonardo:

"Such are the retributions of a just Providence, which though sometimes tardy, are generally sure, even in this world" (256). Here the narrator lays out a moral worldview similar to Richardson's, claiming that God punishes or rewards people according to their merits.

The most noticeable (indeed unavoidable) example of this pattern of simple, even simplistic, moralizing is the ongoing discussion about the moral failure of Laurina, Victoria's mother. In this discussion, we can see an attempt to apply a particular moral explanation, consistent with a particular assumptive world, to the narrative. This assumptive world suggests that, within the Christian patriarchy in which the novel is set, mothers are responsible for moral teaching, and that maternal pedagogical influence is the root cause of moral or immoral behavior.[17] Based on this ideological understanding of the role of women as teachers, the narrator's voice emphasizes again and again the culpability of Victoria's mother.

In the first volume we are told at least thirteen times that Laurina's behavior is the source of the immoral decisions and tragic lives of her children. This count includes only direct expressions of this idea, either from the narrator or from the mouths of the children themselves. The apparent clarity and consistency of these moments is, however, strangely mixed in with condemnations of Victoria's cruelty towards her mother. Early in the novel, Berenza becomes

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[17] As Marion Ann Taylor and Heather E. Weir write in their introduction to *Let Her Speak for Herself:* "For many women, their role as educators was both a moral responsibility and an extension of their position in the domestic sphere…Women's self-understand of their responsibility as 'priests of the home' was…encouraged by their society's idealization of a true women as the moral guardian first of her family, then of society as a whole" (6).

"visibly shocked at her persevering and remorseless cruelty to a mother, whose personal tenderness for her had at least merited some little gratitude" (32). Such a response, seemingly approved of by the narrator, is starkly at odds with the text's overwhelming condemnation of Laurina, demonstrating that the ambiguity and inconsistency of interpretation are built into the text itself. The trauma that pervades the narrative provokes the breakdown of any ideological understanding of the world, including any clear assignment of the position of blameworthy villain to Laurina.

The apparent contradiction between the text's condemnation of and sympathy for the mother is made stranger by Laurina's reappearance at the end of the novel. While Victoria and Zofloya are among the banditti, Laurina and Ardolph are brought to them. Laurina is now presented as a victim of abuse at the hands of Ardolph, who is killed in revenge by Victoria's brother Leonardo. Ardolph is at this moment described as "the infamous author of all," a position previously reserved for Laurina, and Victoria is presented as corrupt and cold-hearted for failing to forgive her mother. In her refusal to do so, however, Victoria seems only to be saying what the novel has been saying all along – that her mother is the cause of her downfall. Leonardo, however, tells Victoria

> —Nor wholly on her, abandoned girl, dare to affix thy guilt and crimes—far, far beyond what her example ever taught thee. No, Victoria, thy base mind was naturally evil;—a mother's example might have checked thy depravity, but could never have rendered thee virtuous! (259)

Suddenly, the blame for Victoria's life is placed by the narrator on Ardolph and by Leonardo, the righteous avenger, on Victoria herself. This scene makes the earlier insistent accusations of Laurina seem excessive and misguided. In fact, Donna Heiland sees the novel's moral in *this* scene, rather than in the earlier moralizing. She writes, "Perhaps, then, the *real* lesson of Laurina's experience is not that bad mothers hurt their children, but that rebellious wives are punished" (Heiland 43; italics mine).

But must there be a single "real lesson of Laurina's experience"? Instead of providing us with a single moral to the story, the novel's inconsistency suggests that it is impossible to rely on a clear ideological framework, a functioning assumptive world, in the face of such omnipresent trauma. In fact, Laurina's role as a moral degenerate does not stand on its own as definitive truth; it is paired with a sense of her as a victim. Furthermore, the repeated claim of her culpability is expressed in increasingly inflated language. By a hundred pages into the text, the accusations move from measured if moralistic to shrill and excessive.[18] Passages such as this one:

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[18] Linguistic excess pervades the work. The *Monthly Literary Recreations* reviewer wrote: "the language in general is bombastical…. Here the sentences are often constructed in an affected, artificial manner, as to render the sense obscure. Here the greatest number of characters are so depraved, as to excite no other sentiment but disgust" ("Review of *Zofloya*" 261). This observation about the "bombastical" (or according to another reviewer, "voluptuous") language is correct – as is the hint that it is often used in the service of expressing something "depraved," that is, something about sexuality. Consider this sentence from *Zofloya*: "If you would have me expire at your feet,' cried Victoria wildly – 'attempt to leave me thus unsatisfied —— in the very midst too of the faint hope you have suffered to beam upon my soul. —What of the house?— what of the storm?' she pursued, as the blue lightning conjured trees of fire, and seemed to dance upon the summit of the mountains; — 'what even of the dissolution of nature in a moment like this, when my soul pants for——" (215).

> What then must be thought of the unfortunate and guilty mother, who, making light of the sacred charge devolving on her… neglects that sacred charge by setting them in her own conduct an example of moral depravity…? (14-15)

are replaced by exhortations such as: "Tremble, unfortunate and guilty mother, for longer and more gloomy becomes the register of thy crimes!" (124). Such moments of relatively obvious hyperbole work to obscure the possibility of moral clarity and call into the question the judgments made in these moments. Through both inconsistency and hyperbole, the novel ultimately refuses to either claim or disclaim Laurina's responsibility for Victoria and Leonardo's unhappy ends, and makes the very question of moral and religious responsibility seem futile. Any explanation of what happens to Victoria framed in such simple terms leads only to more questions, to the need for more explanations. Certainly, no one explanation is left unchallenged; rather, they are held in contradiction throughout the novel.

This contradiction is also evident if we look carefully at the postscript. Its explicit purpose is to explain the moral of the novel. We are told that the devil's "seductions may prevail," because how

> can we otherwise account for those crimes, dreadful and repugnant to nature, which human beings are sometimes tempted to commit? Either we must suppose that the love of evil is born with us (which would be an insult to the Deity), or we must attribute them (as appears more consonant with reason) to the suggestions of infernal influence. (267-8)

The final moral of the text, then, is presented as an either/or proposition. While one of these choices is preferable to the other, as being "more consonant with reason," the fact that there is another choice, another possible explanation, even in the last sentence of the novel, points to the instability inherent in the novel's moral posturing. Laurina is both to blame and not to blame, both a victim and a villain. She is both a fallen women and an object of pity. Despite the ostensible finality of this moralizing moment, the novel refuses to finally answer one way or the other, and in fact verges on becoming parodic in its insistence on moral clarity.

In addition, the extravagantly dramatic, violent, and extremely convoluted plot make the possibility of reading a simple moral impossible. How can we understand a narrative that begins with a young girl whose mother elopes and brother disappears, includes an episode in which that girl stabs another girl and throws her off a cliff, and ends with the revelation that the man she loves is in fact the devil and she is condemned to hell? In this novel we see the impulse to make (literally) unbelievable horrors make sense within a consistent cognitive framework – a belief system that makes sense of the world – played out rhetorically within the novel. Simultaneously, the text shows us the inevitable failure of such a system to fully account for the complexity and intensity of traumatic experience. The assumptive world that would account for Zofloya's nightmarish life and violent actions by blaming it on her mother *and* the assumption that the devil must be actively influencing individuals to turn them towards evil are both unable adequately to account for the horrors described in the

novel. Instead, those explanations, born of patriarchal and Christian systems of understanding the world, and of a desire to assign blame, sit in an uneasy tension with each other and with the action of the novel.

Conclusion

The excess of trauma in these texts is shown through the inability of systematic understandings of the world (assumptive worlds) to explain the trauma represented in them. At the same time, the search for an assumptive world that makes sense in a post-trauma moment is in and of itself a mark of trauma. *Clarissa* and *Zofloya* ask – and demand that we as readers ask – the question, "what is the moral and political impulse of the text?" The texts encourage us to search for an assumptive world that would encompass the events of the narrative, for an explanation that would account for the trauma at its heart.

