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Romantic reading and feminist writing: Political tropology

George, Laura Joan, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1992

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ROMANTIC READING AND FEMINIST WRITING:
POLITICAL TROPOLGY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of
the Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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INTRODUCTION

The Romantic period in British literature, encompassing the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, has been seen as a founding period for many of the concepts which undergird the academic study of literature. In Culture and Society, 1780-1950, Raymond Williams notes during this period the word "culture"—hitherto connected with agriculture—made its metaphoric leap from husbandry to human society. Literature and authorship were significantly redefined during this period, as the Romantic authors made new claims for the originality of, the special qualities of, and the social power of the poet. The new status of Literature and Culture during this period is familiar by now. This period has also undergone significant feminist scrutiny. It has been seen as the crucible of modern feminism with the appearance of Mary Wollstonecraft's The Vindication of the Rights of Woman in 1794. In Desire and Domestic Fiction, Nancy Armstrong argues that this period saw the development of the first modern individual and that she was a woman. My goal in this dissertation has been to further the work of understanding this incredibly dense period and its importance in developing much of the
conceptual framework that still structures modern thought.

My specific focus is the connection between this development of a new sense of the power and importance of Literature and feminism as it is practiced today. I have been concerned both to historicize our sense of Literature and interpretation and to suggest how this Romantic conceptualization of Literature has proved a particular source of social power for feminism in the past twenty years. I argue that many of the most familiar and prevalent tropes of feminist writing are not intrinsic to feminism, but rather also characterized—achieved their recognizably modern formulation and widespread usage during—the Romantic period. I do this not to suggest that feminist writing is tainted by a masculinist discourse or that it is not original—indeed I question the terms of such criticisms—but to suggest that these tropes have a history and that feminism can be seen as, in some ways, the most Romantic of discourses. Making this claim has necessitated the rethinking of the parameters of canonical Romanticism.

I argue that the Gothic, rather than the Romantic defined as a masculinist enterprise, is the first modern literature and that Gothic tropes continue to undergird and structure contemporary literary studies and feminist writing. The Gothic can be seen as the debased,
necessary, and inescapable defining term on which both Romanticism and Literature rest their tenuous claims to identity. This argument has a number of important corollaries.

This foregrounding of the Gothic has important ramifications for feminist theories of literature and feminist critiques of traditional (read masculinist) literary periodization. The "masculinity" of Romanticism has been often remarked. As Marlon Ross notes, "The canon of romantics remains wholly male at a time when rediscovered women writers are finding more or less comfortable homes in many other periods and genres" (3). For Ross and others, a rejection of femininity itself defines British Romanticism, while critics like Karen Swann have explored the incorporation that accompanied this abjection of femininity and "feminine" genres. On the contrary, although the Gothic does not begin with women writers, it was quickly appropriated by them. It has consistently been a genre at which women writers excelled, a form of popular literature which women typically write and consume. In addition it has provided a set of tropes which have been central to the enormous feminist rethinking of literature in the past twenty years. Arguing for the primacy of the Gothic brings women writers into literary history with a vengeance.

Any discussion of the relationship between
Romanticism and the feminine is complicated by the fact that British Romanticism itself arises from and contributes to the stabilization of a particular turbulence in the social configuration of gender. From Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* to Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, the late eighteenth century is Britain has been seen as a watershed epoch in the formulation of modern configurations of gender. Rather than responding to some static notion of femininity, then, Romanticism must be seen as in fact creating the definitions of femininity and feminine genres which it works to abject from its newly fetishized object, Literature. During this period the ideology of separate spheres, of woman's place in the home, took on its familiar modern configuration. For some time now feminist critics have argued that the Gothic negotiates the appropriate locations of masculinity and femininity, specifically exploring and soothing female fears of powerlessness and entrapment. The Gothic and the Romantic together, then, both stabilize and interrogate notions of the masculine and the feminine, inside and out, enclosure and freedom. However the poetry of the Romantic canon significantly evades its implication in this process.

Seeing the Gothic as the first modern Literature and the source for the structures that still define
literariness explains the extraordinary prevalence of Gothic tropology in literary critical writing today. The widespread reliance on this tropology in critical writing, in fact, sparked this entire research project. However, this prevalence raises significant problems for the project of Romantic criticism, as well as for criticism of Romanticism. The use of interpretive structures and critical tropes derived from the Gothic to read Romantic and Gothic texts suggests a certain—and troubling—kind of hermeneutic circularity. This circularity can be seen in its purest form, I think, in the use of psychoanalytic tropes of interpretation to read the Gothic novels in which they originated, because these tropes can be said to have descended from the Gothic. In "The Spectralization of the Other in The Mysteries of Udolpho" and "Phantasmagoria," Terry Castle argues that psychoanalysis can be seen as a Gothic discourse. It is thus no coincidence, I argue in Chapter II, that psychoanalysis has become the privileged grid for interpretation of Gothic novels, since the "fit" between psychoanalytic structures and the structures of these novels must seem particularly easy, peculiarly comforting. This "fit" also makes these interpretations problematically circular. To a greater or lesser extent, this hermeneutic circularity inheres in a particularly pressing way across the terrain of Romantic criticism.
My attention to the status of Gothic tropes in contemporary critical and feminist writing forces a reconsideration of the work that figurative language does in this writing. And once again, this reconsideration necessitates a return to the literary period in which the conceptual status of figurative language undergoes a significant shift—a shift commonly associated today with the theories of William Wordsworth. Hence his importance for this study of the complex interrelations between Romanticism, the Gothic, and feminism. This reconsideration of the work of figurative language will appear in two phases. First, in an analysis of the role of figurative language in Wordsworth's theory of poetry and an examination of this theory through the Gothic/Romantic/feminist tropology of garments as signals of readability, of interpretability. Second, in a concluding consideration of the use of Gothic tropology in theories of the relationship between literature and social change. This second project entails an examination of the work that the by now familiar tropology of garments did to establish the rapidly fetishized and intensely interrelated objects, Literature and Culture.

I argue that this new practice and theory of figurative language underwrote a newly configured artifact called Literature. Interrogating the definition
of Literature necessitates an examination of the status of tropes in both literary and critical writing. Figures of speech are most familiarly attended to as keys to the meaning of an individual text conceived as a unitary body. Tropes also enable critics to detect the relationship between these unitary bodies—in short to underwrite the idea of a tradition. For instance, in The Madwoman in the Attic, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar trace tropes of confinement and hunger through a number of texts to "unearth" a tradition of women writers. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s The Signifying Monkey similarly relies on what he calls tropological revision to make its argument about signfiyin(g) as a tradition in African-American literature. Patricia Yaeger's Honey Mad Women is typically feminist in its assigning of almost magical power to tropes. Although Yaeger sets herself the more general task of detecting "emancipatory strategies" in women's fiction, Honey Mad Women in fact focuses most extensively on the rewriting of certain male Romantic tropes by women writers.

Literary studies characteristically rely on attention to tropes—i.e., the shifting variants of a certain trope in one text or across a "tradition." Increasingly as literary studies has become more engaged with cultural studies, the status of tropes has been seen as even more crucial. Trained in attention to tropes,
new historicists and critics like Christopher Herbert and Anita Levy have tracked tropes outside of Literature and across the terrain of Culture to detect the "same" tropes in, say, belles lettres, anatomies, sociological investigations, and popular broadsides. In these studies the repetition of tropes in effect becomes the basis for the transmission of culture. In Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century, Christopher Herbert analyzes the development of what he calls the culture idea in the nineteenth century, focusing on the presumption of its wholeness: "it is this presumption that renders the various elements of a way of life systematically readable just as the notion of organic unity in literary texts rendered them readable according to the norms of the discipline of 'new criticism'" (5). Herbert's study presents an important parallel to my own because for Herbert this notion of "culture," with its roots in the later eighteenth century, is "essentially occult" (14).

Herbert paraphrases Herbert Spencer's The Principles of Sociology (1876-96) thus:

Here the relations which constitute society as a "complex whole" are expressed in imagery of quanta of communicable psychic energy. These "impulses" . . . magically transmit themselves through intervening spaces in the form of linguistic symbolism. (15)

This occult language is dense in Herbert's transcription. Spencer "perceives the imperceivable," and is replete
with "fantastic imagery of invisible forces and frameworks." Herbert argues that for Spencer, "Life in society is in effect--almost in fact--pervaded by vampire-like spirits exercising their power over the living." For Herbert, finally, the culture idea is based on "imagery of uncanny transmissions": "It has turned out (though Spencer does not make this rapprochement himself, needless to say) that the persecution of the living by the predatory spirits is no primitive delusion after all, but the basis for scientific sociology" (15).

Although Herbert himself doesn't make this rhetorical leap, it would not be stretching his argument too far to suggest that Culture itself can be seen as a Gothic concept. Both Culture and Literature have their roots in the same socially turbulent period, and both rely on Gothic tropes at their foundations.

Feminist writers have tended to have an enormous faith in the power of new tropes to remake the world. Some of the foundations of that faith will be examined here. I depart somewhat from Gilbert and Gubar, Gates, Yaeger, and others by focusing not only and sometimes not at all on the subtle variations in the deployment of certain tropes in different texts, and my goal is nowhere simply to present "readings" of individual texts. Instead I attempt to focus not so much on the meanings of tropes as on the meaning of their proliferation. I am
concerned not with individual creativity but with those tropes which are precisely unoriginal in their excessive repetition. I am most interested in tropes that are banal, commonplace, and so widely disseminated that they range beyond the province of any individual writer.

The status of this artifact "Literature" and the status of tropes is not simply an issue of theoretical curiosity. The stakes are particularly high for feminism. The so-called "second-wave" of feminist movement has always had a particularly intricate relationship to Literature. More than any other social movement I can think of, feminism has begun with and centered around books. Feminist movement itself has conventionally been dated by the publication of books and much feminist activity centers around bookstores, poetry, and authors. Thus it is no surprise that Gloria Steinem's recent best-seller, Revolution from Within: A Book of Self Esteem, contains an appendix on "Bibliotherapy," a list of "books that I've found mind-opening myself or that I've witnessed as rescuing for others" (335). This faith in the salvational power of Literature has echoed and reechoed in feminist writing at least since Audre Lorde's often reprinted 1977 essay, "Poetry is Not a Luxury":

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first
made into language, then into ideas, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought. . . . The white fathers told us: I think therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of freedom. (37-38)

This faith in the power of poetry is the flip side of the feminist insistence on the power of Literature to harm and oppress. In the passage above, Audre Lorde can be seen as performing an act of theft (in a phrase borrowed from an early French feminist text)—the true poet is the Black mother in all of us. She claims the power which the male Romantics usurped for themselves: the poet’s power to make the world new. In this dissertation I hope to historicize this belief in the power of Literature to found Culture, to make the world new, which feminist writers have incorporated. The literariness of feminism makes understanding the artifact Literature particularly crucial. Giving the Gothic pride of place suggests that the masculinity of Romanticism was always a ruse and a smokescreen. When I use the phrase Gothic romanticism I mean to highlight the nature of this ruse—its inaccurate masculinization of literature.

Finally, then, my argument suggests the need to reexamine the relationship between what have traditionally been seen as almost antithetical literary genres, the Romantic and the feminist. In fact, I argue
here that the supposedly masculinist Romanticism and the essentially different (to use Teresa de Lauretis' phrase) feminism rely on very similar tropological bases. Recognition of the Gothic as the first modern literature means that we must also see Romanticism and feminism as critically interconnected literary phenomena, as practices of writing which echo each other again and again.

Although I’ve been talking about "Gothic tropes" in general, my dissertation focuses on a few core tropes which can be phrased as dualisms: inside/outside, surface/depth, and fragment/whole. These tropes are both identified by Pierre Macherey in *The Politics of Literary Production* as central to our sense of literary interpretation and by Eve Sedgwick in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* as core Gothic tropes. Chapter One focuses on the "surface/depth" trope through an examination of the status of literal and figurative language in Romantic Literature and Romantic criticism and through an elaboration of the trope of garments as it relates to the process of reading. Chapter Two takes up the intersections of the "inside/outside" and "whole/fragment" tropes in psychoanalysis and Gothic novels through a reading of the trope of psychoanalysis. Chapter Two develops an analysis of the terrors evokes by "insides," by the enclosed spaces of the Gothic and looks
at the relationship between the tropes or archaeological fragments and the process of interpretation. Chapter Three discusses the valorization of the fragment in Romantic criticism and feminist writing, and the status of the fragment as one of the most important tropes structuring the process of interpretation. Chapter Four returns to the "inside/outside" trope with an examination of cloisters in Wordsworth's sonnets and in contemporary feminist theory. In its stress of utopian "insides," Chapter Four presents the flip sides of the terrifying enclosed spaces examined in Chapter Two. Chapter Five takes up once again the trope of garments to argue that the Gothic is the first modern literature and to examine the affect of this claim on contemporary feminist theories of the relationship between Literature and social change.

A note on orthography: I have capitalized Literature and Culture throughout where I mean to suggest their status as fetishized objects crystalized during the Gothic romantic period. I have also capitalized Gothic and Romantic as substantives though not as adjectives for similar reasons. Finally, I spell archaeology with the "ae" throughout to stress its entomological derivation from the Greek word for origins.
Chapter I

Abandoned Tropes and Dead Figures

Just as the poetic figure of abandoned mortal garments gets literalized, in further writing, as actual clothes; just as the figure of the Winander Boy hanging silent above the lake recurs in some sense, literalized, as an actual corpse; so the interpretive concepts of abandoned tropes and dead figures also get literalized, in the same way, in the process of writing about them with reference to the passage on the drowned man. The slip from figurative to literal—the accident—befalls the critical, as well as the poetic, figure.

Cynthia Chase
Decomposing Figures, 28

This dissertation is concerned with reconfiguring the conjunction "Romanticism and feminism," first through an examination of the networks of tropological repetition that bind them together and second through a consideration of the theories about the powers of tropes which they share. This study, then, is not primarily a feminist reevaluation of Romanticism in the sense of providing feminist readings of the major Romantics or a new evaluation of the women writers of the period, although both strategies will make limited appearances. Instead this work continues the consideration of the connections between Romanticism and contemporary theory which has achieved such prominence since the 1970s. However, it is an
extension of this work with a significant difference: it is concerned at every turn with the work of gender and with the figure of woman. Interestingly, this figure of a woman is most easily introduced into the conversation on "Romanticism and critical theory" through psychoanalysis.

The question of women in Romanticism has been taken up from several different angles, particularly in the past ten years, and this research in general has tended to follow one of two trajectories: examination of the canonical Romantic poets which foregrounds "the Woman question" and a renewed interest in and attention to those women writers in some sense a part of the Romantic "family": Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley in particular. All of this work has started to shift at least slightly the configuration of "Romanticism" that is to serve as the pre-text for critical theory. The appearance of "woman" in theory has also undergone intensive interrogation in the past twenty years: in feminist re-evaluations of the "major" theorists, in feminist

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reconceptualizations of what questions theory should be addressing. While the terrain between Romanticism and theory has been worked over in some detail, the terrain between Romanticism and feminism has been relatively ignored as an area of ideological continuity.

The sense of continuity between Romanticism and critical theory has been taken up again and again since de Man's repeated insistence that the Romantic texts he examines always manage to "anticipate" whatever he has to say about them and whatever he has to say about language and interpretation. Jerome Christensen repeats this move in "From Rhetoric to Corporate Populism: A Romantic Critique of the Academy in an Age of High Gossip" (1990), when he speaks of "the anticipation of the predicament of contemporary academic criticism that occurs in the text of Romanticism" (439). That I could cite other examples

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2 This work is obviously too vast to be summarized in one footnote, or even one dissertation. Particularly crucial in this context are Mary Jacobus's book Reading Woman, Jane Gallop's The Daughter's Seduction, and Teresa de Lauretis's Alice Doesn't. Certain areas of this work will be addressed in relation to Romanticism in the following chapters.

3 Christensen's essay, itself a complicated reworking of prefiguration, not only relies on language of anticipation and prefiguration but argues for De Quincey's precognizant "accurate forecast[ing]" of the "conditions of society [Christensen is quoting De Quincey's essay "Rhetoric"] that "obtained at Cornell, Johns Hopkins, and Yale universities in the 1960s and
just as easily suggests the extent to which Romanticism has come to be seen as the essential pre-text for contemporary theory.4

One of the earlier studies to develop this argument, Tilottama Rajan's Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism (1980), begins with the insight that "the definitions of discourse developed by modern theorists such as Derrida, Heidegger, Sartre, and de Man can already be found in the work of certain Romantic theorists" (19). Here Rajan makes the Romantic poets not even proto-theorists but theorists who create more than they anticipate the current field of writing collectively known as "theory." The figure of woman appears for the first time in Rajan's "Conclusion" when she takes up the way Romantic texts also seem to "invite" psychoanalytic reading:

the presence of works [in Romanticism] like Coleridge's Christabel, which seem to invite a psychoanalytic interpretation and thus to make evident a tension between a conscious reading of the self and a subconscious knowledge that reflects on works of art which incorporate a tension between surface and depth. (261).

It is not, perhaps, insignificant that Rajan receives this invitation—after extended readings of a kind of proto-deconstruction in Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge—

4 See also Jonathan Arac’s Critical Genealogies and Art Berman’s From the New Criticism to Deconstruction.
via a brief gesture towards The Mysteries of Udolpho:

It is not simply the tension in Romantic poetry which declares the need for such change. In a transitional work such as Mrs. Radcliffe’s Mysteries of Udolpho, which begins and ends as a novel of sentiment but is not quite able to account for the core of Gothic and Freudian horror in its middle sections, we find the same problematical duality of surface and depth characteristic of much Romantic poetry. (260–61)5

This Gothic model of surface and depth becomes the central figure of interpretation in Gothic romanticism. The figure of a woman only appears in Rajan’s study when she takes up the question of psychoanalysis and why Romantic texts seem to "invite" psychoanalytic readings.

In her January 1991 PMLA article, "Suffering and Sensation in The Ruined Cottage," Karen Swann makes the following suggestive and highly typical observation connecting the rhetoric of Romanticism with the most characteristic and compelling concerns of contemporary literary theory. In the course of "teasing out" the

5 Rajan goes on to suggest a continuity between Gothicism/Romanticism and psychoanalysis through "the figure of the double" (261). Mary Poovey gestures towards although she does not develop a similar argument about David Copperfield in Uneven Developments: "By the end of the nineteenth century, this division [of agency from knowledge] would be reified and the ‘other’ of the self dignified as the unconscious; in Dickens’s novel, however, the rudimentary notion of some ‘unconscious part’ cannot account for or accommodate the difference within David. In fact, these differences do not even remain within David but reappear outside him—each of which reflects some ‘unconscious part’ of David Copperfield" (119).
associations and meanings of Wordsworth's famous poem she remarks, "A compelling association of ideas prompts us to answer this question [of what drives the mechanics of the poem] in psychoanalytic terms," although she later reminds us:

As other readers have shown, one need not enlist Freud when teasing out the poem's fascination with the mother; one need only go to Wordsworth's "Incipient Madness," originally drafted as part of The Ruined Cottage. (86)

If "one need not enlist Freud" to prepare a reading of the poem, we may feel entitled to ask how "compelling" this "association of ideas" is in the first place. In fact, however, Freud's presence is invoked in the first sentence quoted above, before his name is mentioned, when Swann seems to be "compelled" by an "association of ideas." Because the accident of association is "compelling," in some sense we are, I presume, to take it that it is neither completely arbitrary on the part of the critic nor unpleasantly over-determined. However, the extent and nature of this compulsion is left carefully unexamined, as if the writer is gesturing off stage to some universally acknowledged if dimly understood mechanism. The fact that the slide back from Freud to Wordsworth is achieved so painlessly

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"Perhaps what makes this "association" Freudian rather than Wordsworthian is precisely its compelling nature. However, it is not uninteresting to consider Wordsworth's role in the popular development of a psychology of association."
suggests that some of the "compulsion" must lie in the "association" of Wordsworth and Freud, an association that seems to haunt current literary theory in more than one guise. This chapter will be concerned both with the processes of "invitation"—and the positively giddy social whirl into which they entice the critic—and with what I call "Romantic Reading"—that reading of Romantic texts which is structured by tropes which derive from those texts themselves.

Rajan's brief gesture towards Ann Radcliffe in the conclusion of her book does invokes the figure of a woman for the first time in her discussion of "Romanticism" and "deconstruction." That this appearance is brief, almost shadowy, and serves mostly to link "the Romantics" and "Freud," is perhaps no coincidence.

Although the importance of Romanticism to critical theory has scarcely been underestimated, the extent to which Romanticism is an inevitable and founding pre-text for feminist theory has yet to be examined, and this examination will be my central concern here. In fact, I will be concerned to demonstrate that for feminism, Romanticism is not merely a pre-text but a kind of twin sister, born at the same time (the 1790s) and only ostensibly separated at birth.

In order to pursue this figure of reading in
Romanticism and in feminism, I will examine critical responses to some of the most famous passages in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, passages which are deeply concerned with the status of reading itself, as well as, perhaps only ostensibly peripherally, with the figure of a woman.

ii. "the romance of our own doomed acts of interpretation"

*If we involuntarily recognize a romance in the drowned man episode, it is not simply Wordsworth's Romantic elegy on Winander, but the romance of our own doomed acts of interpretation.*

Cynthia Chase, *Decomposing Figures*, 29

Since Romanticism, interpretation has been particularly concerned with the newly uneasy relationship between the literal and the figurative.7

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7 Jon Klancher, in *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* argues for the extent to which reading became a problem in the Romantic period while maintaining a cultural materialist insistence on social complexity. His study begins, for instance: The English Romantics were the first to become radically uncertain of their readers, and they faced the task Wordsworth called "creating the taste" by which the writer is comprehended. The late eighteenth century ushered in a confusing, unsettled world of reading and writing. Ideas, signs, and styles had to cross new cultural and social boundaries, and the status consciousness of the eighteenth century was already becoming the class awareness of the nineteenth. No single, unified "reading public" could be addressed in such times, as Coleridge and his contemporaries well knew. This inchoate cultural moment compelled a great many writers to shape the interpretive and ideological frameworks of audiences they would speak to. They carved out new readerships and transformed old ones. This book explores the
Because they blur this distinction in a new way, the texts of Romanticism have been characterized at least in part by their fragmentary nature and opacity, formal devices by which they elude or complicate "interpretation." Crucially, contemporary criticism of Romanticism not only points to but is itself replete with images of gaps, fragments, and obscurity. In textual and social tensions they produced. (3)

It is not uninteresting to note here how Klancher repeats the kind of powerfully colonialist image of Romantic poets "carving out" and "transforming" new territories from an "inchoate" mass so appealing to Wordsworth. Perhaps not coincidentally, his study is vastly uninterested in women—they merit precisely two sentences in one footnote and seem to have no place in this struggle over territories although certainly the popularity of a Radcliffe or a Baillie, the notoriety of a Wollstonecraft suggests that women were not as absent from the stage of cultural struggle as Klancher's study implies. Indeed, as Marlon Ross suggests, their very presence gave rise to particular kind of Romantic anxiety. See The Contours of Masculine Desire.

Again, in one of many possible examples: "In contrast [to Spenser], Wordsworth's allusions seem to lend opacity, to mark a loss or deformation of meaning that occurs between Spenser's elegantly ritualized violence and this incident from common life" Karen Swann, "Public Transport: Adventuring on Wordsworth's Salisbury Plain," ELH 55 (1988): 824. Swann continues in a move both strikingly repeated across the terrain of writing on romanticism and crucial for my study: "Piercing through the narrative fabric to scenes whose bearing on the manifest text remains mysterious, "gride" [in 'Salisbury Plain'] functions less like a Spenserian allusion than a nodal point in fantasy or dream; and it allures us into a maverick interpretive activity more like dream-analysis than traditional exegesis. It invites us to free-associate—to move for example from this scene to a contiguous one..." (824). Note how a word in the text is used to "invite" and "allure" us, note that the activity of the critic is Romantically "maverick, that it is structured like "dream-analysis," and finally, and we
Wordsworth, Freud and the Spots of Time, David Ellis struggles with the relationship between psychoanalysis and the interpretation of obscurity in the 'Spots of Time' passages in *The Prelude*. Invoking Breuer's terminology, he argues that because Wordsworth has "failed to bring these memories into 'associative contact' with what surrounded them . . . they continued to haunt him" (82).9 However:

> the consequence of this failure is that the spots are likely to remain impenetrably obscure in several of their details and that some element of 'filling-in' is therefore unavoidable in any attempt to make sense of them. (82-83)

Because the spots of time remain "impenetrably obscure," here, they seem to need and invite 'filling-in' in order "to make sense." For Ellis, this 'filling-in' involves "recovering" though psychoanalysis "the boy's responses to the gibbet about which the only information of a direct or explicit kind Wordsworth offers is, 'forthwith I left the spot'" (80), although he clearly struggles with the permissibility of his strategy. Ellis's argument that these 'spots of time' ask for some filling-in is substantiated by the amount and carefulness of the

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9 This kind of obsessive return of the image of haunting is the subject of Chapter II.
critical attention they have received and the kinds of close and highly associative readings to which they have been repeatedly subjected.

Ellis’s observation of the need for ‘filling-in’ also echoes countless critical observations of the need for interpretation of Romantic texts. These by now commonplace observations about the "interpretability" of Romantic texts are explored and systematized by Tilottama Rajan in The Supplement of Reading. Rajan argues that many of these studies "assume a work that can be reconstructed from the text and are reluctant to explore how problematic a recuperative hermeneutic can be in texts themselves." For Rajan, what characterizes Romantic texts is a "recourse to the 'supplement of reading' as a way of reconstructing a written text.

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10 For instance, in "The Illusion of Mastery: Wordsworth’s Revisions of 'The Drowned Man of Esthwaite,' 1799, 1805, 1850," Susan Wolfson remarks of that passage, "The suggestion is quiet indeed, but the cautious suspension of the verse invites interlinear thoughts and cooperates with other revisions that dilate the interval of the child’s misgivings" (929, emphasis added). Again, in this formulation the text seems actively to solicit the critic’s intervention; it literally "invites" as well as "cooperates" with the reader. Ellis’s study in fact centers on a use of psychoanalysis to provide this 'filling-in' which opens up but does not historicize the particularly vexed question of the relationship between psychoanalysis and Romanticism. This question comes up with particular urgency in the critical interpretation of gothic tropes, which are found not only in gothic novels but shot through the body of Romanticism and the texts of Romantic criticism. I will return to this aspect of the problem of Romantic interpretation later, and explore it in detail in Chapter Two, "Gothic Archaeology."
unable to achieve identity with itself into the ideal totality of the work" although, "[a]s in the case of a supplement to an encyclopedia, the need for it points to a gap in the written text even as it fills it" (3). Although this is not a new insight about Romantic texts (cf. various studies of "Romantic fragments"), in The Supplement of Reading Rajan attempts to systematize Romantic hermeneutics and to suggest the philosophical structures that create these textual strategies rather than casually gesture towards them, simply valorize them as "depth," or, most

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11 This "supplement of reading" is not only invoked in the canonical texts of Romanticism. See, for instance, Keats’s letter to J.H. Reynolds of 14 March 1818:

I wish I had a little innocent bit of Metaphysic in my head, to criss-cross this letter: but you know a favorite tune is hardest to be remembered when one wants it most and you, I know, have long ere this taken it for granted that I never have any speculations without associ[ating] you in them, where they are of a pleasant nature and you know enough to [for "of"] me to tell the places where I haunt most, so that if you think for five minutes after having read this you will find it a long letter and see written in the Air above you, Your most affectionate friend, John Keats. (Letters of John Keats, 76)

In "Keats the Letter-writer: Epistolary Poetics," Susan Wolfson argues that, "the freedom of epistolary composition gives Keats a way to speculate, to play with an idea without having to have his mind "made up" definitively and absolutely" (43), suggesting that Keats’s letters themselves may be quintessentially Romantic documents in the sense that the "speculation" is always only about to begin, what she calls at another point his poetics of "a perpetual beginning" (47). See my fuller discussion of this letter in Chapter III.
problematically, repeat them in the rhetoric of criticism.

In Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition, Cynthia Chase (conditionally) identifies an anxiety about reading with "the Romantic tradition" itself:

If there is a Romantic tradition, it would consist, these studies suggest, in the recurrence of an attention to problems of reading that undercut the possibility of tradition in the sense of a handing on intact of values, knowledge, functions, and forms. The Romantic tradition would consist in attention to a mode of inquiry that in fact recedes as an explicit philosophical topic during the Romantic period as the topic of aesthetics comes into prominence. It would consist in attention to rhetoric or tropology—to the tropological capabilities of language construed as the very conditions of knowledge and action. (3)

This concern with tropology structures my study in the sense that I am interested in the repetition of tropes, of figures of speech, and in particular in the repetition, in contemporary feminist discourse, of tropes that achieved an earlier widespread popularity in the Romantic period. As such, and in common with almost all readings of the Romantics, then, my study will be involved in particularly knotty problems of interpretation as well as in an attempt to displace the centrality of what I call "Romantic reading."

In "The Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Figurative Reading of Wordsworth's 'Books'," Chase begins with a brief passage from Book 5
of The Prelude. An initial concern with the "accidents" that can destroy books sends her to another accident, the drowned man of Esthwaite. The garments by the lake send to her another use of the word "garments" in Book V. The repetition of immersion sends her to the Boy of Winander. The "disruption of the continuity of bathing" (17) sends her to the "one long bathing of a summer's day" (1. 19) in the 1798-99 Prelude. The word "hanging" associated with the Boy of Winander sends her to Wordsworth's image of Imagination in the "Preface of 1815," whence "hanging" again directs her to the Penrith Beacon spot of time. Her narrative progression of sudden darting detours, compelled by a process of association which is not free, structures the rest of her study of the tropes of reading and interpretation in Book 5 of The Prelude. I summarize this trajectory at such length because the problem of association is central to this study, although unlike Chase I am interested in structures of association and repetition that range widely, wildly, and even irresponsibly, outside the enclosed texts of one author or one canonical configuration.

I want to begin by going over a cluster of passages in Wordsworth's Prelude whose depths have been plumbed by Cynthia Chase, Thomas Weiskel, Margaret Homans and Susan Wolfson among others. I focus on the
boy's sight of the gibbet and/or the drowned man of Esthwaite—two passages often read together and connected by their contiguity in the 1798–99 Prelude—because for each of these critics these passages in particular offer the ground for extended meditations on reading and interpretation.

Several of these meditations on reading revolve around the sight of the gibbet near the base of Penrith Beacon. In each version of The Prelude, the boy, having become separated from his servant and guide, wanders down until he sees a gibbet—or the remains of a gibbet—then turns and ascends until he sees a naked pool, a beacon, and a girl "with garments vexed and tossed." In the 1798–99 version the boy sees only the remains of a gibbet:

I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
Came to a bottom where in former times
A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung

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12 The Norton Critical Edition of The Prelude 1799. 1805, 1850 notes that this linking the drowned man of Esthwaite with the Penrith Beacon spot of time [in which the "numerous accidents in flood or field" might be adverted to along with other "tragic facts" which "impressed my mind/ With images to which in following years/ Far other feelings were attached--with forms/ That yet exist with independent life,/ And, like their archetypes, know no decay" (279–87)] has "no counterpart in later versions of The Prelude." The editors paraphrase: "Visual impressions are stored in the memory, and assume new significance with the passage of time. Theirs is an independent life of the imagination, and within the mind they attain the permanence of the natural scenes from which they derive (their "archetypes")" (8, nt. 3).
In irons. Mouldered was the gibbet mast;
The bones were gone, the iron and the wood;
Only a long green ridge of turf remained
Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot, ..
(1798-99, first part, 11. 308-13)

By the 1805 version these enigmatic markers are replaced by writing and the phrase "the murderer of his wife" is expunged:

I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
Came to a bottom where in former times
A murderer had been hung in iron chains.
The gibbet-mast was mouldered down, the bones
And iron case were gone, but on the turf
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought,
Some unknown hand had carved the murderer’s name.
The monumental writing was engraven
In times long past, and still from year to year
By superstition of the neighborhood
The grass is cleared away; and to this hour
The letters are all fresh and visible.
Faltering, and ignorant where I was, at length
I chanced to espy those characters inscribed
On the green sod: forthwith I left the spot .  .  .
(1805, 11. 287-301)

This addition of writing to the mouldered gibbet has drawn considerable attention. Thomas Weiskel, in The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence, for instance, argues that:

the text insists, with an emphasis as extraordinary as it is literal, on this spot as a signifier: characters, "monumental letters," or "writing" (1805). This it is which mediates the meaning of the spot, turning faltering confusion "forthwith" into panic and headlong flight. The order of law is inserted into the order of nature by means of writing. Precisely parallel to the point of contiguity between law and nature—that is, the idea of death and the logic of death for death—is the point of contiguity between image and signifier or symbol. We arrive, by no doubt too great a jump as yet, at the equation writing = death, or more exactly, the recognition of a signifier = the intimation of death. (178)
For Weiskel, this scene dramatizes "resistance to reading":

For in truth, as strange and academic as it sounds, it is against the fact that things may come to signify that the boy is forcing his difficult way." (180)

This interpretation, in which the boy's position is conflated with that of the girl "forcing her difficult way," depends on the boy's flight from the sight of the letters near the gibbet; thus, it "fills" the same gap that Ellis points out when he notes the lack of motivation for this flight in the text.

The most significant revision, then, the one that has to do with creating meaning, revealing the text's motivation and Wordsworth's fears, is the addition of writing at the scene of the gibbet, while the deletion of the murdered wife is clearly only a matter of fact:

Evidently in revision (between 1802 and 1805) Wordsworth brushed up on the facts. He would have learned that the victim was a man and learned too, possibly for the first time, of the characters and that they were still extant. (178)

Although in both instances, Weiskel grounds the revisions in Wordsworth brushing up on "the facts" of the case, it is the meaning of the interpolated letters that Weiskel elaborates on. In fact, the facts of the murder have drawn no small amount of attention. Chase, for instance, remarks:

We might first take note of an episode juxtaposed to [the drowned man episode] in the 1798-99 Prelude in which "hanging" imposes itself literally: the "spot of time" in which Wordsworth
confronts the gibbet on the moor where a murderer had been hung in chains. The texts of 1798-99 and of 1805 offer two different versions of the literal, which here, too, Wordsworth "stumbles" on as if by accident (19).

Jonathan Wordsworth remarks on the failure of either of Wordsworth's "two versions of the literal" to be in any way historically accurate:

'The monumental writing was engraven/ In times long past'—Thomas Nicholson, the murderer in question, had been hanged for killing a local butcher in August 1767, only two and a half years before the urchin's birth. The letters, even if carved very 'soon after that fell deed was wrought', were at most seven or eight years old; the gibbet, unless made of remarkably inferior wood, would not even have fallen, much less 'mouldered down'. For all the circumstantial detail, we are dealing not with fact, but with poetry of the imagination. (57)

Margaret Homans uses the vanishing phrase about the murdered wife to reinsert gender into this extended and severally authored meditation on reading and interpretation:

Wordsworth's text adds a third effacement of the woman to this sequence when he revises her out of the poem in the later versions of the passage, so that the dead woman and the characters she makes possible never appear together. Her death is not marked, either by the characters depicted in the poem or by the words of the poem itself. Wordsworth enacts, in leaving her out, the process of effacement that his poem would have exposed; he duplicates the primordial murder of the mother that he would seem to wish to undo. His poem does accidentally expose this effacement and murder only because manuscripts remain of the poem's first version, manuscripts in the handwriting of Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson. (15)
Susan Wolfson also uses this revision to insert some recognition of sexual difference into the scene of reading:

What is even more striking is that the poetic treatment of the first memory, like the account of the drowning, enmeshes Wordsworth in a confusion of historical references. As the Norton edition points out (9, n. 8), Wordsworth's imaginative chronicle overlays a recent hanging of a murderer at Penrith with a hanging at Hawkshead a hundred years earlier, the execution of a man who had poisoned his wife. This conflation of executions, like the conflation of dates in the memory of the drowning, is suggestive, for it weaves a tangled web of death, guilt, and displaced punishment: Wordsworth's mother died at Penrith, where the poet remembers "stumbling" on the place of a murderer's execution; but he mistakes that murderer's crime for the murder of a woman in the vale to which he was transplanted after his mother's death. (923)

Clearly it is not insignificant that both feminist accounts rely on psychoanalysis to reinsert the figure of a woman. As David Ellis remarks:

It is not only the fact that the spots of time are often obscure, but the particular way in which they are so--the fact that they seem to deal with matters which especially concerned Freud--that makes me feel it would be perverse for a modern reader not to see what help he can provide. But to look in his direction and to find there hints that may often be more general than particular--a distinctive spirit of inquiry rather than a series of keys--is not the same as fastening The Prelude on the Procrustean bed of this or that version of Freudian dogma. (82)

That a psychoanalytic reading, however, need not include a recognition of sexual difference is clear in Weiskel's account, in which the scene of reading can only peripherally relate to "the girl with garments
vexed and tossed" and see in the effacement of the murdered wife only a chance for Wordsworth to brush up on his facts.

Cynthia Chase gets to the gibbet through its repetition and in fact the literalization of the "hanging" of the Boy of Winander who "hung/listening." She relies heavily on Wordsworth's image of imaginative suspension in his 1815 Preface, moving through the Boy of Winander to the gibbet by Penrith Beacon. For Chase, of course,

13 As Margaret Homans puts it, "In a literary text, the literalization of a figure occurs when some piece of overtly figurative language, a simile or an extended or conspicuous metaphor, is translated into an actual event or circumstance" Bearing the Word. For Homans, "literalization suggests a move in the direction of a mother-daughter language, figuration suggests a return to the paternal symbolic" (30). Jerome Christensen notes, "De Man and de Manians often use 'There Was a Boy' to illustrate the peculiar 'hanging' quality that Wordsworth ascribed to imaginative power. These usages, I would argue, respond to De Quincey's original notice; they are predominantly De Quinceyan readings of Wordsworth--and where they differ they falter by regressing from the full rhetoricity of De Quincey's example, which recapitulates Wordsworth's poetic language within a critical practice that effectively suspends, as de Man's does not, Wordsworthian correspondences" (422). In this connection he cites not only Chase and de Man, but Neil Hertz's "Afterword" to The End of the Line and Andrejz Warminski, "Missed Crossing: Wordsworth's Apocalypses," Modern Language Notes 99 (December 1984): 983-1006.

14 Because this trope is so central to Chase's readings of passages from The Prelude, it is not uninteresting to note that for her meaning always "depends": "The distinction between the literal and the figurative on which reading and meaning depend" (6); "an erosion of the distinction between literal and figurative modes on which reading and meaning depend" (14). In her formulation, meaning hangs like a corpse, depending not
the Penrith Beacon spot of time not only literalizes hanging, but offers an opportunity for her to work out her argument about reading:

The spot is a scene of effacement, the erosion of the remnants of an execution, itself the effacement of a murder. Calculated to coincide with and cancel each other out, the matched annihilations leave remains instead—a residue that, strangely, consists not in the instruments or objects of annihilation ("The bones were gone, the iron and wood") but in its site, the spot "whose shape was like a grave." Nature, here, the "long green ridge of turf," is figured as the remnant of the "spot." For the version of 1805, Wordsworth rewrites these remains as literal letters. The residue is writing. It persists through repeated defacements (of the moor’s surface) and effacements (of the letters, as the grass grows back). (19)

The appearance of "letters" in the 1805 version of the episode merely makes unmistakable a scene that was always already about reading, a "long green ridge of turf" (like that in "The Thorn") which already invites and signifies and refuses reading.15 Again, as in

from a gibbet but on the distinction between "literal and figurative modes"—a gibbet that is always already failing; this depending is the most tenuous of all. This failing gibbet fails because it relies on a category of "the literal" which Chase must continually assert in order to destabilize.

"Or, in the meta-narrative represented by his revisions to the passage, Wordsworth seems to be telling us that inscription—contrary to his own arguments in the Essay Upon Epitaphs—always attempts to reverse the meaning of the sign on which it is inscribed, that of an un(re)marked or forgotten grave. Writing, by a double movement, simultaneously remarks and recovers (displays and conceals) an originating, cryptic, undecipherable death." Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on The Prelude (Oxford: Clarendon
Weiskel and Homans, the scene of the gibbet is an extended scene about reading; what rivets the critics’ attention is the appearance of writing that seems to "invite" a "filling-in" of meaning in the more indeterminate markers that precede and underlie it. Chase’s style is highly rhetorical and repetitive, while Weiskel and Homans plumb a depthless psyche ambiguously both the poet’s and the text’s, but their strategies are the same: repetition and association fill in connections about which Wordsworth’s text is reticent.

Depth is a particularly compelling association in Chase’s reading of the drowned man of Esthwaite episode, in which a figure surfaces suddenly from the depth of a lake:

If Wordsworth recognizes in the risen corpse figures familiar to him from allegorical romances, we recognize, in the broken surface of his text, a figure familiar to us from allegories of Romanticism—from the interpretive books that are our own most saving fairy tales. The disruption of the specular surface, the rising of the dead letter, and the fatality of misreading, all this we have read before, and that fact alone allows us to see it, hallowing what we read "With decoration and ideal grace," as "purest poesy" (30).

Here Chase alludes to the circularity of most Romantic reading which we will explore in detail later. But she

Press, 1989), 18. Although Jacobus differs from the other critics in her insistence on the appearance of the letters as another layer of repression, she joins them in seeing the passage as "representing" a "meta-narrative" about writing.
also refers to the critically almost irresistible connection between the lake and its hints of depth as she alludes to "the broken surface of the text" and "the rising of the dead letter." Although she doesn't use the psychoanalytic assumption of depth to make this connection between the depth of the lake and the depth of the text, Wolfson does in "The Illusion of Mastery: Wordsworth's Revisions of 'The Drowned Man of Esthwaite" when she connects the drowned man of Esthwaite with an earlier passage from the 1850 *The Prelude*:

As one who hangs down-bending from the side Of a slow-moving boat, upon the breast Of a still water, solacing himself With such discoveries as his eye can make Beneath him in the bottom of the deep, Sees many beauteous sights—weed, fishes, flowers, Grots, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more, Yet often is perplexed and cannot part The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky, Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth Of the clear flood, from things which there abide In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam Of his own image, by a sun-beam now, And wavering motions sent he knows not whence, Impediments that make his task more sweet; Such pleasant office have we long pursued Incumbent o'er the surface of past time . . . .

(1850, 4. 256-72)

The literalization, as Chase might have it, of this image in the drowned man of Esthwaite episode, for Weiskel is the sign of Wordsworth's genius: "Part of Wordsworth's greatness as a poet is the way he consistently realizes as literal episode the
unconscious, figurative structure of his thought" (192). Also crucial, though, is the way this trope of depth works so intuitively to structure readings of Wordsworth's poetry. In Ellis's reading of the spots of time, this depth has become more than a suggestive trope and signifies the 'truth' of the unconscious. This is how he ends his chapter on "The first spot of time":

Its [The Prelude's] nature is such that, because the 'dim, uncertain ways' in which, at the end of the two spots of time, he claims to have been travelling are not today notably more certain or better lit, one is able to think of him as a pioneer without looking back from the heights of superior knowledge. James Mill hoped to make the workings of the human mind 'as plain as the road from Charing Cross to St. Paul's': but, in the words from Coleridge's Aids to Reflection which Stephen Prickett quotes twice with such good reason, 'the lowest depth that light of our Consciousness can visit even with a doubtful Glimmering, is still at an unknown distance from the Ground . . . .' (83)

That Wordsworth's trope makes so much intuitive sense and carries such epistemological weight suggests the pervasiveness of a certain conception of psychoanalysis, heavily influenced by Romanticism, that is current in both popular culture and academic critical theory. That Chase coyly plays with this possibility in her rhetoric rather than relying on it as the ground of her argument cannot keep her intervention from being fully implicated in the ways Wordsworth's Prelude stages its own scenes of how to
read itself. All of the critics discussed here seem to follow Wordsworth's directions with a kind of zealous scrupulousness.

For Chase, the depth that is crucial in the drowned man passage is also connected to the teasing suggestion of what may lie "underneath" one's garments. She begins her reading of the drowned man passage by announcing that it can only be read literally, although she later uses this assertion as the rejected position which allows her to reach her final argument that any critical reading is caught up in the process of figuration. Still, for her, at first, the drowned man of Esthwaite passage is entirely "literal," that is, "flat," "a plain tale." She argues:

In this episode, Wordsworth leaves unreclaimed the tropes, or "garments," that would mediate the

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16 David Ellis also remarks on the 'flatness' of the other Wordsworth passage centrally under investigation here when he remarks on the Penrith Beacon passage, "And yet what strikes one on the whole is how little it is dwelt upon or exploited poetically. The verse, on the contrary, is fairly flatly expository, demonstrating Wordsworth's firm control of syntax and one or two characteristic devices of compression ('through fear/Dismounting' etc.), rather than any special power of evocation. This flatness in the tone helps to drain excitement from what is otherwise a highly dramatic moment." (63) As for Chase, this observation immediately involves Ellis in a difficulty about how to read, "If the reader gives to this phrase the kind of attention it patently doesn't invite, then it comes to seem more and more remarkable" (64). In other words, when critics receive invitations that are at best ambiguously sent, reading itself becomes a remarkably tenuous enterprise.
naked facts; and "unreclaimed garments" are also the revealing fact in this narrative. (21)

For her, these "unreclaimed garments" that are also "unreclaimed tropes" which could clothe the "naked" text are a literalization of an earlier passage in which metaphoric garments clothe the human soul (1805, 5.17-23). Weiskel, in contrast, is merely irritated that the boy fails to read what after all really should have been (but seems to fail to be) "a plain tale:"

Why Wordsworth hadn't run for help the night before isn't clear, since surely the "Tale"--or at least the suspicion of something wrong--would have been apparent to a boy of eight. (176)

"Clearly," even in this most "literal" of passages, there is a problem with reading. This failure to read draws an irritated aside from Weiskel rather than inspiring the kind of extended meditation on "resistance to reading" that the boy "invites" when he turns away "forthright" from the sight of the mouldered gibbet. But clearly the insistence on the "plain tale" is a problem here. For Chase, this episode itself seems to be "a plain tale," one without the embellishing garments of figures, at least until the critic tries to read it:

Faced with the 'heap of garments, left as I supposed/ By one who there was bathing" (1805, 5.461-62), one cannot choose but feel the divestment of figurative meaning in the literal recurrence of the noun garments. (16)
And yet, as always, she invokes this literalness and divestment only to show that if present at all they cannot help but vanish in the process of reading. Finally, there are no plain tales, and this itself is the central condition of Romanticism:

This book shares the premise of much recent interpretation identifying the Romantic tradition with an exacerbated sense of the problem of figurative language. Misgivings about language that acts like alienating "garments" rather than "the air we breathe" (to cite Wordsworth's famous figures in his Essays Upon Epitaphs), and anxiety about themes and strategies invariably borrowed, inevitably preexisting the writer's intention toward meaning--these mark not only the English Romantic poets but also, critics have shown, the works of Freud, George Eliot, and Rousseau. But anxiety of influence and hostility toward "rhetoric" need to be reinterpreted as symptoms of a more radical unease about the implications of figure. (5)¹⁷

The trope of "garments," then, is central to our understanding of the problem of Romanticism, the instability of the status of reading.

¹⁷ This concern with the falsifying power of the garments of language underlay (and still undergirds) the search for the primitive that also characterized the late eighteenth century. That is, savages and primitives not only lacked the constricting clothing of "modern" societies, but in their language lacked the corrupting and false "garments" of figures and, ultimately, of consciousness. Jacobus, for instance, argues that "what set [Wordsworth] apart was his extension of Blair's theory of poetry to the world immediately 'round him--his belief that ordinary people as well as Red Indians, expressed themselves undisguisedly and forcefully in a language poetry could use" (191). Wordsworth, then, considered that not just foreign savages but the poor of his own land could express themselves without disguises.
A pile of garments by the side of Esthwaite may suggest what ought to be a plain tale, but garments also suggest what is not plain about language, what clothes and conceals. Garments and plain tales are central not only in the drowned man of Esthwaite episode but also in the boy's struggle to come to terms with the girl with her garments vexed and tossed on Penrith. Weiskel argues:

The features of the landscape by which he might expect to orient himself are remote, withdrawn in an unapproachable stasis. The girl, however, "more near," in more ways than one, is an image not of stasis but of difficulty, of forces locked in contrariety. There is a play on clothing beneath the surface: dreariness invests the landscape by divesting it until it is naked, just as the wind whips at the girl's garments. The girl proceeds "with difficult steps to force her way" against the visionary divestment which threatens her with the fate of the denuded, static landscape. As object ("outward sense") to the boy's mind she yet retains her motion and her humanizing garments against the involuntary, dehumanizing strength of that mind, and she thereby images the boy's own difficult struggle against his imagination. (179)

The girl's garments are implicated in the girl's doubled relation to the boy's mind. Her clothes maintain her humanity and her resistance to being appropriated even while she is an image (an externalization, a double) for the boy's own struggle. The boy's vision threatens the girl with divestment, a threat "she" resists despite the stripping wind. The garments make her human rather than denuding her to the condition of the naked pool. If for Chase garments are
the tropes that are at the least the necessary attendants of any critical reading, for Weiskel only the girl's nakedness could render her susceptible to reading.

As we have seen, Chase, Weiskel, Homans, Christensen, Wolfson, Ellis et. al. read over and over again certain passages in The Prelude, not only or not at all to divine their meaning, but to present arguments about structures of reading in general in The Prelude, or in Romanticism, or the possibility of reading at all. That these passages are somehow marked in The Prelude as requiring, "inviting" or "compelling" critical readings, the supplement of reading with a vengeance, is not impossible. Literary critics have certainly privileged and reprivileged these familiar moments in one quintessentially canonical text to make their arguments about the status of reading, as if certain passages can be almost infinitely plumbed for further and further depths. What I want to suggest now, however, is a way of reading that respects less and repeats less the sanctity and enclosure of the individual text, of the individual poet's mind.

The gibbet passage in The Prelude has garnered an extraordinary amount of attention and extraordinarily complex readings. But of course, it is far from the only poetic gibbet of the late eighteenth century. In
fact, gibbets were not only relatively common sights but poetic commonplaces, located on commons as public sights, they were also poetic commonplaces. There’s a striking gibbet, for instance, in "Salisbury Plane," which for Karen Swann in "Public Transport: Adventuring on Wordsworth’s Salisbury Plane" can suggest resistance to the law as well as its power. In Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads (1798), Jacobus sees this gibbet as a "symbol of untutored barbarism" as well as "a cautionary sight familiar to eighteenth century travellers" (154). William Taylor of Norwich’s popular translation of Burger’s "Des Pfarrers Tochter von Taubenhain," called "The Lass of Fair Wone" in the April 1796 edition of the Monthly Magazine, ends with just such a grim reminder, as does Southey’s "Poor Mary, the Maid of the Inn" which was almost certainly influenced by it.18 What Weiskel would argue makes Wordsworth’s Prelude gibbet special is the way it is no longer a symbol in any simple sense—any meaning it might symbolize will only ever be liminal (hence its nearly irresistible invitation to critics).19 But part of what I want to foreground in

18 Both poems are discussed in Jacobus’s Tradition and Experiment, 217-24, and Taylor’s rendering of Burger’s poem is printed in her Appendix II, 284-88.

19 Of course, this is just the distinction William K. Wimsatt, Jr. draws between Coleridge and Bowles in "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery" when he argues
this study is the commonplace rather than the deeply original, and that necessitates remembering that Wordsworth in the Penrith Beacon passage is revising rather than inventing a poetic commonplace, and one whose appearances were not limited to poetry.  

For instance, a gibbet in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* can suggest a very different

that Coleridge’s sonnet "To the River Otter" can be distinguished from Bowles’s "To The River Itchin" not only by its greater vividness ("One notices immediately, however, that the speaker has kept his eye more closely on the object," 82) but by its characteristically Romantic "blurring of literal and figurative" (86). For Wimsatt, Wordsworth’s "Tintern Abbey" is "the full realization of a poem for which Coleridge and Bowles had drawn slight sketches" (84).

20 It will not have escaped the attention of the attentive reader that my study is concerned with roughly the same historical period which so fascinated Foucault. Wordsworth’s deployment of the gibbet in *The Prelude* and "Salisbury Plain" can also be read in conjunction with Foucault’s argument in *Discipline and Punish* that this period marks the end of execution as a public spectacle. In both *The Prelude* and particularly in "Salisbury Plain" gibbets are signs of numbing horror. However in each instance the gibbet is, at the same time, somehow difficult to keep in sight. In "Salisbury Plain," the gibbet is "a spectacle which none might view/ in spot so savage" while by the 1789 *Prelude* the gibbet is "moulder down" and reduced to relic of "former times." In Wordsworth’s last published sonnet sequence, "Sonnets on the Punishment of Death," the actual mechanism of the death penalty is nowhere visible. Instead we find a fourteen-sonnet mediation on the God-like power of judges and the ultimately redemptive mercy of the death sentences they pronounce. Thus Wordsworth could be said to exemplify in his poetry the trajectory outlined by Foucault, the shift from an obsession with the body to an obsession with the soul. In this model, Wordsworth’s early gibbets would represent his echoing of a larger cultural transition rather than simply certain images of personal importance.
meditation on reading and interpretation. As Emily St. Aubert crosses the Alps with her father and Valancourt, she sees a sight which fills her, as it filled the boy poet, with apprehension:

This spot seemed the very haunt of banditti; and Emily, as she looked down upon it, almost expected to see them stealing out from some hollow cave to look for their prey. Soon after an object not less terrific struck her,—a gibbet standing on a point of rock near the entrance of the pass, and immediately over one of the crosses she had before observed. These were hieroglyphics that told a plain and dreadful story. She forbore to point it out to St. Aubert, but it threw a gloom over her spirits, and made her anxious to hasten forward, that they might with certainty reach Rousillon before night-fall. (54)

If the gibbet-passage from The Prelude dramatizes resistance to reading or a literalization of imaginative suspension, then the gibbet passage from Udolpho could be seen to dramatize a kind of excess of reading. Emily reads the "hieroglyphics" which tell

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21 Cf. Jerome McGann's reading of the second stanza of "A slumber did my spirit steal" in The Romantic Ideology (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983: "So, in the second stanza Wordsworth manipulates the initial "problem" of unconsciousness into an avenue of resolution. The ancient, dumb geosphere is instinct with (God's) spiritual life and order. It is an obscure but certain realm of secret, meaningful signs, and to decipher them is to be possessed of the ground of all contingent truths. It is the visionary's task and privilege to decipher these signs--in particular, the visionary poet's task. When Romantic poets deal with Nature and Imagination, then, they are invoking a specific network of doctrinal material. Ecological Nature is the locus of what is stable and orderly, and it is related to Imagination as a set of vital hieroglyphs is related to an interpretive key" (69).
"a plain and dreadful tale"—and the "plain tale" displaces the convention by which Emily is in fact "reading" hieroglyphics made up of material objects: a gibbet and a cross. This need to read the objects in the world around her into a narrative will provide the impetus for Emily's story for the rest of the novel. Where the poet of The Prelude flees the "characters inscribed" to seek a vision (a naked pool, a girl) which will ward off the knowledge of reading, or maintains a tropological structure in which reading is "literally" impossible, Emily will struggle to learn to read the world around her as "hieroglyphics" inscribed through which she will attempt to decode the mystery of Udolfo. As Pierre Macherey indirectly suggests in A Theory of Literary Production, the Gothic ultimately provides the model for what we now know as literary interpretation. For all the Wordsworth's passage may suggest resistance to reading, this resistance becomes a text that is quite readable using Gothic interpretive structures of surface and depth, illuminated and darkened spaces.

Emily St. Aubert is taught to read by her father:

This notion of heiroglyphs needing an interpretive key, as we shall see, is very closely related to Emily St. Aubert's struggles with reading in The Mysteries of Udolfo, as well as being crucial to the Gothic figures shot through literary criticism, psychoanalysis, and feminist theory. This figure continues to haunt one of the most enduring "women's genres": the female gothic.
St. Aubert cultivated her understanding with the most scrupulous care. He gave her a general view of the sciences and an exact acquaintance with every part of elegant literature. He taught her Latin and English, chiefly that she might understand the sublimity of their best poets. (6)

While the poet of The Prelude learns from the breathing presences of the hills around him, Emily learns to read alike from the classics and from landscapes — both in her father’s house. Houses stand in for patriarchal authority in Udolpho; when Emily first sees the castle of Udolpho the text reads:

Silent, lonely and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign. (227)

This vision of the sovereign authority of the castle occurs after Emily has several times "trembled more than ever, at the power of Montoni, which seemed unlimited as his will" (219). It is within this narrative, then, where houses repeat fathers, that the description of St. Aubert’s house is set. Curiously, in this opening passage, the chateau of St. Aubert seems to stand as a kind of shell, most notable for what may be seen through its windows:

On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert. From its windows were seen the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony, stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant woods and vines, and plantations of olives. To the south, the view was bounded by the majestic Pyrenees, whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapors rolled along...
The house of St. Aubert is a house of views, pastoral and sublime, where Emily learns to ramble among the scenes of nature, "where the silence and grandeur of solitude impressed a sacred awe upon her heart, and lifted her thoughts to the GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH" (6). The pattern in The Prelude is for the poet to repeat the same moment in nature (climbing the Alps, reascending the bare common away from the gibbet, climbing Snowdon) with variations so that these ascents direct and narratize the wandering course of the poet’s autobiography—and the repeated ascents form a narrative progression that culminates with a final vision. For Emily, nature is landscape and repetition—her experiences of the sublime will always be the same, the same "gloomy" "awesome" or "terrible" forms will always lead her thoughts to the same God. Because the other lesson in reading that Emily learns from her father—and this is important enough to be repeated almost verbatim at his death bed—is to "teach her to reject the first impulse of her feelings, and to look, with cool examination, upon the disappointments he sometimes threw in her way" (5). In Udolpho, Emily will encounter situations which will test her ability to follow her father’s advice to the limit. And in fact, for most of the novel she more or less fails, as she is repeatedly led to interpret mystifying
hieroglyphs as symptoms of supernatural agency. As with the poet in The Prelude however, Emily's difficulties with reading and interpretation provide the impetus for her narrative. The views through windows that constitutes her father's house model the way that Emily's father teaches her to read her impressions through a cool distance. It is this mode of reading that will finally be "right" although at Udolpho Emily is bombarded with vision after vision which work to draw her into a narrative of first impressions. It is only after tremendous struggles and fortuitous rescues that these mistaken readings will be cleared away by the light of rationality. For Emily, the objects and events around her will always constitute "hieroglyphics" from which she must try to decipher a "plain tale."

Although I have stressed the different structures of reading inscribed in these two texts, what should be equally stressed is the extraordinarily high confluence of images that recur not only in The Prelude and Udolpho, but across a range of Gothic novels and Romantic texts, a confluence which suggests that the normally gendered distinction between Gothic and Romantic is, in fact, highly unstable. To put it

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22 As we will see in Chapter II, although the Gothic in Britain began with The Castle of Otranto and was for some time dominated by The Monk, the genre quickly took
another way, the poet of *The Prelude* learns fully as much about re-writing Enlightenment tropes from the Gothic as from Grey or Cowper. Gothicism popularized the shadowy passages and difficult readings that Wordsworth formalized, or rather Gothicism can stand as an easy shorthand for the casting of shadows across the clarity of the enlightenment. Another way to put this is that it is just as productive to read Romantic poetry in terms of the Gothic as it is to read the Gothic in terms of Romantic poetry, although the gendering of high culture/low culture distinctions resists this suggestion. What makes clear the common discourses in which Gothicism and Romanticism take

on an explicitly feminization, and since Jane Austen brilliantly recast it in *Northanger Abbey* it has been a central genre for women writers and readers.

Mary Jacobus's important study of influences in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* more or less confines itself to canonical sources, and, significantly, entirely to poetry. She acknowledges, for instance, a certain continuity between his work and that of the popular magazines: "Planning a periodical of his own . . . Wordsworth himself had complained of 'the trash which infests the magazines'; yet *Lyrical Ballads* uses many of the themes and genres most popular in the poetry-sections" (184); although she goes on to argue that, "Wordsworth's assault on 'the gaudiness and insane phraseology of many modern writers' ['Advertisement'; Prose Works i 116] constitutes an assault on their lack of engagement; his own writing, by contrast attempts to bridge the gap between literature and life, asserting a community of feeling between sophisticated and simple, literate and illiterate" (185). That is, she invokes this continuity briefly and only to cast into relief what is individual and particular to Wordsworth's work.
part, the extent to which, ultimately, they are not significantly different categories, is the absolute obsession of both with vision: the extraordinary repetition in constantly shifting inflections of verbs of seeing. The contours of these shifting paradigms may be tracked across countless repeated tropes (gibbets and reading characters, mountaintops as vantage points, the play of light and darkness on perception, vision and imagination, etc.). But the shifting paradigms of perception constitute—in Romanticism and Gothicism together—the single biggest challenge to the Enlightenment.24

Contemporary scholars of the nineteenth century have tended to see "it" as something categorically different from the eighteenth, and in particular different from those uncomfortable excesses of its

24 This questioning of the role of the perceiver is, of course, not new with the High Romantics, although people tend to write as though it is. In Udolpho, for instance, we read, "To a warm imagination, the dubious forms, that float, half-veiled in darkness, afford a higher delight, than the most distinct scenery, than the sun can shew. While the fancy thus wanders over landscapes partly of its own creation..." (598-9). Although this question of perception may be taken up more centrally as a subject for Romantic poetry, this preoccupation is a continuation of a series of questions that extends back to the effects of the science of optics on the devout and cavalier poetry of the seventeenth century. Certainly the aesthetic theories of the latter part of the eighteenth century were part of the growing concern with these questions.
latter decades. For instance, Robert Langbaum writes, in *The Poetry of Experience*: 

> It would be wrong to suppose that Carlyle and Mill have as yet at this point entered intellectually into the nineteenth century. They have reached at this point a stage equivalent to that of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, a stage we might call negative romanticism or, as the Germans call it, Storm and Stress. It is the stage of tears, of that deluge of tears on the tide of which the eighteenth century was quite washed away." (16)

In addition to repeating William Wordsworth's famous characterization of a flood or deluge of sensational writings from the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," Langbaum has to locate Carlyle and Mill in some sense in the eighteenth century. In contrast, this study will stress the extent to which what Langbaum here refers to as "eighteenth-century sentimentalism" was never, in fact, "quite washed away."

### iii. Reading and Enclosure

*Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated--overpopulated--with the intentions of others.*

Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 294

I have stressed that this study will not focus on the potential "depth" of any one passage. I argue that some sense of the publicness, the over-populatedness of language must be foregrounded even in this Romantic/post-Romantic era, which still equates the public and the shared with the false, the shallow, the degraded and the outrageous. As with the gibbet passage
above, I am interested not so much in the individual and the deep as in the shared, the repeated, in short the banal—precisely the potentially falsifying and shared "garments" of writing. This structure of reading consciously works against the traditional literary critical (Romantic) assumption that certain canonical works should be read over and over and continuously plumbed for greater and greater depths (which are in critical conception ultimately private)²⁵, and that, in fact, this capacity of illimitable interpretation is what defines their "greatness." This insistence on rereading has characterized how we decide what counts as Literature, that which benefits from continued rereading in Barthes's sense: "Rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere)...rereading is no longer consumption, but play" (16). I will refer to this "rereading" as Romantic Reading, to distinguish it from that other

²⁵ Jon Klancher makes a related critique of Jerome Christensen's, "The Method of The Friend," in Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language: "the discourse it reconstructs is mis-leadingly self-enclosed and gives us no sense of what Coleridge elaborated such stylistic oppositions for. Restricting himself to the 1818 Friend, Christensen makes it a philosophical (or, given his perspective, a grammatological) summa rather than, as in 1809, a first real intervention in England's existing cultural and social relations" The Making of English Reading Audiences, 200, n. 17.
reading presumably appropriate for those texts which we "consume" and throw away. Although my work relies to a certain extent on readings of Wordsworth’s major poems, I hope to shift my focus away from Romantic Reading both by giving critical readings of Wordsworth center stage and by reading Wordsworth as one culturally powerful exemplar of very widespread rhetorical practices.

My emphasis on the banal and the commonplace structures each chapter, which will present "clustered" readings, examining certain structures of tropes which are shared, repeated, which are commonplace in texts called Romantic and texts called feminist. My methodology will seem most obviously to borrow (ultimately from Benjamin) from a kind of postmodern aesthetic of pastiche and ironic juxtaposition (e.g. such as characterizes the fiction of Manuel Puig or the photographs of Cindy Sherman). I want to make as explicit as possible, though, that I am not attempting to sketch out in any clear and simple terms lines of "influence" or filiation. That is, I have not researched and do not want to claim, for instance, that Minnie Bruce Pratt read and studied Ann Radcliffe’s novels. Indeed, I determinedly do not want to make such claims at all, for, I would argue, to do so would be to too easily privilege the "ownership" rights of
individual writers over certain tropes. I am most curious about those tropes which can be found in any number of contemporary texts. In fact, the tropes I am interested in are important precisely because they are common property and, like common women, commonly degraded, because of their general use. More or less continuously available at least since the Romantic period (generously defined), at certain periods they erupt into wide use and can enjoy enormous popularity. The motivations and more properly the effects of this wide-spread use are the focus of my study. I assume that tropes, when used widely, can at the least express fantasies about and possibly enact social change. Of course, I may seem to be paying undue attention to the frills and furbelows of the text. However, as we will see, this very conception of banal figures of speech as garments or accessories depends for its legibility on the Romantic tradition.

This concern of mine comes at a time when the insistence of oppositional discourses on deep analysis appears to me to be singularly ineffective in contrast with the wildly repeatable soundbites of the New Right (can you say "Willy Horton," "politically correct," "left McCarthyism," or "are you better off now than you were four years ago?"?). Repeatability may more than anything signal social change (think of "the personal
is political" almost twenty years ago), even while intellectuals of all political persuasions decry the emptying out of meaning from words and phrases so promiscuously common. Without bracketing the problematic nature of this kind of emptying out, I want to concentrate on the uses and effects of this kind of repetition, which I will call, "political repetition."

In short, it should be apparent that the kind of work I am interested in has a certain allegiance to the tradition of rhetoric, particularly as Jane Tompkins invokes it in her "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism" and "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response," which bracket her anthology Reader-Response Criticism (1980). In these essays lies the assumption, which she has in common with a number of U.S. feminist writers—Barbara Smith, Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde come particularly to mind—that "language [is] the ultimate form of power" (xxv), and that:

The insistence that language is constitutive of reality rather than merely reflective of it suggests that contemporary critical theory has come to occupy a position very similar to, if not the same as, that of the Greek rhetoricians for whom mastery of language meant mastery of the state. (226)

Hence I read the intersections between feminist theory and Romantic rhetoric—not exclusively in the metaveral "ideas" or "theories," but in the details of
writing; not the thesis sentences but the figures of speech, the "as it weres", the "inessential,"
"throwaway" parts of the writing, which function at least as crucially to structure meaning as the cognitive argumentation. That my strategies of reading follow Freud in structure rather than ontology should be apparent in my desire to avoid making claims about the depth of the enclosed individual/text "using" these figures of speech and my explicit concern with displacing a focus on them as the "private property" of this or that writer. Neither am I interested in attempting to "psychoanalyze," except in the most trivial fashion, the networks of texts which invoke and repeat these figures.26 In fact, as we shall see in Chapter II, I am more interested in tracing the continuity of the notion of enclosed and unplumbed depths since the Gothic/Romantic period than I am in

26 Something of this approach may be suggested, however, in Terry Castle's essay, "Phantasmagoria," which has greatly influenced my work: "By the time of Freud, the rhetorical pattern had resolved, as it were, into a cultural pathology: everyone felt 'haunted.' That is to say, the mind itself now seemed a kind of supernatural space, filled with intrusive presences--incursions from past or future, ready to terrify, pursue, or disable the harried subject. Freud struggled with the paradoxes of spectralization, largely by attempting to define a cognitive practice--psychoanalysis--which would exorcise these "ghostly presences" once and for all" (59).
using that model in a circular fashion to "read" the texts it structures.27

In the Classical conception of rhetoric, from Cicero to Hugh Blair, figurative language represented "garments" whose function was to decorate the meaning, the "plain tale" which lay underneath. This understanding of figurative language serves today in theories which assume that figures of speech are throwaways, fripperies that at best may help the intellectually beleaguered reader grasp more adequately what is being aimed at (the image of "aiming beyond," of course, is quintessentially Romantic). This use of figurative speech often appears most nakedly in writing that aims at explaining "science" to a popular audience as well in Presidential addresses of late. If we accept Cynthia Chase's argument that the Romantic tradition consists of a certain slippage between the literal and the figurative, then we might expect that theories of figurative language derived from this

27 Jon Klancher, in The Making of English Reading Audiences, similarly stresses the need to historicize critical terms, although this argument is more or less relegated to a footnote: "This analysis unavoidably recalls Jacques Derrida's notion of the "supplement" in Of Grammatology . . . . Like Arthur Young's opposition between discourses that "circulated" or "disseminate," Paine's metaphors involve constituting and deconstituting these historical texts without any help from latter-day French radical thinkers. They also force us to historicize categories that appear on our own cultural scene as avant-garde, as historically unprecedented" (196, n. 20).
tradition to survive in competition with the Classical model. And in fact, we will find that feminist theories of language pick up with surprising consistency Romantic beliefs in the status of figurative language.

iv. "we only touch each other naked"

And if I have so often insisted on negatives: not, nor, without . . . it has been to remind you, to remind us, that we only touch each other naked. And that, to find ourselves once again in that state, we have a lot to take off. So many representations, so many appearances separate us from each other. They have wrapped us for so long in their desires, we have adorned ourselves so often to please them, that we have come to forget the feel of our own skin. Removed from our skin, we remain distant. You and I, apart.


Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 217-18

We left Wordsworth watching the woman with "her garments vexed and tossed." Clearly, women’s figures have been objects of obsessive investigation not only in feminist theory, popular culture, and pornography, but in the discourse of Romanticism. Homans remarks of Wordsworth’s visionarily dreary girl that:

The girl forcing her way against the wind revives the woman effaced by the operation of the symbolic order. If the symbolic characters depend on the unmarked death of a woman, then it follows that the recovery of the image would require the return, not just of any image, but specifically of the image of a woman. And yet it is not a wife and mother who returns, but a girl carrying her pitcher. If according to Lacanian theory the renunciation of the mother leads to a quest for a series of metaphoric substitutions for her—in the form, according to Judith Herman, of younger, less
powerful women—then the substitution of this living girl for the dead woman would constitute just such a move along the chain of symbolic substitutions. The fact that her sexuality is signified by her pitcher, an ostentatiously symbolic object, would contribute to making her a symbol herself. If this is so . . . Wordsworth’s turn away from the symbol toward the image is more ambivalent than it at first seems. (47-48)

For Homans, this ambivalence is not just significantly but inevitably readable in the figure of a woman,\(^{28}\) whose ostentatiously symbolic pitcher (picture?) works against the garments of which the wind strains to dispossess her.\(^{29}\) If, for Homans, the literal suggests mother-daughter language, then this passage trembles uneasily between not just two modes of language but two modes of gendering. In Wordsworth, these literally un-easy, textual tremors often take place around the figure of a woman, and not only that, around the figure of her always potential nakedness. As Jacobus, in *Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference*, remarks of another uneasily dressed figure of a woman in *The Prelude*, "When the painted woman and her beautiful boy rise up\(^{30}\) in Wordsworth’s path, what

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\(^{28}\) This "girl," by the way, is a "girl" in the boy’s first vision of her in all three versions of *The Prelude*. In the boy’s second seeing, however, she is a "woman" only in the 1799 and 1805 texts. In the 1850 *Prelude* she becomes a "female."

\(^{29}\) See my discussion of Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley* in Chapter V.

\(^{30}\) like the drowned man?
they figure is the seduction of figuration itself, along with the error of romance (the romance of error)" (236).  

Women and their dressing and their figures have also been a central concern with this most recent wave of "the" feminist movement, or as bell hooks (felicitously) would have it, of "feminist movement." Consider, for instance, the most striking visual associations with the earliest days of women's lib in the late 1960s and early 1970s: bra-burners and the striking rejection of the costumes of femininity: hair spray and make-up, high-heels and girdles. The conjunction of a "back to nature" ethos with a stress on de-costuming women is again no coincidence.

This concern, within feminism, of women with their costumes has continued unabated if somewhat transfigured to this day. Now, of course, à la Judith Butler, Susie Sexpert and others it is a symptom of unregenerate cultural and critical naivete to suggest that any "taking off" of costuming, of figuration, is

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31 In this context, Jacobus quotes Erasmus Darwin on the Muses: they are "young ladies, and we wish to see them dressed" to which the editors of Wordsworth’s Prose Works (i, 172 n.) have referred her.

32 There weren’t any, of course. However, once again, the popular longevity of this image (it was recently revealed the Marge Simpson was a bra-burner, for instance) suggests at the least an anxiety about free-floating breasts.
possible." Consider, for instance, the unusually harsh criticisms directed towards what is now called the "old" concern with "images of women" criticism, such as Toril Moi's observation (primarily directed against Elaine Showalter) that "Implicit in such criticism is the assumption that good feminist fiction would present truthful images of strong women with which the reader may identify. . . . What feminists such as Showalter and Holly fail to grasp is that the traditional humanism they represent is in effect part of patriarchal ideology" (7-8). That is, representations can never be "taken off"; any representation is ultimately in some fashion a falsifying garment. In a currently more popular formulation, Judith Butler argues (re: drag shows in particular) that, "Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions" (140). As she argues later:

Practices of parody can serve to reengage and consolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic—a failed copy, as it were. And surely parody has been used to further a politics of

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33 See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Susie Sexpert's *Lesbian Sex World*. 
despair, one which affirms a seemingly inevitable exclusion of marginal genders from the territory of the natural and the real. And yet this failure to become "real" and to embody "the natural" is, I would argue, a constitutive failure of all gender enactments for the very reason that these ontological locales are fundamentally uninhabitable. (146)

Besides repeating without crediting popular feminist insights from the 1970s about the "unnaturalness of gender" [in a disturbing move repeated by Linda Nicholson in her "Introduction" to Feminism/Postmodernism in which, after denigrating the naive formulations of "cultural feminism" she comes up with (wherever from?) the metaphor of a quilt to suggest her "new" model of cultural practice], Butler's formulation brackets, even while seeming to refer to, the struggles of power and entitlement waged around women's costumes. Be that as it may, what is crucial here is the fact that "women's costumes" (in Butler's case, as worn by men) are a crucial, central, obsessively repeated, and widely used figure across the terrain of women's writing. The other "side" of this struggle is characterized by Suzanne Moore in "Style Culture and Designer Gender" when she writes:

Yet here politics reappears not dressed up in the latest clothes but as politics itself—as a life-and-death struggle. As, dare I say it, reality. All of this I think has strong implications for the Cultural Politics of the nineties. For if style culture has been in some ways a feminising move, colonising traditionally feminine areas, aestheticising the everyday, reveling in superficiality, it still can't be said to have
anything to do with feminism if we continue to understand feminism as a depth model. (46).

Obviously at stake here is the price of continuing "to understand feminism as a depth model." What is crucial about this debate is the way it obsessively and unquestioningly returns again and again to the same tropes of costume. For Butler, costume successfully and necessarily displaces the hegemonic illusions of "the real" and "the natural"; for Moore it covers over "real" politics and feminist "depth." To borrow from a widely popular and often cited early feminist essay: Culture is to Nature as Costume is to . . . what? As we've seen, though, in Butler as well as in Wordsworth, rather than a simple structure of opposition, there is a kind of trembling, a hesitation, and tension between the figure and its ground. To

34 See also the sharp exchange between Elaine Showalter and Terry Eagleton that began with Showalter's essay, "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year" in Men in Feminism, Jardine and Smith, eds.

35 In an interesting moment of feminist rhetoric, Tania Modleski writes: "we might prefer to replace Austin's example with a sartorial one and think of feminist performative writing as a sort of "fashion statement," a styling of unconventional femininities" ("The Scandal of the Mute Body," 56). Here, following Virginia Woolf (the famous "football and sport are important, the worship of fashion they buying of clothes trivial") Modleski attempts to replace an illustration drawing on football images with images of fashion. She sees this as feminist move because it involves a replacement of a "masculine" tropology with a "feminine" one; she is attempting to elevate the rhetorical power of "fashion," its performative power.
put it another way, just because the sites/sights of gender are "ontologically uninhabitable" does not mean they are uninhabited. I also want to stress the fact that this conversation is in no way limited to the perhaps sometimes too simplistically delimited realm of "theory." As I write this passage, feminists (however defined) and others are debating the politics of style, and the difficulty of making choices about shaving, about high heels, about stockings and skirts, about hair and make-up, as active agents in a cultural field in which no possible choice is not already contained by someone else's definitions, in which, to borrow from Bakhtin, the language of style is already inhabited and over-populated with the intentions of others. Consider also the popularizing drive of the recent exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum of American History: "Men and Women: A History of Costume, Gender and Power," which stressed the power of style as both reflective and constitutive of a power imbalance between the sexes. A review by Farer Elliot in *Off Our Backs* notes that "the press materials and the gallery brochures tend to obscure the show's clearly inevitable focus on women and appearance" (8). Both the fact that the brochures tended "to obscure" the focus on women and the fact that for Elliot it was "clearly inevitable" suggests the extent to which, the popularity of drag shows
notwithstanding, women are precisely the signifiers of style. In fact, drag shows can only highlight and repeat this obsessive anxiety about and investigation into the "garments" of "women."

In an approach which brackets neither "style" nor "substance" Gloria Anzaldúa introduces her anthology Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras: Critical Perspectives by Women of Color thus:

Masks and Interfaces/ Caras y mascaras. Among Chicanas/mexicanas, haciendo caras, "making faces," means to put on a face, express feelings by distorting the face—frowning, grimacing, looking sad, glum, or disapproving. For me, haciendo caras has the added connotation of making gestos subversivos, political subversive gestures, the piercing look that questions or challenges, the look that says, "Don't walk all over me," the one that says, "Get out of my face."

"Face" is the surface of the body that is the most noticeably inscribed by social structures, marked with instructions on how to be mujer, macho, working class, Chicana. As mestizas--biologically and/or culturally mixed--we have different faces for each aspect of identity, each inscribed by a particular subculture. We are "written" all over, or should I say, carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience. (xv)

Although she ends this paragraph with an image of faces as a kind of tabula rasa painfully tattooed by culture, Anzaldúa begins with a face making itself, looking back, with a literalization of the figure of prosopopeia that de Man and Chase see as central even if always already effaced in Wordsworth's autobiographical project. One way to put this is that while Chase's de Manian reading of Wordsworth's figures
responds to a morbidly Gothic fascination with abandoned tropes and dead figures and doomed interpretation, Anzaldu/a's invokes another kind of speaking face, face-making figure.

At the risk of repeating myself, let me state that I am not arguing that Gloria Anzaldu/a, or Butler or Moore are reading and learning from Wordsworth's Prelude. Instead I want to suggest the promiscuous commonality, even if variously deployed, of certain figures of figures in Romantic discourse and in feminism. By "Romantic discourse" here I necessarily mean the way Romanticism is deployed in figures of reading by current literary theorists, in many ways Romanticism's most obvious heirs. But I also want to sketch out what will be demonstrated in the succeeding chapters: that these Romantic figures are by no means the exclusive property of any one writer or privately enclosed "text" or discourse; rather they are striking precisely because they are so widely repeated in the texts of feminism today. Because of the astonishing proliferation of these tropes no part of this study can be anything but suggestive. I can only ask you, as Keats asked his correspondents, to fill in for me my letters in the air.
Chapter II

Gothic Archaeology

There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said, to play on words a little, that in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument.

Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge

Seen in historical terms, as an offshoot of the radically introspective habit of mind initiated in the late eighteenth century, psychoanalysis seems both the most poignant critique of romantic consciousness to date, and its richest and most perverse elaboration.

Terry Castle, "The Spectralization of the Other in The Mysteries of Udolpho," 252

Excessive outbursts of popular Gothic fiction characterized both the 1790s and the late 1960s–early 1970s. These two outbursts have much in common. The texts of neither period have acceded to the category of Literature. Although the work of Walpole, Lewis, and Radcliffe has to a certain extent been sanctified by time, the work of contemporary popular authors such as Victoria Holt, Phyllis Whitney, and Barbara Michaels has certainly not been investigated under the rubric of literature. Both outbursts have been described with images suggesting their enormous excess and repetitive
banality rather than a deep and insular originality. Although the major tropes structuring our concepts of Literature and its Interpretation—surface vs. depth, inside vs. outside, fragment vs. whole—can be seen to derive from the Gothic, gothic novels themselves fail to attain to the condition of Literature. To put it another way, gothic novels merely thematize depth, while other works of writing "have" it.

The privileged grid for the interpretation of gothic novels from both periods has been psychoanalysis—a practice whose structures and insights have often been seen to be uncannily anticipated or revealed in gothic texts. The novels of both periods have been read through psychoanalysis as investigations of women's "spaces" in culture, the enclosed spaces of "home." The 1790s have been seen as a particularly fraught transition period in which women were increasingly relegated at the level of ideology to their place in the home. The Gothic boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s has also been seen as an investigation of women's fears of confinement and male power, although the most famous reading of these novels—Tania Modleski's in Loving with a Vengeance—is classically psychoanalytic in that it brackets the very particular contexts of this boom and focuses more on timeless female anxieties in a patriarchal culture.
Both Gothic booms, however, are associated with periods of tremendous social upheaval—of terrific fragmentation in the sense of a shared culture, in the definition of civilization, and contestation about the role of women in that civilization. In both periods, the status of women and the status of Literature and Culture were in particular disarray—and both Gothic tropes and Gothic structures circulated insistently through the confusion of the times.

I have said that Tania Modleski's reading of the popular gothic novels of the late 1960s and early 1970s relies on psychoanalysis and brackets history. In her introduction to Loving with a Vengeance, Modleski remarks that in her chapter on popular gothics she relies "more exclusively on a psychoanalytic approach . . . than in any of the others" (33). Modleski's study is just one of many that notice a certain "fit" between Gothic plots and psychoanalysis. As we've seen, psychoanalytic readings use a thematics of surface and depth to tremendous affect. In chapter one I examined how this tropology enables powerful readings of the spots of time passages from The Prelude. At first glance this interpretive structure would seem less useful for the popular gothic novels of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These are novels whose numbers and whose repetitions work against the model of original
depth which canonical Romantic texts support. In fact, Wordsworth explicitly defined his project in opposition to the waves of frantic novels that swelled and crested during his period. That is, if Literature is that which stands isolate and original, then the banal and formulaic quality of gothic fictions makes them ineligible. Their massy qualities have moved the recent wave of gothic novels over under the rubric of popular culture or culture studies. Precisely because of their lack of originality, they have served as symptoms of a larger cultural malaise. This tendency to a certain extent conflicts with the way that they also seem to "invite" psychoanalytic readings—readings which rely on a thematics of depth. Modleski and others have responded to this problem by treating these novels as truly generic—as, in fact, a kind of set of identities in which any one novel can stand in for all of the others and the critic can provide a reading of a kind of standard gothic novel, borrowing examples from many to present a reading of the one gothic plot. The massive numbers of gothic novels, the categorization under "mass culture," as having all surface and no depth, conflicts with the common sense that they "invite" psychoanalytic readings.

However, this seeming invitation is a ruse. That is, psychoanalytic interpretation is not merely a tool
of literary interpretation which could be applied to any text but happens to work particularly well with gothics. In fact, the meeting of psychoanalysis and the Gothic can be figured as an encounter between doubles, dopplegangers who suddenly spy their own features in each other. Psychoanalysis seems to work uncannily well with gothic novels because both are descendants of and heavily structured by the tropes of Gothic romanticism. Gothic novels and psychoanalytic investigations are structured by the same tropes. One of the most central of these tropes is archaeology.

Freud famously saw himself as an archaeologist. Gothic heroines also function as archaeologists—investigating burial sites, piecing together fragmentary accounts, searching for the buried truth. In both psychoanalysis and gothic novels we find an uneasily maintained faith that the truth—once reconstructed—will set you free. A similar faith marks much of the feminist literary criticism of the 1970s, which is also replete with references to our need to "reconstruct" a "buried" tradition of women writers. In each discourse, archaeology is a master trope for the interpretive process and in each case the sense of assurance and comfort that archaeological reconstructions bring is also fraught with a certain anxiety about the status of the reconstruction, about
its authenticity.

Gothic romantic tropes of archaeology have proved particularly productive for feminist writers of the past twenty years as well as for writers of the exceedingly popular gothic romances. That is, the prevalence of archaeological tropes suggests not only the doubling involved in encounters between psychoanalysis and gothic novels but the conjunction once again between Gothic romanticism and feminism. In this chapter I will examine the use of Gothic archaeology in the recent wave of gothic romances both to suggest the tropological continuity between these novels and more High Culture Literary forms and to show how Gothic archaeology in the 1790s and in the past twenty years has worked to empower heroines, to explore the places of confinement to which women have been relegated, and to provide a model for interpretation and intervention which addresses these problems. Before taking up the use of Gothic archaeology in contemporary gothics and contemporary feminist writing, I will examine critical evaluations of the two outbursts of popular gothic writing and the configuration of archaeological investigation—the construction of archaeology.

i. Gothic Feminism

Toward the end of the seventeenth century in England, a new territory for novelistic events is
constituted and reinforced in the so called "Gothic" or "black" novel -- the castle (first used in this meaning by Horace Walpole in The Castle of Otranto, and later in Radcliffe, Monk Lewis and others). The castle is saturated through and through with a time that is historical in the narrow sense of the word, that is, the time of the historical past.

Bakhtin, "Form and Chronotope in Literature"

The early Gothic period in English literature is also marked by the appearance of what is usually seen as the first recognizably modern feminist polemic, Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Both the periods under investigation in this study are marked both by a craze for the gothic and polemics on social justice, including feminist polemics. In 1764, with the publication of The Castle of Otranto, Horace Walpole inaugurated one of those excessive passions for genre at which literary historians have generally nodded their collective heads in rueful acknowledgement that, however inexplicably, it did happen and even Great Writers were caught up in it, misled by the passions of their times. As Eve Sedgwick writes at the beginning of The Coherence of Gothic Conventions: "few Gothic novels are worth reading." According to this model, while the impact of Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s new literary movement is readily understandable, given their colonizing power and individual genius, the craze for the gothic in the late 1700s has remained until
recently merely a curiosity. Like the craze for Ossian or for graveyard poetry during the mid-1700s, the

In The Search for the Picturesque, Malcolm Andrews notes that: "Pleasing melancholy' and 'agreeable horror' were two types of emotional experience induced by the contemplations of ruins. Both feature prominently in mid-century taste. At the end of the century, Charles Heath, the author of one of the best-known tour guidebooks, asserted that 'no two pieces of Poetry, in the English language, have been more universally read, or admired, than Dr. Blair's 'Grave', and Mr. Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard'. Both these pieces belong in composition to the 1740s, and, along with Edward Young's Night Thoughts (1742-45) and Thomas Parnell’s Night Piece on Death (1722), constitute what, in a later age, came to be known as the Graveyard school of poetry.