Ultimately, however, the texts do not reward such a search with a satisfying or definitive answer. Instead, the texts explore the illusory nature of such systems of meaning, and the anxiety that is produced by the resulting cognitive or ideological instability. Specifically, *Clarissa* and *Zofloya* each place the assumptive world of patriarchal Christianity in uncomfortable tension with the realities of trauma suffered by embodied women and the social pressure placed on their sexuality and morality. Assumptive worlds prove unable to fully account for these narratives. Instead, we see in each the way in which the traumas of these texts create both the difficulty (perhaps impossibility) of writing a coherent

narrative that both explains and makes moral sense of trauma, and also the strength of the impulse to try.

The attempt to make coherent, rational, sense of trauma is the problem at the heart of this dissertation. Applying assumptive world theory to literary works allows us to see clearly that the excesses of gothic and sentimental texts are not easily dismissed or explained. Instead, the sometimes uncomfortable but always dramatic excesses of trauma remain a central and valuable aspect of gothic and sentimental texts.

Conclusion:
The Sublime Pleasures of Trauma Narratives

My dissertation has focused on the expression of suffering and trauma in literary texts and the effects that suffering has on the form and tone of the texts themselves. Looking at sentimental and gothic texts, I have considered the impossibility of singular interpretation, the hybridity of tone that includes humor, and the lack of narrative closure in favor of repetition and proliferation. As I have argued, these formal or stylistic characteristics are the result of the texts' narrations of traumatic suffering. However, the texts that I have discussed are pleasurable to read. Certainly, reading *The Monk* or *Zofloya* can be an exhilarating, exciting experience. And while the pleasure of reading *Clarissa* may be masochistic, it is still a kind of pleasure.[19] In this conclusion, I want to consider in more depth the ways that literary representations of trauma can open up a space of pleasure and exploration for the reader, using theories of the sublime to consider how pleasure can arise in the face of disruption and even fear.

The literary works that I have discussed in my dissertation present a unique lens through which to explore the structures and insights of trauma. These works, and my readings of them, answer, in the form of fictional narrative, historian and trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra's call for the representation of "the possibility of working through in which totalization (as well as redemption – whether putatively successful or failed) is actively resisted" (75). They present a model of trauma narrative that allows for the fact that limits are "subject to

[19] See Laura Hinton's *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sadomasochistic Sentiments from "Clarissa" to "Rescue 911."*

disruption, challenge, change, and even radical disorientation" (LaCapra 75). These novels represent the possibility that *not* achieving "total mastery" opens up a space of exploration and more narrative. This exploration is possible because novels exist in and represent the tension between the drive for mastery, recovery, or unity and the drive towards excessive, compulsive symptoms of trauma in a way that might be untenable for an individual psyche, even while they mirror in many ways the experience of individuals who have experienced trauma.

In this alternative vision of trauma narratives, there is no total closure or end to narrative to be found, despite the drive *towards* such a thing. As a result, new possibilities are opened up, possibilities that allow for positive disruptions, radical change, or simply more narrative. Rather than closing down possibilities and creating tidy narratives that serve as explanatory frameworks, this model champions the creation of an open, liminal, and uncertain space, a space that would be open to new creative explorations, if not entirely safe from disruption.

This open space becomes possible because literature is not constrained by the limitations that govern individuals' psychological health. While closure can be oppressive and oppressively conventional for narratives, some approximation of closure is necessary for individuals to maintain psychological health. Closure may actually be a fiction for people, as well, but it is often a necessary step towards functioning and as such cannot be discarded. Individuals need to live with a sense of meaning, even as the rigidity of that can vary, and even if sometimes that meaning is illusory.

However, fictional texts do not need to resolve into closure and recovery. Instead, they can expose the tenuousness of the idea of recovery. After all, an unresolved and excessive trauma narrative is perhaps the only kind of authentic trauma narrative, since a controlled narrative is often seen as placing a period on the end of an experience of trauma – the goal for most post-traumatic therapy. Therefore, seen from one perspective, a resolved narrative is no longer a trauma narrative but a post-traumatic narrative.

The novels I have discussed in my dissertation never achieve a sense of full "control." Instead, they remain in the generative process of the creation of narrative, creating stories and exploring their possibilities without the pressure of recovery. This allows them to open up a space of play and exploration for the reader. Some of the exploration that the reader is able to experience comes from the very excessive features that I have discussed. The sublime pleasures of these texts can come from any number of sources, including: from their grotesque humor; from moments when the text's boundaries are unclear, causing the simultaneous presence of two or more literary modes and a pleasurable tension; or from the text's rebellions against closure or rational systems.