One critic, C.A. Moore, who has made a particular study of this mid-century phenomenon has claimed that, statistically, the period deserves to be called the Age of Melancholy. Melancholy was a notoriously English affliction, and even earned the name the 'English Malady'. That was the title of an authoritative book on the subject in 1733 by Dr George Cheyne, who, in his Preface, attributed these 'nervous Distempers' and 'Lowness of Spirits' to several factors such as the dampness of the English climate, the richness of diet and sedentary occupations of the 'better sort (among whom the Evil mostly rages)', and the crowded conditions of the big towns. He also noted the recent rise in the suicide rate and judged that it was caused largely by this malady. In the 1750s and especially in 1755, suicide seems to have reached epidemic proportions. Moore suggests that the Graveyard poets and their successors who felt the impulse the indulge the melancholy mood were forced by the prevailing ethos to resort to methods of indirection. Thus the 'meditatio mori' in ruined abbeys and country churchyards became much favored as a kind of religious screen for morbid emotionalism. In the later decades of the century the religious pretext is dropped. Robert Aubin, in his authoritative study of topographical poetry, notes that by the 1780s most English poets had substituted unabashed sentimentality for charnel-house horror. The uninhibited indulgence of 'pleasing melancholy' becomes one of the most compelling motives for the Picturesque tourist to visit ruined abbeys and castles. (41-42) This sense that the English are particularly prone to suicide appears a bit anachronistically in Ann Radcliffe's The Romance of the
gothic period, for literary historians, is marked by excess (remember Langbaum's image of "the deluge of tears")—excessive tears, excessive consumption of repetitious texts, and architectural excesses like Walpole's own Strawberry Hill. In *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*, for instance, J.M.S. Tompkins characterizes the Gothic Romance thus:

>The Gothic Romance was the predominant literary fashion of the 'nineties and extended, amid the outcries of critics, well into the next century. Like the beanstalk, it shot up overnight into redundant vegetation, and enterprising novelists thronged its stem. (243)

For Tompkins, the Gothic appeared too quickly and throve not only into lush vegetation but into

*Forest* (1791). While Adeline is sojourning in Savoy with the enlightened family of La Luc, they are visited by a young chevalier who debates the role of happiness in life with La Luc. The chevalier, M.Vernueil, argues that, "When we observe the English, their laws, writings, and conversation, and at the same time mark their countenances, manners, and the frequency of suicide among them, we are apt to believe that wisdom and happiness are incompatible" (268-9).

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2 These images of Gothic excess recur throughout Tompkins' chapter, "The Gothic Romance": she remarks that Radcliffe's talent is no longer obscured by "the excess of its own charms" and (in another horticultural metaphor) that recent studies have succeeded in "cutting through" the "redundancies" of her novels (248); her fiction is characterized by "skilful though too lavish" use of suspense (261); and Schiller's work in particular and German Romances in general "came to connote wile extravagance of sentiment and incident, passion would up to the highest pitch, horror, grotesqueness, and the expression of all these qualities in inflated language" (289)
"redundant vegetation" thronged with presumably equally redundant novelists. Since "redundant" does not seem to work too well with the image of one beanstalk (it is a confused if not a mixed metaphor), it seems as if Gothic excess is creeping into Tompkins' own metaphors. As Tompkins continues later, in the kind of Gothic rhetoric that tends to creep into criticisms of the Gothic:

But the guilt of the degeneration should not be laid wholly at the German door, for though without the Schauerroman there might have been a little less crudity and horror in the Gothic Romance, it must equally have perished of over-elaboration and over-emphasis, and all the consequences of the endeavor to outdo its first models. Even in the hands of its finest exponent, it was precariously balanced over the abysses of the ludicrous and disreputable, so that a movement in any direction must confound it. It was a folly, run up without any consideration of the needs of reasonable beings, a glaring and picturesque facade on the edge of a precipice, uninhabitable by flesh and blood, or even by authentic ghosts. (247)

In an absolutely paradigmatic moment of Romantic Reading, Tompkins' own prose is most shot through with Gothic tropes precisely when she is attempting most clearly to distance herself from this excessive and

3 The genre is later characterized by its "wilfulness," a curious kind of anthropomorphizing which echoes this passage in its insistence on the genre's own o'er weaning ambition. A later similarly sublime metaphor compares Radcliffe to her peers: "Other had paddled toy-boats in the edge of the perilous seas; her great ship takes the tide with its flags floating and its mistress aboard" (249). As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwich notes in her 1986 "Preface" to her 1976, The Coherence of Gothic Conventions, her study "performs as much as thematizes certain Gothic gestures" (vi).
debased genre. In her thrilling narrative, Gothic Romance, like a certain brand of Gothic anti-hero, contains within itself the tragic flaw which will lead inexorably to its demise; the seeming intervention from outside that seems to promise destruction is only a ruse. This tragic flaw, this over-reaching and excessive endeavor keep it always balanced over the abyss (a truly sublime sight), always "glaring" and "picturesque" and specifically "uninhabitable" just like Udolopho and many another Gothic castle. As we see again and again, Romantic reading seems almost inevitably to recycle tropes from the literature for which it is ostensibly offering critique or commentary.

As we have seen, these literary/historical valuations not only use the Gothic to critique the Gothic, but repeat Wordsworth’s own founding scorn, in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," his reference to "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and the deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse." It sheds an interesting light on the production of literary history to note that this passage has been so often repeated as to be one of the most famous passages in the "Preface." Rather than asking what texts Wordsworth is referring to here (a helpful footnote in English Romantic Poetry suggests Radcliffe, Lewis, and the translated works of Kotzebue), we can
see the rhetorical structure of his opposition as a founding moment in our contemporary configuration of high and low culture.

Literary historical approaches to the Gothic craze have been characterized by puzzlement, a failure to understand how texts so banal could have achieved such a widespread popularity, and not only with women and others all too susceptible to the lure of irrationality. However, in fact, I think this lack of attention to this inscrutable Gothic excess primarily represents a failure to take seriously what came to be seen—despite Walpole and Monk Lewis—as a peculiarly feminine genre and a reluctance to engage with the debased masses of low culture texts. As should be clear by now, this stance involves repeating Wordsworth’s own in a most literal fashion.

This historical coincidence between the feminist and the Gothic was repeated in the latter years of this century. The 1960s and early 1970s, the years of Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics*, Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*, and Rita Mae Brown’s *Rubyfruit Jungle*, were also the years in which the casual observer wandering past any airport newsstand or into any bookstore would confront, without a great deal of surprise, rack upon rack of cheap paperbacks with covers that depicted a young woman with long unbound
hair in a flowing white gown fleeing in terror from a
dark mansion or brooding castle. In *Reading the
Romance*, Janice Radway dates the gothic boom to 1960
when Gerald Gross of Ace books, recalling the sustained
popularity of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, inaugurated
his new "gothic line" with Phyllis Whitney's *Thunder
Heights* while at the same time Doubleday was issuing
Victoria Holt's enormously successful *Mistress of
Mellyn*. While Radway ventures some explanation for the
popularity of these novels, which began in 1960 and
seemed to increase exponentially throughout the decade,
she attributes it primarily to the marketing acumen of
the publishers and the helpless passivity of the women
readers who consumed these fictions in enormous
numbers: because "social constraints" on women limited
"their diffusion throughout social space. . . as a
potential book-buying public [they were] remarkably
easy to reach" during their visits to supermarkets and
drugstores, primary outlets for this fiction (32). For
Radway, this accelerating popularity represents a
surprising disjunction from what was happening to the
rest of America in the 1960s. Before attempting to
document in summary fashion the enormous popularity of
gothic romances, she briefly gestures toward the
cultural events that surrounded this publishing boom:

The popularity of gothic romances increased
throughout the decade of the 1960s. While
American college students were beginning to protest American involvement in Vietnam and a gradually increasing number of feminists vociferously challenged female oppression, more and more women purchased novels whose plots centered about developing love relationships between wealthy, handsome men and "spunky" but vulnerable women. The audience for gothics grew to such proportions that by the early 1970s works of top gothic authors outsold the works of equivalent writers in all other categories of paperback fiction, including mysteries, science fiction, and Westerns. A typical Whitney or Holt paperback began with a first printing of 800,000 copies. . . . At the peak of their popularity, from about 1969 to 1972, gothics issues at the rate of thirty-five titles a month, over four hundred titles per year. In the peak year of 1971, gothics constituted 24 percent of Dell's paperback sales. . . . This extraordinary sales success of gothics established them as a true cultural phenomenon and qualified them for endless analysis and satire in the news media. (33)

As we've seen in accounts of the gothic boom of the 1790s, this moment is characterized by its startling excess. As J.M.S. Tompkins says of her Gothic Romances, the "vogue was intense and brief" (246). Tompkins is slightly more willing than Radway to speculate on a relationship between the Gothic and its historical context when she notes in passing that "dreadful compositions in dripping dungeons, stained instruments, and putrid or mangled flesh increase in number and violence as the public temperature rises with the insecurity and excitement of the French Revolution" (272).4 Interestingly, changes in tastes for debased genres are quite often figured in terms of fashion, as Tompkins notes that "the attitude of the romantic mind
of feminism and the Gothic boom as discordant social phenomena, she seems to suggest that feminism in fact played a role in the demise of the Gothic:

When asked to explain the decline in market popularity, former publishers of gothics equivocate. Some feel that the market had simply been saturated, while others suspect that the growing visibility of the feminist movement and increasing openness about female sexuality let to a greater tolerance if not desire for stories with explicit sexual encounters. (33)

That is, feminism and gothic romances are contradictory social phenomena, coeval but at odds, the one inevitably tending towards the demise of the other. That this is problematic may be suggested by the fact that the end of the Gothic boom was truly heralded by the publication of *The Flame and the Flower* by Kathleen Woodiwiss, the novel that instigated the next romance boom--that of the "bodice ripper"--a genre in which an obsession about male violence is, if anything, more explicit and raised to significantly higher stakes. In other words, the "bodice rippers" offer not only scenes of more explicit sex, but vastly more explicit scenes of rape and sexual torture, scenes even less appealing to feminists that those in the relatively tame Gothic novels. While Radway stresses the disjunction between Gothic romances and the times in which they flourished,

towards guilt was undergoing an important change of fashion during the last ten years of the eighteenth century" (285).
I will be examining the interconnections between the Gothic and feminist turmoil, a coincidence between genre and social theory.

In *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, Kate Ferguson Ellis does connect the Gothic boom of the 1790s with concurrent social upheaval. She investigates "two epiphenomena of middle-class culture: the idealization of the home and the popularity of the Gothic" (ix-x) to argue that "popular literature can be a site of resistance to ideological positions as well as a means of propagating them" (xii). Like Radway, she notes women's limited "diffusion throughout social space" but she is concerned to study as a contested moment the period during which, she claims, these limitations were increasingly put in place: "[The] typological conception of 'domestic happiness' emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century, as the middle-class home, distanced in ideology and increasingly in fact from the place where money was made, became a 'separate sphere' from the 'fallen' world of work" (ix). For Ellis, Gothic novels represent precisely an interrogation and critique of this typology of "domestic happiness":

Of course the privileging [of the blissful home] was put forward, and is still being put forward, as utopian vision of harmony between the sexes, with the home the highest expression of that
harmony. The unequal power relations that this vision conceals have been a focus of feminist concern since the late eighteenth century, when Mary Wollstonecraft and her contemporaries began to attack it. That a genre of popular fiction written, in the main, by women and for women, should be a site of resistance to this concealment therefore adds a historical and cultural dimension to an issue that is still far from resolved. (xvi)

Ironically, she reads Gothic novels as sites of revelation, of "resistance to concealment," a move that is somewhat striking as regards a genre both obsessed with concealment and concerned with the blissful closure that will result (and precisely the "harmony between the sexes" that will follow) when what has been concealed is exposed to the light of day.

For feminist scholars of the past ten years, the connection between the female Goths of the 1790s and feminist polemic has seemed increasingly clear. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria,* published posthumously in 1798, is the story of a woman incarcerated in a horrifically gothic lunatic asylum by her scheming husband. It never concludes and the notes published by Godwin suggest that she intended to resist what had become the standard female gothic promise of a blissful hymenal closure. Ellis makes much of this as Wollstonecraft

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5 It is not uninteresting to note that while the sketchy outlines left by Wollstonecraft clearly suggest Darnley's betrayal and abandonment of Maria, Wollstonecraft was unable to carry the draft beyond the point of the lovers' unity. As Mary Poovey says, in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer,* "Just as she turned from exploring the radical implications of Jemima's
becomes one of her radical heroines; curiously, to accomplish this she disregards the provisional nature of Wollstonecraft's notes to argue that, "Wollstonecraft's notes have Maria succeeding in the suicide she herself attempted when she faced the end of her alliance with Imlay" (96). That is, while Wollstonecraft's notes suggest several possible conclusions, including a failed suicide and an emotional reunion with both her daughter and Jemima, for Ellis, Maria is a kind of allegory which has only one conclusion. Ellis argues that, "When Maria comments that 'marriage had bastilled me for life' she is using a metaphor that underlies the whole of her uncompleted novel" (96). In this reading, Maria is the purest example of a Gothic functioning as pure feminist allegory, using a popular fictional form to embody feminist polemic.

Tilottama Rajan, in The Supplement of Reading, echoes Ellis' reading of the female gothic in her reading of Maria. She argues that:

We have already commented on the melodramatic almost gothic, quality of the novel with its tale of imprisonment in an "abode of horror" and its brutal male villain, more sociologically specific narrative, she now stops short of exposing the tyranny of the marriage contract itself. Instead, the defiant Mary Wollstonecraft clings to that bedrock of bourgeois society—the belief in individual marriage—and in doing this her voice hesitates and finally falters into silence" (108).
but as nightmarish as Radcliffe’s Montoni. The interest of women writers in the gothic, as several critics have suggested, derives from its ability to suggest an experience of frustration and confinement, a world that is internally disordered and split with no possibility of transcendence. The *Wrongs of Woman* is a form of political gothic which retains the gothic setting as a socially imposed metaphor so as to exhibit critically the emotional excesses of the form and its complicity in the attitudes of patriarchy. (178-179)

For Rajan, then, Wollstonecraft uses the gothic to expose the gothic. Of course, this argument can be easily turned around to say that Wollstonecraft’s novel exposes a claustrophobia that was already part of the female gothic.

As I suggested in the last chapter, and as many other critics have noted, the Gothic is centrally concerned with problems of vision and interpretation. We have noted that in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily must learn to read the mysterious hieroglyph of the world around her through the frame of her father’s cool reason. *Maria* opens with this attempt to shift the Gothic into a new register:

> Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavoring to recall her scattered thoughts. (23)

If in the Radcliffean Gothic, a central tension inheres between reason and passion, then Wollstonecraft’s
gesture of literalization (in which Maria is incarcerated in a lunatic asylum, "this most horrid of prisons") is more a development of the Gothic than a rejection of it. Maria makes what has become a standard gothic gesture of contrasting the "reality" of the heroine's situation with the unreal fabrications of Gothics: "The lamp of life seemed to be spending itself to chase the vapours of a dungeon which no art could dissipate" (27). However, this kind of literalization cuts both ways; the novel also uses as metaphors phrases which are literalized in other

6 That is, when Rajan calls Maria "almost gothic" (178), she completely misses both the intense repetition as well as literalization of Gothic tropes, but also the extent to which the Gothic genre has always been self-referential. Given this disavowal of the Gothic, it is perhaps not surprising to note the Gothic vocabulary that creeps into Rajan's own rhetoric, "They [Wollstonecraft's potential endings] are transmitted to us by Godwin as possibilities we must play with, probabilities we must think beyond, cultural anxieties that may continue to haunt our attempts to move beyond them" (181).

7 This gesture--made most famous by Austin in Northanger Abbey continues to appear in gothic romances with striking frequency. The heroines of gothic romances continue to compare themselves to heroines of other gothic romances, only to assert that they are not living in such improbably plots. Barbara Michaels' heroines in particular seem to have learned from Catherine Tilney not to expect too much from hidden manuscripts. In romance novels in general and in gothic romances in particular, heroines frequently comment on the fact that their plots frequently diverge from what they recognize as the standard romance plot, although they are, of course, wrong. In this way the improbability of the Gothic is both referred to and marginalized in the same gesture and the status of the Gothic is itself subject of investigation.
Gothics: "she had already been six weeks buried alive" (33). When Maria contemplates the other inmates, we find this tension between figuration and literalization is repeated with a vengeance:

Often at midnight was she waked by the dismal shrieks of demonic rage, or of excruciating despair, uttered in such wild tones of indescribable anguish as proved the total absence of reason, and roused phantoms of horror in her mind, far more terrific than all that dreaming superstition ever drew. (41-42)

It out-Gothics the Gothic. The demonic shrieks here are explained from the first, as they would not be in the Radcliffean Gothic, but though there is no threat of "real" phantoms at which to tremble, these shrieks raise up "phantoms of horror in her mind." Gothic terror is no longer located in castles made distant by time and geography, but in contemporary London.

Wollstonecraft makes explicit what critics like Ellis argue has always sustained the Gothic: an exploration of female fears of powerlessness and entrapment.

In "Phantasmagoria," Terry Castle traces the interiorization of phantoms which culminates finally in psychoanalysis:

Certainly many people in the nineteenth century spoke of "phantoms of brain" as though they came from outside—as it there were, at the very heart of subjectivity itself, something foreign and fantastic, a daemonic presence from elsewhere, a specter-show of unaccountable origin. By the time of Freud, the rhetorical pattern has resolved, as it were, into a cultural pathology: everyone felt "haunted." That is to say, the mind itself now seemed a kind of supernatural space, filled with
intrusive spectral presences—incursions from past or future, reader to terrify, pursue, or disable the harried subject. . . . Even as [Freud] attempted to demystify the uncanny forces of the psyche, he could not help reinventing in the very theory of the unconscious itself an essentially daemonic conception of thought. (59)

Castle continues to argue, "Despite heroic efforts, Freud never fully escaped the pervasive crypto-supernaturalism of early nineteenth-century psychology," and in a footnote cites her essay, "The Spectralization of the Other in The Mysteries of Udolpho," "on the atavistic intrusion of supernatural terms into the Freudian description of transference" (59). This model of "escaping" (as we’ve seen in Stocking’s insistence that "archaeology" had to "escape" "antiquarianism") and "atavism" may be overly teleological; that is, and this line of inquiry could perhaps be pursued through considerations of UFOs and Elvis among other contemporary phenomena, "supernaturalism" may not be force so easily left behind. This is suggested in Castle’s rhetoric when she stresses Freud’s "heroic efforts" to "escape" the supernatural. In fact, the use of the supernatural may not be "atavistic" in Freud at all, but as fully as much a part of his project as his scientism.

In the passage from Maria we can see just such as instance of the interiorization of phantoms. Rather than argue that in this instance, Wollstonecraft
transcends or displaces the Gothic, we might see this move as a fuller realization of Gothic terror.

This passage from Maria continues:

Besides, there was frequently something so inconceivably picturesque in the varying gestures of unrestrained passion. . . It was the uproar of the passions which she was compelled to observe; and to mark the lucid beam of reason, like a light trembling in a socket, or like the flash which divides the threatening clouds of angry heaven only to display the horrors which darkness shrouded. (42)

This image is, of course, classically Gothic in its use of light imagery to focus on the failures of reason, the boundaries beyond which it may not cast its illumination. For instance, in The Romance of the Forest we read that, "The words of Adeline stilled the tumult of his mind: the agitation of terror subsided; and reason beamed a feeble ray upon his hopes" (61).

Philip Rieff, in his introduction to The History of the Psychoanalytic Movement characterizes Freud thus: "He poked around in the darkness for a lifetime, driving out ugly little terrors here and there, but never pretending to find some adjuratory formula against them" (10). This imagery, of course, is fully Gothic in its play with a darkness which is both interior and exterior; Freud becomes a hero walking through the darkness chanting formulae. But as we’ve also seen, in Gothic and Romantic writing the literal and figurative tend to waver into each other, not only in Wordsworth
but in novels like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Maria*. This may be why the Gothic novels of the 1790s seem to lend themselves so insistently to psychoanalytic readings. Relying on many of the same tropes that, as Castle argues, Freud interiorized, and deploying them in a characteristically Gothic romantic and liminal fashion, they seem almost ready to psychoanalyze themselves. However, this may be the most paradigmatically circular reading of all.

The fragment of *Maria* actually ends with the moment of Maria’s incarceration:

> The gates were drawn heavily, and the sullen sound of many locks and bolts being drawn back, grated on my very soul, before I was appalled by the creeking if dismal hinges, as they closed after me. The gloomy pile was before me, half in ruins; some of the aged trees of the avenue were cut down, and left to rot where they fell; and as we approached some mouldering steps, a monstrous dog darted forwards to the length of his chain, and barked and growled infernally. (134)

Maria’s world is one of Gothic fictions made literal and unescapable. There will be no rescue for Maria and no assurance that her terrors are unfounded. Shortly after this the fragment of Maria’s memoirs and the fragment itself comes to an abrupt end. Like the fragmented manuscript which Adeline finds in *The Romance of the Forest*, which also ends in abruptness, terror, and uncertainty, Wollstonecraft’s novel breaks off at this point. For Rajan, in a marvelously Gothic passage:
The kind of reading the novel elicits, then, is neither a surface reading that confirms it as a tale of woe, nor a deeper but still positive reading that acts upon the desire intimated in it: the desire for a sentimental ending in which Maria is united with Darnford. Rather, we are invited to practice a negative reading that unfolds a meaning shadowed in the text but not yet contained in either manifest or latent content. (176)

That is, the novel "elicits" and "invites" a particular kind of reading, one that will be able to materialize the novel's own "shadowed" self. Although Rajan does not connect this "negative reading" with Freud, his "shadowed" presence is suggested by the appearance of "manifest or latent content."

Maria presents us with an interpretive problem because it is, like so many Gothic romantic texts, a fragment. Rajan notes that, "Like Hyperion and Christabel, The Wrongs of Woman is broken off at a crisis, and the effect (whether intentional or not) is to elicit a divinatory completion" (194). Paul de Man takes up the tendency of Romantic fragments of "elicit" "divinatory completion" when he takes critics to task for succumbing to what he calls the "archeological labor associated with Romanticism." The fragments and ruins which little the landscapes of gothic novels bring in their train the suggestion of archaeological interpretation. Like other Gothic novels, Maria is full of ruins. The asylum, Maria prison is "half in ruins," and its steps are "mouldered down" (134).
However, while these ruins may seem to "invite" archaeological interpretive reconstruction, as will see, the archaeological project is itself subject to suspicion.

ii. The Archaeological Project

The Gothic frenzy of the late eighteenth century was associated with another debased and irrational fascination with ruins. Mostly material for anecdote now, the craze led William Gilpin to remark that Tintern Abbey would look considerably more picturesque if someone could take a mallet to it and knock it down a bit. Like the gothic novels which are famously in authentic and inaccurate, the antiquarian craze in England was less concerned with historical accuracy and authenticity than with achieving a certain set of affects. The science of archaeology, which has its barest beginnings in this period, promises to leave this irrationality behind and guarantee the possibility of true authenticity.

The late eighteenth century is usually characterized as a kind of liminal period, one in which a rapidly growing interest in antiquities was beginning to shade into what we now recognize as archaeology, as antiquarianism began to take on enhanced respectability and seriousness.

One characteristically liminal figure is William
Stukeley [1687-1765], "a pioneer of modern archaeology and a well known writer on Druids in his own time" (Richardson, 124). Stukeley had an avid interest in the past. In addition to writing a pedigree of Queen Anne from Noah, he "laid out a garden with a Druid temple and an old apple tree, covered with mistletoe, in the center" and sometimes signed himself "Chyndonax, Archdruid," (124). While Stukeley represents only one instance of the antiquarianism that was capturing the British imagination during the eighteenth-century, he was one of the more productive devotees, producing volumes on Stonehenge and Avebury in the 1740s. For Robert D. Richardson, Stukeley not only represents an antiquarianism which is the mire archaeology must escape, but importantly creates and predicts the "true" archaeology to follow:

In Stukeley’s interest in Druidism, many lines converge and many new attitudes can be seen evolving and emerging. For one thing, Stukeley’s work is the bridge between old-fashioned antiquarian scholarship and the modern mythopoesis—the creative use of old materials—of such poets as Blake. In another way, Stukeley’s antiquarianism deepened until it began to evolve into systematic archaeology, which was to provide the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with a substantial body of historical material. His patriotic quest for English origins and British greatness is related to the new pre-romantic

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⁸ In what can be seen as an interesting foreshadowing of the characteristically Romantic fragment (see chapter III), these two volumes were intended to be the final two of a seven volume set. Needless to say, the first five volumes were never completed.
interest in primitive times and ways...Stukeley had prepared the ground: he had himself almost remythologized the Druids; but Blake actually accomplished it, and it is no accident that Blake—as well as Wordsworth, Emerson, and others—owed a large debt to the imaginative and idiosyncratic William Stukeley. (125)

The late eighteenth century, then, can also be seen as a period in which antiquarianism and archaeology interweave each other in such figures as Sir George Stukeley.

The shift into modern archaeology is always marked by this shift in terms: from "antiquarianism" to "archaeology," although in fact both were in common use and had a rather fluid relationship to each other from the mid-1700s to the mid-1800s. The meaning of "archaeology" in its most familiar sense today, as a discipline, as a science of the relics of the past, was first formulated during the early Victorian period in Britain (according to the OED, the first attested usage of archeology in this sense occurs in 1837) and

"In his influential essay, 'How the Ancients Depicted Death' (1769), Lessing succinctly expressed the difference between 'antiquarian' and 'archaeologist': the antiquarian 'has inherited the fragments, the archaeologist the spirit of antiquity . . . before the former can say it was so, the latter already knows whether it could be so.' The breach between grand a priori mythic theorizing and carefully documented philology was occasionally bridged, with immediately interesting results by such men as Lessing, Fréret, Thomas Blackwell, or Winckelman." (The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, eds., 215)
solidified during its height. In *Victorian Anthropology*, George Stocking dates what he calls "the revolution in archeology" to 1858. Before that "archaeology" was still mired in the meshes of "antiquarianism:" "In 1850, however, British archeology was only beginning to stir from the doldrums of antiquarianism, and seemed hardly likely to play a central role in a scientific revolution" (71). That is, religion and Romanticism together seemed destined to keep "archeology" from escaping "antiquarianism": "Although there were indications of heightened activity in the archeology of Britain itself, that study too, was only beginning to break out of the older antiquarian tradition" (71).

The term "antiquarianism" is primarily an eighteenth-century term, and is usually used to signify the passion for ruins and relics that famously characterizes the end of that century, a passion that is seen to be unscientific, excessive, willful, and almost childish. Clearly, in Stocking's terms, "antiquarianism" is what "archaeology" needs to shake off in order to become a science. "Antiquarianism" is a mania, and one that only begins to foreshadow the science to which it must soon yield.

Although the birth of this new science is usually marked by the shift from one term to another, both
terms were used more or less synonymously during the eighteenth century, and the term "archaeology" appears most often used in its literal sense (a study of origins), that of its first attested usage in Br. Hale's *Holy Observances* (1607) when he refers to "the archaeology of the Jewes till Sauls gouerment" (OED). Importantly, this nascent science will by the end of the nineteenth century seek to elaborate a systematic method for translating artifacts into a coherent historical narrative, much as Freud, who was obsessed with antiquities and archaeological investigations, was to do for the pre-history of the individual subject.

In fact, scientific archaeology is very much a product of the Victorian age that also produced Freud. The first systematic excavations at Pompeii began in 1860; Sir William Flinders Petrie, "the father of scientific archaeology" first investigated the Hawara pyramid in 1880; he discovered the jewelry of Sit-Hathor-Iunet in the pyramid of Senusert in 1914; Schleiman was excavating Troy in 1874. Freud followed these developments avidly throughout his life and the images he drew from this nascent science informed his most striking interpretive tropes. Although Suzanne Cassirer Bernfeld does not extensively develop an analysis of Freud's language in "Freud and Archeology," she cites no less that three phrases in which he refers
to archeology as a source of "comfort." Bernfeld argues that in his passion for archeology Freud sublimated both his regret at losing an idyllic home in Freiberg and his desire that those dead and "buried," with whatever ambivalent emotions, are never buried permanently.

In his "Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria," Freud's conceptualization of himself as an archaeologist is dependent on his sense that this "case" is made up of "fragments":

In the face of the incompleteness of my analytic results, I had to choose but to follow the example of those discoverers whose good fortune it is to bring to the light of day after their long burial the priceless though mutilated relics of antiquity. I have restored what is missing, taking the best models known to me from other analyses; but like a conscientious archaeologist I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic parts end and my constructions begin. (12)

Like the Gothic heroine or feminist literary critic who, as we will see, struggles with fragmentary texts, fragmentary memories, and a fragmentary past, Freud

10 It is not uninteresting to note that this case was retitled Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria when it was published by Macmillan for a popular audience. Any notion of the fragment is, to put it one way, effaced. The jacket copy is also rather marvelously lurid. Bold letters at the top of the back jacket proclaim, "Her homosexual . . . love for Frau K. was the strongest unconscious current in her mental life." Here, instead of ignoring an issue that Freud made central, the status of the study as fragment, the jacket copy highlights a problem that Freud's text evades and literally marginalizes.
longs to "restore" something whole, to provide "constructions" where "incompleteness" threatens. And, like the authors of many modern Gothic romances, he employs archaeology as a trope for this process. Toril Moi notes this passage briefly in "Representations of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora," only to sound one of the characteristic notes of suspicion that surround this metaphor: "The archeologist must be suspected of having mutilated the relics he finds" (186). Jacobsen and Steele echo this note of suspicion most insistently in "From Past to Present: Freudian Archaeology," finally remarking of Freud's reliance on archaeological tropes to characterize his use of dreams and associations:

These are not facts in the sense that a stone axe found at a depth of ten feet is a fact. They are dependent on the psychoanalytic method for their discovery, and Freud's construction process for their meaning. (360)

In this passage, Freud's "false" archaeology is contrasted with a "real" archaeology, whose facts, the relics, are presumably not "dependent on" any interpretive "method for their discovery" or "construction process for their meaning."

Archaeological interpretation, then, may always be vulnerable to accusation that it creates rather than discovers that material it analyzes. This passage from the "Fragment" which is so susceptible to suspicion
appears in the Freudian text that most famously introduces the relation between analyst and analysand as one fraught with difficulties of interpretation that cut both ways (to repeat one of Freud's tropes from the "Fragment"), a relationship shot through not only with transference on the part of the analysand but "countertransference" on the part of the analyst.

In Paul de Man's collection of essays, The Rhetoric of Romanticism, only one essay has an epigraph. That epigraph is from Thomas Hardy's "Barbara of the House of Grebe":

... while digging in the grounds for the new foundations, the broken fragments of a marble statue were unearthed. They were submitted to various antiquaries, who said that, so far as the damaged pieces would allow them to form an opinion, the statue seemed to be that of a mutilated Roman satyr; or, if not, an allegorical figure of Death. Only one or two old inhabitants guessed whose statue those fragments had composed.

De Man returns to this passage at the end of his argument against what he calls the "archaeological labor" (93) that is "characteristic of the interpretive labor associated with romanticism" (94). For de Man, Shelley's The Triumph of Life is the anti-archaeological text par excellence. While Romantic readings of Shelley's poem revolve around reconstructing a fragment "[The Triumph of Life, Shelley's last poem, is, as is well known, a fragment that has been unearthed, edited, reconstructed, and
much discussed" (93)], de Man asks:

What relationship do we have to such a text that allows us to call it a fragment that we are then entitled to reconstruct, to identify, and implicitly to complete? This supposes, among other things, that Shelley or romanticism are themselves entities which, like a statue, can be broken into pieces, mutilated, or allegorized (to use Hardy’s alternatives) after having been stiffened, frozen, erected or whatever one wants to call the particular rigidity of statues. (94-5)

After Freud, of course, it is almost impossible not to comment on the location of de Man’s insistence that his choice of words is immaterial. But putting aside for the moment the kind of phallic anxiety that seems so obvious in this passage, we see that for de Man, archaeological interpretation is always subject to suspicion, to the suspicion that the archaeologist is producing "reconstructions" that are in fact creations, appealing to a lost wholeness that is only ever illusory. The claim to have uncovered or recovered the complete statue from some inaccessible past is at best self-delusional and at worst fraud. For de Man, this claim is characteristic of Romantic interpretation, interpretation which is always monumentalization. According to "Shelley Disfigured," Shelley, in a typical de Manian move, knows this criticism in advance of de Man and enacts it in The Triumph of Life. De Man concludes his essay with this echo from Hardy’s passage:

If it is true and unavoidable that any reading is
a monumentalization of sorts, the way in which Rousseau is read and disfigured in The Triumph of Life puts Shelley among the few readers who "guessed whose statue those fragments had composed." Reading as disfiguration, to the very extent that it resists historicism, turns out to be historically more reliable than the products of historical archeology.11

Disfiguration will be de Man's term for the only reading which can skirt the fallacies of archaeological reading, of "historical archaeology." "Disfiguration," however, may work fully as well as "archeology," "statue," or "monument" to maintain the primacy of the archaeological model of interpretation; that is, "disfiguration" as well as being an almost irresistible pun, suggests that a prior "figure" exists to be disfigured, that the problem with archaeological interpretation is not that it produces figures at all (de Man's ostensible argument) but that it produces the wrong figures, figures which look whole when they ought, in de Man's aesthetic, to look "disfigured," or in another valorized term, "defaced." In some ways we've come full circle here, to an aesthetic which prizes ruins over monuments. Archaeological interpretation, which structures the plot of Gothic novels, rather than valorizing ruins, offers heroines and feminist literary critics safety through the power

11 N.B. that I am not being sloppy about the spelling "archa/eology" here. The word appears with the "a" at the start of de Man's essay and without it at the end.
to reconstruct their own pasts.

iii. Antiquing Patriarchy

Gothic narratives and psychoanalysis overlap not only in their reliance on archaeological comfort, but in a simultaneous obsession with and disavowal of sexual violence and in particular incest. It is more than a little suggestive that in these two accounts, one "popular" and one popular with academics, sexual violence is the problem and archaeology is the solution.¹²

Ever since The Mysteries of Udolpho was published in 1794, what has come to be known as "the female gothic" has staged and framed in a variety of ways a heroine's encounter with some notion of the past. As soon as her mother dies, Emily's family history becomes a source of mystery as she accidentally sees her father sighing over certain letters and the miniature of a beautiful young woman he keeps hidden under floor boards. Emily's parentage becomes a kind of low-grade mystery: the solution is not actively pursued but reminders of the mystery are fairly common, and it

¹² The connection between psychoanalytic and gothic narratives is not a new observation. Interestingly, however, this connection is usually read backwards; that is, the gothic is examined psychoanalytically. The gothic becomes interesting as it seems to "lend itself" to psychoanalytic and feminist readings rather than being seen as a central progenitor for both of these discourses.
remains a source of tension which the novel needs to resolve. Although Jane Eyre’s own family history is not set up as a problem in the same way (not that there aren’t a few surprises), at Thornfield Hall, which she describes as "a shrine to the past," she encounters similar symptoms of mystery: unexplained noises, confusing dangers, and secretive behavior. Modern gothic novels continue to frame this sort of disruptive encounter with the past in a variety of ways. The past, in gothic novels, desperately needs to be written. The search for letters and diaries, for documents that appear only to disappear again, and whose discovery often lays to rest the questions which have haunted the heroine is one symptom of this need for a specifically written past. Gothic heroines become secret archaeologists, searching and researching, sifting through the strata of the past, making connections, exploring burial sites, frantically trying to piece together the narrative which will set them free.

Feminist literary critics have learned from these heroines’ strategies. When Patricia Yaeger refers to "the archaeological know-how of American feminists" (20) she refers to a literary project which in this country has always been characterized by the trope of archaeology: "American feminists . . . have excavated
the writing of past" (18). In this also banal and commonly repeated trope, feminist critics function as the heroines of these romances, digging up the pieces of the past and forming them into the narratives which will set them free.

This need for archaeological explanation seems to have taken on a particular urgency in the late 1960s and early 1970s, during the great boom in gothic romances when Victoria Holt, Mary Stewart, and Phyllis Whitney shot to the top of the bestseller lists, and bookstores shelves were full of obsessively repeated images of young women in long gowns looking back in terror as they attempt to flee somebody's ancestral home. The time period is suggestive; the gothic romance boom more or less coincides with the growing insistence of feminist challenges to patriarchal constructions of women's "place" in the home. In this section I will examine the novels of the two most consistently popular writers of gothic romances in the US, Phyllis Whitney and Barbara Michaels, for the ways their narratives reconstellate the narrative connections between sexual violence and archaeology. I will be examining two clusters of novels—a series of novels written by Barbara Michaels about twenty years ago and four of the most recent novels by Phyllis
Whitney. I've selected these groupings for two reasons. The first is that both writers have been fairly continuously successful in the US for over a quarter of a century, surviving several of the boom and bust cycles of romance publishing. In addition, each of the clusters of novels I will be talking about incorporates different narrative frames for marking and resolving the irruption of and desire for a history. These novels locate patriarchal oppression in the past, antiquing abuses that are quite contemporary.

Before taking up these novels, I will clarify what is at stake in feminist analyses of popular gothic romances.

Although Julia Kristeva wrote in 1969 that "every text is an intertextuality," her formulation has not

13 "Barbara Michaels" is actually Barbara Mertz, a PhD Egyptologist. Mertz also publishes humorous gothic romances under the name "Elizabeth Peters." Her novels under both names were marketed unmistakably as "gothic romances" throughout the seventies. Recently, however, more and more of her novels have been reprinted, and today "Elizabeth Peters" novels will be found in the murder mystery section, while "Barbara Michaels" novels, vaguely marketed as "horror" novels, can be located in the general fiction section. Phyllis Whitney's novels have undergone a marketing transformation similar in direction if not in degree. Now her novels may be found with the general fiction and bestsellers. Mertz, herself, attributes these changes to that fact that "in those days" most women writers were marketed as romance novelists (personal correspondence).

14 That is, just as Castle's remark that Freud's "supernaturalism" is "atavistic" might be too hasty, so too these novels' insistence that unchecked male power is a thing of the past might be too simple.
generally been applied to what has come to be known (very problematically) as "popular culture." For instance, Joanna Russ's well-known essay, "Someone's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband" (1973), treats the genre of "gothic romances" as a kind of fixed set, even presenting a list of the component elements. Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982) similarly treats popular gothics as a fixed set in which one "feminine oedipal" structure can be decoded, although she acknowledges that these novels do lie along a continuum which shades off at either end into other genres. The "true" gothic, presumably, would be that situated in the center of such a continuum. This notion of genre as a fixed set of conventions has characterized most discussions of romantic novels in this country and has certainly been implicated in the ways we think about the so-called split between high culture and low culture: high culture involves repetition only in the sense that we are expected to read the same text over and over again, while low culture involves reading the same story (fixed set of elements) in different "texts." While this schematization is not entirely wrong -- for instance Zebra Romances, a division of Pocket Books, currently publishes a line of "Gothics" which seem to be written with this kind of understanding of genre --
for the purposes of this argument I'm interested in the more amorphous territory of the best seller. In particular, I'm interested in Michaels and Whitney, whose work was originally associated with the gothic boom of the late 60s and early 70s, but whose popularity has continued to grow, although the once ubiquitous image of the woman in white fleeing the ominous castle has all but vanished from the bookstore shelves. Kristeva's notion of intertextuality problematizes the "fixed set" method of discussing popular gothic romances which brackets the history of the production of popular culture texts. Ironically, the charge of bracketing history is one to which psychoanalytic readings have always been vulnerable. As we have seen, gothics always seem to invite psychoanalytic readings, at least in part, perhaps, because psychoanalysis, like the gothics, is a discourse originating in a narrative of connection between symptoms and their history.

The status of the text, then, is always a problem in both psychoanalytic and gothic narratives. When

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15 Clearly, more work needs to be done on the reasons for the gothic boom during this time period. We know that other booms in literary taste have fluctuated with social and political changes -- one thinks of the passion for graveyard poetry in the 1750s especially and the concurrent rise in the suicide rate -- yet the connections between these social phenomenon and literary taste are vaguely understood at best.
Julia Kristeva, in her very early writing, worked to redefine the meaning of the "text," she almost immediately invoked the notion of "inter-textuality."

This passage is from "The Bounded Text" (1969):

The text is therefore a productivity, and this means: first, that its relationships to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive - constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories than linguistic ones; and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. (36)

In this work she goes on to discuss "the ideologeme of the novel" through the example of La Sale's *Jehan de Saintre* (1456) in which she notes the "extranovelistic sources" of two modes of discourse in the novel, remarking: "The first comes from the fair, marketplace, or public square" (53). Bakhtin's influence is unmistakable throughout this discussion of intertextuality (especially with the allusion to his beloved 'public square'), and again when Kristeva returned to this concept in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974). In the latter "text" she is careful to note that intertextuality is not a matter of "literary influences" but instead, "the term intertextuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another" (59-60). More specifically:

The new signifying system may be produced with the
same signifying material: in language, for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text. Or it may be borrowed from different signifying materials: the transposition from a carnival scene to the written text, for instance. (59)

This notion of intertextuality, then, for Kristeva (from Bakhtin), seems to signify the inter-penetration of certain previously mutually distinct discourses. A sense of chronology is necessary for this account; that is, one knows the material is "extra-novelistic" because at one point it was not associated with novels, but with the carnival or public square. As we shall see, the novels I will discuss here incorporate a different kind of "intertextuality," an incorporation of narratives of containment: not the liberatory potential of "the public square" but the framing structure of the museum, the miniature, the ghost story, and the art of historic restoration.

Terry Castle’s argument connecting Freud and the Gothic relies on a similar model of incursion:

The rationalists did not so much negate the traditional spirit world as displace it into the realm of psychology. Ghosts were not exorcised -- only internalized and reinterpreted as hallucinatory thoughts. Yet this internalization of apparitions introduced a latent irrationalism into the realm of mental experience. If ghosts were thoughts, then thoughts themselves took on -- at least notionally -- the haunting reality of ghosts. The mind became subject to spectral presences. ("Phantasmagoria," 52)

This intrusion of spectral presences into the realm of psychology, like Kristeva’s chronological
intertextuality, itself invokes a gothic narrative: a space that was once "pure" is invaded by other ideas, other languages. When "the mind became subject to spectral presences" the chronology suggests, a space that was once free has become irrevocably contaminated. Of course, this spectralization, as we have seen, was accompanied in Freud (and perhaps for the culture at large?) by an intensifying of the desire for archeological stability, by enormous "strides" in the systematizing of the science of recovering the past.

Castle's and Kristeva's metaphors of incursion, despite their shared nationalist underpinnings seem to work in opposite directions, Kristeva's suggesting increasing liberation and Castle's increasing claustrophobia (the ghosts were once already "outside" us -- with rationalism they moved in and took over). However, like Bakhtin's distinction between epic and novel for that matter, they each, in order to shore up a sense of the categorical instability of the present, ironically, rely on the idea of a category that was at least stable and clearly bounded in some "past"; the past becomes that category which one has prior to

16 This passage also invokes a kind of determinism that has haunted Western twentieth century discourse from Freud to de Man in its subtle insistence that ghosts can never be exorcised. If they are removed from one space they will only inevitably reappear, elsewhere.
"incursions" and "intrusive" "presences."

Interestingly, this is a categorical structure that theory relies on much more than contemporary gothic romances, in which the past represents a space of inexpressible terrors that must be put to rest, memorialized in some way, in order to create the categorical stability in the present that makes possible the final freezing of the "happily ever after" moment. The frequent rereading suggested by the constant recycling of similar plots in new novels suggests more strongly than anything else could the obsessive instability of archaeological narrative.

Before I venture into a discussion of the two most popular US writers of contemporary gothic romances, I want to make a detour through the writing of the most famous British practitioner of popular gothic romances, and the woman credited by Janice Radway, in Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture, with starting the whole gothic romance craze of the 1960s. Victoria Holt's texts follow most closely contemporary understanding of what "the gothic romance" is all about.17 For instance, her novels set the parameters still followed by the "Zebra Gothic" series romances.

17 Victoria Holt is also historical novelist Jean Plaidy. The publishing history of gothic romances is almost as replete with sudden transformations, pseudonyms, and double identities as the novels themselves.
The gothic romance as it is popularly read and written today is a very WASPy genre (think of the returns to ancestral homes in England, Ireland, and Scotland, for instance). Holt’s in particular rely on popular understandings of the Victorian Empire and tend to restate colonialist rhetoric at its most nakedly hegemonic. In light of this WASPy and colonialist rhetoric it is not surprising, although it is interesting, to note that Holt’s 1988 bestseller The India Fan was favorably reviewed "In Short" by no less an august authority than The New York Times Book Review. On November 6, 1988, Sheila Paulos remarked that "Victoria Holt could turn the most resolute boob tuber into a book lover . . . . what makes The India Fan special is Victoria Holt’s talent for storytelling and her obvious respect for her audience" (22-23). In light of the fact that this novel insistently valorizes misogyny and colonialistic violence, this review is a bit puzzling.

Although The India Fan begins with a description of the traditionally secret-ridden ancestral home in which "the past seemed to be leering at one from all corners, insidiously imposing itself on the present and almost -- though never quite -- obliterating it" (3), in fact the real center from which danger emanates is India ["our family has interests there" (32)] and the
body of Lavinia, a woman marked as too "physical":

I think I knew her better than anyone else did; thus I became aware of a trait in her character which, without a doubt, was the reason why certain things happened to her.

She was governed by a deep sensuality and she had matured early. She was a woman at fifteen, whereas I, in spite of my superior knowledge, was physically a child. (45)

Despite the heroine's careful insistence that she and Lavinia are totally different, the terror invoked by the possibility that they could be confused drives the novel. Drusilla helps Lavinia cope with an unexpected pregnancy, and her loved ones and the hero assume that the baby that appears is hers. It takes a bloody uprising of "natives," to whom this distinction between the two women seems to be clear, to resolve this threatened confusion:

The sight that met my eyes was one that will be forever imprinted in my mind. Disorder ... and horror. The walls of the room were splashed with blood. And there, spreadeagled across the bed, was Lavinia's nude body. Something about its posture was obscene, and I knew it had been placed deliberately so. . . . Lavinia was dead. That beauty which had been her pride, which had obsessed her and made her what she was, had in the end destroyed her. (335)

Lavinia's body has all along been "marked" with the signs of "what she is" ["I always knew what she was," commented Polly. "Plain as the nose on your face" (55)], and here the "natives" have finalized and memorialized this marking, making it once and for all unmistakable that Lavinia and Drusilla have nothing in
common.

Drusilla becomes implicated with "India" in a complex colonial moment. Fabian, the future romantic hero who will successfully "put down" the rebellion, opens the novel playing both father and mother to an infant Drusilla. Later, however, taking up his position as rightful heir and master, he announces that he will play Caesar and that Drusilla and Lavinia will be his slaves. Lavinia, daughter of the ruling elite, makes a bid for equal status with her brother:

"I’ll be your queen . . . or whatever Caesars have; Drusilla can be our slave."
"You’ll be a slave too," said Fabian, to my delight and Lavinia’s dismay. (23)

Drusilla, of course, is sent to fetch "the india fan" and she is caught up in the family "interests" in India, where, as she learns:

"There was often trouble. The Company kept it under control, but there were always the mad ones. They didn’t see what good we were bringing to their country. They wanted us out." (33-34)

Like an inordinate number of other contemporary gothic romances, The India Fan is set in the heyday of that colonialist period which gave rise to not only psychoanalysis, but our contemporary understandings of archaeology and anthropology as well. Although the narrative structure of the novel is not as archaeological as some of the other romances we’ll be looking at, Holt frequently invokes another set of not
unrelated tropes which she shares with Phyllis Whitney: the tropes of tourism.\textsuperscript{18}

Although the novels of Victoria Holt are sometimes seen as the paradigmatic gothic romances, very different narrative structures are at work in the novels of her US contemporaries. In Barbara Michaels' early ghost stories, the past returns as a force that (usually) only at first seems threatening. In these stories of haunted houses, neither the heroine's past nor the hero's is particularly implicated with the ghost story. The house itself carries the source of the disruptive history.

Michaels' novels exploit this sense of dwelling "saturated through and through with a time that is historical" with a vengeance. While she has moved her characters into pleasant older houses, often houses in need of restoration and usually furnished with antiques (we will come back to this later), there is a similar pattern of history made visible in her work. In these texts, the house itself is not necessarily a traditional "shrine to history" (there are usually no portrait galleries or crypts), but the ghost becoming visible that haunts it has this function: the black

\textsuperscript{18} Although it can only be suggested here, in another paper I develop the connections between gothic archaeology and the often concurrently invoked intersections with anthropology in these romances.
mass that swirls up from the basement where the murdered bodies are hidden in *Ammie Come Home*, the hooded woman who draws closer and closer to the heroine in *The Crying Child*, the feelings of terror that paralyze the heroine and hero of *House of Many Shadows* when they open the doors at night and see shadowy figures waiting under the trees. In each case visual apparitions signal the presence and insistence of the past which it will be the heroine's job to lay to rest. In each of these stories once the "truth" about the past is known, once the heroine's archaeological research puts the pieces in order, the manifestations vanish (one is reminded of some of Freud's early analyses of cases of hysteria). *The Crying Child* ends with perhaps the ultimate apotheosis of this idea. The hero turns to the heroine and says, "I'm reminded of another passage from the Bible, You shall know the truth..." and she completes his sentence, "and the truth will make you free."19 This phrase resonates significantly throughout Michaels's novels. That is, archaeology allows one to put the past to rest; the symptoms will cease, and, at the same time, the hero and heroine who have met through the agency of this

19 Also not a formulation unknown to feminism, and in fact also common to other such popular discourses as self-help psychology books and such recent gothic films as *Flatliners*. 
supernatural ordeal will be united and about to wed at last.

In these novels, published in the early seventies and somewhat atypical for the romances popular during that period, Michaels uses the tropes of the ghost story in conjunction with a Gothic trajectory of what Tania Modleski calls a "feminine oedipal" desire to frame an encounter with some irruption of the past, some force that menaces all the characters (although no one is ever killed or even seriously hurt). In each of these novels the ghostly disturbances will finally be traced to a murderously controlling pater familias: a man who rapes his daughter and then kills her and her lover, a rigid mystic whose inability to interact with or understand his neighbors leads directly to his own and his daughter's murder, a man who brings his young mistress and mis-shapen son into his New England home. In each novel, once the truth about this man's evil or misguided deeds is exposed, the supernatural phenomena cease and the heroine will be united with her lover. The violence done or caused by the cruel, unyielding, and unemotional father is framed as the "solution," the answer that puts an end to the supernatural terrors experienced by the heroine and her friends. The irruption of fear which the heroine will experience previous to this union, as the past of her new house
fails to remain within its proper boundaries (the true horror of ghosts) is carefully re-framed and repaired. Throughout the novel the apparitions seem to draw closer and closer to her. One heroine reports:

She was standing on the edge of the paved terrace, not five yards away -- closer than she had ever been. I still couldn’t make out her features. The hood of the cloak cast a pool of shadow where her face should have been. (The Crying Child, 140)

Despite this horror of nearness, of gradual encroachment, of lack of boundary or frame, the final threatened implosion ["Ugh," I said, "The last time was too close for comfort. What if she came into my room . . . or touched me . . . Jed, I think I’d lose my mind if she ever --" (The Crying Child, 188)] never happens. In fact, this moment is literally unnarratable; the heroine’s language ceases at the moment she tries to articulate what it might be like. But her collection of evidence will reinscribe this energy as written history at precisely the same moment that the complete failure of boundaries will seem most imminent (that the past will literally "touch" the present); the disturbance will be reframed -- more firmly this time -- as an aberration of the past: "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Phyllis Whitney’s novels tend to be considerably more vague about any attribution of guilt, although her families are always tension ridden and divided by
secrets. These novels invoke another narrative structure for encountering and reconciling oneself to the past -- that of the museum, although there is some overlap. Whitney’s novels more often focus on her heroine’s own family histories -- in some cases one of her parents has died a mysterious death, in others a heroine becomes inextricably caught up in the murderous tensions of some other family -- that of her long estranged father or one in which her kidnapped little girl has reappeared under another name.

Phyllis Whitney was the pre-eminent writer of gothic romances in the early seventies, the only US woman to challenge the popularity of Victoria Holt and Mary Stewart. She was known for writing something that one reviewer called the "tourist gothic." Most of her novels were set in "middle class vacation spots": the Poconos, the Catskills, etc. In her more recent bestsellers, although her settings have become a little more far-flung (Maui, Key West) the touristic structure has become even stronger. In her most recent novels she habitually includes a great deal of information about local customs, restaurants, directions, as well as specific descriptions of the picturesque "look" of the place. However, I am interested in a structure in

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her work which I will call "the museum gothic." These
touristic explorations inevitably include a visit to
local museums or restored houses along with a tour and
a collection of historical information. In her work,
the museum functions as a memorial to an absolutely
vanished history.

Nowhere is the past more controlled than in a
museum. This is certainly part of the appeal of
archaeological reconstructions. In fact, with the
sights the heroine visits, the past is literally
obliterated, vanished, completely effaced by the
monument marking its absence. She finds
"reconstructions" (remember Freud's "reconstruction" of
Dora's case) on the sites where history, as she likes
to imagine it, was once "real." This accords with the
curiously static quality of Whitney's narratives. Her
heroines repeatedly say, "there was nothing I could do
as I watched events around me build to some unknown
climax," and in fact they will often spend the
intervening chapters sightseeing until some other
character's action precipitates the climax. Instead of
Michaels's furiously searching heroines we find a woman
who waits. Instead of the intensifying sense of danger
as an apparition moving closer and closer, in Phyllis
Whitney's novels we find a narrative of stasis. The
preserved past can never quite threaten the present.
In *Silversword* (1987), for instance, the heroine returns to her childhood home on Maui only to find that her mother, whom she has believed dead, is in fact alive, though insane, and suspected of murdering her father. Although understandably upset by this information, the heroine determines to bring her mother into the present and out of the past into which she has retreated. In the midst of various struggles with other members of the family who mistakenly view the past as threatening instead of realizing that it will cure her mother, the heroine does a great deal of sightseeing.

She visits the restored Iolani Palace where she reflects on the destruction of "traditional" Hawaiian culture and the suffering of the queen at the hands of her colonial oppressors: "A world long gone -- no longer real -- yet it had happened. Stirring events had taken place in this room of vanished thrones, and I wanted to count myself one of those Hawaiian Americans who must remember" (213). Her "native" friend reassures her about this colonial past:

"For a while our history was forgotten, put aside," Ailina went on. "Even our language was almost lost. Of course, this isn’t true any more, and there is a wave of nostalgia for the past, and a pride, a need to know about ourselves and our history, before that’s lost too. We remember what was done to the queen and to us. Though I don’t want to remember with anger -- these are different times and we are different people." (208)
"Nostalgia" sanitizes and redeems historic destruction. As we've seen with Holt, the past that gothic heroines must come to terms with often includes their relation to a colonial past. Just as Whitney's heroines learn that their dangerously patriarchal predecessors don't matter, Ailina reassures her that a history of colonial abuses no longer troubles anyone. While in Michaels' most archaeological narratives this history is continually a source of terror—until the restoration is complete—Whitney's heroines are happy with the restorations all around them, content to visit museums that frame a static past and obviate the necessity for any uncomfortable emotions or conflicts in the present. Whitney's Ailina stresses that "These are different times and we are different people" to disavow carefully any threat of connection between present and past.

When the heroine finally uncovers the truth ["one of the awful things I had to face and accept was that my father -- that hero Grandmother Elizabeth had wanted me to love -- had tried to kill my mother" (Silversword, 336)] she seems to have learned from Ailina not to let the past affect her emotions in the present. Instead, by the next page she is full of hope for the future, for her new marriage and new home. The murderous past in gothics is usually swept away just in time for the new home and new family -- just beyond
the final closure — to begin.

It should be clear by now that this trope of archaeological restoration is common to almost all of the novels I am discussing here. Michaels' heroines restore houses and Whitney's heroines visit them once they are restored. In fact, Michaels' heroines are generally drawn to the debris of the past as much as Whitney's are, but it is always the past as it is uncovered, or takes shape through discovered journals or lovingly restored antiques ["The dining room set downstairs is junk -- that heavy carved mahogany with bunches of grapes all over it like goiters. With the Duncan Phyfe we could fix up the dining room to be quite attractive" (House of Many Shadows, 206), or "Jonathan Gostelowe of Philadelphia flourished about 1765 . . . I'll eat my hat if this isn't his work. It's solid mahogany. . . . There's a chest very similar to this in the Philadelphia museum" (House of Many Shadows, 174)]. The tension, as I have suggested, lies in whether she'll be able to uncover everything in time. Her heroines want to restore the past, put it in its place, to museumize it.

Just as the heroine's restoration of and love for antiques suggests a mini-inscription of the processes at work in her narrative, so in Whitney's books the appearance of miniatures, tiny totem poles and little
statues of the goddess Pele, repeat on a literally smaller scale the heroine’s appreciation for the contained history of the museum. In *Silversword* the heroine finds a tiny Pele she loved as a child. In *Feather on the Moon* the deaf brother of the autocratic matriarch spends his time in the attic making tiny totem poles which are the delight of the heroine’s long lost daughter. In each case, these miniatures represent "actual" and more monumental sights in the heroines’ tourist tours. In *Feathers on the Moon*, for instance, the heroine also visits a tourist attraction of "reconstructed" giant totem poles -- a monument to the now nearly eradicated North West Native Americans who were "once" badly treated. In *On Longing* Susan Stewart writes:

> Even to speak of the miniature is to begin with imitation, with the second-handedness and distance of the model... the miniature typifies the structure of memory, of childhood, and ultimately of narrative’s secondary (and at the same time causal) relation to history... From the privatized and domesticated world of the miniature, from its petite sincerity, arises an "authentic" subject whose transcendence over personal property substitutes for a strongly chronological, and thus radically piecemeal, experience of temporality in everyday life. (171-2)

The miniature in Whitney’s novels organizes and contains the past. In the narratives of Phyllis Whitney the past, finally, can be cradled in one’s hand. There are no fragments of the kind that worried Freud in his
"Fragment," only comforting and "fascinating" reconstructions. What hand has done the reconstructing is never asked.

In all these novels, language and framing devices from the discourses we call history and archaeology continue to celebrate a narrative trajectory in which the past is finally and completely put to rest. Barbara Michaels' controlling patriarchal forbearers may still have the power to control and terrify from beyond the grave, but Whitney's -- like the father who killed the heroine's mother -- are always safely contained.

Thus I would suggest that it is more than a little revealing that Modleski's chapter on the popular gothic is the most "psychoanalytic." Both psychoanalysis and the novels I have been discussing stage encounters with a past that threatens to irrupt from its boundaries, that threatens to touch the present. Containment of the past makes the new marriage possible—makes clear that the dangers of patriarchy remain in the past. The gothic heroine (and gothic reader) is most uncertain, most threatened by these incursions of history. Performing a psychoanalytic reading, being an archaeologist, narrating the substratum of truth that lies within the fixed set of gothic conventions, may too easily allow the feminist critic to frame and
control this threatened implosion of boundaries. At its best, though, I think psychoanalytic theory suggests how inevitable it is that frames fall apart — that new means of framing are constantly necessary even if always provisional.

We need to maintain some notion of the "incursion" of the discourse of the museum, of the miniature and of history as restoration, into a gothic genre which is far from being "fixed" in any simple way. Michaels, more than any of the other writers I have examined, works as an innovator. Like her heroines who create their own reconstructions, she reconstructs gothic plots into new narratives. Even in most of her "Victorian" gothic romances there is a real effort to shift the terms of the genre. In Greygallows and Black Rainbow, for instance, heroines are married to husbands who really are trying to kill them (see Russ) while at the same time exploiting the working classes. In both novels, heroines are re-paired with social agitators and union leaders. Black Rainbow, in fact, is an explicit and quite complex rewriting of Jane Eyre, with a divided narrative, and two heroines who meet each other just as Jane and Rochester do, each mistaking the other for a representative of the supernatural world. In the end, Jane, in this novel the feminist and radical spinster, murders the heroine Megan's truly
murderous husband to save her dear friend's life.

Gothic romances are both famously inauthentic and offer fulfillment of the kind of archaeological comfort to which Bernfeld sees Freud as being drawn. However, archaeological interpretation may still be subject to suspicion. Because one characteristic of the gothic crazes is that gothic plots must be ceaselessly reread: the process is, finally, quite interminable.

Originally I meant to conclude here, with this rather precious reference to "Analysis Terminable and Interminable." This echo was meant to suggest that the comforting and narratizing moments which archaeological tropes manage are only ever fragmentary and processual. This ending too, my final stress on fragment and process, also continues, of course, to echo with archaeological resonance.
Chapter III

"Something Evermore About to Be"

The displacement efforts of Romantic poetry, its escape trails and pursued states of harmony and reconciliation—ultimately, its desire for process and endless self-reproduction ("something evermore about to be")—are that age's dominant cultural illusions which Romantic poetry assumes only to weigh them out and find them wanting.

Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, 133

However it may be with me I cannot help looking into new countries...

John Keats, letter to John Taylor, 27 February, 1818

The dream of feminist critics, I think, already includes some linguistic knowledge of the culture of another country, even if we haven't traveled there.

Nancy Miller, *Getting Personal*, 89

i. The Fragment of a Dream

The works of the ancients have become fragments; the works of moderns are fragments at their inception.

Fredrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum* fragment # 24, 1798

The Romantic fragment has received a great deal of attention in the past decade. Thomas McFarland's *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation*, Marjorie Levinson's *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of Form*, and Anne Janowitz's *England's Ruins*, are all major studies which in different ways argue for the primacy of the fragment or the ruin in Romantic ideology. In addition, Tilottama
Rajan’s *The Supplement of Reading* and Susan Wolfson’s *The Questioning Presence*, among other studies, suggest that a kind of poetics of incompleteness characterizes the Romantic age, that Romantic writing in particular refuses closure, always "inviting" its reader to fill in what’s missing, even in poems that are technically and formally finished. Each of these studies was published in the 1980s or early 1990s; each owes something to a Romantic critical climate inflected (in particular) by de Manian deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and feminism. In this chapter, I will discuss this Romantic fascination with Romantic incompleteness, with fragmentariness and refusal of closure, in relation to a strikingly similar repetition of this fascination in feminist writing. As we’ve seen, the fragment may seem ceaselessly to invite a Gothic archaeological filling-in. It may also, however, be valorized as a trope of endless process and self-reproduction.

Nancy Miller’s 1991 book *Getting Personal* includes some brief speculations about feminist conclusions in the course of a discussion of feminist dreams:

You will have noticed that in most of the instances in which I have quoted a dream passage, the dream comes toward the end of the essay in which it appears. The dreams tend to occur in a writer’s

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1 Or, as Rajan says of Wollstonecraft’s *Maria*, "we are invited to practice a negative reading that unfolds a meaning shadowed in the text but not yet contained in it as either manifest or latent content" (176).
text as a way of pointing to an as yet unrealized program of social change; their occurrence in the place of closure, as a move toward closure, engages and exhorts the reader to share the dream, to imagine and help create a world, a text, a mode of being in the world beyond what has already been imagined and realized. This move is not surprising—in fact it is almost predictable—since most of the pieces I have been working with articulate social and cultural agendas animated by utopian impulses: social critical theory that in the face of historically unsatisfactory reality looks for an elsewhere in which to locate the vision of an otherwise. The dreams arise so frequently in this discourse, I think, because of the radical difficulty inhabiting the feminist project of bringing about social changes that touch on fundamental notions of human identity. (87)

That is, in feminist writing, we find a dream in the place of closure, a dream driven by the "radical difficulty" in the desire for fundamental change in "notions of human identity." Her previous chapter ended with the reading of a Gothic gesture in one of the most famous essays on "Identity Politics," a passage that echoes Gothic nightmares of loss of visionary power, which suggests that patriarchal spaces are literally uninhabitable for feminists and details the nightmares that haunt feminists and drive them to these dreams. As Miller puts it later, describing Minnie Bruce Pratt in "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," "she is haunted by her father’s claims on her" (92). Miller’s passage on the dream continues:

These are the dreams of identity politics. But the daytime dreams of possibility, of social transformation, have their dark side—as the briefest glance at international politics shows; dreamt at night, the dreams of identity politics
are nightmares of despair. (This points to the simultaneous existence of both the vivifying claims of identity and the murderous results of those claims across the geopolitical map.) (87)

In a kind of Gothic doubling, the "daytime dreams of possibility" are stalked by their "dark side," their counterparts "dreamt at night." Miller introduces this Gothic double into a discussion of feminist "dreams" after making a brief detour through "their occurrence in the place of closure." "The place of closure" (in more ways than one, as we will see in the final chapter) has often been a space of particular anxiety for feminists; Miller is referring to a gesture of non-closure that has been positively endemic to feminist writing: the refusal of closure as the feminist gesture par excellence. For instance, when Elizabeth Meese concludes *Crossing the Double-Cross* with the following sentence: "As one who dreams of what is not now, though fervently sought, I must refuse to close this question, preferring instead to write in/conclusion" (150), she is making a gesture that has been echoed and re-echoed through feminist writing in the last twenty years.² An enormous number of

² This gesture, for instance, is echoed in the title of the last chapter of Jane Flax's *Thinking Fragments*: "No Conclusions." This chapter also ends with a tension between feminist dreaming and the nightmares that stalk it. After listing some of the many questions her study has raised without putting to rest ["If justice has something to do with appropriateness (Plato), can we have fragmenting and fragmentary theories and practices of justice--and still worry about the question of doing right? What are the relations of knowledge and power?"],
contemporary feminist writings have presented themselves as fragments, as incomplete pieces of some much larger but only dreamed of literary project. It is, again, precisely the sort of promiscuously common textual gesture we are examining here. When Miller reflects on this gesture, she does so in the context of feminist politics. This gesture is precisely "predictable" because it occurs in writing "animated by utopian impulses: social critical theory that in the face of historically unsatisfactory reality looks for an elsewhere in which to locate the vision of an otherwise";

Flax’s chapter, like many a Romantic and feminist text before it, stresses that her work is only the beginning, only the jumping off point for further speculation: "Although these questions remain unanswered to my satisfaction, behind them lies a recurrent nightmare. This nightmare is not unusual among those who reflect upon experiences in the contemporary West. In this nightmare there "really is" something "out there" after all—a (Hobbesian) Leviathan at work, content merely to watch while and only as long as we amuse ourselves elsewhere. I leave this dream for others to interpret—if and as they will" (236). As we will see, this is a particularly rich passage, condensing many of the tropes we will be examining this chapter: the refusal of closure, the call the future practice, the poetics of cooperation, and the tension between feminist dreams and feminist nightmares.

This move has also characterized feminist readings of an enormous number of texts. Tilottama Rajan says of Wollstonecraft’s Maria, that, "None of the endings involving Darnford is elaborated in sufficient detail to acquire any mimetic authority, and all of them are too based on cliches to ring entirely true. Their fragmentation and mechanization is a way for the text to write beyond itself, to exhibit the conventionality of the systems of representation it is forced to use, even as it stops short of overturning them or replacing them" (180).
this gesture is "predictable" because it has already occurred elsewhere, in feminist politics. Although this very characteristic moment has garnered some feminist attention, it is always explained as "natural" or "predictable" in the face of the feminist social project. In this chapter we will look at this gesture otherwise: as a rhetorical strategy which also enjoyed enormous currency during the Romantic period. That is, I will examine this gesture not as an example of real political desire but as rhetorical strategy, as a consistently used and constantly reiterated trope which echoes as much as it inherits its Romantic precursors.

ii. Romantic Fragments

Thomas McFarland begins his monumental study of Romantic fragmentation, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, by arguing that, "The phenomenology of the fragment is the phenomenology of human awareness" (5). That McFarland's use of "fragment" will apply to an enormous and loosely connected webbing of metaphorical and literal fragments is suggested when he blithely continues:

I look out of my study window as I write this sentence and see a fragment made up of fragments: a mass of stone and concrete that is part of New York City: buildings in such a variety of size, shape, and architecture, mostly bad, juxtaposed in such randomness, and showing such heterogeneous effects of time, as to constitute a visual junk heap. (5)

This vision of "a fragment made up of fragments" framed by his window serves both as a mini-preview and a
repetition of what he sees when he looks at Romantic poetry: a mass of fragments, of fragments manifested in every possible register. As Marjorie Levinson notes in *The Romantic Fragment Poem:*

"Despite its title, [McFarland's] book has little to do with forms or ruins as those words are commonly—that is, materially—understood. The author addresses "modalities"—phenomena as diverse as poetic lapses, early deaths, Wordsworth's agoraphobia, Coleridge's divorce, and the perception of hallways (9)."

That is, in his study "fragment" functions as a kind of portmanteau metaphor, combining, for instance, a list of Romantic suicides with the metaphoric notion of a fragmented life. In one example, McFarland compares Wordsworth's life to Coleridge's, noting that, "Nor was Wordsworth's existence, despite surface indications to the contrary, really less torn and broken" (6). This image, which relies, as we have seen, on the familiar Romantic distinction between surface and depth, also suggests McFarland's ability to see Romantic fragmentation literally everywhere; in his initial vision of New York City as "a fragment made up of fragments," he doesn't seem to be gazing out at the literal ruins of the Bronx. Both instances suggest the wild proliferation of metaphor possible when one metaphor is granted an overarching interpretive status.

For McFarland, Romanticism and fragmentation become virtual synonyms, in every instance utterly coextensive
with each other. Not surprisingly, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* is particularly replete with examples of the kind of repetition of Romantic rhetoric that we have come to expect in Romantic criticism. In what, as we shall see, is a particularly Keatsian conclusion, McFarland ends his study with this highly generalized reference to:

> the *topos* to which all meontic art aspires. It is as wholeness and a transcendence, shimmering before us as the goal of all strivings. It alleviates the burden of incompleteness, fragmentation and ruin. And if we could enter rather than glimpse it, all strivings would cease; for there could be no need of art in paradise.

For McFarland, the fragments, incompleteness, and ruin which resonate throughout Romantic discourse always gesture beyond themselves to this other dream, this other vision "shimmering before us" of "wholeness and transcendence." In thus concluding his study, McFarland is repeating a most characteristically Keatsian insistence on not only the fragment but on the transcendence towards which it can only gesture.

While Marjorie Levinson’s book on the Romantic Fragment Poem (or RFP, as she refers to it throughout) departs from the totalizing drive of McFarland’s on almost every conceivable level, she too insists that, "The poetic fragment, while not, of course, unique to the early nineteenth century, is nonetheless a peculiarly Romantic form" (5). She also suggests that "the poetic
fragment" works to "enable a participatory or constructive reading" practice (26). Levinson's formulation, however, is rather more historically complex. She argues:

Roughly speaking, the RFP owes its epochal specificity to certain stable, empirically available facts (composition, publication, and reception); to the special, social, doctrinal, and psychic purposes realized or intended by the sign of indeterminacy in the early nineteenth century (the Romantic ideology); and to the position of the concept, "the fragmentary," in the critical and artistic discourses of the last thirty years (epistemological legacies of the Romantic ideology). (8)

The peculiarly Romantic quality of the Romantic fragment poem "owes its epochal specificity" not only to the facts of composition ("Christabel" is a fragment; "Kubla Kahn" is presented as, literally, the fragment of a dream) or to some essential component of Romantic ideology, but also to the way the Romantic fragment has been read through the grid of its own legacy. That is, the primacy of the Romantic fragment takes on a particular inflection in the criticism of the past few decades in part because this criticism inherits Romantic epistemology. As we've seen, this is a classic example of the circularity of the Romantic reading that we've come to see as endemic to Romantic criticism. In fact, of course, Levinson herself does not totally escape from the critical proliferation of Romantic rhetoric. Her chapter on "Christabel," for instance, concludes not only with a reference to the way
Romantic texts invite a readerly filling-in, but use this rather marvelously gothic gesture to make her point: "It is, after all, to a literary idea of reality that Coleridge refers, and the referent itself is a ghostly presence that each reader and each reading materialize" (96). It is as if each reader of "Christabel" works as a kind of medium, summoning up a referent that is only (and creepily) "a ghostly presence." This insistence that Romantic fragments, whether literal fragments or not, invite their readers to "materialize" or "realize" some fuller writing to which they can only refer is consistently repeated in contemporary Romantic criticisms, which present their own projects as fragments of some larger process which will enable us to "realize" the "full presences" of the works. As Levinson concludes her own work:

Clearly, the way to revalue the RFP is by challenging its standard of value. When we submit its "modalities" to a removed critique, we restore the form to the world of praxis and poesis. It is here, if anywhere, that full presences are realized. (230)

Here, Levinson is repeating Jerome McGann's crucial insistence that: "the scholarship and criticism of Romanticism and its works are dominated by a Romantic Ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" (1). However, both McGann and Levinson valorize a gesture of "challenging" Romanticism's own "standard of value" on the grounds that
this will enable us, in McGann's words, "to make them present resources by virtue of their differential" (3).

In a repetition of Romantic rhetoric McGann insists that:

Like Trelawney at the cremation of Shelley, we shall reach for the unconsumed heart of the poem only if we are prepared to suffer a genuine change through its possession. Poetry is not to be had in the easy forms of our current ideologies. (13)'

McGann's project is both archaeological and salvational. Religious language inheres throughout The Romantics.

For McGann as for Levinson, proper reading, purged of all such "mortal sins," will restore an awareness of the differential between the Romantics and us, will preserve

' McGann also maintains that, "thematic criticism sidesteps the concrete, human particulars of the originary works, either to reproduce them within currently acceptable ideological terms, or to translate them into currently unacceptable forms of thought. The latter maneuver--so frequent today--generally operates by reducing poetic works to a network of related themes and ideas--a condition of being which no artistic product can tolerate without loss of its soul" (11). In this conceit, "poetic works" are "beings" which are "maneuvered" into making Faustian bargains, and whose "being" is destroyed when they lose their souls. Again, we can see that McGann's project is ultimately salvational.

5 Or again, Heine is valued because he "developed a method" which could allow him to critique Romanticism without "suffering at the same time either the fire of repetition or the ice of reification" (59).
Shelley's unconsumed heart, and will finally offer to save "poetry from the ruins of historical change and cultural transformation" (149).

While McFarland and Levinson focus on only Wordsworth and Coleridge, both insist that textual fragmentation peculiarly characterizes the Romantic period as a whole. In this chapter our test case will be Keats, in part because the contested punctuation of "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" makes of these lines one of the most famous examples of inconclusive conclusions in Western literature, but primarily because of Keats' own notorious reluctance to come to conclusions.

iii. "a little Speculation"

In "Keats the Letter Writer: Epistolary Poetics," Susan Wolfson explains Keats' attraction to letter writing thus:

...though a sum of letters may in effect constitute a version of autobiography, the epistolary composition of self is conditioned primarily by the immediate occasion, compared to the retrospective self-fashioning refined by the autobiographer. In the overall processes of letter writing, self-representation is for the moment, to be cast and re-cast on subsequent occasions....Unlike these permanent stamps of thought, the freedom of epistolary composition gives Keats a way to speculate, to play with an idea without having to have his mind "made up" definitively and absolutely (43).

6 As McFarland remarks, the line "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," is "noteworthy for the plethora of uncomprehending commentary it has elicited" (47).
Letter writing as a form of self-representation allows Keats "to speculate," "to play," to "cast and re-cast" himself and his thought. This kind of refusal to draw final conclusions recurs again and again in Keats' letters. David Luke also notes this refusal in his reading of one of the most famous passages in the letters: "Innumerable compositions and decompositions...take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of Beauty." As Luke points out, "Keats' curious image of a "trembling snail-horn" suggests that the creative act, like some continuously vibrant antenna, "arrives" only at a heightened anticipation of further events (210)."

Wolfson finds the same structure repeated yet again in the imagery that surrounds Keats' speculations:

The interrogative impulse of Keats's speculations is not just a coincidence of syntax, but informs the metaphors he uses to describe the play of speculation itself. As a "beacon," for instance, a question illuminates a field of investigation, but what it uncovers, "a little Speculation," is a further casting of light: one beacon leads to another. Or, in another metaphor, "a voyage of conception (I,231)," "conception" becomes the occasion, the process, and the result, with the force of Keats's pun suggesting a perpetual beginning (47).

Keatsian letter writing, then, suggests "a perpetual beginning," "a further casting on of light." That this gesture can be found again and again in Keats' letters suggests that it can be seen as somehow central to Keats'
epistolary version of the Romantic project; instead of the kind of overarching conclusions for which Wordsworth strove (failing only in spite of himself), in Keats we find a real refusal to come to conclusions. Each conclusion is only ever provisional, an opportunity for "a voyage of conception."

This hesitation around conclusion also informs several of Keats' major odes, in particular the conclusion of "Ode on a Grecian Urn." At first the problem seems merely technical, a matter of misplaced punctuation. As a footnote in David Perkins' anthology, *English Romantic Writers* notes: "These lines have been endlessly disputed, partly because they have usually been punctuated so that only the first five words are enclosed in quotation marks as the comment from the urn" (1186, note to lines 49-50). Perkins follows Douglas Bush in enclosing the entire final two lines in quotation marks, viz. "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty--that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'" Some editions, however, completely leave out quotation marks, claiming as authority Keats's own autograph copy as well as early copies of the poem made by his friends. However in the volume which Keats' published in June 1820, for the first time the first five words only are placed in quotation marks. While this appearance of the quotation marks around "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" would seem clearly
to represent Keats' final say in the matter, copies of the poem in print today are still far from standardized.

What is at stake here, though, is far from a simple matter of punctuation. These two final lines represent one of the most disputed passages in the history of Romantic criticism. What does Keats say in this poem? Or, what does the Urn speak? Does Keats second what the Urn says? Does this poem mark the high water mark of his aestheticism or his ironic distance from it? Cleanth Brooks' triumph, in "The Well-Wrought Urn," was to settle (conclusively?) this question on the basis of internal evidence. Because the properly attentive reader will have been cognizant throughout the poem of its stress on irony and paradox, he will not be surprised by the puzzling conclusion of the poem:

If the urn has been properly dramatized, if we have followed the development of the metaphor, if we have been alive to the paradoxes which work throughout the poem, perhaps then, we shall be prepared for the enigmatic, final paradox which the 'silent form' utters. (434)

The virtue of Brooks' reading is that it completely bypasses the question of textual history to derive the conclusion's final meaning "from the context of the 'Ode' itself." However, not surprisingly, the poem's final meaning remains "enigmatic," a "paradox" which seems primarily to invite further speculation, speculation which even Brooks' masterfully authoritative essay by no means put an end to. In fact, Brooks-style mastery of
the poem as a whole has been out of critical favor for some time now, and these lines and this poem are today most valued for the way they serve primarily to invite continuing speculation. That is, Romantic criticism has shifted its stress from literal fragments which are formal wholes, to complete poems which seem to function as formal fragments, part of some much more diffuse and endless process of speculation. As I've argued, this too can be seen as an example of the Romanticization of critical rhetoric.

In fact, Keats' disavowal of solid conclusions has led, if anything, to whirl of readings and speculations which valorize his endless speculations. In The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry, Susan Wolfson investigates "the questioning presence" in Keats' poetry as a conscious aesthetic: "'Ode on a Grecian Urn' culminates in an answer that can only provoke further questions" (332). For Wolfson, the relation established between Keats' poetry and its readers is one of "cooperation:

In each case, Keats's poetry retains a mystery of signs and situation that requires negotiation through the questioning presence of a reader and achieves its fullest imaginative value in the poetics of cooperation so engendered. (332)

Her use of "engendered" here is an interesting echo of one of the most popular puns in feminist writing of the
1980s. This may suggest that Wolfson's description of Keats' aesthetic is taking on a feminist inflection; certainly her use of the phrase "the poetics of cooperation" echoes throughout an enormous amount of feminist writing produced in this country during the 1970s in particular, the period in which feminist gym teachers were developing the "New Games" which would foster cooperation instead of competition and Carol Gilligan's book *In A Different Voice*, which valorized "girls'" skills of cooperation over "boys'" skills of competition, was a runaway feminist bestseller. This phrase has echoes too, throughout the conclusions of several of Keats' letters, which seem to strive to create a "poetics of cooperation" between text and reader precisely by the gesture of refusing closure we are concerned with here.

On 14 March 1818, Keats wrote to J.H. Reynolds, concluding his letter with the following bit of in/conclusion:

I wish I had a little innocent bit of Metaphysic in my head, to criss-cross this letter: but you know a favorite tune is hardest to be

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7 As could, perhaps, have been predicted--following, among other things, the kind of tension McGann sees between Romanticism and "the dominant cultural illusions" of its age, which Romanticism "assumes only to weigh out and find them wanting" (133)--this stress of the binarism "competition/cooperation" (which functioned as a synonym for "masculine/feminine," has been seriously critiqued recently. See, for instance, the anthologies *Conflicts in Feminism* and *Competition: A Feminist Taboo?*
remembered when one wants it most and you, I know, have long ere this taken it for granted that I never have any speculations without associating you in them, where they are of a pleasant nature and you know enough to [for "of"] me to tell the places where I haunt most, so that if you think for five minutes after having read this you will find it a long letter and see written in the Air above you,

Your most affectionate friend
John Keats (76)

Here Keats clearly appeals to what Wolfson has called a "poetics of cooperation." Instead of describing his activities he asks his reader to use his own knowledge to fill in the details. Rather than offering a conclusion he gestures to some other letter which will remain unwritten, which Reynolds will be able to fill in. In this example of his own brand of neo-Platonism, Keats suggests that his writing is only a fragment of that "long letter" which his friend will see "written in the Air." This gesture accords well with the wide-spread Romantic valorization of the fragment, and, as we shall see, with that species of feminist writing which also, obsessively, represents itself as a fragment of some larger project, "engendering" the cooperation which will bring us closer to realizing the unfulfilled dream that is feminism.

This reading of Keats’ characteristic preoccupation with speculation may be so familiar as to be banal by now, to require no further comment. As long ago as 1966 it was summarized by a then barely known scholar
introducing a new volume of Keats’ poetry. In his "Introduction to the Poetry of John Keats," Paul de Man wrote:

The pattern of Keats’s work is prospective rather than retrospective; it consists of hopeful preparations, anticipations of future power rather than meditative reflections on past moments of insight or harmony. His poems frequently climax in questions—"Was there a poet born?" "Did I wake or sleep?"—or in statements such as: "and beyond these/ I must not think now . . . ", "but now no more, My wand’ring spirit must not further soar"—that suggest he has reached a threshold, penetrated to the borderline of a new region that he is not yet ready to explore but toward which all his future efforts will be directed. . . . None of the larger works—and we know that the larger works mattered most to him—can in any sense be called finished. The circle never seems to close, as if he were haunted by a dream that always remains in the future. (181)

As we’ve seen, this sense of being "haunted by a dream" has also been used to characterize the current feminist moment. Somehow this reading of Keats, however, has consistently failed to remain only a reading of Keats, as if the characteristically Keatsian gesture has bled out and permeated writing on Romanticism in this country, achieving a particular intensity of repetition during the past twenty years.

In his own "Introduction" to The Rhetoric of Romanticism, for instance, Paul de Man reviews his own collected essays:

Such massive evidence of the failure to make the various individual readings coalesce is a somewhat melancholy spectacle. The fragmentary aspect of the whole is made more obvious still by the hypotactic manner that prevails in each of the
essays taken in isolation, by the continued attempt, however ironized, to present a closed and linear argument. This apparent coherence within each essay is not matched by a corresponding coherence between them. Laid out diachronically in a roughly chronological sequence, they do not evolve in a manner that easily allows for dialectical progression or, ultimately, for historical totalization. Rather, it seems that they always start again from scratch and that their conclusions fail to add up to anything." (vii)

Like Keats's conclusions, de Man's "fail to add up to something," and he must always "start again from scratch," falling into a realm of constantly failing conclusions and constantly renewed speculation. In contrast to Keats, though, de Man does not tend to invoke a "poetics of cooperation"; in his rhetoric the stress seems consistently to fall on "failure." As in Keats, however, "the fragmentary aspect of the whole" is in some sense valorized (if not by de Man himself here, than by his students), despite the fact that de Man’s tone is, as always, rather less exuberant than that of Keats in his 1818 and 1819 letters. That de Man’s gesture here does not represent simply the natural diffidence of someone surveying his collected work is suggested by the frequency with which it is repeated throughout the volume. The first essay, "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," almost seems to invoke a "poetics of cooperation" along with a reminder that this essay is only a fragment of a larger project:

We are only beginning to understand how this oscillation in the status of the image is linked to
the crisis that leaves the poetry of today under a steady threat of extinction, although, on the other hand, it remains the depository of hopes that no other activity of the mind seems able to offer. (16-17)**

Leaving aside the typically de Manian joie de vivre, we will find that this gesture will characterize literary criticism of the 1970s and '80s, particularly in the fields of Romanticism and feminism, as again and again works end with a call to future practice and locate their argument as only a fragment of some much greater project which remains to be written (or dreamed). Often, in Romanticists, this gesture takes on an explicitly Keatsian inflection, as when Arden Reed concludes his

** de Man similarly notes in "Autobiography as De-Facement" that, "This takes me of course, beyond the scope of this paper; I must limit myself to suggesting the relevance of the Essays upon Epitaphs" (74). In "The Image of Rousseau in the Poetry of Ho"/"lderlin," de Man insists that, "in these few pages, then, there is no question of examining the problem in its entirety" (20); that, "obviously there is enough material here for a number of chapters, indeed for a whole volume" (21); and that, "the aim of this essay is above all to name this obstacle in the hope of transforming it into a point of departure for other studies" (21). That is, de Man consistently gestures off stage to all the other material about which he could have written although he didn't. In this last passage, he also invokes a version of the "poetics of cooperation" which Wolfson has alerted us to, although its not clear whether he envisions himself as cooperating with other scholars or with some future version of himself who might (potentially) complete the study. This gesture has become so familiar that we might do well to remind ourselves that one does not, characteristically, find Cleanth Brooks remarking that he could have said a whole lot more about "Ode on a Grecian Urn" or T.S. Eliot suggesting, say, that he could have done more with Hamlet.
"Introduction" to Romanticism and Language with this line from Wallace Stevens: "He stops upon this threshold" (remember de Man's assertion that Keats' poetry is continually in the position of "having reached a threshold"). For Reed, "In a similar way the following essays stop, or more accurately they are written upon a threshold, and with something resembling "wild surmise."

(21).

iv. anticipatory poetics

As I've suggested, much feminist writing of the past two decades has been figured as if it too is "written upon a threshold, and with something resembling 'wild surmise.'" However, before I begin to follow this trope through some of its diverse permutations in feminist writing, I want to suggest that a kind of connection between Romantic fragments and contemporary feminist writings may already have been foreshadowed in Marjorie Levinson's The Romantic Fragment Poem, not in the "body" of her text, but in its epigraphs.

Like mine, Levinson's book is thick with epigraphs;

9 This passage continues, "Neither comfortably within nor wholly detached from any possible structure, or else has Wordsworth has it "both at once," the essays wind through liminal and labyrinthine passages, reading Romanticism as a kind of language" (21). As we've seen in Chapter Two, this is another example of the kind of romantic repetition we've come to expect from Romanticists. In this instance, the essays (our protagonists) "wind through" the "labyrinthine passages" much as a gothic heroine wandering through her bewildering abode.
the book as a whole gets three and each chapter gets one or two. Most of her epigraphs are taken from familiar canonical writers, but quotations from a rather surprising source actually bracket her study: passages from Marilynne Robinson’s 1982 novel, *Housekeeping*, a novel which has enjoyed enormous popularity with feminist readers and teachers in the decade following its publication.

The Romantic Fragment Poem opens with three epigraphs, of which the third follows:

To crave and to have are as like as a thing and its shadow. . . . When do our senses ever know anything so utterly as when we lack it? And here again is a foreshadowing—the world will be made whole. . . . Though we dream and hardly know it, longing, like an angel, fosters us, smooths our hair, and brings us wild strawberries. (*Housekeeping*, 152)

After the final chapter of Levinson’s book we find an "Afterward." This has two epigraphs, of which the final is:

...fragments of the quotidian held up to our wondering attention, offered somehow as proof of their own significance. (*Housekeeping*, 73)

This final epigraph, which precedes her conclusive discussion of "The Ruined Cottage," is also literally a fragment, the fragment of a sentence. Why does Robinson’s novel have such a place of honor in Levinson’s book? It is not a work of theory, a Romantic text, or one that bears any obvious relation to Levinson’s work as a Romantic theorist. In *Around 1981*, Jane Gallop remarks
of the function of epigraphs that "Such use of quotations is normally the most domesticated sort of polyphony, the other voice serving only as an authorizing chorus, echoing and deepening the author's voice" (35). How might Robinson's novel serve as "an authorizing chorus," how might it "echo" and "deepen" Levinson's voice?