These pleasures are caused by the excesses of trauma narratives – excesses that find analogies in Burke and Kant's understandings of the sublime. By comparing trauma narratives to these classic definitions of the sublime, it becomes possible to see the relationship between the disruptive excesses of trauma narratives and the pleasures of reading such texts more clearly. Furthermore, I argue that the traumatic content of gothic and sentimental texts

encourages the reader to consider their excesses as pleasures and possibilities, rather than as a feature of the text that must be contained, repressed, or explained away. Drawing on theories of the feminine sublime, I argue that trauma pushes us into a position of acceptance rather than mastery, and that this can open up new and potentially liberatory possibilities for the reader, causing both disruptions and the pleasure of exploring new spaces and understandings.

Experiences of trauma themselves are, to be clear, *not* sublime for the individual experiencing the suffering and disruption.[20] But as Dominick LaCapra points out in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, there is the possibility, even tendency, to "convert trauma into the occasion for sublimity," allowing for "the excess of trauma [to become] an uncanny source of elation or ecstasy" (23). Given space, retrospective or imagined narrations of trauma are often "the occasion for" the sublime. The very literariness of the texts that I have considered in this dissertation creates the necessary distance from the pain being represented,

[20] This is not to say that the experience of trauma, or more likely of the recovery from trauma, never has positive or pleasurable impacts for a traumatized subject or a witness to trauma. After all, as Cathy Caruth points out in *Unclaimed Experience*, "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). In other words, sometimes trauma and trauma narratives allow us to access a truth that could not otherwise be accessed. LaCapra goes even further, claiming that recognizing "absence as absence"…"opens up empowering possibilities in the necessarily limited, nontotalizing, and nonredemptive elaboration of institutions and practices in the creation of a more desirable, perhaps significantly different – but not perfect or totally unified – life in the here and now" (58). In both accounts, trauma can be turned into an important moment of truth-telling and can even, for LaCapra, lead to a better life. However, claiming that the outcomes of trauma can have positive aspects does not mean that experiences of trauma are somehow "worth it" or that trauma can be easily recuperated as a positive experience. While an individual trauma survivor may find silver linings in her process of recovery, and while experiences of trauma may "tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available," focusing on these possible positive outcomes runs the risk of denying the pain and suffering that come with experiences of trauma.

and allows the texts to evoke and represent the mixture of fear and pleasure that characterizes the sublime while reflecting the shattering pain of a traumatic moment.

Within literature, we can experience a pleasure in encountering disruption and the feeling of being overwhelmed by forces (even destructive forces) beyond ourselves. By comparing narratives of trauma to the sublime, the aesthetic and intellectual pleasures of considering trauma can be seen clearly. Both Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, two of the major eighteenth-century theorists of the sublime, acknowledge that while the sublime is a response to fear, disruption, or danger, the pleasure of the sublime is only possible with distance from that danger.[21] This distance can be provided by the fact that the trauma and pleasure at stake in these texts are accessed via the reader's encounter with that narrative, rather than a response to a direct experience of trauma.

Burke and Kant write that for fear and pain to become sublime they must be experienced with distance, and in safety. Burke, in particular, makes it clear throughout his writing that immediate pain forecloses the possibility of pleasure of any kind, writing in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, "So it is certain, that it is absolutely necessary my life should be out of any imminent hazard before I can take a delight in the sufferings

[21] Burke writes that "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (36). Similarly, Kant writes, "The feeling of the Sublime is therefore a feeling of pain," although he is careful to point out that not every source of pain is a source of the sublime: (§27). For both Burke and Kant, then, the sublime is an experience that is premised on an experience of overwhelming danger, fear, or pain.

of others, real or imaginary, or indeed in any thing else from any cause whatsoever" (44). Kant makes a similar observation, claiming in *Critique of Judgment* that the sublime can only be experienced when the observer is in a position of safety (§28). He illustrates this point with a description of the sublime in nature: "Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening, rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals…. the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, *provided only that we are in security*…." (§28 italics mine) This dynamic mirrors the relationship I see between responses to trauma and responses to trauma narratives – that only with the distance that the constructed, fictional narrative creates can the pleasures of reading about the disruptions of trauma be experienced. While the sublime can only be experienced with distance between the observer and the object, as Burke and Kant make clear, experiences of trauma are immediate. Literary representations, however, create a distance between the reader and the trauma that allows for pleasure.