Another way to put this is: in the juxtaposition of Romantic fragment poems and *Housekeeping*, who's echoing whom? The ambiguous position of the epigraph makes this question difficult to answer definitively. Following Gallop's analysis, it would seem that these passages should echo Levinson's argument, should authorize her reading of the Romantic Fragment Poem. As a late twentieth-century novel, however, *Housekeeping* would seem most obviously to be an echo of the Romantic primacy of fragmentation that Levinson is analyzing (the kind of echo we have been tracing throughout late twentieth-century Romantic writing). Do the Romantic fragments echo Robinson or does Robinson echo them? (As a concluding moment, this question would be marvelously Keatsian.) Finally, these epigraphs serve (me) as yet another example of the kind of tropological reverberations between feminism and Romanticism which is our concern here. *Housekeeping*'s position as source text for bracketing epigraphs in *The Romantic Fragment Poem* suggests that Levinson, too, hears this echo, although it
remains untheorized in her writing.

This echo reverberates across an enormous range of feminist texts written during the past twenty years. At the start of this chapter I quoted the conclusion of Elizabeth Meese's 1986 *Crossing the Double-Cross*. Her 1990 book, *Ex)tensions: Re-Figuring Feminist Criticism* ends with this Keatsian passage:

> I want no end to this text of feminism(s). Without end, a text refuses itself as a system of speculation to which post-scripts and appendices may be added. In the beginning was no conclusion; in the end no summation, no supplement, post-script, to the already written (Derrida, *Dissemination* 27-28)--just more beginning(s), as one text gives way to another in the play of process, of (dis)placement (Kamuf, "Replacing").

"Without end," Meese's writing aims at "a system of speculation" which will never conclude. The biblical echoes are strong here: "In the beginning was no conclusion," "World without end, Amen." Like Keats, Meese is offering us "a little speculation," but finally the process of speculation itself is valorized: "So today

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10 The relationship of French post-structuralist theories and U.S. Romantic critical writing is particularly rich. Clearly what is at stake here, however, is not the relation of, say, Derrida and Romanticism (although this remains a particularly fertile ground for analysis) but the kind of reception Derrida's work as received in the U.S. academy, and in particular the astonishing proliferation of certain, more or less Derridean, tropes across a range of critical writing (including feminist writing) in recent years. As we will see in the next chapter, this proliferation has a rather complex relation to feminist critical writing in this country.
I am writing here in a kind of for(e)play of anticipation, in the incalculable interest in and of more to come" (182). There's a kind of insistence on the present moment ("today" and "here"), but this present moment is interesting only as a threshold, as a moment of "anticipation." This is a rhetorical gesture which has been repeated again and again, obsessively and insistently, in feminist criticism.

In her "Introduction: Terms of Reference" to Coming to Terms, for instance, Elizabeth Weed concludes:

As long as feminism remains a process of coming to terms but never arriving, always interrogating the very terms its constitutes and never mastering them, it will continue to be a challenging mode of inquiry. (xxxii)

This passage suggests that for feminism to be "challenging" it must remain a liminal, threshold discourse, "a process" (a repetition of my epigraph from McGann: "desire for process and endless self-reproduction" are the "dominant cultural illusions" of the Romantic age).

In another example, Shari Benstock concludes her "Epilogue" to Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre thus: "Taking a deep breath, we begin to act, to move" (196). This is the kind of textual gesture which Nancy Miller would connect with feminism's utopian social projects, with feminism's dream; however, as we have seen from the beginning, this dream may always run the risk of
being replicated as a nightmare, stalked by the double it endlessly flees. How did this trope become such a self-evident, endlessly recirculated part of feminist writing, and what is its purchase?

v. The Dream of A Common Language

As we have seen, feminist writing is marked again and again by a refusal of closure, or rather by moments of closure which rhetorically invoke a threshold state, and endless play of speculation, and a "poetics of cooperation." This rhetorical move might signify a threshold which will hold this "poetics of cooperation" in a position of endlessly deferred possibility. However, this poetics of cooperation may always be haunted by the nightmare of its also ever-present failure.

At its most simple this gesture occurs when the text ends with a moment that seems simply utopian, often an image that is both geographical and communal. For instance, the end of Domna Stanton's article, "Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Disconnection," reads:

If we accept the connection, then these Franco-American exponents of the poetic can surely guide us through the labryinths of the Logos to an-other word, and perhaps, an-other world. (82)

Stanton's text moves from an articulation of the different stances of feminist writers to a desire for "an-other" space where the desired "we" can all finally
come together. The closing sentence of Alice Jardine's *Gynesis* reflects a similar desire, also in the context of a Franco-American disconnection:

The most important work by feminist theorists convinced of modernity's importance thus remains yet to be under-taken. It is henceforth in the dialogue between these texts by women in France and those by feminists in the United States that the future of gynesis might begin to be decided—for women. (264)

Here, although the image is not as spatial as it was in Stanton, we see the "call to future practice" most clearly (as well as the desire for dialogue between "texts by women in France and those by feminists in the United States"). Both these texts end in a kind of refusal of closure, with a desire to situate themselves among other texts in an on-going process which will lead (onwards and upwards?) to future worlds and future decisions. However, both these passages also desire this other space or other world to be characterized by a "dialogue," a kind of connection between women.

What is at stake here is not some necessary refusal of a poorly thought-out utopianism. As Mary Ann Doane notes at the end of her "Commentary, Post-Utopian Difference" in *Coming to Terms*:

My critique of psychoanalysis is not a critique of utopian thinking. . . . Utopias open up a space for non-essentialized identities. . . . A utopia is the sighting (in terms of the gaze) and siting (in terms of emplacement) of another possibility. The chance of escaping the same. A refusal of utopian thinking is also a denial of the operation of fantasy and desire in the work of theory, leading
us to the issue of pleasure—which is another question altogether. (78)

In what we have seen is a characteristically feminist gesture, Doane leads us right to the threshold of another question, and leaves us there. But she also suggests both the appeal of utopian writing and its characteristically geographical turn; a "utopia" after all is "no place." The question we will turn to now is, who inhabits this "no place"?

This sort of utopian gesture is, importantly, often implicated in some desire for women to 'connect' or 'be together.' Gayatri Spivak ends her essay, "French Feminism in an International Frame" with a familiar "call to future practice:"

I emphasize discontinuity, heterogeneity, and typology as I speak of such a sex-analysis, because this work cannot by itself obliterate the problems of race and class. It will not necessarily escape the inbuilt colonialism of First World feminism toward the Third. It might, one hopes, promote a sense of our common yet history-specific lot. It ties together the terrified child held down by her grandmother as the blood runs down her groin and the 'liberated' heterosexual woman who... in bed with a casual lover. . .confronts, at worst, the 'shame' of admitting to the 'abnormality' of her orgasm: at best, the acceptance of her 'special' need; and the radical feminist who, setting herself apart from the circle of reproduction, systematically discloses the beauty of the lesbian body; the doweried bride—a body for burning—and the female wage-slave—a body for maximum exploitation. There can be other lists; and each one will straddle and undo the ideological-material opposition. For me it is the best gift of French feminism, that it cannot itself fully acknowledge, and that we must work at; here is a theme that can liberate my colleague from Sudan, and a theme the old washerwomen by the river would understand.
Here, as with Stanton and Jardine, this final moment gestures towards a future critical practice that will unite women the world over. This future critical practice will "tie together" all the women in the list. "Other lists" "will straddle and undo the ideological-material opposition." In her list, as we shall see later, she deploys a strategy in which a series of terms are enumerated in such a way that they may possibly be in relation to each other without making textually specific what that relation will be. It is also interesting to note the terms of her enumeration: first the girl subjected to clitorectomy, then the 'liberated heterosexual woman' struggling with her orgasm [and here the text gets into a kind of verbal knot--my ellipses reflect the considerable hedging with which the text surrounds this image]. Then, after this more elaborated mentioning of the first two terms--which both locate the clitoris as the site of oppression--a quicker listing of the "radical feminist" (does she mean lesbian here?) who depicts the "lesbian body" and "the doweried bride" and "the female wage slave." These last three terms are more and more quickly enumerated, and the oppression that these "women" experience is less intimately bound up with the clitoris--although a connection could be seen. The reason to examine this particular enumeration this
closely is to make clear some of the difficulties which the semi-colon elides, but more importantly to underscore the desire that is present in this list--to reach towards the (almost?) impossible practice that will "tie" women together.

That is, the conclusion of Spivak's often-quoted essay, is not just a specific winding-up of her questions about the relationship between "third world women" and "feminism." It is another example of the familiar strategy which will maintain feminist writing on a threshold of possibility, but here the possibility is highly specific rather than generally utopian: some future discourse will find a way to unite all these disparate women, women that Spivak unites in the provisional form of a list. This utopia, then, this "no place," will present the geography in which feminism will "tie" women together across boundaries of race and class and nationality.¹¹

This trope of map-making recurs in the recent anthology Third World Woman and Feminism. In their "Preface," for instance, the editors note:

Questions of race, class, sexuality, colonialism, and imperialism are (and always have been) the ground for political struggles around the world,

¹¹ As Minnie Bruce Pratt writes in "The Maps in my Bible," "All of us caught on a map marked off by race, by color, by blood" (208) and speaks of an "irresponsible fantasy, and escape to some land on a map yet drawn" (211).
just as they are now constitutive of knowledge production in a number of disciplines (not merely ghettoized in marginal fields). In this context, we can aim only for provocative, challenging analyses rather than comprehensive coverage. This collection maps a political and intellectual field which has gained increasing significance in the last decade. These are maps which will of necessity have to be redrawn as our analytic and conceptual skills and knowledge, as well as historical shifts (most recently in Eastern Europe), transform the way we understand questions of history, consciousness, and agency. (xi)

This passage suggests that old maps need to be rewritten (geographical maps, conceptual maps, the way disciplines are mapped out); however the editors stress with a familiar insistence that their maps will always be liminal, provisional, sketched-in rather than finalized.

In her extended introduction to the volume, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," Chandra Talpade Mohanty suggests this limit of this volume's "cartography:"

Again, these are necessarily partial contexts meant to be suggestive rather than comprehensive—this is, after all, one possible cartography of contemporary struggles. And it is admittedly a cartography which begs numerous questions and suggests its own gaps and fissures. However, I write it in an attempt to "pivot" the center of feminist analyses, to suggest new beginnings and middles, and to argue for more finely honed historical and context-specific feminist methods. (39)

Again, this "cartography" will be "suggestive," and is riddled with "its own gaps and fissures."

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12 This insistence of "gaps and fissures" also resonates across an enormous terrain of contemporary writing, recalling, among other moments, Jonathan Arac's
repetition of the cartographic quote stands in an interesting relationship to the difficulties of "mapping" third world women:

While the term third world is a much maligned and contested one, we use it deliberately, preferring it to postcolonial or developing countries. Third world refers to the colonized, neocolonized or decolonized countries (of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) whose economic and political structures have been deformed within the colonial process, and to black, Asian, Latino, and indigenous peoples in North America, Europe, and Australia. (vii)

That is, the "third world" both can (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) and cannot be mapped; ultimately the "third world" is everywhere, in every peopled continent, interpenetrating and completely separable from its opposite term: the "first world." No less than the closure of Spivak's essay, this passage dreams of a liminal geography in the name of "empowerment" (viii) and in the name of mapping some new relation between "third world women" and between "third" and "first world" women.

There are other echoes of Spivak's passage in the book. Ann Russo's essay, "'We Cannot Live Without Our Lives:' White Women, Antiracism, and Feminism," more or less begins with a list of the categories of women who made up Russo's community during the period in which she

figuration of The Prelude as riddled with "crevices which interrupt the smooth path around" (60). It is as if an obsessive fascination with a textually sublime landscape, replete with chasms, fissures, and crevices, has infected certain ostensibly widely disparate discourses in our time.
helped organize the the conference which became a jumping
off place for this anthology:

I worked and hung out with a wonderful group of
women, black, Latina, third world, Jewish, and
white lesbian and heterosexual, coming from poor,
working-class, and middle-class backgrounds. We
talked about our lives, discussed and argued
politics, ate, sang, and danced, as well as
organized events, encouraged each other in our
work, and formed groups working against racism in
the context of local feminist organizing. (298)\textsuperscript{13}

Constructed in the feminist pattern of a list, Russo here
actually presents a series of lists: based on race and
ethnicity, based on sexual orientation, based on class,
based on leisure activities, and finally based on work
activities. Like Spivak's list, without specifying what
the material relations among these women were in the past
or could be in the future, this list holds the promise
that a kind of complete leveling was or will be
accomplished, that all hierarchies and all differences
can be strung out as equal components on a list. The
list, then, may be particularly useful for feminist
writing, as cartography is, in its rhetoric of
liminality, of the thresholds of possibility that
feminist writing seems constantly to strive to maintain;
that is, both may be seen as examples of a peculiarly
Romantic tropology, and a particularly Keatsian

\textsuperscript{13} Importantly, this "community" is represented as
a lost community: "This loss feels even greater now since
I have moved away from this community to Boston, where I
have encountered few multiracial groups of feminists
working together for social change (298).
conceptualization of the possibilities of writing when measured against the neo-Platonic whole of a dream.

The final essay in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* ends with an echo of Spivak's insistence that finally, in some as yet unrealized way, there will be a thread which can "tie" all of us together. Cheryl Johnson-Odim concludes her essay, "Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism," with this utopian vision:

We must discontinue reproducing our own oppression in the ways we treat one another, in the ways we raise our children, in our misdiagnosis or half-definition of the problem. Based on the things we have in common as women, which are greater in number through space and time when we make right connections between them, we must view women's oppression in the context of all oppression. We must challenge a feminist perspective to envisage a human-centered world, in which the satisfaction of human needs, justly met, is a primary goal. (326)

In this final "envisaging" of a remapping, it seems as if a list of "differences" between women has been compared with a list of "the things we have in common" and the second list has been found to be "greater in number through space and time when we make the right connections between them," that is, when we draw the right connections between them. This essay too ends with a dream, a dream in which the connections will be drawn correctly through space and time, the world will be remapped in such a way that utopia, "no place," becomes everywhere.
I do not present these moments from *Third World Woman and the Politics of Feminism* in order to present a totalized "reading" of the anthology a la Jane Gallop. In fact, I am simply interested in tracing out some examples of rhetorical gestures so wide-spread as to be impossible fully to find and annotate without an encyclopedic attempt to assimilate enormous numbers of instances. The moments we have seen in Spivak and Russo and Mohanty are moments that have been repeated again and again in feminist writing; they are specific moments of textual dream that seems shot through feminist writing, the dream of a true conversation among women, a conversation that exists not now, maybe never, but always dreamed of.

In her tremendously influential essay, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," Minnie Bruce Pratt also relies on this familiar rhetoric:

I'm trying to get a little closer to that longed-for but unrealized world, where we each are able to live, but not by trying to make someone less than us, not by someone else's blood or pain. Yes, that's what I'm trying to do with my living now. I take the moments when I speak and am spoken to, the exchange with dignity, respect, perhaps pleasure, as fragments of that world; but often the moment slips, the illusion of acceptance vanishes into the chasm of the world-as-it-is that opens up between me and another. (30)

So here it is: I'm putting it down for you to see if our fragments match anywhere, if our pieces together, make another larger piece of the truth that can be part of the map we are making together to show us the way to get to the longed-for world. (32)
Writing fragments, making maps is always a communal practice. Keats leaves his letter unfinished so that his friend can do the filling in; Pratt offers her "fragments" to see if they can find a match. The feminist rhetorical dream is also a feminist rhetorical map.

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* also engages with a question of mapping, but in a different register. Rather than using the dream of a new mapping as a trope for the feminist project, she interrogates the purchase price of any map, finally insisting that each possible location cannot be conceptualized as remaining within any borders, however drawn or redrawn. Her collection begins with the essay "The Homeland, Aztlán; El otro México:"

The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal." Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether their Chicanos, Indians, or Blacks. (3)
Throughout her book "borderlands" becomes a figure of enormous resonance, a resonance that has begun to find echoes in other feminist writing. Alzaldu/'a's essay focuses on all map making as a bloody drama of extended conflict, a conflict that in the case of the U.S. Southwest is by now means safely located in the past of long ago wars with Mexico. Borderlands, the lines on the map, become the valorized places in her writing. In her poem, "To live in the borderlands means you" she writes:

To live in the Borderlands means knowing
that the india in you, betrayed for 500 years
is no longer speaking to you,
that mexicanas call you rajetas,
that denying the Anglo inside you
is as bad has having denied the Indian or Black;

...;

To live in the Borderlands means to
put chile in the borscht,
eat whole wheat tortillas,
speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;
be stopped by la migra at the border checkpoints;

...;

To survive the Borderlands
you must live sin fronteras
be a crossroads (194-195)

Anzaldu/'a's writing suggests a new spin on the familiar feminist trope of new cartographies; for Anzaldu/'a, all maps are an exercise in power, a charge from which maintaining that they are provisional does not save them, because they never were anything but provisional and
contested. *Borderlands/La Frontera* ends with a call to future practice in a rather different register than those we have been examining. The final poem in the book, "Don’t Give in Chicanita (para Missy Anzaldu’a)" ends with this stanza:

Yes, in a few years or centuries
la Raza will rise up, tongue intact
carrying the best of all the cultures.
That sleeping serpent,
rebellion-(r)evolution, will spring up.
Like old skin will fall the slave ways of obedience, acceptance, silence.
Like serpent lighting we’ll move, little woman.
You’ll see. (203)

As we saw in the first chapter, Anzaldu’a here invokes a Romantic trope with a difference: rather than shedding inappropriate or falsifying garments, la Raza will like a snake shed its old skin. This is the familiar feminist dream of a future, a possibility yet to come, but translated out of the realm of discourse it finally maintains the dream of a new unity: "the best of all the cultures." That last line in the book is actually this note following "Don’t Give in Chicanita": "--translated from the Spanish by the author." Like the last sentence of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, "It translated well," *Borderlands* ends with a dream of translation, an answer to the question not raised by Adrienne Rich’s famous phrase "the dream of a common language": whose language?

That is, the final moment of Gloria Anzaldu’a’s
Borderlands/La Frontera can be seen as a translation of the familiar refusal of closure, call to future practice, and invocation of what Wolfson calls "a poetics of cooperation" that we’ve seen operating across a wide terrain of feminist and Romantic texts. Translation throughout Anzaldu’a’s writing functions as a kind of metaphor that maintains a tension between similarity and difference, as does Anzaldu’a’s writing style which ranges across genres (poetry and prose) and across languages.

What has caught our attention in this chapter is the promiscuous proliferation of certain tropes, certain rhetorical gestures which can be sorted into different categories but which all locate specific instances of feminist writing, essays, books, as fragments of some larger, still to be completed discourse, some dream of writing yet to be fulfilled. As we’ve seen, what could be more Romantic than that?

What we’ve seen again and again in this feminist writing, in these constantly reiterated gestures towards the completeness of the feminist dream, somewhere out there, much feminist writing of the past two decades has tended to construct a kind of feminist geography of the imagination. Dogged at night by patriarchal nightmares, in Nancy Miller’s conceit, daytime feminist writing gestures consistently towards an elsewhere: a
geographical elsewhere free of masculine violence and a textual elsewhere where the writer's incomplete intentions will be completed and fulfilled, where all the fragmented pieces of writing that have constituted the feminist project in literature will come together, as complete as Keats' imagined "letters in the Air." As Keats concludes one of his more famous dissertations on poetry ("if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it has better not come at all"): "However it may be with me I cannot help looking into new countries"(70).
Chapter IV

Nuns fret not: The Sense of a Cloister

During his entire career, [Wordsworth] restricted his use of nuns as an image almost exclusively to his sonnets, presumably because the subject and form share similar spiritual and aesthetic properties.

Lee M. Johnson, *Wordsworth and the Sonnet*

The columbine was growing upon the rocks; here and there a solitary plant, sheltered and shaded by the tufts and bowers of trees. It is a graceful slender creature, a female seeking retirement, and growing freest and most graceful where it is most alone.

*Dorothy Wordsworth, Grasmere Journal, 1 June 1802*

But if women are to preserve and expand their auto-eroticism, their homo-sexuality, might not the renunciation of heterosexual pleasure correspond once again to that disconnection from power that is traditionally theirs? Would it not involve a new prison, a new cloister, built of their own accord?

*Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which is not One," trans. Catherine Porter*

In what seems to be a marked shift, we will turn now from the epistemology of the Romantic fragment, to a consideration of the sonnet as a Romantic form, and in particular to a consideration of the place of the sonnet in Wordsworth's career and in Wordsworth criticism. At first glance, the sonnet may seem a poetic form at odds with current and past vogues for the fragment; one of the most enduring, formalized, and contained of poetic forms,
the sonnet is above all short and controlled (with relatively fixed rhyme schemes, volta, and scansion).¹

¹ This is in part the result of what Stuart Curran calls "an entrenched belief that Romanticism was inherently suspicious of, even hostile to, traditional literary forms, thus divorcing itself from history, from the continuities of Western literature, and from the conceptual syntax that encodes them... [a] myth of a radical generic breakdown in European Romanticism that in fact never happened" (4-5). Even when recent critics have turned their attention to Wordsworth sonnets, as we will see in the discussion of Alan Liu in the chapter, the constraints of the sonnet form are consistently disparaged, and anything hinting at "limits" is seen, implicitly or explicitly, as anti-Romantic. For instance, John Kerrigan's 1985 essay, "Wordsworth and the Sonnet: Building, Dwelling, Thinking," contrasts the implicitly "bad" Wordsworthian sonnet with the implicitly "good" Keatsian one by relying on the by now familiar Romantic opposition between the "experimental" and the "contained." Keats' sonnets are characterized by "restless experimentation," an "eager seeking-out of new verbal possibilities," "adventure and uncertainty," "a sense of possibility," based on "some expression of what is not achieved," and "a fascination with wild surmising [which lends] his mature sonnets an utterly unWordsworthian elan." In this formulation, as has been characteristic for Romantic criticism in this century, Wordsworth becomes almost completely unRomantic in his sonnets. To make this point, Kerrigan imagines how Keats might have written a sonnet on the cloudscape Wordsworth viewed on the night of his wedding to Mary Hutchinson (the sonnet with which Kerrigan opens his essay): "He would have welcomed the chance construction of clouds seen from the Hambleton Hills, and so would most romantic artists... but Wordsworth, though fascinated by the airy buildings, found them deeply disconcerting, unheimlich, unhomely." That parenthetical phrase, "and so would most romantic artists," of course, locates Wordsworth firmly outside this company, in case we have missed the implications of Kerrigan's description of Wordsworth's sonnets as finding "lodging in the verb 'to be'," as "ontic" rather than "subjunctive." Finally, for Kerrigan, "The 'narrow room' of the Miltonic Sonnet charmed Wordsworth all his life, and he stuck firmly to its limits and conventions. Keats, however, found the tight and elaborate form increasingly irksome." That is, Kerrigan's analysis relies firmly on the familiar opposition between "something evermore about to be" and
In fact, one of Wordsworth's most famous sonnets on sonnets, used by him from 1807 on to introduce the sonnet form, compares the sonnet to a cloister, a cell, and a scanty plot of ground. "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room" figures the sonnet as a prison which "no prison is," a retreat from "the weight of too much liberty." With this characterization of the sonnet in mind, it is no surprise that Wordsworth's sonnets should have fallen into relative critical disfavor as a genre. That is, although a certain selected company of Wordsworth's sonnets continue to garner critical attention, the place of the poetic genre in Wordsworth's canon has not received sustained attention since 1973. This is more than a little ironic considering that Wordsworth's 535 sonnets make him "the most prolific sonneteer of all the major English poets" (Johnson, 16), a poet whom William Sharp in 1886 praised along with Shakespeare and Rossetti as "the three greatest "limits and conventions," with Wordsworth's sonnets here occupying the "narrow room." See Kerrigan, 60-65.

That is, those sonnets firmly located within the confines of the poet's "Great Decade." The later sonnets, a considerable portion of his oeuvre, seem to inspire almost universal derision. For instance, an editor's note in David Perkins' anthology English Romantic Writers, reads: "Wordsworth became a prolific writer of sonnets, but it is a curious fact that most of the memorable ones were produced within a year or so after his first use of the form on May 21, 1802" (286). A recent defender of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets notes that they remain "for the most part unread or misunderstood or unjustly maligned" (Rylestone, xv).
sonneteers of our language" (lxxii).

Curiously, however, several of Wordworth's early sonnets have been taken up by the two critics most influential in forcing a reconsideration of Wordworth's relation to history: Marjorie Levinson and Alan Liu. In fact, as we shall see, an examination of Wordworth's use of the sonnet form involves us not only in the problems of history but the problems of cloisters, of the intersections and tensions between "private" and "public" spaces—to use a rhetoric which, as we saw in chapter II, was significantly consolidated in the period we are studying. Despite the ways in which Wordworth's sonnets can be seen as constituting a fully historical discourse in the public sense, they are also from the start fully interwoven with images of feminized, cloistered spaces. It is thus "no accident" that Wordworth's first published poem was a sonnet, and not only that, but a Shakespearian sonnet written to a poetess of feeling: "Sonnet, on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress." While James Averill characterizes

3 Ramona Marie Ralston, in an unpublished dissertation, "Wordworth and the Feminized Sonnet: A Suppression of Eighteenth-Century Poetic Influences," argues that although Wordworth's own account of indebtedness to Milton's sonnets has been accepted without question, his sonnets are also "clearly indebted" to a late eighteenth-century sonnet tradition characterized by a "feminine sensibility," dominated by women writers, and emphasizing "the writers capacity for emotional sensitivity."
the sonnet's language as "conventional and derivative" (derived almost completely, in fact, from Williams' own vocabulary) he also sees it as:

a remarkable performance, revealing much about the nature of Wordsworth's early relationship to contemporary popular literature. The poem's complex, involuted structure reflects a sensitive mind working within a literature fascinated by emotional response. (34)

As we will see, Wordsworth's famous first "public" sonnet of 1802 literally turns on a valorization of a feminized, private space in rejection of an (implicitly) over-masculine world of power-struggles and wars.

Images of cloisters are also a source of considerable energy and anxiety for feminist theory in terms which reverberate with Wordsworth's own. I will trace this connection, the tropological repetition, by looking at the two periods in which the "cult" of the Ladies of Llangollen flourished most strongly: Wordsworth's own turn of century Romantic period, and the decades since 1971. Once again we will see a repeated flourishing of widely disseminated tropes, this time tropes of domestic bliss, enclosed havens, and female solidarity. Although feminist writing since the 1970s has engaged with the image of the cloister as an area of tension, as a trope to be deconstructed as much as valorized, in some ways the "cult" of the Ladies continues to be written across a wide terrain of feminist writing, often figured, not surprisingly considering the
In order to make the connection between Romantic and feminist cloisters, we need a new—and more careful—consideration of the location of the sonnet in Wordsworth’s oeuvre. It has become a critical commonplace that Wordsworth’s sonnets are his preferred vehicle for national or public themes, and perhaps for this reason they have drawn less attention as Wordsworth critics continue to revalidate the canon established by Hartman’s *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814*. Wordsworth’s sonnets clearly dominate his writing after 1807; more than half of his 535 sonnets were written in the last quarter of his life. These later sonnets are arranged in sequences as public utterances: they are structured into tours, histories (“Ecclesiastical Sonnets”), and political documents (“Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order,” “Sonnets Upon the Punishment of Death”). In part, then, Wordsworth’s sonnets have drawn relatively little critical attention because so many of them belong to his poetically "dead" years, his years as an embarrassing revenant. In fact, Stephen Gill’s recent biography of the poet justifies its existence in part by noting that Wordsworth’s "later years" have been largely ignored by twentieth-century critics:

The modern critical consensus is that Wordsworth’s best poetry was written before he was 40 and that
it would have been better for his reputation had he joined Keats, Shelley, and Byron in an early death. It is not likely that this literary-critical evaluation will be reversed. What needs to be recognized, however, is that as Wordsworth grew older he became a stronger, not a weaker, power in national culture. His later writings were increasingly well received as the same time as his earlier work was being discovered by many in the younger generation who were to contribute significantly to the culture of nineteenth-century Britain and America. Wordsworth began to matter to his contemporaries just as, in the judgement of most critics, he stopped being an important poet. (vii-viii)

Ironically for a critical community ostensibly obsessively engaged with the intersection of "literature" and "society" [to put it a bit cavalierly], Wordsworth's career is itself treated as a kind of fragment, one that for all intents and purposes stopped around 1807 or 1810, although its author, in a kind of gruesome survival, remained ambulatory and became, in fact, increasingly powerful for the next four decades. In other words, only the private voice of Wordsworth is recognized as fully poetic. This explains, among other things, the enormous importance of his unpublished *Prelude* in the twentieth-century canon. Or, to point out an even more peculiar aspect of contemporary Wordsworth criticism, Wordsworth has been fairly consistently taken to task for

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'My rather gothic image here is, of course, far from original. Geoffrey Hartman quotes Crabb Robinson's 1827 statement that, "The great poet survived to the fifth decade of the nineteenth century, but he appears to have died in the year 1814 as far as life consisted in an active sympathy with the temporal welfare of his fellow creatures" (qtd. in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, 14-15).
evading history, another although his canon of "great works" has been constructed so that almost no other reading of his work is possible. His most "historical" and "public" poems are resolutely marginalized, as if when he does turn to comment on public events, his comments do not count simply because nobody much likes or agrees with them.5

The sonnet form raises troubling questions about what seems to be an almost anti-Romantic confinement and order which have led the sonnet to be rather marginalized as a form in critical studies of Wordsworth’s canon. Wordsworth’s sonnet boom of 1802 begins in the midst of his rapidly fraying relationship with Coleridge, a relationship fraying at least in part because of a struggle over the direction and purpose of Wordsworth’s career. Coleridge remained adamant in his hostility to "small poems" (C. to W. c. 10 September 1799; CL I. 527). Writing to Southey in May 1802 Coleridge seems primarily concerned with the length of Wordsworth’s poems: "a number of Poems (32 in all) some of them of considerable Length (the longest 160 lines)" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge Letters, 2:830). Coleridge, of course, wanted Wordsworth

5 Somewhat ironically, given the nearly unanimous indifference to Wordsworth’s later sonnets, Johnson’s study of Wordsworth and the Sonnet aims to "indicate a way of correcting our sense of a ‘decline’ in [Wordsworth’s] imaginative power" (9). This is not a critical approach which has had much influence since its appearance in 1973.
to write the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM. In fact, Coleridge's famous passage to this effect in the *Biographia Literaria* is obsessed with these rather peculiar images of size:

The following analogy will, I am apprehensive, appear dim and fantastic, but in reading Bartram's *Travels* I could not help transcribing the following lines as a sort of allegory, or connected simile and metaphor of Wordsworth's intellect and genius. "The soil is a deep, rich, dark mould, on a deep stratum of tenacious clay; and that on a foundation

6 One perspective with which to analyze this struggle between Wordsworth and Coleridge is suggested by Paul A. Cantor's "Stoning the Romance: The Ideological Critique of Nineteenth-Century Literature: An Afterward" appended to a 1989 *SAQ* special issue on Romanticism. Cantor argues that, "The way the ideological critics are attacking Romanticism is in fact a reenactment of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry, which according to Plato was already "old" in his day" (718). In some ways Cantor's position is reductive: he is less interested in the specificity of early nineteenth-century British Romanticism than his targets: "the fact that Plato developed a critique of poetry which is so applicable to Romanticism over two millenia before the Romantics wrote suggests that the Romantic ideology may not be quite the historically delimited phenomenon its critics claim." However, Coleridge's concerns with the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM can usefully be seen as an attempt to respond to Plato's critique in *Ion*. Given this, it is perhaps no surprise that Wordsworth, during this contentious period, turned to a careful study of the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets and in particular to intensifying experimentation with meter. During this period Wordsworth was also at work on his revisions for the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," revisions in which his discussion of the importance of meter were substantially revised and expanded. Wordsworth, then, seems to respond to Coleridge's insistence on "philosophic poetry" with a reinvigorated insistence on what makes poetry distinct as he now strongly emphasizes the connection between meter and pleasure in his revised "Preface." Cantor's essay indirectly suggests that this collision between philosophy and poetry may be numbered among the phenomena "that often occur[s] at the turning points in literary history" (715).
of rocks, which often break through both strata, lifting their backs about the surface. The trees which chiefly grow here are the gigantic, black oak; magnolia grandi-flora; fraxinus excelsior; plantane; and a few stately tulip trees." What Mr. Wordsworth will produce, it is not for me to prophesy: but I could pronounce with the liveliest convictions what he is capable of producing. It is the FIRST GREAT PHILOSOPHIC POEM. (590)

The passage from Bartram's Travels does indeed seem "dim and fantastic" in relation to Wordsworth's poetry. Coleridge figures his relationship to this passage as helpless and passive: he "could not help transcribing it." The power of this passage seems to derive primarily from its emphasis on overgrown, exaggerated foliage--on an obsession with size. The location of the sonnet in Wordsworth's canon and his aesthetic theories about the sonnet are both centrally concerned with image of size, but, perhaps resolutely in opposition to Coleridge's obsession, they ambivalently valorize the small and contained. Wordsworth's first significant collection of sonnets was published in 1807 in the Poems, in Two Volumes. The appearance of the volume marks the end of his Great Decade, and at its appearance was not well-received. In a letter to Lady Beaumont, Wordsworth takes considerable pains to defend himself against some of the charges made against his work:

"Pity," says Mr. R[ogers], "that so many trifling things should be admitted to obstruct the view of those that have merit"; now let this candid judge take, by way of example, the sonnets, which, probably, with the exception of two or three other poems for which I will not contend appear to him
the most trifling, as they are the shortest, I would say to him, omitting things of higher consideration, there is one thing which must stike you at once if you will only read these poems,—that those to Liberty, at least, have a connection with, or a bearing upon, each other, and therefore, if individually they want weight, perhaps, as a Body, they may not be so deficient, at least this ought to induce you to suspend your judgement, and qualify it so far as to allow that the writer aims at least at comprehensiveness. But dropping this, I would boldly say at once, that these Sonnets, while they each fix the attention upon some important sentiment separately considered, to at the same time collectively make a Poem on the subject of civil Liberty and national independence, which, either for simplicity of style or grandeur of moral sentiment, is, alas! likely to have few parallels in the Poetry of the present day. (Zall, 79-80).

Wordsworth, here, as well as prefiguring his later focus on sonnet sequences, at length and defensively (rather than "boldly" and "at once") both acknowledges and defends against challenges which, considering his struggles with Coleridge, must have stung considerably: that they are too short. In other words, although his turn to the sonnet form in 1802 connects Wordsworth's poetry to "tradition" and "history," it is also a turn to what was at the time a devalued and debased poetic genre. It was Wordsworth's virtuosity with the sonnet, in fact, which re-established it as an important nineteenth-century genre. Wordsworth's use of the sonnet, then, is entirely implicated in his concerns about his poetic vocation, and about the size and scope of his poetic works. In some way he seems to want his sonnet sequences to make up for the lack of the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC
POEM in his work. This reading is born out again by the conjunction, in 1838, of his public acknowledgement that he would never write *The Recluse* and the appearance of a collection of his sonnets. Gill marks this moment as a significant turning point:

On 9 May 1838 the American George Ticknor asked Wordsworth—surely naively—why he did not finish *The Recluse*. The poet turned to him "very decidedly, and said, 'Why did not Gray finish the long poem he began on a similar subject? Because he found he had undertaken something beyond his powers to accomplish. And that is my case." (Gill, 390)

Given the significance of this acknowledgement, it is no coincidence that June 1838 saw the publication of *The Sonnets of William Wordsworth* collected in one volume. This collection of 415 sonnets, each printed on a separate page, stands in for the long philosophic poem he now knew that he would never write.

Wordsworth’s turn to the sonnet in 1802, then, was already heavily implicated in questions of tradition, history, form, length and scope. It was also over-determined by the political events of 1801-3 and by significant changes in the poet’s personal life. Wordsworth famously takes up the sonnet on May 21, 1802, roughly a month after the signing of the Peace of Amiens (in addition to be the most rigorous of poetic forms for Wordsworth it is also the most precisely dated) after being inspired by hearing Dorothy read a series of Milton’s sonnets. Alan Liu, discussing this famous
moment in Wordsworth: The Sense of History, calls the sonnet "a form of lyric especially suited to reifying turns of mind" before noting that "the Miltonic (and Italianate) sonnet . . . became his preferred and virtually exclusive form between May 21, 1802 and January 1804" (428). Lee M. Johnson, however, argues that the precision of this turning point is perhaps overstated:

Although he attributed his veritable conversion to the form in 1802 to a new-born understanding of Milton's sonnets, his receptivity to them was contemporaneously prepared for psychologically by his residence in Grasmere, and Dorothy's reading of Milton was merely the catalyst that set him off. (74)

That is, Wordsworth's decisive swerve into public, political discourse was fully conditioned by the confines of his domestic haven. Dorothy's role in this oft-repeated anecdote has also been marginalized: Wordsworth's revelation about Milton is mediated by the sound of Dorothy's voice, the voice of his more-than-sister domestic partner and perhaps the most important of the three women whose lives were entangled with his own this epochal year.

Wordsworth's public sonnet career begins with "I grieved for Buonaparté" and is generally taken to be coeval with his return to political discourse. Liu, for instance, selects seven sonnets from this fertile year which he reads as Wordsworth's first sustained political discourse in almost a decade:
These seven sonnets anchor the whole matrix of political sonnets at the time in a deliberately public mode of discourse, and so create the prototype for all of Wordsworth’s later sequences of political poems. Indeed, they compose the poet’s first such fully political discourse since the abortive Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff of 1793. (430)

Wordsworth’s sonneteering, then, is taken to be part and parcel with his development of a public voice, speaking on public issues, far from the intensely solipsistic voice of his greatest lyrics (several of these sonnets were, in fact, published as political commentary in the Morning Post), and can even be seen as a harbinger of his fall into public punditry. In fact, however, Wordsworth’s famous first public sonnet may also be read as a rejection of public power:

I grieved for Buonaparté, with a vain
And an unthinking grief! The tenderest mood
Of that Man’s mind—what can it be? what food
Fed his first hopes? what knowledge could he gain?
’Tis not in battles that from youth we train
The Govenor who must be wise and good,
And temper with the sternness of the brain
Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood.
Wisdom doth live with children round her knees:
Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
Of the mind’s business: these are the degrees
By which true Sway doth mount; this is the stalk
True Power doth grow on; and her rights are these.

In short, this initial sonnet valorizes not public politics at all but the private spaces of Wordsworth’s own “significant group.” The second quatrain,

7 See Thomas McFarland’s discussion in chapter three of Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin.
uncharacteristically rhymed abab, connects good and womanhood in opposition to brain and train; the sestet begins with an unmistakable valorization of a feminine domestic space: "Wisdom doth live with children round her knees." That is, Wordsworth's move into the constricted sonnet form and into public political discourse, into history on several levels, is also, simultaneously, a retreat into and a valorization of a private, and almost literally cloistered world. The sonnet turns on a gendered opposition between the overly public and the fully private.

The connections between these sonnets and history may seem obvious on several levels. On a formal level, the sonnet is for Paul Fussell, in Poetic Meter and Poetic Form, a perfect exemplar of poetic structure, that aspect of poetry which which "involves the larger elements of form which ally the poem with a tradition or with history" (109). Lee M. Johnson notes this connection between the sonnet and "tradition" or "history" to explain what he sees as a modern disparagement of the form:

The pairing of originality and excellence has not encouraged appreciation of either Wordsworth's sonnets or the form in general. His sonnets are, after all, the work of a mature artist and their craft show him to be extraordinarily mindful of tradition. To some readers, a poet who reverts to traditional forms or makes an obvious pact with the past—and this is particularly true for sonetteers—seems to demonstrate a lack of originality and thereby reduces his stature. Some have found it
disturbing, even incredible, that Wordsworth, on
the one hand, was instrumental in revolutionizing
English poetry and, on the other, wrote hundreds
of sonnets. (171)

As we shall see, Wordsworth’s turn to the sonnet in 1802
is significantly predicated not only on his growing
nationalism, but on the intersections between this
nationalism and poetic tradition. Wordsworth’s increasing
use of the sonnet, his obsession with the Miltonic
sonnet, is also an obsession with the repeatedly invoked
earlier Revolution of Milton’s day, which makes "history"
in many of the sonnets a code word for nostalgia.
Wordsworth’s responses to France in these sonnets most
obviously figure these sonnets as interventions in the
course of history. Thus, these sonnets seem most clearly
to be what Liu reads them as: a sustained and public
discourse.

What this reading neglects, however, is the extent
to which this creative burst of 1802 is also criss­
crossed and determined by the exigencies of the poet’s
private history. The preliminary deliberations towards
peace between France and England of 1 October 1801 had
allowed correspondence between Wordsworth and Annette
Vallon for the first time in a decade. Sometime during
this spring Wordsworth was forming plans both to marry
Mary Hutchinson and to visit Annette in Calais. That is,
the burst of sonnet activity marks not so much the
development of a sustained public voice as a series of
poems exploring and developing complicated tensions between public and private, between the domestic and the historical. These tensions still need to be explored, and particularly in relation to contemporary feminist theories.

Given all this, it is perhaps no coincidence that recent studies by the two most important critics to take up the question of Wordsworth’s relation to history have turned to particular sonnets to make their claims. Marjorie Levinson begins her essay on "Wordsworth’s New Historicism" with the following familiar assessment of the sonnet’s art:

Wordsworth’s sonnet, "The world is too much with us," seems to give very little purchase to critical interest, and this could be said of nearly all the sonnets written between 1802 and 1804 and assembled in the 1807 edition. The argument of the poem is clear, unconflicted, and doctrinally bland, its controlling rhetoric baldly indicative, and its redemptive figures classically familiar. (634)

After making this initial judgement, Levinson goes on to explore the complexities of the sonnet’s denial of history. Like Liu, she limits her consideration of the sonnet’s "context" to "the period 1802-1804--loosely, the period between two wars, and strictly, the interval separating the two movements of the Intimations Ode" (639). For Levinson, Wordsworth’s sonnet is in some sense reprehensible, because of its denial of history. Liu’s argument in Wordsworth: The Sense of History takes a slightly different tack.
Although Liu's massive study of the sense of history in Wordsworth's poetry concludes with an extensive discussion of several of Wordsworth's 1802 sonnets, his most important chapter does not engage with the sonnet form at all. His penultimate chapter, "A Transformed Revolution" contains an extended discussion of "the reifying turn" in several of Wordsworth's 1802 political sonnets which turns, as it were, on the play of volta in seven of Wordsworth's early political sonnets. Although his final chapter, "The Idea of the Memorial Tour: 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge,'" a detailed study of the location of that sonnet in Wordsworth's oeuvre, reads sonnets almost exclusively, it begins with what amounts to a denial that its subject is the sonnet. Liu begins his discussion of "Westminster Bridge" with the following disavowal of its status as sonnet:

We notice to begin with that although "Westminster Bridge" belongs to a specific form, the sonnet, it nevertheless contains a riot of modal and generic possibilities matching the shapeless eagerness of the Revolution books in The Prelude. Lyric form is again transformed: it is not committed to any particular form. . . . "Westminster Bridge" flickers perpetually on the verge of generic stability--tour poem né epitaph né love poem, and so on" (460).