Given this important caveat, then, I want to consider the possibility of what Burke calls "a sort of delightful terror," a sublime moment, produced by encounters with the excess of gothic and sentimental narratives of trauma (123). As I have established throughout this dissertation, trauma creates a boundary-breaking, transgressive, and generally excessive narrative. These qualities are also the qualities that, according to its major thinkers, characterize the sublime. Establishing these similarities opens up ways of seeing these characteristics not just as reflective of the trauma depicted in the text but also as productive of

pleasure in the reader of the text.[22] In addition, it suggests that the pleasures of the texts I have written about derive from their excessive and transgressive qualities, from their refusal or inability to remain within teleological, generic or ideological boundaries.

The sublime, like gothic and sentimental novels, is characterized by excess and the transgression of boundaries. Adam Phillips, in his introduction to *A Philosophical Inquiry*, writes that the sublime "is always that which is in excess of any kind of limit or boundary" (xxii). Burke himself identifies a lack of clear boundaries as a necessary criterion for something to be sublime, as "nothing [can strike the mind with its greatness] whilst we are able to perceive its bounds" (58). Kant similarly emphasizes the way that the sublime is defined by a lack of boundaries, writing, "The Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries. The Sublime, on the other hand, is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it *boundlessness* is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought" (§23). For both authors,

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[22] To be clear, I am using the word "pleasure" differently than Edmund Burke, to encompass both what Burke describes as "delight" and what Kant describes as "negative pleasure." Burke makes a clear distinction between pleasure and delight. He argues that, while beauty can cause pleasure, the sublime creates delight. He establishes that "*delight*…is very evidently different in its cause, and in its own nature, from actual and positive pleasure" and takes as his question how it is that the sublime can cause delight given that its root cause is terror or pain (122). His answer is that delight occurs when we "have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances" (47). Furthermore, he claims that delight is caused by the removal of pain or danger. While Kant uses the word "pleasure" to describe the experience of the sublime, as I do, he also understands the pleasure of the sublime to be a qualified type of pleasure. He writes, "But the other [the feeling of the Sublime] is a pleasure that arises only indirectly… the satisfaction in the sublime does not so much involve a positive pleasure as admiration or respect, which rather deserves to be called negative pleasure" (§23). Semantic confusion notwithstanding, Burke's delight is also a type of pleasure and both Burkean delight and Kantean pleasure are caused by an encounter with the overwhelming nature of the sublime.

the sublime is placed in opposition to clear, impermeable boundaries and instead is provoked by a kind of boundlessness.

This boundlessness and the sublime pleasure that it can evoke is a feature of gothic and sentimental literatures of trauma. For these genres, however, the permeable boundaries do not consist of a literal inability to conceive of the bounds of an object, but instead the transgressing of the boundaries of accepted formal, linguistic, and affective limits. This feature – the way that these texts exceed our expectations – may in fact challenge a reader's ability to conceive of the novel in a singular, bounded way. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the presence of humor in texts whose primary generic mode is not humorous, for example, creates a hybrid tone.[23] As Fanny Burney wrote of *The Vicar of Wakefield,* it is "impossible any person could read this book thro' with a dry eye at the same time the best part of it is that which turns one's grief out of doors, to open them to laughter" (qtd. in Rousseau 53). This description of the simultaneous presence of comedy and tragedy in Goldsmith's sentimental novel places the movements between these two modes at the threshold, the boundary line between indoors and outdoors, as it "turn's one grief out of doors" and "open[s]" the reader's eyes to laughter.

This liminal space, and the exceeding of boundaries, can be unsettling. Certainly, the descriptions in *The Monk* of Agnes "cover[ing] [her dead baby]

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[23] I make this claim – that the humor of these novels is a boundary-crossing that creates a pleasure in a way analogous to sublime pleasure – despite the fact that humor is *not* generally associated with the sublime. As Adam Phillips writes, "Humour and cheerfulness – the ludicrous, the ridiculous, the burlesque – are the enemy of the sublime" (xxii). Whether or not the sublime could possibly be seen in the ridiculous or burlesque, the violent comedy of the gothic and sentimental novels under consideration here is not ludicrous or cheerful, but dark and layered.

with kisses" are disturbing (412). But along with these dark undercurrents, there is the possibility of humor and reading pleasure. After all, Agnes' response is so excessive as to create a darkly humorous and pleasurable reading experience. She is described as "lamenting it, loving it, adoring it" and "she talked to it, wept, and moaned over it without remission, day or night" (413, 412). In other moments in *The Monk*, the movement between, and simultaneous presence of, humor and violence errs more on the side of obvious humor and subtle threat or violence. For example, in a passage I mentioned in Chapter 2, when Ambrosio spies on Antonia through Matilda's magic mirror, the narrator's description of her makes clear the humorous nature of the scene through its description of a bird nuzzling her bosom, while maintaining a sense of threat through the fact that she is being observed while naked and vulnerable: "She stood hesitating upon the brink, in the attitude of the Venus de Medicis. At this moment a tame Linnet flew towards her, nestled its head between her breasts and nibbled them in wanton play" (271). In both cases, as with the presence of humor in other gothic and sentimental novels, the simultaneous presence of humor and threat of violence creates a kind of frisson, moments when the text's boundaries are unclear and aspects of two modes of literature are simultaneously in evidence. This pushing of boundaries, this hybridity, causes a sublimely pleasurable reading experience, regardless of the position that the characters themselves are in, and allows readers to explore a liminal space.

In addition to this shifting, transgressive tonal boundary crossing, gothic and sentimental texts also transgress the boundary of the rational, of the

comprehensible. Both Burke and Kant explicitly state that one of the key characteristics of the sublime is the way that it exceeds rational thought. Burke connects this quality to the way that the sublime evokes fear. He writes, "No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear" (53). He also suggests that obscurity creates the sublime because when the mind cannot understand what it sees, it experiences fear, an emotion that underlies the sublime. For Kant, however, this quality is even more central, and becomes part of the very definition of the sublime. He writes that "the sublime is that, the mere ability to think which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of Sense." (§25) An encounter of the sublime, then, forces the individual to face the limits of reason, of the mind's ability to understand and measure what it sees and experiences.

Trauma, like the sublime, causes a confrontation with the limits of rational understanding. As I established in Chapter 3, traumatic suffering threatens our philosophical and cognitive understandings of the world, exposing and threatening the desire for a clear, rational explanatory framework to understand the world. This confrontation between an excessive emotional experience and the limit of the rational is in evidence in gothic and sentimental literatures of trauma, but it is not obvious how this causes an experience of pleasure, even for the reader of such literatures. After all, encountering this limit often causes a psychological crisis for an individual trauma survivor, and the absence of consistent, rational explanations for events can cause anxiety even in readers. So, what is pleasurable

about encountering the limits of the rational and discovering that reason is not adequate?

I want to suggest that there is in fact a possible pleasure to be derived from reading narratives that exceed the rational. This kind of pleasure can be experienced in reading Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa.* Clarissa refuses to fully accept an explanation of her suffering that places all the blame on herself, an explanation that is presented by both characters within the novel and by the postscript in the voice of Richardson himself. However, as I argued in Chapter 3, she resists this explanation through her allusions to Job, a Biblical story that condemns straightforward attempts to understand why bad things happen to good people. Clarissa, and thus to some extent the novel *Clarissa,* resists the idea that Clarissa's actions have led to her suffering, and thus to logic-based explanations of that suffering that rely on cause and effect. While the novel closes with a postscript that justifies the seeming disparity between Clarissa's actions and her fate through an appeal to systematic Christian theology, these explanations do not fully account for the actual events of the novel, pointing to the failure of systems of thoughts that attempt to logically account for the realities of traumatic suffering. At the same time, this failure is potentially pleasurable to the reader, who has been identified with and sympathetic towards Clarissa throughout the novel. The system *needs* to fail, from the position of someone sympathetic to Clarissa's suffering, because the system suggests that Clarissa is to blame for her suffering. So the fact that Clarissa enacts subtle rebellions against the system gives the reader, similarly, a space to rebel against the postscript's closed system

of cause and effect. In this case, the pleasure is in recognizing the ways that rational systems do not account for the experience for suffering.