In order to valorize the poem under discussion, Liu begins by willfully dismissing its "form" in a passage which opposes "the sonnet" to "a riot" of possibilities and to "shapeless eagerness." That is, the passage establishes a clear opposition between "riot" and
"shapelessness" on the one side and the sonnet on the other. It is clear, in Liu's terms, which half of the dualism is valorized. In a sense, with this move Liu shifts "Westminster Bridge" away from the context of Wordsworth's use of the sonnet form, and locates it in a field much more compelling to contemporary Romanticists: that of freedom from form, from constraint, and ultimately from the cloister. "Westminster Bridge" is saved because it "flickers . . . on the verge of generic stability," although as a fourteen-line poem in iambic pentameter rhymed abbaabbaabababab it is also, at the same time, despite Liu's contentions, utterly and unmistakably a sonnet. Liu proceeds with a discussion which could

8 Liu's ability to make this move is underwritten by his highly impressionistic style. For instance, in an extended passage which introduces his "Westminster Bridge" chapter, Liu ruminates on the scars which, in his analysis, history has left on the body of Wordsworth's poetry, in effect comparing Wordsworth's poetry to the body of Christ on the cross. Liu begins this passage with some of the gothic language which, as we have seen, so infects Romantic critical writing:

I wish to conclude my project by summoning up for my poet a[n] . . . after life. I wish to remember the later, imaginatively "dead" Wordsworth who, in the view I will argue here, sacrifices part of his original self--his imagination--to redeem part of history. To redeem a poet able to redeem his lost history, of course, may seem a strange task of harrowing after a series of chapters whose net result is arguably demystifying: a nailing up of the poet on the cross of the historical world that, in that act of pointing out the stigmata where political, social, and economic history have penetrated, refuses to acknowledge any of the poet's saving fictions of transcendence except in distancing quotes--as if hanging up an accusation.
seem to be completely dependent on an understanding of the place of the sonnet form in Wordsworth's canon: with one exception he cites only other sonnets to shore up his argument about "Westminster Bridge"; his extended "Appendix" to this chapter, "Contents Lists of Principle

Here Liu seems to figure himself in the position of the tormentors of Christ, "nailing up . . . the poet on the cross," but the rhetoric is quite slippery here as the critic shifts to merely "pointing out" the stigmata left by quite other forces. This tension around the position recurs in the renewed violence of the metaphor on the following page:

As I have said about my own methodology, such new history is thus radically skeptical in its ontology but positive in its displaced locus of epistemology. It would know with precision not so much the historical other across the divide as the shape and dimensions of the divide itself together with the imprint of such impending division, or becoming, within the other—a palpable absence, we may say, like the track of a blade after it has left the wound.

But though we do not want a too-easy regeneration of the flesh of "humanity" in the wound or stigmata of history, neither do we desire the scarring, thickening, and coarsening that endangers all the demystifying strategies of New Historicism. I refer to the potential for adversarial dogmatism that resides in all such strategies, including my own: a too inflexible and hardened preference for marks of difference. (457)

The density of Liu's repeated tropology of crosses, stigmata, wounds, blades and scars makes this passage somewhat difficult to untangle (both "history" and the critic are clearly implicated in some violent and possibly sacrilegious activity). Given that Liu's style raises significant questions about the use of metaphor in critical writing, it is not uninteresting that we find here another instance of the tropology Chase echoes and amplifies from Wordsworth: the status of a language which precisely "hangs" between the literal and the figurative.
Editions of Wordsworth's Poems from 1820 to 1849-50," although he doesn't point this out, can be easily seen as demonstrating the steadily increasing importance of sonnets in Wordsworth's editions and revisions of his oeuvre; and the chapter relies for its final gesture on "The Column Intended by Buonaparte for a Triumphant Edifice in Milan, Now Lying by the Way-side in the Simplon Pass." Of this poem Liu argues that if we "penetrate deeply enough under the rhetorical ambition and hardened ideology of the sonnet . . . we can recognize the original sense of history, inchoate, terrifying, and brutal, underlying Wordsworth's poetry" (499). Liu's analysis here again relies on an opposition between "hardened ideology" and "inchoate" history. It is as if Liu wishes to evade the status of poetry as artifice, an evasion which requires considerable extra work in the case of the sonnet.

It seems more than a little peculiar to me that this extended investigation, or in Liu's terms, extended "tour," which depends for all its landmarks and way stations and turning points on Wordsworth's sonnets, should begin with such a categorical denial of the sonnet form. The strategies of Levinson and Liu suggest some of the tensions between the sonnet form and history: both critics simultaneously disparage the sonnet form and rely on sonnets to make their incredibly intricate arguments
about Wordsworth's evasion of history. It is as if the sonnet form or Wordsworth's particular use of it provokes even more troubling questions about form and history, public and private, than Levinson and Liu are willing to acknowledge.

Despite his peculiar disavowal of the sonnet, Liu's study overlaps with my concerns here in centering, finally, on Wordsworth's negotiation of the public and the private. Liu reconstructs as the central context for Wordsworth's burst of writing in 1802 a period of repetition: the period begins with Wordsworth's repeated attempts to write *The Pedlar* as a separate poem, a series of attempts dogged by repeated insomnia and illness, by Coleridge's illnesses, by the repetition of anxieties about the Lonsdale inheritance (surfacing again after ten years). Finally, there is also the resurfacing, in Liu's terms the repetition, of anxieties about Annette, who also returns to Wordsworth's life after an absence of approximately ten years. Although Liu mentions Wordsworth's decision to marry at this time, and the connected visit to Annette, his text in effect repeats the silences of Dorothy's journal and Wordsworth's sonnets in not discussing in any detail the personal aspects of the August journey to Calais. Liu structures what he calls the first of Wordsworth's "tours" (not coincidentally, although Liu doesn't mention this, the
suceeding tours are almost entirely made up of sonnet
tours): the "Calais Tour," which is bracketed in
important ways by "Westminster Bridge"--two of the
various dates of composition which Wordsworth gave for
this poem, July 31 and September 3, exactly mark the
departure to and return from Calais. Although Liu’s
construction of the Calais tour ends with the sonnet,
"Composed After a Journey Across the Hambleton Hills,
Yorkshire," a poem written on the day of Wordsworth’s
marriage to Mary Hutchinson, after his initial reference
to Annette and to Wordsworth’s decision to marry, Liu
effectively disregards these decisions as part of the
context for the journey or the poems. Instead, Liu
focuses entirely on questions of nation in his
consideration of Wordsworth’s shifting relations to
history in these poems. He moves from the sonnets of

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9 As Stuart Curran remarks of the "Sonnets Dedicated
to Liberty" as collected in the 1807 Poems, in two
volumes, "Wordsworth, whether deliberately or not,
recapitulates the pattern that Bowles had popularized,
extending his sonnet sequence as travelog into a public
and political realm" (45-6). In fact, some consideration
of the sonnet as the building block for most of
Wordsworth’s tours would harmonize nicely with Liu’s
initial definition of the tour: "a tour reduces to two
points between which a break poses the problem of
continuity" (6). The poetic pointillism of Wordsworth’s
sonnet tours (the series of self-enclosed forms) could be
seen as posing the problem of continuity with a
vengeance.

10 In other words, Liu’s "sense of history" is
unmistakably masculine in a post-Romantic, post-French
Revolutionary sense. (In a recent essay, "Feminism and
George Sand," Naomi Schor calls "the opposition between
the Calais Tour back to a focus on "Westminster Bridge,"
its various dates and shifting locations in Wordsworth’s
collections of his poems, to argue:

The net effect of the reorganization was that the
middle zone of private and public concerns became
increasingly sure ground for a poet concerned to
walk though life attentive to both realms. Not
natural place ("Poems on the Naming of Places,"
"Inscriptions") but commonplace in the Memorial
Tours—meditations upon place compounded of
lyricism and topicality—now ensured that there was
indeed continuity between, for example,
"Miscellaneous Sonnets," and "Sonnets Dedicated to
Liberty"; ensured, that is, that there was one road
to walk among all private and public moments of
life. (495)

Finally, for Liu, this "perspective that was neither
private nor public but precisely the to-and-fro
interchange between the two" (495) is achieved through
the poet’s constant revision of his tables of content.
Liu examines the way "Westminster Bridge" and other tour
poems through Wordsworth’s various revisions increasingly
take up the position of being bracketed by Wordsworth’s
groupings which follow the chronology of a man’s life.
That is, "Poems Written in Early Childhood" open most
volumes, and "Poems written on Old Age" close them. In
the middle we find various configurations of sonnets and
tours. What Liu seems to mean, then, by a tension
between the "private" and the "public" is a tension

... the great opposition produced by
the French Revolution" (48.) Liu’s study does little to
historicize this "sense of history," and absolutely
nothing to interrogate its gendered foundations.
between the biography of an individual man and the corporate public events of his time.

In other words, what is not examined in Liu's configuration of this tension is gender. Although this reading may be underwritten by Wordsworth's shifting tables of content, it is not, finally, underwritten by his poetry which, from the beginning of his "public" voice is inflected by a fantasy of a "private" space which is unmistakably a feminine cloistered space. For Liu, this tension between "public" and "private," which finally prepares "the poet to be the Laureate, a national poet" (496) rather than inhering from the beginning as an anxiety and source of energy for Wordsworth's poetry, is only achieved over time as the poet goes through distinct phases, as he shifts his allegiance from "History" to "Imagination" and finally back to "History" again. Without ignoring the development of Wordsworth's poetry through time, I will now argue that, as suggested in the earlier reading of "I grieved for Buonaparte," when we trace the development of Wordsworth's use of the sonnet, we can see from the beginning and again and again a tension between the public and private, and the increasing invocation not only of a Nation but of a cloistered and feminized community which is its salvation.

As we leave behind Liu's extensive examination of
the problems of dating the composition of "Westminster Bridge," it is perhaps not insignificant to note that with "I grieved for Buonaparté" Wordsworth once again enacts one of his notorious "slips" in dating: although composed on May 21, 1802, the poem was first published (and dated) as 1801. If we assume, as Liu does, that these slips are too consistent to be meaningless, what can be made of this incorrect date? "1801" would perhaps locate the poem in a period before resumed contact with Annette. That is, this inaccurate pre-dating would locate the poem in a period before the poet’s life was intricately criss-crossed by the competing claims of the women in his life, before the feminine configuration of his harmonious world was thrown into temporary disarray. It would also locate the poem during one of Wordsworth’s fallow periods, before his famous burst of creativity in 1802.

Although, as Liu remarks of his own speculations, these can only ever be speculations, it is perhaps noteworthy that the supposed precision with which we can date Wordsworth’s turn to the sonnet is from the outset marred by the poet’s own conflicting narratives of that moment. That is, the famously precise turn to the sonnet overlays a moment of historical uncertainty, the failure to find an accurate date. In some sense, my argument here merely repeats what is fast becoming a critical
truism about Wordsworth's poetry: the poet once more stands convicted of "evading" something (usually history or politics, sometimes women). I want to suggest the extent to which Wordsworth's "evasion," rather than working in any simple way in his sonnets, has been in part constructed by the critics who critique it. Wordsworth's sonnets do not simply "evade" either history or femininity. That their interconnections with what were fast becoming two rigidly opposed categories are more intricate than can be assimilated under a simple rubric of evasion or denial, makes their study all the more pressing for feminist research.

As we have seen, recent major studies of the relationship between Wordsworth and "history" rely more heavily on Wordsworth's sonnets than they acknowledge and draw on a distinctly masculinist definition of history. Major studies of the sonnet have tended to revolve around a perceived split between "public" and "private" sonnets in which each half of the dualism is distinctly masculine. That is, not only does the use of the word "public" take on its familiar masculine connotations, but we find that the private is simply the privacy of Wordsworth's own mind. Everyone agrees that some notion of the "public" and the "private" is indispensible for any approach to the sonnets. Lee M. Johnson notes that "Wordsworth generally thought of his sonnets as
reflecting either public or private themes and occasions." In the conclusion to Part II of the "Miscellaneous Sonnets," for example, he divides the "transcripts of the private heart inspired by lonely nature" from those animated by "the scenes of public life" (39). For John Kerrigan "this is where I would locate Wordsworth and the Sonnet. He not only writes about building and dwelling in his sonnets . . . but finds the sonnet form itself a homely rooted thing" (57).

Stuart Curran argues that:

> even where [Wordsworth’s] tones are most stentorian, the sonnets of Poems, in Two Volumes uniformly attain to power out of a self-consciousness intensified by formal enclosure, a highly sophisticated version of the "lonely feeling" that Coleridge saw inherent in the sonnet. As he began his tutelage with the sonnet Wordsworth stressed the element of confinement. (40)

For Curran, Wordsworth’s valorization of this confinement in "Nuns fret not" evades an essential loneliness, only disingenuously praising the peace of idyll:

> It may be that "'twas pastime to be bound/ Within the Sonnet’s scanty plot of ground," as Wordsworth testifies in the "Prefatory Sonnet" of the 1807 edition, but the sense of isolation, of "some lonely feeling," however refined the emotion or privileged the experience, underlines all the great sonnets of Wordsworth’s maturity. (40)

In Curran’s reading the ostensible joy of the sonnet is merely a ruse, covering over the essential loneliness of the too private space. Later in his reading of the sonnets collected in Poems, in two volumes, Curran suggest that Wordsworth never escapes this lonely, enclosed
space. Even in the "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty," including those sonnets which Liu characterized as a significant public, political discourse, Curran argues, "the true narrative is internalized, events serving as markers for the mental and imaginative growth discerned in the narrative voice" (45). While Johnson stresses the "two types" found among Wordsworth’s sonnets, for Kerrigan the sonnets are always about "being home" and for Curran they never even escape the enclosure of the poet’s own mind. Thus, although all three arguments rely on some distinction between public and private, home and not-home, inside and outside, nowhere is gender an acknowledged component of these oppositions.

From 1804 on, "Nuns fret not" was used as Wordsworth’s "Prefatory Sonnet," introducing his "Miscellaneous Sonnets." This sonnet encapsulates Wordsworth’s connection of the sonnet with the cloister, with enclosures:

Nuns fret not at their Convent’s narrow room;  
And Hermits are contented with their Cells;  
And Students with their pensive Citadels;  
Maids at the Wheel, the Weaver at his Loom,  
Sit blithe and happy; Bees that soar for bloom,  
High as the highest Peak of Furness Fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in Foxglove bells:  
In truth, the prison, unto which we doom  
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence to me,  
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound  
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground:  
Pleas'd if some Souls (for such there needs must be)  
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find short solace there, as I have found.
After 1807 the only significant revision is the exchange of "brief" for "short" in the final line. However, there are a number of significant revisions between this published version and that found in DC MS. 38, 19(r).

Lines 5 and 6 of the MS version read:

Could sit and sing till day of doom  
Bees that one flight would take from Bath to Wells

The revised lines, of course, are appreciably stronger (and avoid the repetition of "doom"). They also increase the stasis of the poem's images; the bees' flight from Bath to Wells, a horizontal journey, is replaced by a vertical journey, and one entirely located within the Lake District. In line 10 "'tis pastime" is changed to "'twas pastime," locating sonnet activity somewhere in an almost halcyon past. With this revision, Wordsworth distances himself from the static, harmonious, and enclosed world of the sonnet; it is not only a pastime, but one bound in the past. The references to "nuns" and "hermits" are similarly time bound. As a matter of fact, the crazes for the picturesque at the end of the eighteenth century included a passion for hermits. Just as many estates had "fake" ruins, it became popular to hire assorted locals to dress up as "hermits" and inhabit them. The "main region" of the poet's song is still to be the FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM he would never write. Although this haven of harmonious labor is more than a little suspect a the turn of this century, I do not think
that this vision is beyond saving.

In *Bearing the Word*, Margaret Homans argues for a rigid distinction between the stylistics of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: Dorothy's writing is attuned to the literal, while William turns toward a (masculine) figurative writing which relies (according to her invocations of Lacanian and Chodorowian psychoanalysis) on the denial and death of the mother, the separation of the signifier and signified. Her chapter on William and Dorothy is called "Building Refuges: Dorothy Wordsworth's Poetics of the Image," and the archetypal moment for her analysis is one in which William refuses to enter a "refuge" during the tour that recreated his 1790 tour through France with Robert Jones. For Homans, "Within the allusive frame of Dorothy's texts, William's refusal to enter this refuge constitutes, like his naming of it, his futher insistence on a model of language requiring absense" (59).

Although her analysis transcends this simplistic dualism, Homans throughout this chapter touches on what has become in the past two-hundred years, a very simply gendered distinction between those who understand refuges and those who fear and flee them. For Homans, Dorothy, as a woman, can "build (and inhabit) refuges" and need not fear her (still preoedipal?) connection with the maternal enclosure. Wordsworth, as a man, can only
destroy it. Homans' analysis of Wordsworth's poetic relies wholly on *The Prelude*. As we have seen, analysis of Wordsworth's sonnets can cast a very different light on his attitude towards "refuges"—although these analyses have yet to be connected with any feminist approach to the poems.

I want now to repeat Curran's reading of the 1807 "Sonnets Dedicate to Liberty"—with a difference. As we've seen, the divisions of the "Sonnets" can at first seem a simple division between "private" and "public" themes. The "Miscellaneous Sonnets" begin in "How sweet it is when mother Fancy rocks" and continue through a dense array of poems about "havens" "hermits," and "Anchorites." "Home" is consistently the location of "solace" as in 13. "Written in very early Youth": "a harmony/ Home-felt and home-created seems to heal/ That grief for which the senses still supply/ Fresh food" (7-10). Wordsworth's seeming association of the sonnet form with nuns is suggested again with the appearance of the Nun in the penultimate sonnet, "The holy time is quiet as a Nun/ Breathless with adoration" (2-3). Nuns, solace, home, quiet, stasis, and harmony are all inter-linked associations, here and throughout Wordsworth's later sonnets, which often turn on some question of home.

This questioning doesn't end with the end of the "Miscellaneous Sonnets," though. The "Sonnets Dedicated
"to Liberty" are not less imbricated with a desire for home. Curran sees the "narrative" in each section as essentially the same, focused on the development of the poet's mind. While in some sense I am repeating Curran's argument that the concerns of the two sonnet sections are not completely separable, I argue that an obsession with a more or less explicitly feminized home connects all the sonnets of the 1807 edition. Many of these sonnets, as we've seen, were written during Wordsworth's prenuptual visit to Calais. True to form, no record of the personal nature of his visit to France appears in these sonnets (and this excision has been embraced and repeated by most of his critics). The sonnet about Wordsworth's daughter, for instance, appears near the end of the "Miscellaneous Sonnets" rather than with the initial sonnets "Dedicated to Liberty" with which it shares a setting: strolling along the seaside at Calais, at evening, looking across the sea. Wordsworth's first sonnet, "I grieved for Buonaparté" appears fourth in the collection, mixed in with the Calais sonnets, as if again suggesting a movement away from Wordsworth's obsession with feminine havens, as if he is again trying to construct a separation between the public and private which he is unable to maintain.

This "separation," inasmuch as it can be said to exist here, is more or less totally undermined by the
time these sonnets are configured into his final, 1849 edition of collected poems. These "Miscellaneous Sonnets" are even more ostentatiously about "home" here: the initial sonnets in the collection echo and re-echo the language of "Nuns fret not" to characterize the poet's home in the lakes as "Idyll" confined, like the sonnet. The second sonnet describes a poor house as a "cottage" with its own "small pasture" and own "small sky" and urges the tourist not to covet it; other sonnets contrast "great" spots beyond its borders with its own small perfection: "What the great Parnassus' self to Thee/ Mount Skiddaw?" (V. 9-10); "Yet to my mind this scanty stream is brought/ Oftener than Ganges of the Nile" (VI. 6-7). In other words, the "Miscellaneous Sonnets" are not very miscellaneous; despite some gesturing towards various journys, the sonnets repeatedly valorize home, quite ("Of silent hills, and more than silent sky" from Sonnet XXXIV, originally published in Joanna Baillie's Poetic Miscellanies) and the tranquility of safely enclosed havens. The later sonnets are, if anything, more insistent in their repetition of these themes. Sonnet VIII, in the second section, argues:

If the whole weight of what we think and feel,  
Save only far as thought and feeling blend  
With action, were as nothing, patriot Friend!  
From they remonstrance would be no appeal;  
But to promote and fortify the weal  
Of her own Being is her paramount end;  
A truth which they alone shall comprehend  
Who shun the mischief which they cannot heal.
Peace in these feverish times is sovereign bliss:
Here, with no thirst but what the stream can slake,
And startled only by rustling brake,
Cool air I breathe; while the unincumbered Mind,
By some weak aims at services assigned
To gentle Natures, thanks not Heaven amiss. (pub. 1827)

The immediately following sonnet takes up the same themes, with what we can describe as an increasingly insistent feminization of tranquility:

Not Love, not War, nor the tumultuous swell
Of civil conflict, nor the wrecks of change,
Nor Duty struggling with afflictions strange--
Not these alone inspire the tuneful shell;
But where untroubled peace and concord dwell,
There also is the Muse not loath to range,
Watching the twilight smoke of cot or grange,
Skyward ascending from a woody dell.
Meek aspirations please her, lone endeavour,
And sage content, and placid melancholy;
She loves to gaze upon a crystal river--
Diaphanous because it travels slowly;
Soft is the music that would charm for ever;
The flower of sweetest smell is shy and lowly.
(pub. 1823)

The message of both sonnets is unmistakable: "feverish" "tumultuous" and "patriot" times must be rejected in favor of "weak aims" "unincumbered minds" "gentle natures" "diaphanous" streams "meek aspirations" and "shy and lowly" sweet flowers. Wordsworth, rather than rejecting or destroying feminine refuges, honors and valorizes them. The extent to which his language in these two sonnets is implicated in a fully gendered nexus is suggested by a passage from Dorothy’s much earlier 1802 journal:

The columbine was growing upon the rocks; here and there a solitary plant, sheltered and shaded by the
tufts and bowers of trees. It is a graceful slender creature, a female seeking retirement, and growing freest and most graceful where it is most alone. 1 June 1802

Thus is should be no surprise to read in sonnet XXX of Part I to read:

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquility. (1-4)

Home and tranquility and solitude and nuns and women connect and reconnect in the intricately interwoven images of Wordsworth's sonnets. "Maids at the wheel" takes on a darker inflection in his poem to Sara Hutchinson:

Excuse is needless when with love sincere
Of occupation, not by fashion led,
Thou turn'st the Wheel that slept with dust o'erspread;
My nerves from no such murmur shrink,—tho' near
Soft as the Dorhawk's to a distant ear,
When twilight shades darken the mountain's head.
Even She who toils to spin our vital thread
Might smile on work, O Lady, once so dear
To household virtues. Venerable Art,
Torn from the Poor! yet shall kind Heaven protect
Its own; though Rulers, with undue respect,
Trusting to crowded factory and mart
And proud discoveries of the intellect,
Heed not the pillage of man's ancient heart. (pub. 1827)

In this sonnet Wordsworth returns to and repeats the classic feminist sonnet of sensibility of the late eighteenth-century. "Maids at the wheel" no longer work "blithe and happy"; the harmony has been interrupted by "Rulers," "factory and mart." The imagery of "Nuns fret not" harks back to a utopian world of use-value and
harmony. Here Wordsworth puts the sonnet form to use as a kind of social protest, but one fully within a feminine tradition of sensibility, which emphasized empathy and devotion over political punditry. Ultimately, after reading all of the miscellaneous sonnets, we can ask whether, when Wordsworth speaks of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility," "tranquility" can be said to take on a gendered inflection.

If the preceding arguments suggest that the "Miscellaneous Sonnets" take on an increasingly home-centered and feminized inflection as Wordsworth's reconfigurations progress throughout his career, although one that was suggested from the start of his experimentations with the sonnet form, we may ask, what becomes of the 1807 section: "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty"? Rather than immediately following the "Miscellaneous Sonnets" they are separated from them by the "Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803" and the

11 This collection, after memorializing "Ellen Irwin," "To a Highland Girl," "The Solitary Reaper," and "The Matron of Jedborough" offers the following sonnet to Mary who waits at home:

Fly, some kind Harbinger, to Grasmere-dale! Say that we come, and come by this day's light; Fly upon swiftest wing round field and height, But chiefly let one Cottage hear the tale; There let a mystery of joy prevail, The kitten frolic, like a gamesome sprite, And Rover whine, as at a second sight Of near-approaching good that shall not fail: And from that Infant's face let joy appear; Yea, let our Mary's one companion child--
"Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1814." In fact, the section is no longer a selection of sonnets; it has been transfigured into "Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty" (mostly sonnets) which add to the sonnets printed in the 1807 edition a few odes and a number of sonnets on the concluding chapters of the Napoleonic Wars. Although the new subheading no longer acknowledges the original status of the sonnet series, the new configuration of this section in fact repeats, although in a less condensed form, several of the concerns which characterize the "Miscellaneous Sonnets."

For instance, we now find included the sonnet "Composed by the Side of Grasmere Lake," composed in 1807 but first published in 1819, a sonnet which repeats the now familiar themes of the "Miscellaneous Sonnets."

Clouds, lingering yet, extend in solid bars
Through the grey west; and lo! these waters,
steeled
By breezeless air to smoothest polish, yield
A vivid repetition of the stars;

That hath her six weeks' solitude beguiled
With intimations manifold and dear,
While we have wandered over wood and wild—
Smile on his brother now with bolder cheer. (comp. 1803, pub. 1815)

Wordsworth may valorize the feminized, domestic harmonies of home, but he is also free to wander over "wood and wild" while Mary (of all resonant names) is content to remain at home with her child.

12 Which, not unsurprisingly given Wordsworth's poetic obsessions, begin with a poem on "The Brownies Cell," one of Wordsworth's many poems on hermits.
Jove, Venus, and the ruddy crest of Mars
Amid his fellows beauteously revealed
At happy distance from earth’s groaning field,
Where ruthless mortals wage incessant wars.
Is it a mirror?—or the nether Sphere
Opening to view the abyss in which she feeds
Her own calm fires?—But list! a voice is near;
Great Pan himself low-whispering through the reeds,
‘Be thankful, thou; for, if unholy deeds
Ravage the world, tranquility is here!’

This sonnet seems most obviously allied with "The World is too much with us; late and soon;" its appearance here is in the "Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty" is rather puzzling, but so is that of several other sonnets appearing here (such as Sonnet II.XXIV on a mother’s grief). Ultimately, then, there is no longer any clear division into two groupings: one "private" and one "public." Each sonnet is implicated in an aesthetic theory of structure and containment, and despite its proponderance of sonnets, the new section of "poems" on national liberty and independence stress the separation of the sonnet form from "liberty." Despite this ostensible separation, however, we find the themes of the "Miscellaneous Sonnets" even more interconnected with the "Miscellaneous Sonnets" than they were in 1807.

Here we seem to be tending toward an argument that Wordsworth increasingly tried, as well as increasingly failed, to separate the "public" and the "private" voices in his poetry as his career progressed after his Great Decade was over. However, we can see in the tripartite structure of his "Ecclesiastical Sonnets"—probably today
his second most disliked sonnet sequence after "Sonnets on the Punishment of Death"\textsuperscript{13}--a more complicated reworking of the relationship between "history" and and the poet's feminine-inflected life.

Not surprisingly, given Wordsworth's characteristic preoccupations, cloisters and hermitages and monastaries occupy a significant proportion of his "Ecclesiastical Sonnets." Although for Curran that sonnet sequence "soon loses its congregational independence in the institutional exigencies of ecclesiastical history" (49), and for Johnson, "Wordsworth is usually too close to his sources, which admittedly are generally concerned with historical and doctrinal subjects of limited poetic interest, and his religious sequence has been destined to share their restricted popularity" (169)\textsuperscript{14}, the

\textsuperscript{13} Curran remarks that, "By the time Wordsworth steered the sonnet into conservative polemics, in the 'Sonnets on the Punishment of Death' of 1839, he leaves the perverse impression of having pursued across the arc of his career an almost undeviating course away from the internal debates and epiphanies by which he had redefined the form for his culture" (49). That is, in turning "conservative" Wordsworth "perversely" moves away from the sonnet form as he had defined it for the nineteenth-century.

\textsuperscript{14} Ironically, considering Wordsworth's early insistence on the separation of poetry and prose through meter, Johnson believes that, "Fortunately for Wordsworth and for us, his decision to cast the materials best suited to a prose tract as a series of sonnets facilitates the resurrection of individual pieces of true distinction" (169). In some ways this reading echoes Liu's remark of the beginning of Wordsworth's mature sonnet career that his "political" sonnets could be read as a "political tract." In other words, we might do well
structure of this sonnet sequence is in fact not quite totally assimilated by a history of the Church of England. In the first section, the poet speaks in propria persona only once, to announce his desire for the retirement of the hermitage and to connect this desire with that of the "war-worn Chieftain" in sonnet XXI. In sonnet XXII the poet suddenly appears:

Methinks that to some vacant hermitage
My feet would rather turn—to some dry nook
Scooped out of living rock, and near a brook
Hurled down a mountain-cove from stage to stage,
Yet tempering, for my sight, its bustling rage
In the soft heaven of a translucent pool;
Thence creeping under sylvan arches cool,
Fit haunt of shapes whose glorious equipage
Would elevate my dreams. A beechen bowl,
A maple dish, my furniture should be;
Crisp, yellow leaves my bed; the hooting owl
My night-watch: nor should e'er the crest fowl
From thorp or vill his matins sound for me,
Tired of the world and all its industry.

Although this desire is rebuked immediately in sonnet XXIII, "Reproof," which celebrates the ceaseless activity of the Venerable Bede, it can be seen to underlie the significant space which the Dissolution takes up in section II: eight of the 46 sonnets in this section deal with monasteries and convents either before or after the Dissolution (and section III will return to this obsession in "Mutability" and the sonnet which follows it). What most characterizes the sonnets on convents and to be skeptical about the extent to which Wordsworth's sonnetical preoccupations "swerve" or "turn" during the course of his career.
monasteries in Section II of Wordsworth’s sonnet sequence is a kind of dramatic ambivalence: on the one hand Sonnets such as XIX: "Abuse of Monastic Power" and XX "Monastic Voluptuousness" (in which "Venus sits disguised as a Nun") support Wordsworth’s anti-Catholic public concerns (the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" were written in 1821, primarily in response to the Catholic Relief Bill of 1820). However, since Wordsworth has consistently idealized nuns, hermits, and monks as alter-egos of a sort, it is no surprise that this anti-Catholic attack is commingled with significant ambivalence. Sonnets XXII and XXIII, for instance, contrast the different situations of displaced nuns. Sonnet XXI is titled "Dissolution of the Monasteries" and Sonnet XXII is simply titled "The Same Subject"; however, it is only the same if a shift from a meditation on the mutability of structures such as Glastonbury is "the same" as the figure of a Nun (Johnson remarks that in this Nun sonnet Wordsworth is "freeing his imagination from his sources" (168) as if he is here for the first time breaking away from "history"):

The lovely Nun (submissive, but more meek
Through saintly habit than from effort due
To unrelenting mandates that pursue
With equal wrath the steps of strong and weak)
Goes forth--unveiling timidly a cheek
Suffused with blushes of celestial hue,
While through the Convent’s gate to open view
Softly she glides, another home to seek.
Not Iris, issuing from her cloudy shrine
An Apparition more divinely bright!
Nor more attractive to the dazzled sight
Those watery glories, on the stormy brine
Poured forth, while summer suns at distance shine,
And the green vales lie hushed in sober light!

Other nuns, by contrast, are not obscured by the
brightness of this mythological imagery:

Yet many a Novice of the cloistral shade,
And many chained by vows, with eager glee
The warrant hail, exulting to be free;
Like ships before whose keels, full long embayed
In polar ice, propitious winds have made
Unlooked-for outlet to an open sea,
Their liquid world, for bold discovery,
In all her quarters temptingly displayed!
Hope guides the young; but when the old must pass
The threshold, whither shall they turn to find
The hospitality—the alms (alas!
Alms may be needed) which that House bestowed?
Can they, in faith and worship, train the mind
To keep this new and questionable road?

While the first, and more virtuous, Nun remains scarcely
visible, and leaves the convent only "another home to
seek," those Novices are eager to escape are like ships
( Wordsworth's dominant trope of voyage from home in the
"Miscellaneous Sonnets"), their "quarters temptingly
displayed." While this sonnet might be expected to
present the "positive" aspects of the Dissolution—
freedom for those young women from whom the Convent was
no haven—the sonnet shifts abruptly away from their
"hope" to focus on the homelessness of older nuns, in
need of alms as they walk out of the convent gates and
down a "new and questionable road." Despite this
section's ostensible anti-Catholic impetus, Wordsworth's
fascination with the cloister makes inevitable this
ambivalence and sadness at the thought of these displaced
nuns, a sadness in no way matched in his still apparent ambivalence about the Dissolution of monastaries.  

Still, despite these highly personal, or in Johnson's term "imaginative" detours, the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" can be said to follow a recognizable historical narrative until the end of the second section. In the third, however, something markedly peculiar occurs. Anne Rylestone, the only recent commentator on the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," reads them unproblematically as an account of the "intriguing intellectual, psychological, and artistic processes by which Wordsworth comes to terms with his own Christian identity" (xii), actually spends six of her eight chapters on the first section of the Sonnets, and only a chapter a piece on sections two and three. Of section three she correctly observes that "it is least dependent on historical events, with only fourteen strongly historical sonnets" (14). Or as Kerrigan puts it, the third section "abandon[s] chronology, straying through the sacraments towards King's Chapel" (68). That is, although the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" have been taken to present the ultimate limit of Wordsworth's poetic interventions into

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15 That this valorization of convents was not at all inevitable can be suggested by the bad press they routinely got in gothic novels. Consider, for instance, the inexpressible evil that leads to Agnes' grisly incarceration in The Monk, a novel in which the cloister can only lead to sadism and sexual perversion.
history—Liu refers to them as "the magnum opus of Memorial Tours in which Wordsworth applies his form of peripatetic meditation to the places and events of public history" (494)—in fact almost a third of them may be said to be given over to historical stasis and regression, to a kind of characteristically Wordsworthian "straying" rather than the plain road of history and chronology. After an initial series of familiarly "historical" sonnets, Wordsworth turns his attention to "places of worship," "pastoral character," and "the liturgy," subjects of a sonnet series which both tracks the course of an unchanging and infinitely repeatable year and follows the progress of a Christian life through the various sacraments. Even this simply historical narrative is interrupted in sonnet XXII, "Catechising," by a characteristically Wordsworthian intense personal memory:

From Little down to Least, in due degree,  
Around the Pastor, each in new-wrought vest,  
Each with a vernal posy at his breast,  
We stood, a trembling, earnest Company!  
With low soft murmur, like a distant bee,  
Some spake, by thought-perplexing fears betrayed;  
And some a bold unerring answer made:  
How fluttered then they anxious heart for me,  
Beloved Mother! Thou whose happy hand  
Had bound the flowers I wore, with faithful tie:  
Sweet flowers! at whose inaudible command  
Her countenance, phantom(sic)-like, doth re-appear:  
O lost too early for the frequent tear,  
And ill requited by this heartfelt sigh!

It would be clever to say that the Mother in this poem signifies the end of History—a break in the historical
continuity from which the poem never quite recovers. Clever—but too easy. After the volta, instead of responding to the images of catechism depicted in the sestet becomes an address to "Beloved Mother" and a vivid memory of the flower she bound for him. The next sonnet, "Confirmation," seems smoothly to resume the sequence's historical procession, but in sonnet XXIV, "Confirmation Continued," something peculiar happens again:

I saw a Mother's eye intensely bent
Upon a Maiden trembling as she knelt;
In and for whom the pious Mother felt
Things that we judge of by a light too faint:
Tell, if you may, some star-crowned Muse, or Saint!
Tell what rushed in, from what she was relieved—
Then, when her Child the hallowing touch received,
And such vibration though the Mother went
That tears burst forth amain. Did gleams appear?
Opened a vision of the blissful place
Where dwells a Sister-child? And was power given
Part of her lost One's glory back to trace
Even to this Rite? For thus She knelt, and, ere
The summer-leaf had faded, passed to Heaven.

Although they are separated by Sonnet XXIII, this sonnet picks up essentially where "Catechising" ends: with a Mother's eye anxiously watching her child perform. Here the mother is even more intertangled with her offspring "in and for whom" she feels. Both sonnets end, as Homans would no doubt stress, with the death of the mother, a

16 "I remember my mother only in some few situations, one of which was her pinning a nosegay to my breast when I was going to say the Catechism in the church, as was customary before Easter". Memoirs of William Wordsworth.
mother who while alive is emotionally fused with her children and seems to continue to be so after death, as if Wordsworth's dead mother reappears in another incarnation in "Confirmation Continued." The kneeling mother reappears yet again two sonnets later, and this time the vision is monitory:

WOMAN! the Power who left His throne on high,
And deigned to wear the robe of flesh we wear,
The Power that thro' the straits of Infancy
Did pass dependent on maternal care,
His own humanity with Thee will share,
Please with the thanks that in His People's eye
Thou offerst up for safe Delivery
From Childbirth's perilous throes. And should the Heir
Of thy fond hopes hereafter walk inclined
To courses fit to make a mother rue
That ever he was born, a glance of mind
Cast upon this observance may renew
A better will; and, in the imagined view
Of thee thus kneeling, safety he may find.

Once again the sonnet ends with an image of a mother separated from her child, this time because of the child's own sins and disgraces. Here more explicitly than ever the imagined but lost oneness with the mother signals a haven, a place of "safety." "The straits of Infancy" in line 3 is certainly an ambiguous phrase: most obviously a trope for the childhood through which the Son "did pass dependent on maternal care," it also invokes that other incarnation of the vagina, the birth canal. Once again the mother is associated with harmony, with the enclosed security of the Church and of the mother's body and with the promise of an ultimate safety.
After this sonnet, the focus of the remaining twenty seems to shift, to leave the mother behind as the poet wraps up his account of the diurnal course of the liturgy and focuses on Church buildings and the sonnets famously written in response to Wordsworth's visits to the site of Robert Jones' proposed new church and to King's College Chapel with his brother Christopher. Ultimately, however, these final Church sonnets can be read as extensions of the haven promised by the cloister, interfusion with the mother, and incorporation into the mother's body. Church takes care of its ill with "maternal zeal" in sonnet XXVIII; the flowers bound together by the poet's mother reappear as "may garlands" (XXXIX.11) and a wreath (XLV.6). The "may garlands" will in "Church to be Erected" become the site of the new "holy altar."

John Kerrigan argues that throughout his career, though most pressingly in the case of the sonnet, Wordsworth was obsessed with perishable homes, and that his continual search for a safe and permanent one lead him first to Cots in the Lake District, then to the grave, and finally to the Church as a symbol of his permanent home in heaven. What Kerrigan leaves out is the significantly gendered inflection Wordsworth's homes take on, every step of the way. Kerrigan argues of Wordsworth's final sonnets that, 'Wordsworth erects his
prefabricate structure . . . with commendable efficiency, but what he constructs is uninhabitable and insufficient" (70). At the end of his career, "'Transient bowers' cannot tempt the poet now; he will not try to remember things that forget themselves; he knows that his proper home is heaven" (71). While this is in some sense unmistakably true, I think it is not sufficient to summarize what is at stake with these final sonnets. The dreamed-of church and the existing one at Cambridge are both still connected with the dream church of the mother's body observed earlier. The sonnet before "Mutability" is "Regrets," the sonnet which marks the end of the sacramental series and the shift to a new subject, and it is a sad and painful sonnet which ends with an image of pews turned into nature's haven:

Would that our scrupulous Sires had dared to leave
Less scanty measure of those graceful rites
And usages, whose due return invites
A stir of mind to natural to deceive;
Giving to Memory help when she would weave
A crown for Hope!—I dread the boasted lights
That all too often are but firey blights,
Killing the bud o'er which in vain we grieve.
Go, seek, when Christmas snows discomfort bring,
The counter Spirit found in some gay church
Green with fresh holly, evey pew a perch
In which the linnet or the thrush might sing,
Merry and loud and safe from prying search
Strains offered only to the genial Spring.

The church only becomes a "gay" "counter Spirit" when overgrown with greenery, as if its final crumbling is imaginatively foretold. Rather than replacing the Lakeland nests and havens of Wordsworth's early poems,
the church is transfigured or reconfigured into one which can hold the linnet or thrush safe "from prying search." What prying search the poet might fear or shink from is unclear, but the sense of nature providing haven from prying invasion is unmistakable. The image here repeats one from the second section, from the sonnet sequence about the Dissolution. Immediately before the beautiful nun is forced through the convent gates, the poet imagines the future of the Monastaries and Convents which are being blown apart:

And, 'mid their choirs unreoofed by selfish rage,
The warbling wren shall find a leafy cage;
The gadding bramble hang her purple fruit;
And the green lizard and the gilded newt
Lead unmolested lives and die of age.
The owl of the evening and the Woodland fox
For their abode the shrines of Waltham choose:
Proud Glastonbury can no more refuse
To stoop her head before these desperate shocks—
She whose high pomp displaced, as story tells,
Arimathean Joseph's wattled cells.

As we read in "Mutability": "From low to high doth dissolution climb,/ And sink from high to low, along a scale" (1-2). Glastonbury can no longer refuse being overgrown and providing a leafy haven for the wren because it has been destroyed, but in "Regrets" the overgrowth is beginning already, as the poet imaginatively lets his privileged nature take over and subsume the building of the Church.

The sonnet on the other side of "Mutability," "Old Abbeys," not surprisingly, takes up explicitly the topic
of the Dissolution, in many ways the emotional center of the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets":

Monastic Domes! following my downward way,
Untouched by due regret I marked your fall!
Now, ruin, beauty, ancient stillness, all
Dispose to judgements temperate as we lay
On our past selves in life declining day:
For as, by discipline of Time made wise,
We learn to tolerate the infirmities
And faults of others—gently as he may,
So with our own the mild Instructor deals,
Teaching us to forget them or forgive.
Perversely curious, then, for hidden ill
Why should be break Time's charitable seals?
Once ye were holy, ye are holy still;
Your spirit freely let me drink, and live.

Although here the poet disavows any "regret" at the fall of the old structures, his relationship to them is still peculiar: "Perversely curious" and tempted to "break Time's charitable seals." Rather than emotionally identifying with the linnet "safe from prying search" the poet, as in "Nutting," seems drawn to some prying search of his own, to a curiosity which belies his claim of disinterested observation in the opening lines. His refusal of the prying search allows him finally to speak his desire for these cloistral spaces: "let me drink and live."

It is only after his ambivalence about the Dissolution and what it represents for his imagination—the loss of cloistral spaces—is in some sense rhetorically controlled, that the poet turns at last to Robert Jones' nascent church and to King's College Chapel. But as we've seen, Jones' new "holy altar" will
simply take up the position occupied by "daisies" and "may-garlands"—in a process of replacement which can be infinitely reversible and repeatable. The builder of King's College Chapel "spread that branching roof" "where light and shade repose" as if the building grew up from and incorporates the trees that preceeded it; the "sainted Eremite" still shines from the stained glass window, and music "cast(s) before the eye/ Of the devout, a veil of ecstasy" as if the poet has taken up the position of a veiled nun enraptured in adoration.

Although the final sonnet on the Chapel asserts

They dreamt not of a perishable home
Who thus could build. Be mine, in hours of fear
Or grovelling thought, to seek a refuge here;

as if the poet has found his final place of refuge, we know from "Mutability" that all such refuges are perishable, even the cloisters of St. Paul's, "Filled with mementos, satiate with its part/ Of grateful England's overflowing Dead" (13-14). Although the sonnet sequence ends with the waters of the stream of church history, "less and less by guilt/ Stained and polluted . . . as they roll,/ Till they have reached the eternal City," the echo of the water image in the "overflowing Dead" suggests a darker side to the poem's final insistence on light and brightness. Throughout the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," the poet has returned again and again to an overmastering if denied desire for the safety
of a cloistered space associated with nature, with convents, and with his mother's body. If these images seem to echo ones that became popular in feminist writing of the 1970s and 80s, I will suggest in what follows that this is no coincidence. To put it another way, Wordsworth's poetry can be seen to be replete with images which modern feminist theory has associated with a privileged preoedipal space. While Margaret Homans might insist that it is Dorothy who has privileged access to this space through her gender, and although she emphasizes Wordsworth's role as destroyer of refuges and effacer of the mother, we can see that hunger for home is no less written across his poetry than is his desire to transcend it.

In 1824, on tour through Wales, Wordsworth visited the most famous feminine haven of his time, and the two women of his time most valorized by lesbian historians, Miss Sarah Ponsonby and Lady Eleanor Butler, two Irish women who eloped together in 1778 and established a home together in the Welsh town of Llangollen. After his visit to their home, Plas Newydd, the New Place, Wordsworth wrote for them (what else?) a sonnet:

A Stream, to mingle with your favorite Dee,  
Along the VALE OF MEDITATION flows;  
So styled by those fierce Britons, pleased to see  
In Nature's face the expression of repose;  
Or haply there some pious hermits chose  
To live and die, the peace of heaven his aim;  
To whom the wild sequestered region owes,  
At this late day, its sanctifying name.
GLYN CAFAILLGAROCH, in the Cambrian tongue,
In ours, the VALE OF FRIENDSHIP, let this spot
Be named; where, faithful to a low-roofed Cot,
On Deva's banks, ye have abode so long;
Sisters in love, a love allowed to climb,
Even on this earth, above the reach of Time!

This sonnet has mostly received attention for its peculiar inaccuracy. Donald E. Hayden, in his account of Wordsworth's Travels in Wales and Ireland, remarks that his reference to a "low-roofed Cot" is "surely inappropriate as a glance at the photograph will indicate" (46). In an often-repeated anecdote, the Ladies took umbrage at the poet's characterization of their home: although he went back to Llangollen several times he was never again invited to Plas Newydd. Doris Grumbach, in her novel The Ladies, has this account of their response to the sonnet:

Sarah thought it quite beautiful. Eleanor was furious when Sarah read it to her. "To call our house 'a low-roofed cot!' Insulting. Inaccurate!"

Sarah said: "It was for the rhyme, I believe, my dear one. The rest is very complimentary in reference to my beloved Saint Collen, "the Vale of Friendship," "Sisters in love"--I think that is lovely."

Eleanor muttered "low-roofed cot," and then said nothing else.

The poet returned to Langollen a number of times but never again managed to gain entrance to Lady Eleanor Butler. (172)

In Grumbach's account, as in most modern lesbian rewritings of the story of the Ladies, Eleanor is 17

The current appeal of this anecdote may be measured by the fact that it appears again in a recent guide of lesbian traveling in Europe. In Are You Two Together, Lindsey Van Gelder and
distinctly butch and Sarah distinctly femme. Thus as we will see when we examine Simone de Beauvoir's passage on lesbians at the end of the chapter, it is no surprise to find that it is Eleanor who objects to the poet's offering, who forever after bars the entryway to the poet. Despite the insistence on and repetition of the anecdote in which Wordsworth is turned away, his life and writing intersected with theirs in significant ways, before and after the famous moment of their meeting. Elizabeth Mavor, in her biography The Ladies of Langollen, tries to follow the "clues" that will uncover for modern readers the truth about their relationship:18

The need for clues and the consistent ambiguity which has surrounded their relationship is also suggested by the process of revision which now surrounds Plas Newydd as a tourist attraction. The visitor's pamphlet, for instance, reports without comment that, "To the left at the top of the stairs is the State Bedchamber, also (wrongly) called Miss Ponsonby's bedroom, which was the room in which guests slept." Despite the fact that it is now certain that Sarah Ponsonby never slept in this room, a few paragraphs later the guide continues, "The room to the right at the top of the stairs was almost certainly the Ladies' Bedchamber" (10). That is, although the State Bedchamber is definitively a guest bedroom, the only other bedroom in the house is only "almost certainly" the Ladies' Bedchamber, as if Sarah might actually not have slept anywhere at all. However the pamphlet does go on to chart in exhaustive detail what evidence there is, what clues there are about the furnishings of this Bedchamber; I quote from a quite long passage more or less at random: "Unfortunately the Sale Catalogue does not indicate the colour of the moreen but it is quite likely to have been a red for according to the catalogue the seat furniture in this room was upholstered in scarlet leather" (10). The pamphlet has enormous detective zeal for the details of interior design except for the detail which is for visitors the most inspiring or titillating (or both): whether the
There are clues here and there, some dropped unawares. Their bound books are gold-lettered, E.B. on the front, S.P. on the back; so with their china and with nearly every possession they have. Their letters are signed jointly, the initials of the Beloved followed by the full name of the writer of the letter. In speech they always used the collective 'We'. They call one another 'Beloved' always, as Dorothy and William Wordsworth do. (95-96)

In short, the Ladies were part of a turn of the century passion for retired idylls which were distinctly feminine—a phenomenon in which Worthsworth was equally caught up and which he was, in a sense, instrumental in making mainstream. When Anna Seward, one of the sentimental female sonneteers who influenced Wordsworth's conception of the genre, visited the Ladies,

her head was quite turned by the Ladies' Aeolian harps, Gothick lanterns and wavy gravel walks; the friends were Minervas; they were Enchantresses, they were Rosalind and Celia and Plas Newydd was Arcadia, and she wrote a long, impassioned, and disastrous poem upon the subject. (93)

Ladies slept in the same bed.

Like Gill, I've bracketed the not at all unrelated issue of Wordsworth's sexualization of his female retreats: not the least his early blissful "cot" shared with Dorothy. Gill merely remarks that their relation was "unquestionably, profoundly sexual" (203) although he treats this as the most marginal possible bit of information, essentially meaningless for his study of the poet's life and work.

Seward actually wrote quite a number of poems to the Ladies, one of which Lillian Faderman uses as an epigraph for her book Surpassing the Love of Men. Like Wordsworth's sonnet, one of Seward's poems begins with the history of the vale before describing how the Ladies now belong to that history. "Llangollen Vale: Inscribed to the Right Honorable Lady Eleanor Butler, and Miss Ponsonby" the "vale" shifts from being a "war-torn" vale
That is, Wordsworth cannot be said to be merely original in his fascination with female bowers; in a sense his sonnet to the Ladies was written for him before he ever wandered the grounds of Plas Newydd, and this perhaps explains his seeing or recording a "low-roofed Cot" in the place of a substantial mansion.

Wordsworth's dream of a haven has been formulated as a retreat from the 'masculine' public world into the (equally masculine) haven of his own mind. But in Wordsworth's poetry we find a complex tension between public and private, between havens and history, between confinement and freedom, that is every step of the way inextricably and intricately interwoven with considerations of gender. That it is more explicit in his use of the sonnet than in the blank verse epics which have most consumed twentieth-century critics suggests how this criticism has falsified Wordsworth's published and of heros to a "love devoted vale." The poem actually is kind of weird:

Now with a vestal lustre glows the Vale,  
Thine, sacred Friendship, permanent as pure;  
In vain the stern authorities assail,  
In vain persuasion spreads her silken lure,  
High-born, and high-endow'd, the peerless twain,  
Pant for coy Nature's charms 'mid silent dale, and plain.

Although the "vestal luster," the purity, and the silence accord perfectly with the tropes that circulated around Ladies, the spectacle of Eleanor and Sarah "pant[ing] for coy Nature's charms" is a bit disruptive. For some reason, too, Sarah becomes ZARA in the rather idiosyncratic orthography of the poem.
public persona during his lifetime. Wordsworth picked up and developed a feminine tradition of the sonnet no less than a masculine (Miltonic) one; in fact, from the beginning of his acknowledged sonnet career in 1802 the two are never fully separable. Given Wordsworth's obsessions with feminine havens, with the safe enclosure of the sonnet form throughout his later writing career it is certainly no surprise that this public career should have a prehistory in his experiments with the "feminine" sonnet of sensibility in the 1880s. Rather than representing a feminized, adolescent (not fully male) experiment which was shucked off as he achieved his 'public' poetic voice, the early sonnets present us with the germ of a theme and obsession which was to inflect his writing throughout his life, and particularly inflect his use of the sonnet form. Thus it is no surprise to learn, as Johnson points out, that, "During his entire career, [Wordsworth] restricted his use of nuns as an image almost exclusively to his sonnets."

Wordsworth's encounter with the Ladies in 1824 is an exemplary moment: an intersection between different lives whose rhetoric, whose tropology had intersected long before, as both Wordsworth and the Ladies were part of widely circulating tropes caught up in the increasingly solidified but phantasmatic separation between a feminine 'private' and a masculine 'public' realm. The mythology
and language that surrounded the Ladies and that recurs throughout Wordsworth’s poetry was part of a larger cultural fascination. The poems of domestic bliss are the utopian narratives of which gothic prose provided the distopian obverse. And these two oppositional strands for figuring female havens continue to oscillate throughout feminist writing today.

When Elizabeth Mavor wrote her 1971 biography of the Ladies she incorrectly announced that, "In Llangollen itself the cult of the Ladies is dying . . . they are vaguely famous for being suffragettes, spies, nymphomaniacs, men dressed as women, women dressed as men" (214). Her book ends on rather gothic notes of desolation and decay; the home of the Ladies has become a ruin: it is "cold and empty," "Their garden, with its shrubbery, it flower borders, its winding gravel paths so painstakingly raked . . . has gone," "the rustic bridges so carefully copied from L’Art des Jardins have rotted long ago" (214-15). As in Wordsworth’s "Dissolution of Monastaries" only nature survives the ruin of the once sacred space:

Tout passe, toute lasse, toute casse. Only the Cufflyment is unchanged. Foaming and clear as ever, his rushing noise can be heard in the empty cottage, in the still library, where the wind blows coldly through the broken window glass, and where Sarah Ponsonby’s account book lies yellowing in its glass case. (215-16)

But as we know from "Mutability," "from low to high
doth dissolution climb." Elizabeth Mavor's book in fact marks the beginning point in what has been a tremendous resurgence in the Cult of the Ladies. Plas Newydd is now a thriving tourist attraction, restored and fussed over. Mavor attributes the death of the cult to the problem of categorizing their lives today. She quotes with some mild censure the famous passage from Colette's Ces Plaisirs:

Can we possibly imagine the Ladies of Llangollen in this year of 1930? They would own a car, wear dungarees, smoke cigarettes, have short hair, and there would be a bar in their apartment. Would Sarah Ponsonby still know how to remain silent? Perhaps with the aid of crossword puzzles. Eleanor Butler would curse as she jacked up the car and would have her breasts amputated. (206)

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21 Mavor doesn't cite whatever translation she was using. The passage appears on page 185 of the 1932 edition published by J. Ferenczi and Fils, and opens the chapter after the one that focuses on the ladies, as she shifts from their story to the present. Colette's discussion of the Ladies is based on The Hamwood Papers, a portion of the Ladies' journal, published in 1934. She quotes extensively from these journals certain phrases which catch her attention, the first time in English. Her discussion of the Ladies begins thus: "Peut-être cet amour, qu'on dit outrageux pour l'amour, échappe-t-il aux saisons, aux déclins de l'amour, sous la condition qu'on le gouverne avec une sévérité invisible, qu'on le nourrisse de peu, qu'il vive à tâtons et sans but et que sa fleur unique soit une confiance telle, que l'autre amour ne puisse ni la sonder, ni la comprendre, mais seulement l'envier,--telle que par sa grâce un demi-siècle coule comme "a day of sweetly enjoyed retirement". Je copie ces mots, cent fois tombés de la plume de Lady Eleanor Butler, cent fois serrés, comme un sentimental signet, entre les pages de son Journal" (160-161). In general, Colette is drawn to familiar passages of domestic bliss: "'Ma Bien-Aimee et moi nous nous promenons devant notre cottage.' Malgré moi je m'arrête, je lis and relis cette phrase que commémore une jour entre les jours" (170). She also focuses on the phrases
Mavor notes that "her interpretation of the two women, though sympathetic, was very much in terms of her own times" (206). As we will see, the wide circulation of these "terms of her own times" can be seen in the way they still shape Simone de Beauvoir’s images of the lesbian in 1949. In fact, with the twentieth-century introduction of the language of sexuality into the Ladies Garden of Eden, a second dystopian narrative begins to take shape: one that significantly inflects feminist writing on the subject of women coming together, a spectre which continues to haunt feminist writing to this day.

In many ways, feminist writing of this century was founded on the discourse of the cloister, as if, in Adrienne Rich’s words, "a woman got up quietly/ and left the argument and jargon in a room," walking away from the clamour of male voices and into "a whole new poetry beginning here." In the 1970s sisterhood was powerful and separatism was an explosive topic. Increasingly throughout the 1980s "women" as a corporate category was

"La chambre" and "Notre lit" to comment, "Ici le lecteur ordinaire sourit. Il ne se prive pas, non plus, d’un petite "eh! eh!". Mais je ne suis pas un lecteur ordinaire. Je ne souris pas de cette heure refermée sur deux femmes qui, refusant d’être la parodie d’un couple, franchissent, suppriment le stage d’un faux hymen, atteignant le refuge du sommeil à deux, de la veille à deux, de la nocturne angoisse à deux..." (179). All of this, however, seems to be ruined when it is located in the 1930s.
rendered problematic in feminist writing: fractures along the lines of race and class and sexuality were pointed out and absorbed into mainstream feminist writing. "Early" 1970s feminism was increasingly figured as a claustral space, a frighteningly homogenous haven admitting of no difference. This dystopian image of female spaces remains an obstacle for many feminist writers.

In fact, this dystopianism, this sense of the dangers that riddle an enclosed woman's space, have been central to feminist literary theory. Nina Auerbach's introduction to her 1986 *Romantic Imprisonment: Woman and other Glorified Outcasts*, in a venerably feminist move, begins by defining itself against the failings of earlier feminist critics. This catalogue of failings is riddled with what we can call the most obvious and simple rejection of the cloister. Auerbach complains that Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* "constrained me because it purged itself of men, and thus of the larger world of fun and power to which I hoped we aspired. . . . Moers' invigorating conservativism gives us back ourselves but denies us the world." In language drawn from the era of the Ladies, Auerbach proclaims that she is made nervous when "they" (other feminists) "instruct me to settle into a complacent separatist bower of womanhood" (xiv). In fact, her fears are consistently written in the language
of comparative size which underwrote Wordsworth's turn to the sonnet: "I am glad I experienced so early the power of books that galvanize, not merely a segregated female tradition, but the larger culture women and men inherit jointly" (xvi). She decries the "self-pitying insularity" that "still dogs" feminist criticism (xix) and worries about the "self-imprisoning alacrity" of certain feminist strategies (xxi).

This dystopian narrative achieved singular prominence in academic feminism (in a way it still hasn't outside the academy) in part because of the increasing circulation of "European" theories and "French Feminisms" in academic feminist writing throughout the 1980s. This circulation at first was figured as a confrontation over increasingly insistent warnings that rallying in the name of a corporation of "women" was dangerous and humanist. "French Feminism" seemed riddled with warnings about the dangers of a "women's space," from Julia Kristeva's dismissal of "la communauté indifférenciée de femmes" to Irigaray's warning about the dangers of the cloister in "This Sex Which Is Not One":

But if women are to preserve and expand their auto-eroticism, their homo-sexuality, might not the renunciation of heterosexual pleasure correspond once again to that disconnection from power that is traditionally theirs? Would it not involve a new prison, a new cloister, built of their own accord? (32-33)

This new dystopian narrative suggests that the separation
of feminine public and masculine private, taken to a kind of logical extreme, will result in a cloister which is a synonym for a prison. For Irigaray, the cloister is only safe when it is a "stage," and this fear that the cloister will become a prison rather than a haven continues to haunt feminist writing in various guises to this day.

As we saw in Colette's imagination of "Sarah and Eleanor today," the sacred retreat can seem untranslatable, unworkable in "today's world," the world in which Eleanor would "cut off her breasts." In fact, the image of the cloister in much feminist writing can be seen to manage anxieties about lesbians, about women for whom an all-woman space is a condition of their romantic lives. Simone de Beauvoir concludes her largely sympathetic chapter on "The Lesbian" (its location at the end of the section of "The Formative Years" marks it safely as a "stage") with the following rather extraordinary fantasy about what a lesbian, all-woman social sphere would look like today:

Most lesbians, as we have seen, reticently avoid men. . . . They are incensed . . . to see men holding social advantages and to feel that they are the stronger: it is a burning humiliation to be unable to fight with a rival, to know that he is capable of knocking you down with a blow of his fist. This complicated hostility is one of the reasons that impel certain female homosexuals to make themselves conspicuous; they flock by themselves; they form clubs of a sort to show that they have no more need of men socially than sexually. From this the descent is easy to empty bragging and all the play-
acting that springs from insincerity. The lesbians play first at being a man; then even being a lesbian becomes a game; masculine clothing, at first a disguise, becomes a uniform; and under the pretext of escaping male oppression, woman becomes enslaved to the character she plays; wishing not to be confined in woman's situation, she is imprisoned in that of the lesbian. Nothing gives a darker impression of narrow-mindedness and of mutilation than these groups of emancipated women. (trans. H.M. Parshley, 472-3)

In a repetition and expansion of Colette's rhetoric, de Beauvoir sees a frightening sight in the "narrow-mindedness," "enslavement," and "imprisonment" that occur when lesbians "flock together." What we saw in the last chapter as the feminist desire for the utopian moment when women will finally "come together" seems easily to slide into an image of horror and, significantly, mutilation. Not for these writers the comfort of the "narrow cell" or "scanty plot of ground": nothing but darkness and entrapment greets the traveller into an all female world. This image of darkness and confinement echoes one of de Beauvoir's most striking images of the female world she is rejecting:

I recall seeing in a primitive village of Tunisia a subterranean cavern in which four women were squatting: the old one-eyed and toothless wife, her face horribly devastated, was cooking dough on a small brazier in the midst of an acrid smoke; two wives somewhat younger, but almost as disfigured, were lulling children in their arms--one was giving suck; seated before a loom, a young idol magnificently decked out in silk, gold and silver was knotting threads of wool. As I left this gloomy cave--kingdom of immanence, womb, and tomb--in the corridor leading upward toward the light of day I passed the male, dressed in white, well-groomed, smiling sunny. He was returning from the
marketplace, where he had discussed world affairs with other men; he would pass some hours in this retreat of his at the heart of the vast universe to which he belonged, from which he was not separated. For the withered old women, for the young wife doomed to the same rapid decay, there was no universe other than the smokey cave, whence they emerged only at night, silent and veiled. (95)

This parable of the three ages of Woman in the cave has reverberated through feminist theory, picked up and improvised upon by Gilbert and Gubar and Yaeger among others. If this is the quintessential moment of Woman's entrapment—a leitmotif in The Second Sex—then the lesbians grouped together—despite the pathetic spectacle of butches trying to fight—represent the ne plus ultra of femininity, a moment of pure darkness and imprisonment.

I’ve argued that we can see two narratives—utopian and dystopian—oscillating around the "separation of the spheres" in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century ideology: one of cloistral bliss and one of Gothic entrapment. Similarly, in feminist writing of the past two decades we can find that narratives of liberation and joyful reunion and harmony associated with women’s spaces are shadowed by a darker counter-narrative of imprisonment and entrapment, of horrifying enclosure.22

22 A fictional correlative of this phenomena occurs in A.S. Byatt’s "literary" fiction Possession, in which every single female character and woman’s space is figured in terms of "penetratability." The "good" women characters all eventually welcome penetration of their cloistered bodies, lives, and abodes.
The spectre of the lesbian seems most to invoke this fear of enclosure in feminist writing, and it is thus perhaps no coincidence that the figure of the lesbian has taken on an increasingly gothic configuration in the tropology of recent feminist theory.

That is, lesbians are increasingly being figured as ghosts, another example of the gothic tropology that resonates always more insistently in critical discourse. It is as if lesbian and gay theorists are turning to Gothic genres to find new ways to thematize the "inside/outside" trope because this dichotomy is so heavily under investigation in the Gothic. For instance, at the end of her *A Lure of Knowledge*, Judith Roof remarks that, "expecting lesbian sexuality to carry the burden of political or epistemological positions is like asking a specter to support the weight of critical challenges to ideology" (251). This is clearly a very different style of writing than that we've seen in writers like Kristeva and Auerbach. As we've seen with other examples of wildly repeated rhetoric, of common language, this image of the lesbian as specter is starting to recur across an ever denser textual terrain. Diana Fuss's "Introduction" to *Inside/Out*, for instance, contains the following rather lurid passage:

*Heterosexuality can never fully ignore the close psychical proximity of its terrifying (homo)sexual other, any more than homosexuality can entirely escape the equally insistent social pressures of*
In this passage, Fuss merely pulls together in a cluster an increasingly popular critical tropology. An essay in her anthology, for instance, "Female Spectator, Lesbian Specter: The Haunting," is an "attempt to trace the ghostly presence of lesbianism in classical Hollywood cinema on the one hand, and in feminist film theory on the other" (142). This essay by Patricia White can be seen as literalizing or at least extending one of the central metaphors in Robert Wise's film: she repeatedly uses phrases such as "the ghost of lesbian desire" (148) not merely to paraphrase or explicate the film but as if lesbian desire is in some literal sense a ghost in our material world. This suggestion is reinforced in her final call for a model of spectatorship which would "incorporate" the almost lesbian character in the film—that is, both include her and bring her into fully embodied form, materialize her. White calls for a model based on clairvoyance:

Telepathy, to lesbians and gay men as historical
readers and viewers, has always been an alternative to our own mode of parnoic spectatorship: "Is it really there?" The experience of this second sight involves identification of and with Theo as a lesbian. (169)

The lesbian spectator is given a chance to be the medium, using her special knowledge to contact other lesbians in the spirit world of the film.

In "Contagious Folly: An Adventure and Its Skeptics" (part of the "Questions of Evidence" series in Critical Inquiry), Terry Castle also takes up the question of ghostly lesbian visitations in her study of the "Ghosts of Versailles," ghosts of Marie Antoinette's court seen in 1901 by Charlotte Ann Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain, the principle and vice-principle of St. Hugh's College, Oxford. The two women published an account of their vision in 1911 to a hailstorm of controversy. According to Castle, "the most damning as well as most exhaustive assault on the book came in 1957--in the shape of Lucille Iremonger's 300-page ad feminam attack, The Ghosts of Versailles: Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain and Their Adventure" (756). Again according to Castle, "Iremonger's most sensational revelations had to do with Moberly and Jourdain's relationship itself. That the two were lesbians and hence morally and psychologically suspect, was one of Iremonger's barely concealed assumptions" (758). Castle also notes the "lingering rumors regarding Marie Antoinette's own lesbianism" (767)
but refrains from making any particular connections between lesbians and ghosts—although her "Contributor's Note" reveals that she is currently working on a book called *Lesbians and Other Ghosts*. This suggests again the increasing use of gothic, ghostly tropology in connection with the figure of the lesbian.

In 1939 Dr. Mary Gordon, one of the first women doctors in England, wrote a novel, *Chase of the Wild Goose*, based on the Ladies of Llangollen. Her inspiration came in this form:

When last year I went, in response to a dream of Vale Crucis Abbey, to Llangollen where I had not been for fifty-six years, I met the Ladies of Llangollen, who had then been what is termed dead for 103 and 105 years. (240)

She met them first in the form of two "presences" who "followed me all over the house, either by my side or close behind me, and once seemed to stand, so that I could not pass, while I looked at an old watch in a little case of relics" (241). Dr. Gordon returned to the spot eight months later and was caught up in a kind of repetition compulsion:

In her journal of 147 years ago Eleanor Butler had written "Rose at half-past six. The loveliest blue and silver morning I ever beheld." At such an hour on such a morning, I became wide awake and was drawn to the accustomed walk. (242)

It was on this walk that she first saw the Ladies: "They wore habits of cool light blue linen fastened up for walking" (244). (Dr. Gordon describes herself as garbed
in "Shetland homespun and my strong brown shoes and rough stockings.") Gordon sees herself here as a kind of doppleganger for Sarah Ponsonby: "I saw Lady Eleanor Butler start as she looked at me, although she at once controlled the surprise she evidently felt as my likeness to her friend" (244). The sense of a doubling recurs when the Ladies learn that their diaries had been published. Dr. Gordon tries to comfort them:

"But you know you lived in an age of diaries . . . memoirs . . . autobiographies, and of much letter-writing. They were no doubt reliving, but were dangerous diversions. On the whole one may marvel that your journal lay hidden for so long." I saw that they were still feeling outraged that the dear intimate record had thus been exploited.

"Don't think I don't understand your feelings about this. Twice in my life writings of my own have been stolen and published. But when you left your journal to the wrong person, did you not inadvertently give it to the world? If one lets intimate documents go out of one's keeping, the world, which is a damnable devouring shark, is bound to get them in the end." (247, ellipses hers)

Like the mother and daughter in Wordsworth's "Confirmation" sonnet, their feelings are intertwined. And like the linnet hiding in the holly, they have both been subjected to the violation of the prying search. Dr. Gordon is, not surprisingly, drawn to the security of their enclosed bower: "But in your journal the truth comes crystalline. It is as though you had been born and had lived together in . . . in a . . . in an amythyst" (249). Gordon made an appointment to meet with the Ladies two nights later in Plas Newydd, into which, at
the age of 75, she cheerfully breaks ["I am cut out by nature for a burglar" (257)] and spends the night catching them up on the condition of women in the mid-1930s. The three together characterize themselves in opposition to those women who still live as "slaves" (261) and explains birth control and suffrage. The encounter ends with a homage to the Ladies:

"You made the way straight for the time that we inherited. You meditated among your books and dreamed us into existence. You handed on to us your passionate love of freedom, plus honour. We may very well ask our spiritual progenitors how we, discouraged and belittled as we were, can be born as we were. People like yourselves are the answer to that. (269-270)

Simone de Beauvoir seems to have enjoyed this novel; she notes in her chapter on "The Lesbian" that, "The union of Sarah Ponsonby with her woman companion lasted for almost fifty years without a cloud: apparently they were able to create a peaceful Eden apart from the ordinary world," and footnotes Dr. Gordon's novel as evidence, remarking that, "the story of the lifelong association of Miss Sarah Ponsonby and Lady Eleanor Butler is beautifully--and reticently--told" (469). She does not at all refer to the ghostly reverberations of the postscript.

We have seen that Dr. Gordon sees herself as resembling Sarah Ponsonby. In Mavor's account, the hint of ghostly identification is even more complicated: when Dr. Mary Gordon first visits Plas Newydd the custodian
imagines he sees "the incarnation of Lady Eleanor Butler walking down the path; a short, stocky woman with grey hair neatly cropped" (208). With the proceeds of her novel Dr. Gordon had a plaque designed and dedicated for the Llangollen church and, in what Mavor calls an act "in thrall to some form of self-identification, posed as Lady Eleanor" (211). That is, the enigmatic Dr. Gordon not only has the opportunity to meet the ghosts of the Ladies of Llangollen, she almost becomes one as she is mistaken for being herself a ghostly visitant, her face memorialized in the plaque for the Ladies.23

Why is this connection between lesbians and "other ghosts" so resonant for contemporary critics? In some sense, I think, the visions of the literally disembodied spectres evades the too fleshly corporate bodies of

23 This sense of ghostly redoubling and possession is repeated even in the Lesbian guidebook Are You Two... Together? Lindsy Van Gelder and Pamela Robin Brandt write (referring to the fact that "The two friends slept together in a huge four-poster bed of richly carved oak"): "Across the stream from the font is a tree which has become a sort of tourists' friendship shrine annex: more recent "friends" have, for a hundred and fifty years, inscribed their own entwined initials on its bark. Embarrassing as it is to admit, we did whip out those Swiss army knives which God issues to all lesbians as birth--well, She should--and carved our own names, and the date. This was exactly the sort of pseudospiritual sentimentality we usually avoid. But remembered the "E.B. AND S.P." over Plas Newydd's fireplace, we told ourselves that just this once, instead of being a tacky gesture, carving initials on a tree was more like adding a footnote to gay history. It is an oak" (54). I should perhaps confess as well that my own initials and those of my partner have been memorialized on the oak.
Colette and de Beauvoir, the insistently corporate bodies that shift the idyllic bower of the New Place into a scene of horror and mutilation. In both Colette and de Beauvoir the imaginative vision of corporate lesbian bodies is made to stand in for a kind of excess femininity, a state of pure claustrophobia for all that they are signaled at the same time as not really women—in Colette's vision of the ladies wearing dungarees and Eleanor jacking up a car, in de Beauvoir's spectacle of butches in felt hats, trapped in a "narrowness of spirit" and longing to throw punches. The "narrow cell" that Wordsworth valorized and longed for all his life has become a scene of horror. Much feminist writing of the past two decades has worked to transform this sense of the horror of corporate female bodies. Thus Tania Modleski concludes "The Scandal of the Mute Body" with what we have seen is a paradigmatic feminist moment of closure: "Woolf's prophecy of a female 'fellowship' in which women speak freely to and of another remains to some extent a promise—and nothing less" (58).
Chapter Five

Romantic Reading and Feminist Writing

Criticism can begin only from a desire for change.

Pierre Macherey, *A Theory Of Literary Production*, 15

If we have established that contemporary feminist writing is shot through with tropes which were also widely circulated during the Romantic period, the obvious final question is: what of it? What does this mean for the study of Romanticism, and for the current practices of feminism? Without saying that the domain of Romanticism is perfectly coextensive with the domain of feminism, we can say that both discourses are marked with a certain density of the same figures, figures of garments, gothic figures, figures of fragmented discourse, figures of cloisters around which utopian and dystopian narratives oscillate simultaneously. Like feminism, Romanticism was a literary movement which has its beginnings in revolutions, in dreams of a new social world; both discourses struggle with new forms, new words, with new languages waiting to be born. Both feminism and Romanticism also look back in time for literary models, to "simple" oral cultures,
seeking to bring a pre-historic honesty and freshness back to a language which has become riddled with artifice and oppression. Both movements also quite quickly interrogate and challenge their own founding desires, while in some sense continuing to rely on them for a sense of identity. This final chapter will re-examine these networks of tropes both to better understand what their insistent repetition means for feminism, and, most importantly, to suggest what this tropological density, what this politics of repetition, means for theories of the relationship between literature and social change. Ultimately, the theoretical structure suggested here will rely on a careful understanding of the status and function of tropes in philosophical writing, a subject that is now, as it was at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, under intense scrutiny.

Feminism, as practiced in the past two decades, has been a profoundly literary social movement. This is often forgotten in the midst of mass media images of bra burners and demonstrations. But feminism more than any other social movement of this century has truly been a battle of the books. In fact, the "second wave" of feminist movement in this country is usually dated with the publication of a book: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a text quickly followed
in Britain by Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch. One of the best selling feminist texts of the early 1970s was a doctoral dissertation on literature, Kate Millet's Sexual Politics. In the academy, feminist theory found one of its first and strongest home in departments of literature as courses on "women writers" began to blossom all around the country in the early 1970s. Even today, thirty years after the appearance of Friedan's work, the continuing vitality of feminist movement is suggested as much by publishers and best sellers lists as by demographic social changes. While the bookishness of feminism is hard to quantify, some brief illustrations may suggest its scope. The central gathering spaces for feminists in most urban areas are bookstores: there are approximately 105 feminist bookstores in the United States, and such bookstores form recognizable havens in cities internationally. The decades since 1970 have seen a veritable burgeoning of feminist presses; there are currently approximately 76.¹ The feminist lists of academic and trade publishers have also expanded astronomically since the

¹ These numbers from the editors of The Feminist Bookstore News, the trade publication for feminist bookstores. They define a feminist bookstore as one owned and operated by women, and having at least 50% of their titles written by and about women. Most of the bookstores on their mailing list are closer to 75% stocked with "women's" titles. Phone conversation 6/24/92.
late 1960s. Books like Susan Faludi’s *Backlash*\(^2\) and Gloria Steinem’s *Revolution from Within* mark the continuing—and unanticipated—hunger for feminist analysis among the reading population of this country. However embattled feminists may feel today, publishing on feminist issues, feminist criticism, and feminist-based analysis clearly has never been richer. In fact, the clearest connections between feminism inside and outside the academy (to use a tropology so simplistic it might almost seem to deconstruct itself—but not quite) may have to do with shared reading lists, with an emergent and constantly enriched new canon of feminist writers. The most prominent figures in feminism in this country have all been writers, and often poets: Tillie Olsen, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Gloria Anzaldúa, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Paula Gunn Allen; those who don’t see themselves as poets still make their revolution through writing: bell hooks, Betty Friedan, Charlotte Bunch, Gloria Steinem, Marilyn Frye. It is certainly no coincidence that the feminist activity of the 1970s was accompanied by the most profound reevaluation of the place of women writers in literature that has ever occurred. In a generation, the shape of "literature" as a social

\(^2\) Backlash has been so lucrative that Faludi was able to command a 1.5 million dollar advance for her next book. [find source]
document has shifted drastically in some ways; in other ways, as we have seen, it continues to be filtered through and to rely on familiar Romantic notions of the "literature’s" roles in social change. That is, as its jacket copy claims, Pierre Macherey's 1966 *A Theory of Literary Production*, may develop "a materialist theory which supersedes all those early mythologies of literature based on notions of creation," but the practice of literary scholarship continues to be firmly based on those "mythologies." Since the late sixties, various Marxist-inflected theories of the production of "literature" have attempted to dismantle the Romantic underpinnings of this contested term. However, as we have seen, Romantic tropes continue to interfuse most of the writing done under the rubric of "literary criticism" as well as much writing not done under this rubric. And in fact, an enormous number of feminist writers continue to rely on and profit from familiar Romantic theories about inspiration, about the special role of the poet as a woman speaking to women, about the use of familiar diction in art, about the need for a literary language which will be purged of the artifices and falsities of an elite and oppressive literature.

In a sense, then, any attempt to evaluate the impact of feminism must evaluate feminism’s
literariness. Macherey represents a new direction for this study most obviously because it is neither feminist, nor Romantic, nor about Romanticism. Macherey is primarily concerned not with the production of literature but with the production of literary criticism. His text opens with the question, "What is literary criticism?" and works hard to debunk what he considers a series of fallacies that distort its practice. Many of these "fallacies" are in fact the widely circulated critical tropes which we have seen derive from the Romantic period: "creation," "interior and exterior," "depth and complexity," "implicit and explicit," "the Spoken and the Unspoken." The tropes which Macherey singles out for particular scrutiny parallel almost exactly the tropes which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick foregrounds in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*: "burial," "depth and surface," and the "Unspeakable." As Macherey's study critiques fallacies which most obviously derive from Romantic conceptions of literature, Macherey would seem to be, and no doubt would see himself as, someone working against the Gothic romantic tradition. In this sense, introducing Macherey would seem to introduce for the first time a discourse that can be said to be removed from the exuberant proliferation of Romantic tropology. In another sense, however, taking up Macherey to begin to
address questions of literature and social change also takes us back to the heart and home of this tour, the gothic, because Macherey's theory of literature and literary criticism is profoundly Gothic. For Macherey, "The book is furrowed by the allusive presence of those other books against which it is elaborated; it circles about the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return" (80). Literary criticism must resist simple gothic closure: "The work is finite because it is incomplete. At the same time, to double the line of the text with the ghostly relief (sculptural) that its incompleteness projects, can be to show another work behind the work, a kind of secret which it masks or translates: and so we fall back into the interpretive fallacy" (81). In fact, literature, like the human psyche, had become inescapably haunted: "The recognition of the area of shadow in or around the work is the intial moment of criticism. But we must examine the nature of this shadow: does it denote a true absence, or is it the extension of a half-presence?" (81). As Macherey's work progresses, this gothic tropology becomes ever more dense: "The recognition of this simultaneity, which precludes any notion of priority, is fundamental because it makes possible--from the beginning--an exorcism of the ghosts of
aesthetic legality" (90); "we must show a sort of splitting within the work; this division is its unconscious, in so far as it possesses one—the unconscious which is history, the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges: this is why it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts it" (94). All the tropes which Eve Sedgwick and others have identified with the gothic are here: a "haunting presence," a temptation (which must be resisted) to tear "off the mask," "depth," (98) "doubling," "reminiscences, alterations, revivals and absences" (99). Given the density of the repetition of this tropology, rejected in one breath, played with in another, we will not be surprised to find that Macherey’s ideal examples of how literature works come from Edgar Allen Poe and Mrs. Radcliffe. If, as Nancy Armstrong argues in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, "the modern individual was first and foremost a woman" (8), then perhaps we can argue that modern Literature was first and foremost the Gothic. Macherey suggests this inadvertently when he writes:

> To narrate is also to construct, to build this edifice of secrecy which coincides miraculously with the real architecture which initiates it, or which it initiates: the black abode of a castle.

(29)

Finally, for Macherey:
The transparency of the book is always retrospective, and it is only ever a moment rather than a defining characteristic of the narrative. As Mrs. Radcliffe says, everything will be explained when the time is right; we must be content to wait. In its substance and its truth, this delay makes the work possible. Other than its own unfolding, there is nothing within or behind the narrative; thus it reproduces itself. The urgent need to understand, to achieve a transparent reading, paradoxically requires delay and opacity. (38)

That is, Macherey uses Poe and Radcliffe, uses the Gothic, to argue against a kind of "denouement"-based theory of literary criticism.

Macherey's discussion of Poe and Radcliffe begins with a rather distressingly familiar gender configuration: Poe's is the philosophical text, Mrs. Radcliffe's is "unreflecting" (21). Nevertheless, it is rather startling, and yet familiar, to find Gothic texts at the heart of a new materialist theory of literary production. For despite the fact that figuratively one has a mind and one does not, Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition," and Mrs. Radcliffe's text have "an almost identical theme" (21), the two texts are concerned with "the same image in a different way" (27), and "in the work of Poe there is more of Mrs. Radcliffe than there is of Walpole" (28). Curiously, however, the Radcliffean text which Macherey takes up, Les Visions d'un chateau des Pyrenees, was not written by Mrs. Radcliffe, and may not have been written in English. A translator's note points out
that, "this novel, of which no English original has been identified, is generally considered to be incorrectly ascribed to Mrs. Radcliffe" (27). In fact, Macherey acknowledges this point but is quite uninterested in it:

The book in question is, as they say, unpretentious. This is not to our disadvantage; indeed, it is precisely why it has been chosen. Even among minor works it is of the second rank; probably it was not written by Mrs. Radcliffe but is a forgery, a pastiche, published under her name after her death. This kind of text, the more or less accurate fake, is often the most characteristic of a genre of style. Here is to be found in a pure if not original state all that defines the type. The skilful imitation can be more revealing than the model. (28)

Now this is a very peculiar move in some ways; under the sign of Radcliffe, Macherey is going to offer a pastiche and a forgery, but one which with the uncanny logic of gothic doubling will be a better subject than the supposed original which it replaces. Although Macherey seems to be contrasting two "works" and two "authors," in fact he is contrasting one author and one type, suggesting that many texts may be read under the sign of "Radcliffe." In Macherey's model, the Gothic is in fact the genre of infinite proliferation, not "a" text but a theme, an image that models and embodies textuality itself.

Twenty-five years later and on another continent, another writer concerned with literature and social change will also take a Gothic text, and specifically
one by Poe, as a kind of tropological heart from whence
all her images emanate. In *Rebellion: Essays 1980–
1991*, Minnie Bruce Pratt leans heavily on Poe’s "The
Fall of the House of Usher" to derive figurations for
her vision of the role of literature and the place of
women in social movement. Although she relies heavily
on a kind of Gothic apparatus in her writing, like
Macherey Pratt seeks to revise it at the same time. We
can say that Pratt attempts to reverse what Terry
Castle has called, in regard to *The Mysteries of
Udolpho* "the spectralization of the other."

In "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," one of the most
famous and influential feminist essays of the 1980s,
Pratt details her journey away from "the protected
circle marked off for me by the men of my kind as my
'home’" (44). She describes her experience thus: "The
cracking and heaving and buckling in my life was the
process of freeing myself" (53). A few paragraphs
later, the source of this image is made explicit:

It felt like the catastrophic ending of a story
from my childhood, one of Poe’s stories that I
read late at night: The walls of a house split,
zigzag, along a once barely noticeable crack, and
the house of Usher crumbles with "a long
tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a
thousand waters." A woman is the reason for the
fall of that place of "feudal antiquity"; she is
the owner’s twin sister who dies and is buried in
a chamber deep under the house. The brother, who
suffers from a continual and inexplicable terror,
"the grim phantasm FEAR," becomes terrified; his
friend reads a romance to soothe him, a crude tale
of a knight who conquers by slaying a dragon; the
sounds in the story, of ripping wood, grating clanging brass, piercing shrieks, begin to be heard in the very room where the two men are seated. In horror the brother reveals that he had buried his sister alive, but he had dared not speak; the sounds are "the rending of her coffin and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison. . . ." At that moment, the doors rush open; the lady stands before them, bloody in white robes, and then falls upon her brother in violent death-agonies, bearing him to the ground a corpse, shattering the house over them. (53)

The images from this story, as Pratt recirculates them, are insistently present in her collection of essays from start to finish. The first essay in the collection turns on her realization that, "Until not so very long ago, I did not know that I was being kept in also, and thought of a house only as a shelter" (19). In this formulation, Pratt herself would seem most obviously identified with the entombed woman, clawing her way out into freedom. And in fact, this inflection of her Usher imagery reverberates throughout her essays.  

3 This is unmistakably Pratt's intention. A few pages later in the same essay she writes, "The image from my childhood, from Poe's story, returns to me: the woman who escapes with superhuman effort from a coffin whose lid is fastened down by screws, from a vault with iron doors of immense weight. She may free herself, but then she dies violently, carrying home and kin with her, a catastrophe that she seems to cause, though what she is doing is fighting to live. Melodramatic; yet twenty years after I first read the story, when I began to admit to myself how I had been buried by my culture, coffined in heart and body (one is reminded of Wollstonecraft's famous rhetoric: "Bastilled for life!")--and how this was connected to my sex, my race, my class, my religion, my "morality"--when I began to push through all this, I felt like my life was cracking around me, that my world was
my 'protection'(55). In this passage, she explicitly identifies her father with Roderick Usher:

Read by me a hundred years after it was written in the 1840s, a time of intensifying Southern justification of slavery, Poe's description of the dread, nervousness, and fear of the brother, pacing through the house from "whence for many years, he had not ventured forth," could have been a description of my anxiety-ridden father, trapped inside a belief in white supremacy, a need to enforce the purity of (white) women, the fear that his world would crumble if anyone, including himself, questioned these taboos out loud. (53-54)

Pratt deploys Usher, then, as a parable of patriarchy, "written . . . in a time of intensifying Southern justification of slavery," as if it encodes the fears of white men also trapped in their confining beliefs in white and male supremacy. However in this precis, she italicizes the words "had dared not speak" as if she now identifies with the brother, with his terrorized silence. Immediately before she introduces her summary of the Usher story she writes: "This breaking through did not feel like liberation but like destruction" (53).

Her invocation of the gothic allows her to suggest a split identification, not just the one entombed by patriarchy but the oppressive entomber trapped in [his] own silence and dread: "Because I was implicated in the crumbling." Interestingly, again, immediately before she introduces this vision of her place in the fall of Usher, she again connects herself with Roderick by italicizing the crime of her own silence: "Why do I dare not speak against anti-Semitism, against racism?" (56).
doing of some of these injustices, myself and my people, I felt in a struggle with myself, against myself" (53). That is, no matter how she ostensibly deploys the Gothic tropes of Usher to textualize her confinement and her break for freedom, Pratt also invokes Gothic metaphors to suggest a familiar kind of splitting; not just Madeline, she is Roderick also.

While I'm thus dealing out positions of identification like so many playing cards, I'm obviously holding one back, rather like the Old Maid: the position of the narrator. I will return to the question of Pratt's relationship to the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" after I suggest the extent to which this story, rather than providing a particularly vivid tropology for this one passage of one essay, in fact provides the tropology that undergirds and connects all of Pratt's writing.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" haunts Pratt's literary imagination. In "I Plead Guilty to Being a Lesbian," Pratt writes of "How I had imagined breaking that barrier with my hands, with bare fury" (89). In "When the Words Open" she returns again the images of entombment which obsess her:

I read Poe, and Rossetti also, for their poems of women dead, rotting, but still powerful, opening the tomb or the earth to come back to claim the living. The poets expressing the fears rampant in a culture of masters, owners, and spiritual overseers who were nervous and obsessed, as usual,
with the possibility of rebellion among those below. The poems hiding my own desire to break free (129).