While the process of coming to this recognition is potentially disruptive and painful, it can allow new possibilities. It opens up new possibilities for understanding the world, possibilities that are potentially radical in their rejection of the rational. And it suggests that another way to understand the pleasure of the encounter with a traumatic sublime – with an experience that exceeds boundaries and rational thought – is to consider it as something that does not need to be explained, let alone overcome or recuperated. Instead, it can be conceived as a liberatory perspective, one that de-emphasizes rational or logical mastery.

Barbara Freeman's concept of the "feminine sublime" provides an alternative model of the sublime that allows for such an encounter.[24] Freeman argues that "the vast majority of theorists conceptualize [the sublime] as a struggle for mastery between opposing powers, as the self's attempt to appropriate and contain whatever would exceed, and thereby undermine, it" (2). She invokes Longinus, Burke, and Kant as well as twentieth and twenty-first century scholars including Thomas Weiskel and Neil Hertz in order to suggest that these writers, in general, understand to the sublime to be a discourse of mastery.

Instead of considering disruptive encounters – encounters with inappropriate humor, or experiences that cannot be contained within existing rational systems, for example – as elements that need to be controlled or

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[24] Barbara Freeman is indebted to Patricia Yaeger's "Toward a Female Sublime" from *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Critics, 1989*. However, Freeman takes issues with what she sees as Yaeger's "domestication" of the sublime and differs significantly from her.

mastered, Freeman's model of the feminine sublime considers such encounters as potentially prompting a recognition of otherness and excess in a posture of respect and acceptance. The feminine sublime "does not attempt to master" the object, or to dominate it, nor does it see the object as a threat to the subject's integrity or superiority (3). The feminine sublime attempts to remove the impulse of dominance from the theory of the sublime, and to allow for an open and open-ended experience of the sublime. In this model, the sublime does not require the closure provided by the mastery of the subject over the object. Instead, it opens up a place for exploration and play outside of systems of domination. I see Clarissa's rebellion as opening up a small space of this kind within a novel otherwise consumed with power, mastery, and domination.

Freeman's concept of the feminine sublime also importantly reconfigures the role of excess in the sublime so that it becomes something of value rather than something to be mastered or tamed. She writes that in traditional understandings of the sublime, excess is understood "as a hostile, persecutory force," that writers on the sublime "[conceive] of excess only as a frightening (and feminine) other provides the occasion for a confrontation that enables the (masculine) self to confirm, or enhance, its own existence" (25).[25] Similarly, Joanna Zylinska states in the introduction to her book on the feminine sublime that she was inspired by "the discovery that most theorists of the sublime attempt to control or even annul the discursive excess evoked in sublimity" to consider the ethical implications of an alternative vision of excess and the sublime (3). In contrast to the masculinist

[25] In her reading of Neil Hertz, for example, Freeman writes that he "fails to envision a sublime that does not depend for its construction upon the repression of excess" (25).

sublime that both Freeman and Zylinska see as attempting to repress excess, the feminine sublime is a mode that understands excess as a characteristic of the sublime that need not be "neutralized," but that can be acknowledged and respected as an aspect of an encounter with the sublime, something that neither should nor can be mastered (Freeman 4).[26]

Considering excess as a term of value, or at least a characteristic of language that should be respected, allows us to take seriously the implications of excess in literature, including in the literature of trauma. Considering excess as a valuable aspect of the sublime suggests that excess can be part of the pleasure of reading such texts. The excess in sentimental and gothic texts that is caused by their narratives of trauma is intimately related to the excess of the sublime. Freeman herself acknowledges this similarity in her discussion of Toni Morrison's *Beloved.* She writes that "the experience of trauma entails a crisis in representation: as in the sublime, we encounter that which imperils, or impedes, speech" (128). Freeman sees the sublime as both a marker of trauma and an analogue to it, and suggests that they have structural similarities – that they pose a similar set of challenges to language and our understanding of representation.

The importance of these similarities is that they allow us to see new things about both trauma and the sublime, including illuminating the pleasures of reading traumatic narratives and the relationship between the reader and the trauma narrative. However, I want to return for a moment to the important caveat

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[26] Zylinska follows Freeman's general definition of the feminine sublime in *On Spiders, Cyborgs, and Being Scared*, but focuses on the way that the concept of the feminine sublime opens up interesting conversations about the "ethical dimension in the discourse of sublimity" (9).

I began with. When comparing the sublime with the traumatic, the main difference between an encounter with the sublime and an experience of trauma has to do with what is being encountered. In the case of the sublime, the encounter is with an overwhelming and frightening *but distant or abstract* object. In the case of trauma, the encounter is with overwhelming *personal or immediate* suffering. However, both experiences present an encounter with the limit of the representable or comprehensible. And the reader of the literature of trauma is able to encounter trauma mediated by the distance of fiction. Thus, for a reader, as for the individual encountering the sublime, this moment of disruption can both be pleasurable and prompt an adjustment in perspective, away from an impulse of mastery and towards a "feminine" position of acceptance towards alterity and excess.

In fact, trauma forces everyone into this feminine position. Which is to say, trauma does not allow the individual to master the excess of the unrepresentable. The only tenable position in relation to the disruption of trauma is one of acceptance. As I argued in Chapter 3, trauma threatens and shatters pre-existing understandings of the world and causes a dramatic re-evaluation of systems of meaning. As a result, trauma does not allow for cognitive mastery and cannot be explained through rational systems of understanding. While traumatized individuals nearly always reconstruct new, albeit more flexible, systems of meaning-making, literature can remain more radically open to the feminine position of acceptance and respect while allowing the reader to experience pleasure at the excess and unknowability of the text.

This impossibility of mastery can be seen in the ways that gothic and sentimental literatures refuse the resolution of narrative closure. As I argued in Chapter 1, the excessive repetitions within these texts (of both character and plot) do not resolve themselves comfortably. Instead, the boundaries that typical plots put in place (e.g. the resolution of the marriage plot) are exceeded by these texts and their refusal of closure. These repetitions point to the way that trauma resists closure in favor of a proliferation of language and emotion. Furthermore, as I argued in Chapter 2, these texts do not remain within one tonal register, but present themselves as hybrid texts – both horrifying and amusing, both sad and funny. These different affective registers are not resolved any more than the repetitions are. Instead, they present a both/and to the reader, who experiences an uncomfortable but pleasurable humor along with encounters with excess negative affect.

These texts present an alternative model of affective excess and lack of closure which gives the reader the possibility of what Freeman describes as "not satisfaction but prolongation" (37). She writes, in relation to Edna in Chopin's *The Awakening*, that in this mode "[fulfillment] is neither a matter of getting what one wants…nor of removing desire from the realm of contingency" (37). Instead, it is a question of a extending a relationship, of an excess that refuses finality. Freeman emphasizes the lack of closure in these texts as a positive element – and as something that is evidence of their representing the feminine sublime. This pleasure of the sublime is related directly the excess of the texts and to their

refusal to be fully contained. Instead, these texts remain open to the possibility of further narrative, further excess, and further exploration.

My exploration in Chapter 1 of the endings of *Evelina* and *The Castle of Wolfenbach* also emphasizes the contingent nature of the closure in those texts. Both novels, which appear to end with the closure of the fulfilled marriage plot, also leave us with (subtle) suggestions of the possibility of the unresolved and incomplete, and therefore with the possibility of more narrative. And there, I would argue, lies the pleasure of the lack of closure associated with the feminine sublime – in the pleasure of the possibility of *more*. More questions, more language, more narrative. While Freeman and others who write on the feminine sublime do not emphasize the role of pleasure in this new formulation of the sublime, I see a pleasure that lies in the "unrecuperable excess of excess" that characterizes both the sublime and literature of trauma. In not attempting to master or recuperate the excess of the texts I have written about, the reader is able to experience the pleasure of that excess – the sublime pleasures of trauma narratives.

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