This tropology of enclosure and escape, of inside and outside, structures every moment of Pratt's writing:

I also perfected the kind of escape I had learned from the Fugitives and New Critics: I stood back and looked at literature as an artifact to be commented on; I learned to build my own closed space as a critic by constructing narrow theories about what I read... I remained trapped in someone else's version of my life. (159)

Pratt's tropology is more complex than it seems here: "trapped" by others, she also "build[s her] own closed space." Not only that, however; this "closed space" is also a "kind of escape." That is, rather than offering a seamless tropology of enclosure and escape, Pratt's tropology is more multi-valent than it seems. Her enclosure, her "narrow theories" are also an escape, an escape from social knowledge and self-knowledge. Pratt does not just focus on her imprisonment and the process of her liberation; she also focuses on the seduction of confinement, on "the protection of that circle, how seductively secure it was for me to think I knew the One Truth and lived in it" (199).

In identifying with Madeline Usher, Pratt not only connects herself to a woman who escapes entombment, but to a virtually non-existent character, one whose death following her escape is merely a repetition of and
return to her state of near-death before her burial. She only looks alive once encoffined, only becomes animated once buried. The narrator of Poe's tale sees Madeline twice. The first time she appears, her image is summoned (as it will be in end) by her brother's words. Roderick bemoans her approaching death and:

"While he spoke, the lady Madeline (for so was she called) passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared. I regarded her with utter astonishment not unmingled with dread—and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings. A sensation of stupor oppressed me, as my eyes followed her retreating steps." (144)

Madeline functions like the House of Usher itself to infect the narrator with a sense of horror, as he falls into a "stupor" not unlike the one which will take her. And in fact the presence of the narrator seems to cause her immediately succeeding demise: "on the closing in of the evening of my arrival at the house, she succumbed . . . to the prostrating power of her destroyer" (145)—the antecedent of "her destroyer" is perhaps ambiguous. Madeline is an infection rather than a character: she sends the narrator into a stupor, with her burial the house springs into a weird kind of life, and her twin brother becomes subject to "hysteria" (152)—to a disorder of the womb. She appears again only to be a final harbinger of death and destruction. Pratt's identification with Madeline, then, can be seen as a kind of feminist misreading or
revision; she reads a character where there is none, and evades Madeline's final death.

But "The Fall of the House of Usher" is primarily structured around tropes not of imprisonment but of perception, tropes worked most fully through the position of the narrator. The narrative commences with the narrator's first view of the House of Usher, which confronts him immediately with the mystery of his own feeling: "What was it--I paused to think--what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered" (138). The narrator responds by trying to use "a black and lurid tarn" as a kind of Claude Glass'--to frame his vision and take pleasure in the indirection of his gaze:

It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down--but with a shudder even more thrilling than before--upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows. (139)

The narrator's attempt at distancing and framing fails: the power of the image of the house is if anything

' Add note explaining Claude Glasses; quote from Andrews probably.
redoubled in its reflection. The narrator's proximity to the House immediately infects him with Roderick's neurasthenia and Madeline's death in life. However the narrator consistently seeks to deny and turn away the knowledge that strikes him with his first vision of the House: he labels his feelings "unaccountable" and when Roderick attempts to show him the vision of the luminous House he cries, "You must not--you shall not behold this!" (153). The narrator's characteristic gesture from his first glimpse of the House of Usher is to turn away. His final action after the appearance/death of Madeline is to run: "From that chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast" (157). His running is cut short, however, by the final vision which holds him transfixed: "I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued . . . While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened. . . . my brain reeled as I saw" (157). The narrator may be liberated by the fall of the House of Usher, but the final tableau of the story leaves him transfixed in his first moment of inescapable vision.

Although Pratt does not rely on the familiar Enlightenment tropes of vision which the Gothic destabilizes, there is one often-cited moment of failure of vision in which her writing is shot through with gothic tropology. In The Mysteries of Udolpho
Emily St. Aubert’s visions oscillate between the sweeping panoramas of the mountains, visions from on high of entire nations, and visions of entrapment, of obscure corners in the dark passages of patriarchal houses. Pratt, in "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," conflates these two moments of vision:

When I was about eight years old, [my father] took me up the front marble steps of the courthouse in my town. He took me inside, up the worn wooden steps, stooped under the feet of folks who had gone up and down to be judged...up past the courtroom where my grandfather had leaned back in his chair and judged for over forty years, up to the attic, to some narrow steps that went to the roof, to the clock tower with a walled ledge. (33)

Pratt uses this image to detail the class-and-race-bound map of her home town: "What I would have seen" and "What I would not have seen from the top: the sawmill, or Four Points where the white mill folks lived, or the houses of the Blacks in Veneer Mill Quarters." However, Pratt is terrified by the height, unable to take in what she explicitly identifies as a patriarchal vision ("a view that had been his father’s and his"). Pratt uses a gothic technology of vision and failures of vision to trope her relation to the peoples of her home town, a technology similar to of Poe’s tale.

In other words, Pratt’s use of gothic tropology connects her more with Poe or with the tale’s narrator than with either Roderick or Madeline. Pratt turns
away from the vision from the tower only to substitute a new vision, because "our perceptions are distorted, limited, constricted by that old view." In Pratt's figuration the foundational constriction is that of vision: she focuses again and again on what can be seen and not seen. The entombment of the dead in living woman is a ruse.5

5 In light of our interest in the connected tropes of feminism and Romanticism, it is noteworthy Rebellion ends with Pratt's theory of poetry, a rewriting of Shelley's defense. She begins "Poetry in Time of War" by describing a lecture she gave for "a poetry series with a theme from Shelley's statement: 'Poet's are the unacknowledged legislators of the world'"(228). She says:

As a lesbian poet, I have been contemplating Shelley's words. To be a poet who is a lesbian is to be a potential felon in half the states of this country and the District of Columbia, where I live. . . . And when I write and speak of my life as a lesbian, my poems have also been seen as outside the bounds of poetry. . . . It has taken me years to call myself a poet. I am a woman who stopped writing in her early twenties, when my imagination faltered before the poets my teachers offered for emulation—the white male writers of my region, the poets who glorified the values of the Old South; who gave, in the lyric beauty of their poems, the literary equivalent of laws that kept women in their place, Blacks in their place, and those of us with perverted love entirely hidden. To me, then, poets looked and acted very much like legislators: two sets of upperclass white men, the legislators in control of public communal space, the poets endorsing their world or (some few) locked in isolated reaction to it. . . . I have become a poet, not one who offers alternative legislation, but one who offers possibility, threatening to some, desired by others, but possibility. (228-29) Pratt rejects Shelley's trope of legislators; for her the poets she read as a student acted as very real and acknowledged legislators of her life. But while rejecting Shelley's language, she takes up Shelley's
Both Macherey and Pratt, in their very different
critical dialects, are primarily interested in the
literature’s relation to the social—that great
question thrown into turmoil in the Romantic period.
And yet both rely heavily on Gothic tropology: for both
it becomes a founding moment. Gothic literature
authorizes and knits together their theories. As we
saw in Chapter II, Gothic tropology has most often been
translated into interior psychic realms: the interior
spaces of Gothic novels are most usually read as
doubles for the interior spaces of our own tortured
psyches, Gothic splits echo our fragmented selves. How
then are we to read this doubled resurfacing of Gothic
tropes in Macherey and in Pratt?6

If we argue, as I have above, that the Gothic can
be seen as the first modern literature, the literature
that shaped the terms for Romanticism’s own conceptions
of "Literature" and which continues to inflect what is
recognized as the practice of literary criticism in the
United States today, then it becomes inevitable that

6 In Toni Morrison’s Playing in the Dark: Whiteness
and the Literary Imagination, the central section,
"romancing the shadow," depends on a reading of Poe’s The
Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. Gothic tropes, in fact,
structure Morrison’s study from beginning to end.
However in her hands they are explicitly racialized.
calls for a new commitment to literature in the name of Marxism or feminism should operate in terms of the Gothic. What is perhaps somewhat unexpected is the extent to which these politicized literary criticisms remain founded on and shot through with the terms of the Gothic. But in order to comprehend what is at stake in this problem of the relations between Gothic Romanticism and feminism we need to approach the question from one other angle: through feminist theories explicitly about the relation between literature and social change.

Feminism, as I have said, has been and continues to flourish as a profoundly literary movement. From the beginning feminist writers have relied on arguments about the power of literature (and language) both as an oppressive force and as an avenue for liberation. Ironically, however, most feminist approaches to literature have exhibited (and continue to exhibit) a concerted indifference to what is outside the text, and in this they continue to follow the practices of literary study in this country since the 1950s. Even in feminist literary studies, formalism remains the name of the game. When Derrida writes that "there is no outside the text" he produces a scandal. When literary scholars practice their criticism as if there were no "outside the text" it is recognized as business
as usual. Although increasingly feminist literary scholars are struggling to find a literary practice that moves beyond formalism, it is practically impossible here for me not to invoke a Gothic trope of entombment in the text. For critics most impatient with the powerful formalist impulse of most literary criticism, ethnography has most often served as the light at the end of the tunnel.

In "Some Functions of Feminist Criticism; Or, the Scandal of the Mute Body: Reducing the Variables: Feminism, 'Ethnographic' Criticism and Romance Readers" Tania Modleski opens her argument with an epigraph from Barbara Pym which contrasts "The anthropologist, laying bare the structure of society, or the writer of romantic fiction, covering it up." Modleski begins her argument with an attempt to dislodge what she perceives as the hegemony of ethnographic criticism, implicitly in the name of romance. Claiming as predecessors Catherine Moreland ("who rejects 'male' history books as unacceptable alternatives to Gothic and romantic novels") and Barbara Pym, Modleski argues that ethnographic approaches to literature are "male" in their investment in "calm objectivity." For Modleski, the cross-cultural and cross-class popularity of romance narratives suggests the need for a more psychoanalytic approach to their study. She argues
The point here is not only that it is questionable from a moral and political point of view to treat romance readers as if they were natives of Bora Bora rather than middle-class housewives from somewhere around Kansas (although, of course, ethnographic studies of the natives of Bora-Bora are also often morally and politically problematic). The point is also that romances are the property of us all—and not just of white Anglo-Saxon and American women either: Moreley’s female West Indian and African subjects, we recall, seemed just as avid for mass-produced female fantasies as Kansas housewives, and, of course, Harlequin and other serial romances are translated into dozens of languages. In this regard, the limits of a "subcultural" approach to women’s romances ought to be clear, since the popularity of romances is a cross-cultural phenomenon, and romances provide women with a common fantasy structure to ensure their continued psychic investment in their oppression. (43)

Here Modleski’s indignation betrays her into some uncomfortable rhetoric. When she implies that it would be ridiculous to treat housewives from Kansas like natives of Bora-Bora (and her parenthesis does not save her from the tone of ridicule) she suggests a politically problematic "obvious" separation between housewives and natives—a separation which depends on their having a different status as "objects of study."

Still, it is significant for our purposes that Modleski’s theoretical predecessors are heroines in romance plots, and that the terrain of her dispute is romance novels. For Modelski, both the wide dissemination of the romance plot and the behavior of romance readers blur the line between observer and
observed, between leader and follower, effectively revealing the extent to which ethnographic criticism's claims to greater social reality are built on a house of cards. She concludes the first half of her essay with this parting shot at her chief adversary, Janice Radway:

"Therefore," writes Radway, "while the members of the Smithton group share attitudes about good and bad romances that are similar to Dot's it is impossible to say whether those opinions were formed by Dot or whether she is simply their most articulate advocate." But what, finally, is the feminist critic but an articulate advocate about opinions about texts?--opinions which she sometimes shares with other women and sometimes helps to form. (45)

Ethnographic approaches to literature are flawed because they fail to articulate the position of the critic, of the ethnographer in relation to her "subjects." As we will see, it is no coincidence, but rather a repetition of a common critical structure, that Modleski turns to romance, even to the Gothic in her invocation of Catherine Moreland, to expose the failures of ethnographic criticism. Her reliance on a trope of "the primitive" and what she implies is its unmistakable and even risible difference from "Kansas" is also grounded in theories of language and culture current since the Romantic period. After her initial debate across the terrain of romance novels, Modleski turns to her argument, her suggestion of the proper project for the feminist critic. She argues that
attention to the performative aspect of language is the proper tactic for feminist criticism. In her exemplary reading of *A Room of One's Own*, she focuses on the ways that, "Not unlike Austen's Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*, who found standard history boring because it excluded women, Woolf directs her attention to the lives of the Aunt Mabels rather than to the French kings and emperors, and in rejecting accepted views of the insignificance of women's lives, begins to put new values and new ideologies into 'play'" (56). Despite her focus on the formulaic romance, and on the heroine of a very famous gothic novel, Modleski finally focuses on the liberatory possibilities of feminist language, on its powers to make something "new."

In one of her footnotes, Modleski cites as exemplary Patricia Yaeger's *Honev-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing*. Not surprisingly for a feminist critic who calls herself "a reprobate Romanticist" (ix), Yaeger's argument about "emancipatory strategies in women's writings" relies on her belief in the performative power of new metaphors, and her understanding of the role of metaphors in

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7 Claudia Johnson argues, as does Kate Ferguson Ellis, that *Northanger Abbey*, rather than displacing the Gothic in the name of (masculine) reason, simply transfers its structures to the very territory which claims to be free of them. See her *Women, Politics, and The Novel*. 
social change; bringing us back full circle to the beginning and root of our study. Yaeger stresses the power of women writers to make the world new through metaphor, a writing practice she herself echoes and emulates, not least in her recasting of Levi Strauss's parable of honey-mad women as a feminist narrative of oral pleasure.

Yaeger's study relies on her theories of the status of metaphor. She argues that she has based her study on "a metaphor instead of a theory" (31) because "the implications a metaphor brings to a discussion are not meta-logical, but proverbial or commonplace":

One does not require technical or specialized information for the metaphor to go to work, for it to be understood. It is this workaday character of metaphor that I am seeking, this capacity to offer us ordinary access to extraordinary thinking we may not yet have tried. (32)

For her, metaphors are almost anti-theoretical in their social power; like Modleski she stresses their power to make the world new: "Thus metaphors have a performative dimension" (33). She argues, using Keats's valorized term, "Thus a new metaphor can prove useful in engendering new forms of speculation. . . . Metaphors are not linguistically inert. . . we should be aware of the potency of our figures of speech" (32). Yaeger's metaphors will bring her closer to that feminist dream of a community of women:

My own contribution . . . will be to unearth a set
of metaphors that focus on women's pleasure and productivity in language. These metaphors should help us to recover a community of women writers who . . . make optimistic, productive use of their lexicons. (33)

Like the feminist critics we observed in chapter two, Yaeger puts herself in the position of the Gothic heroine "unearting" a set of metaphors. In her model, the metaphors already lie buried and available in women's texts; they need only be activated by the careful feminist critic to become truly "performative." This special power, this rough magic, lies hidden but only just; in Yaeger's model metaphors have an untheorized, Romantic power which can, not surprisingly, become dangerous. Yaeger bases her study on Victor Turner's work on metaphor, quoting him liberally:

The central danger of such "root" metaphors resides in their unconscious appeal, their "aura." "The danger is, of course, that the more persuasive the root metaphor or archetype, the more chance it has of becoming a self-certifying myth, sealed off from empirical disproof." (33)

Like Turner's, Yaeger's theory of the "performative" dimension of metaphors is essentially magical; she is less than interested in the social and redundant nature of metaphoric function. Given this formulation of the power of metaphor--and hence the magical, untheorized power of "literature" as a mystic practice--it is not

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8 She is quoting from Turner's Dramas, Fields and Metaphors. This passage appears on page 30.
surprising that Yaeger's study—despite the fact that her avowed interlocutor is Teresa de Lauretis' Alice Doesn't—can be read as an extended conversation which she orchestrates between canonical Romantic and women's texts. In her hands, women writers out-Romanticize Romanticism.

Yaeger's second chapter reads Charlotte Bronte as recasting the images of theories of the male British Romantics, particularly in terms of her faith in the performative power of language:

I want to hypothesize that one of the verbal practices making women's writing of this period different from men's is an emancipatory interest directed toward language itself, a sense, precisely, that English must not be "kept up," that it is harmful to women. While this idea has only gained recent currency in feminist and in post modernist thought, I am suggesting that this concept has been available as metaphor for some time. I would add that the images of language we see in the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats suggest that the word represents for them not only a means to communication, not only a vehicle through which divinity passes into humanity, but it also delineates a metaphysical border defining a sharp epistemological limit. (43)

For Yaeger, male Romantics ultimately acquiesce to this limit while women writers continue to carry forward the emancipatory strategies which the male writers never fully believe in. Yaeger picks up the Romantic self-questioning emphasized by McGann, the moments in which, as she says of Keats's "Ode to a Nightengale," the poet "foreground[s] this limited word." Not for her the
Keats who delights in "speculation" (a word heavily valorized in her own lexicon)—it is Charlotte Bronte who carries the torch of that speculation into brave new worlds:

It is my suggestion that rather than feeling excluded from the Romantic tradition, Bronte has discovered a duplicitous, double-voiced way to consume it; she has begun to reshape the Romantic tradition for her own purposes—splitting and fragmenting its plots. (50)

In consuming the Romantic tradition, Bronte both incorporates and surpasses it: "Honey-mad men, the Romantic poets speak again and again of a failure to achieve their own visionary victories" (51). The dialogue between feminist emancipatory strategies in women's fiction and Romantic textualities continues throughout her work. And always in her work, "metaphor" is the magic key to these strategies of social power, providing what she repeatedly calls an "objective correlative" for the "collective impulse" (267). That is, the relationship between these new metaphors and the community of women they seem both to reflect and bring about is left untheorized; "metaphor" itself is given the power of a magical sign, standing in for powers of innovation in language itself.

As I've suggested before, this stress on the innovative social power of metaphor isn't surprising in a feminist theory of social change intimately interconnected with British Romanticism. In fact, as
we have seen in Chapter I, Romanticism itself has been described as the literary period in which a new deployment of figurative language came into being, a new blurring of the literal and the figurative which Yaeger's reading of "the metaphor" can be seen to repeat inasmuch as she only magically gestures towards the mechanisms by which "new metaphors" bring about new "realities," create "new communities."

While Yaeger ostensibly seeks to distance herself from Romanticism, her study in effect relies on it at every turn. Most important for our purposes here is her reliance on a relatively untheorized conception of the magical power of metaphor. She, like the Romantics, may overstate the case. When Marlon Ross remarks that Wordsworth, rather than engaging in politics directly, "wields his metaphors from home" and that he "remains snugly at home, claiming that the impact of his words derives ironically from the metaphoricity of his blows" or when Marjorie Levinson in Rethinking Historicism notes "our own (and the Romantics) tendency to equate criticism with intervention" (8), both suggest that Romanticism relies on a certain confusion between the political and the literary based on a faith in the power of metaphor. Yaeger's study relies on a similar faith in metaphors—one based on Romanticism and Gothic romanticism's
artifact, Literature. These theories of Literature and tropes rely on an idea of Culture which privileges the figurative by valorizing a certain idea of the primitive.

Importantly for feminist theories of literature and social change, the new theories of figurative language during the Romantic period relied on and supported a new conception of "culture" which was fast achieving hegemonic status. To return to the network of tropes that opened this study, figurative language was—in contrast to the dominant theories of the history of language—becoming the "garment" that marked a text's cultural status and defined it in opposition to the nakedness of that culture's newly configured "others."

Literature and Nakedness

Popular notions of savages and nakedness suffused British critical thinking including critical theories of literature and writing in the early nineteenth century, and, as we shall see, suffused also British Romantic conceptualizations of what was becoming a newly configured social artifact: Literature. In The Noble Savage: A Study of Romantic Naturalism (1928), Hoxie Neale Fairchild apologizes for the possibly transgressive aspects of his work:

If at times this discussion appears to go beyond its legitimate boundaries, it will be because of a
desire to show how closely interwoven is the cult of the savage with the general fabric of romanticism. (63)

The cult of the savage, which is so important for Romanticism, insists again and again on the literal as well as the cultural nakedness of the savages against whom the idea of culture is measured and determined. Wordsworth is still relying on this obsessively common conjunction in his poems "A Morning Exercise" (1828) and "Presentiments" (1830) both of which compare a naked Indian and a child. Scott uses it in the opening pages of *Waverley* to contrast dress "sixty years hence" with "the primitive nakedness of a modern fashionable at a rout" (35) and again when Waverley sees the little Scottish children in Tully Veolan, "sprawling" "in a primitive state of nakedness" (74). This conjunction is important for our purposes not because it was well theorized, but because it was almost completely untheorized. Indeed, it is just the sort of commonly and widely circulated trope that is our focus here, the kind so common as to attract no critical attention. Interestingly, these images of nakedness appear configured not only around the expected Red Indians, but also around Scottish Highlanders and women, two groups of people rapidly being established as culture's others. These images of savage nakedness exist in a particularly complex and contradictory relationship
with developing Romantic theories about the status of literature; the tensions in these theories become particularly pressing when we examine theories about the relationship between literal and figurative language. In order to understand some of what is at stake in these new literary theories, we must first make a condensed, but crucial, detour through the late eighteenth-century theories which provided the ground on which and against which Wordsworth formulated what he considered his literary revolution.

The terms "savage" and "primitive" are everywhere late eighteenth-century thinking, and are far from relegated to the kind of ethnographic writing found in the popular magazines. George Stocking briefly suggests the extent of the usage of these terms, in *Victorian Anthropology*, when he notes that after the French Revolution, "the fact and character of European Civilization hung in the balance, and from the beginning the idea [of civilization] itself was implicated in the crisis." Although not specifically interested in textual analysis here, Stocking goes on to note that for Edmund Burke, the French Revolution recalled the spectacle of "American Savages" while Thomas Paine concentrated on the "savagery" witnessed in the wretchedness of the masses, whose state was, "far below the condition of an Indian." (Stocking, 30).
While this fin de siècle diction is not Stocking's main quarry, he does concisely suggest the extent (which can be demonstrated with a dizzyingly proliferating number of examples) to which popular notions of savages were shot through polemics about the state of civilization. This widespread repetition of the terms "savage" and "primitive" at the end of the eighteenth century should, in some sense, be no surprise as this is the period which introduced our modern conceptualization of the idea of culture. As Raymond Williams writes in *Culture and Society 1780-1950*: "it is from the [early nineteenth century] on . . . that the idea of Culture enters decisively into English social thinking" (59).

In the late eighteenth century, even in discourses not ostensibly about the state of civilization, we find examples of this popular language, and not only after the spectacular upheaval of the French Revolution. My focus here will be on a different conjunction: on the conflation of notions of naked savages and aesthetic theories as they were variously used to manage various cultural collisions, and as literary Britain worked to establish itself in opposition to images of Red Indians, naked Highlanders, scantily clad women, and the working poor.⁹ Since this exploration can only be

⁹ Although there isn't space for a sustained historical account, it should be noted that these "cultural" collisions existed in varying degrees of
suggestive I will focus in particular on Wordsworth’s "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* and on Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley*.

Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), which seems to be an important precursor for Wordsworth’s aesthetic theories, solidifies what was a quite common assumption about the relationship of figurative to literal language. In this midst of his lecture "On Figures of Speech," Blair cites the following passage from Cicero’s *De Oratore*:

> The figurative usage of words is very extensive; a usage to which necessity first gave rise, on account of the paucity of words, and barrenness of Language: but which the pleasure that was found in it afterwards rendered frequent. For, as garments were first contrived to defend out bodies from the cold, and afterwards were employed for the purpose of ornament and dignity, so Figures of Speech, introduced by want, were cultivated for the sake

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tension during this period. Red Indians were far away from England and were rather wildly romanticized during this period. Wordsworth’s "" in *Lyrical Ballads* is only one example of an extremely popular genre, the dying Indian lyric. Coleridge’s "Lewti" was originally entitled "Wild Indian’s Love Chaunt" ("Tamaha’s stream" is the Georgia river Atamaha), a representative of the equally popular Indian love lyric. Scottish Highlanders had clearly not represented any kind of threat since the dramatic events of 1745 (and long before that not much of one). The positions of women in society, however, were rather more contested during this period, as, most dramatically, were the plights and angers of the poor during this tumultuous period in Britain’s history. Not surprisingly, Scots and Indians are most obviously present in literature (as opposed, somewhat tendentiously, to polemic); that is, these temporally and geographically distanced others appear most often as romantic others, images assimilated by aesthetic theories which then use them to create a sense of self-defining opposition.
of entertainment. (I.282-3)

In Blair's own rhetoric, this simile connecting figures of speech and garments shifts onto that quasi-metaphorical terrain which is so susceptible to sliding into literalization. That is, when Blair notes that, "Simple Expression just makes our idea known to others; but Figurative Language, over and above, bestows a particular dress upon that idea; a dress, which both makes it be remarked and adorns it" (I.274-5), figurative language no longer functions as a dress; rather, it is a dress which adorns the bare idea underneath it. The bare idea underneath it is, literally, a body: "The figure is only the dress; the sentiment is the body and substance" (I.277). This dress can be assimilated with images of splendor and rank:

When we want to adapt our language to the tone of an elevated subject, we would be greatly at a loss, if we could not borrow assistance from Figures, which, properly employed, have a similar effect on Language, with what is produced by the splendid dress of a person of rank; to create respect and give and air of magnificence to him who wears it. (I.285)

This language of costume and status is shot through Blair's work on figures, recurring not just here and there, but every time he refers to the status of
Two competing and contradictory historical narratives exist in a kind of tension in Blair’s own tropology of figurative language. The dominant, the famous one, descended at least from Sidney, holds that figurative language is itself a product of the birth of language, and that this can be seen in the language of various primitive peoples which are, Blair avers, famously rich in figures:

all Languages are most figurative in their early state. Both the causes to which I ascribed the origin of Figures, concur in producing these effect at the beginning of society. Language is then most barren; the stock of proper names, which

Although this model may seem intuitively correct to some readers, it is clearly not the dominant mode of understanding figures in the academy today. For instance, in his introduction to Culture and Anomie, Christopher Herbert describes his methodology thus: "Therefore I take as my point of departure Fleck’s proposition that scientific theories have a kind of larval phase in which they exist as "proto-ideas" or "pre-ideas," often of the thoroughly superstitious character, embodied not in logical discourse but in emotionally loaded metaphors. The only way to assess this argument or to apply it to a particular problem of intellectual history is by way of a concerted literary analysis of texts, analysis keyed intensively to the recurrences of constellations of figurative language, and by the same token keenly wary of the falsification of data which occurs whenever one abstracts an idea for purposes of analysis from the expressive form it takes in a given text" (24-25). That is, for this methodology, the cardinal mistake would be to see meaning as separate from metaphor. Instead, the "proto-ideas" Herbert is concerned to track are in fact "embodied" precisely in and perhaps by metaphors. The "dress," in Blair’s formulation, is the more revelatory and more meaning laden aspect of language, because finally "an idea" cannot and should not be "abstracted" from "the expressive form" which makes it.
have been invented for things, is small; and, at the same time, imagination exerts great influence over the conceptions of men, and their method of uttering them; so that, both from necessity and from choice, their speech will, at that period, abound in Tropes. For the savage tribe of men are always much given to wonder and astonishment. Every new object purifies, terrifies, and makes a strong impression on their mind; they are governed by imagination and passion, more than by reason; and of course, their speech must be deeply tinctured by their genius. In fact, we find, that this is the character of the American and Indian languages; bold, picturesque, and metaphorical; full of strong allusions to sensible qualities, and to such objects as struck them most in their wild and solitary life. An Indian chief makes a harangue to his tribe, in a style full of stronger metaphors than a European would use in an epic poem. (I.283-4)

As M.H. Abrams noted some time ago: "It was standard practice in Wordsworth's day, when characterizing poetry, to refer to its conjectured origin in the passionate, and therefore, naturally rhythmical and figurative outcries of primitive men" (78). Hugh Blair, whose popularity was enormous in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries,11 significantly articulated and circulated this theory in his many lectures and popular editions. Although, as Abrams says, "there is no direct evidence that Wordsworth had read the Lectures," they "were published while Wordsworth was still at Hawkeshead Grammer-

11 The Lectures went through 130 editions between 1783 and 1911; the only twentieth century edition appeared in 1965 from an academic press (the editors take some time to justify the edition on the grounds of Blair's now forgotten influence) and is, of course, out of print.
School, and the book was used very widely as a school text" (96). However, this historical narrative in which primitives are the most figurative has to work against a peculiar kind of tropological undertow in Blair’s rhetoric—one which echoes in the conjunction of Blair’s insistence on figures as a kind of high-class fancy dress and the proverbial nakedness of the primitive state. That is, the language of primitivism, in Blair, also works to figure that naked, pre-figurative state of language:

Rhetoricians commonly divide [figures] into two great classes: Figures of Words and Figures of Thoughts. The former, Figures of Words, are commonly called Tropes, and consist in a word’s being employed to signify something that is different from its original or primitive meaning. (275)

The primitive state of language, of a word, is its primitive, naked state—what exists prior to the dress and ornament with which its naked meaning can be overlaid. This language too is shot through Blair’s rhetoric in a curiously insistent way. It is this rather submerged strain in Blair’s rhetoric on which Wordsworth will draw most heavily.

Wordsworth is very concerned also in his "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads of 1798 to articulate the proper and improper uses of figures of speech in his new language of poetry—the langage of a man speaking to men:
...for, if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions in the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures. I forbear to speak of an incongruity which would shock the intelligent Reader, should the Poet interweave any foreign splendor of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests: it is sufficient to say that such addition is unnecessary. And, surely, it is more probable that those passages, which with propriety abound with metaphors and figures, will have their due effect, if, upon other occasions where the passions are of a milder character, the style also be subdued and temperate. (324)

Here Wordsworth is more than a little concerned to justify and delineate those occasions in which what he earlier calls "ornaments" will be proper to his new poetry which will be "a selection of the language really spoken by men." That Wordsworth may feel a little anxiety on the subject may be suggested by his insistence that under certain circumstances and as long as such figures of speech are selected carefully they will not suggest too much "foreign splendor": the word "judiciously" is repeated twice, and the choice must also be made "with propriety." Clearly Wordsworth seems to be defending himself from the charge that any use of figurative language will mar the impression of

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12 In an earlier passage, Wordsworth has noted that his new writing will "cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets," because he wants "to keep the Reader in the company of flesh and blood"--that is, real bodies--rather than bodies kept from the reader by such "mechanical devices" of style as artificial personifications.
"the language really spoken by men," will suggest the presence of artifice and poetry rather than the "reality" of "natural" speech.

The question of style comes up again when Wordsworth is concerned to defend his new poetry from the charge that it is too plain and simple to qualify as poetry:

In answer to those who still contend for the necessity of accompanying metre with certain appropriate colours of style in order to the accomplishment of its appropriate end, and who also, in my opinion, greatly underrate the power of metre in itself, it might, perhaps, as far as related to these Volumes, have been almost sufficient to observe that poems are extant, written upon more humble subjects, and in a still more naked and simple style, which have continued to give pleasure from generation to generation. Now, if nakedness and simplicity be a defect, the fact here mentioned affords a strong presumption that poems somewhat less naked and simple are capable of affording pleasure to the present day; and what I wished chiefly to attempt, at present, was to justify myself for having written under the impression of this belief. (327)

Once again Wordsworth's argument is rather remarkably hedged with caveats and disclaimers; still, the central contention is plain: poetry may also be acceptable which is relatively free of those ornaments of speech which have historically been the provenance of poetry. Here his concern is explicitly with "naked" poetry (the word "naked" is repeated three times in quite short compass), and although the precise nature of the poetry he has in mind is characteristically murky, he clearly justifies his own practice with an appeal to some
poetry which has been passed down from "generation to
generation," that is, which is inherited from some kind
of antiquity, and which still affords pleasure in its
nakedness. Thus, naked poetry belongs to the past of
poetry, to an earlier poetry which existed before the
superaddition of figure and ornament.

Although Wordsworth is vague in his Preface about
the specific poems against which he is playing off in
his work (just as he prefers to remain coy about the
critical theories which have shaped his own) his
tension about the passage he is charting is clear. On
the one hand, the use of figures of speech endangers
his claim to be selecting from the real language of
real men for his poetry, marking his work too clearly
as part of the realm of culture in its newly emergent
sense of what is finest and most fully wrought by the
most gifted of men. On the other hand, without enough
figures of speech the claim of his new work to belong
to the valorized category of "poetry" is endangered--
again because its "nakedness" stands in threatening
contrast to the properly clothed condition that, in
Hugh Blair's words, indicates splendor and rank.
Wordsworth's scylla and his charybdis, however, both
rely on the same logic: an opposition between nakedness
and culture, in which nakedness belongs to a primitive
past and in which culture keeps this nakedness properly
clothed and separated from its readers.

As we saw in chapter one, the Penrith Beacon spot of time has become a kind of critical philosopher's stone for modern theorists of Romanticism; inflecting this extraordinary attention is a fascination with and absorption of these Romantic figures of nakedness and reading. That is, the fact that the girl "resists strippings" makes of her a symbol of "the resistance to reading," as if nakedness figures a condition of immediate readability, the kind of immediate readability that suggests no complexity and ultimately, no culture. Female nakedness will present another kind of reading problem in Sir Walter Scott's Waverley.

When Waverley visits "A Scottish Manor-house Sixty years hence" he moves through the hamlet of Tully-Veolan, observing that:

Three or four village girls, returning from the well or brook with pitchers and pails upon their heads, formed more pleasing objects, and, with their short-gowns, and single petticoats, bare arms, legs, and feet, uncovered heads and braided hair, somewhat resembled Italian forms of landscape. Nor could a lover of the picturesque have challenged either the elegance of their costume, or the symmetry of their shape; although, to say the truth, a mere Englishman, in search of the comfortable, a word peculiar to his native tongue, might have wished the clothes less scanty, the feet and legs somewhat protected from the weather, the head and complexion shrouded from the sun, or perhaps might even have thought the whole person and dress considerably improved by a plentiful application of spring water with a quantum sufficit of soap. (100)

Like the "girl who bore a pitcher on her head" in The
Prelude, these girls with pitchers on their heads are images usurped by a narrator, images revised and appropriated to the point of view of "an English post-chaise." Although in The Prelude the woman merely has "her garments vexed and tossed/By the strong wind," here the Scottish girls seem to collude with the narrator's reading, undoing their own clothes ("thin short gowns and single petticoats...bare arms") to reveal their "symmetry of shape," or, (more bizarrely) how they resemble "Italian forms of landscape." It is, of course, more than a little bizarre to find these semi-naked poor Scottish girls compared to a form of Italian landscape but it is a gesture which Scott repeats more than once. [cite other examples]. In some ways this makes sense in a novel which concludes with the final aesthetizing gesture of a portrait of Waverley and Bonnie Prince Charlie which becomes part of the museum of relics which safely marks Waverley's adventures, as well as the uprising of '45, to a romantic but comfortably contained past.
be pictures. The resisted nakedness in Wordsworth can only ever give way to another picture, a "more pleasing object," something quite literally "picturesque." What teasingly lies underneath the garments is always already another picture. That Wordsworth tries to forestall this textual recognition by keeping the garments (with difficulty) on the girl, much as he tries to maintain in his language some liminal condition between the literal and the figurative,¹⁴ can only defer for so long the awareness it must continually ward off. This dense network of associations around unclothed girls is repeated again once Waverley enters the court of Tully Veolan, once again curiously conflated with images of Italy and art:

The scene, though pleasing, was not quite equal to the gardens of Alcina, yet wanted not the 'due donzellette garrule' of that enchanted paradise, for upon the green aforesaid two bare-legged dames, each standing in a spacious tub, performed with their feet the office of a patent washing-machine¹⁵... alarmed at the appearance of a handsome stranger on the opposite side, [they] dropped their garments (I should say garment to be quite correct) over their limbs, which their occupation exposed somewhat too freely... (81)

¹⁴ Although there isn't space to develop the point here, for critics from Wimsatt to Chase, this blurring of the literal and the figurative is the salient condition of Romanticism.

¹⁵ The fact that the girls are also doing "the work of a patent washing-machine," of course, also suggests their acultural status.
Scott is here also invoking of course, that "other" category of people at once naked and highly costumed: "the primitive." In fact, one of the consistent themes which runs through Scott's novel is an insistence that the savage highlanders are, if not precisely naked, certainly not very properly, or very safely, clothed. Aunt Rachel worries about Waverley's sojourn among the Scottish not the least because:

> there could be no great delicacy among the ladies, where the gentlemen's attire was, as she had been assured, to say the least, very singular, and not at all decorous. (71)

The Highlanders are referred to as "the petticoat people" (329) and "the petticoat men" (418), suggesting the feminized quality of their nakedness. That is, in civilized society, "primitive nakedness" may be worn by a presumeably female "modern fashionable at a rout" (35), but for a male to be bearer of a petticoat and indecorous dress suggests a failure to attain the status of a truly cultural being. Although Waverley, born along by a seemingly inexorable sequence of coincidences and events wears the plaid for a while, he has the foresight to save "his Highland garb and accoutrements, particularly the arms" as "curious in themselves" (428) so that they can finally be displayed on the wall beside the final painting of "Fergus Mac-Ivor and Waverley in their Highland dress" (Waverley as
Highlander has joined the "picturesque" girls of Tully-Veolan in the frame, making room for Waverley the adult and loyal Englishman: remember the association of savages and women with children). The arms are museumized just as the painting aestheticizes Waverley's experience: "The whole piece was beheld with admiration, and deeper feelings" (489).

This conjunction of images suggests the real shift we've seen from Blair's theory to the aesthetic theory which accompanied the canon building of the high romantics--a shift on which we've focused through brief readings of the two works which set the literary stage for the beginning of this brave new century: Wordsworth's 1798 watershed poetic manifesto and Sir Walter Scott's tremendously popular and influential 1815 novel. Both works establish themselves as the works of a culture which is opposed to the condition of primitive nakedness: a nakedness located in women, in savage Highlanders, and in the poor. That this nakedness is not merely literal or without metaphoric baggage should be clear by now; in fact, it draws on and reconfigures an older obsession with the nakedness of savages and with the relationship of this nakedness to the precultural condition in which such savages were assumed to live. In opposition to the more familiar historical trajectory in which poetry arises from the
richly figurative speech of primitive peoples, we find a submerged but consitently reiterated narrative in which primitive nakedness, rather than providing the ancestry and ground of modern literature isfigured as its other, the pre-cultural and anti-cultural other against whom the safely clothed British educated male develops a comfortable solidity of identity.

We could say that it is against this absorption of figurative power by the male Romantic poets that Margaret Homans' establishes *Bearing the Word*. For if figuration signifies a state of cultured, clothed, masculine power, then women’s uneasy relationship with garments, their always threatened nakedness suggest their different relationship to this ideological economy of the figurative. Homans picks up and replicates this gendered division of language, what she calls in her first chapter "women’s place in language." She argues that "the differential valuations of literal and figurative originate in the way our culture constructs masculinity and femininity, for if the literal is associated with the feminine, the more highly figurative is associated with the masculine" (5). This construction, I have argued, in some sense achieves its recognizably modern configuration in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a construction which Homans significantly naturalizes in her attempt
to valorize women writers' negotiations of the literal. Homans also naturalizes this model by relying on psychoanalysis to provide the grid through which she reads the deployment of the literal in nineteenth-century women writers, a grid which, as Terry Castle argues, can be said to derive its dominant tropes from the Romantic period. Ultimately, in Homans' conception:

The literal will be valueless and the figurative valuable because what the son searches for is not the mother herself, the literal that is forbidden by the father's law, but figures for her. For the daughter, however, to the extent that she is able to see differently from the cultural symbolic order, the whole question of the literal and the figurative will be more complex. The daughter will perhaps prefer the literal that her brother devalues. (13)

Homans argues that "While these nineteenth-century daughters write revisionary myths of literal and figurative, they do so more through thematics than through the invention of new representational practices" (16). That is, the critical practice Homans uses to read the functions of the literal in nineteenth-century women writers ultimately depends on her attention to the figures of their texts. Finally the literal becomes a kind of figure for Homans, figuring a particular relation between daughters and their mother's bodies, between women writers and their language.

The Grand Finale

Throughout this dissertation I have argued for the
extraordinary tropological confluence between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Gothic and Romantic literatures. By looking at the two periods in which popular Gothic novels flourished to a "bewildering excess," we have examined the ways these novels have managed and express social upheaval about the place of women "in the home," and the way they are grounded in the same archaeological tropology which structure the psychoanalytic texts which have been generally privileged as their best interpretive grid. Looking thus at tropes which have proliferated at certain periods to the point that they become almost unreadable, or in a rather Gothic formation, "dead" metaphors, has necessitated some consideration of the figurative dimensions of language. If, as numerous critics of Romanticism have suggested, Romanticism itself can be seen as a new theory and practice of figuration, than some sense of the history of theories of figurative language is also crucial for a careful assessment of the significance of these findings. This historical understanding is necessary to avoid what I have called the circularity of Romantic Reading, the tendency for critical approaches to Romantic texts to use Romantic tropes derived from those texts to "interpret" them.

My attention to the banality of tropes places this
work outside the familiar confines of the "influence" study. For instance, when Henry Louis Gates Jr., in The Signifying Monkey, writes, "By tropological revision I mean the moment in which a specific trope is repeated, with differences, between two or more texts" (xxv) or that "the tradition of Afro-American literature, a tradition of grounded repetition and difference, is characterized by its urge to start over, to begin again, but always to begin on a well-structured foundation" (256), he locates his interest in tropology in a particular field: the field of "two or more texts" and the field of "tradition." For Gates' purpose, it is necessary that his attention to tropological revision be based on a series of binary pairs: c is like and not like b which is like and not like a etc. This approach works wonderfully to trace a series of grounded repetitions and revisions, but it does not explain the flourishing of certain tropes across numerous texts. As a matter of fact, the textual apparatus of a study such as this dissertation can easily break down, not through paucity of evidence, but because the examples are so numerous as to be overwhelming. I've been concerned here with tropes whose proliferation becomes so common, or so untheorized, that they bear down like a kind of mass on the body of certain texts. I have argued that much
feminist thinking, particularly in the realm of literature, in the domain of academic feminist criticism and in the domain of feminist figures who take social and political prominence through books, has been shot through, more than inflected, with rhetoric most famously associated with the Gothic/Romantic period.

On a quite simple level, this study has also attempted to perform a kind of bare bones deconstructive move on two overlapping binarisms: Gothic and Romantic, and Gothic and Literature. As we’ve seen above, the "two" binarisms are in fact inextricable as Romanticism is seen to define what comes to be recognized as "Literature." There is obviously a feminist impulse behind this kind of proto-deconstructive move: the two binarisms in question have been rather decisively gendered for some time. Unlike most of the other canonical divisions of literary studies—"eighteenth-century," "nineteenth-century," "American,"--"Romanticism" has seemed resistant, not to feminist interpretation, but to a feminist reshaping of its canon, as if what is increasingly recognized as the masculinism of Romanticism defines itself be marking "women" as essential outsiders to its literariness.

Finally this study has suggested that the Gothic can be seen as the debased, necessary, inescapable, and
defining term on which both Romanticism and Literature rest their tenuous claims. Like the tropes we've studied here, Gothic fictions as well as Gothic tropes can be seen to proliferate senselessly, to threaten the purity and autonomy of an individual sovereign subject. Naming as Gothic the condition on which literarity depends, the condition on which theories of the subject, theories of the structure of the literary text and narratives of literary criticism depend, means refusing the abjection of repetition. It means, in a move many are calling for and few enacting, a final move away from Romanticism’s fetishization of "originality," of that which makes texts private property, properly enclosed. In the name of this project, feminist writing, feminist theories have challenged and fragmented the unitary body of the masculine subject, the literary text, the literary period, ironically often by invoking a Gothic tropological machinery to their aide.

Does this mean that feminism's Romanticism should be seen as a kind of patriarchal contamination, a tropological infiltration which must be eradicated for feminism to become truly its liberated self? Of course not--as we've seen such a model would rely on the very Romantic valorization of flawless enclosure we've been interrogating throughout. In fact, the reliance of
writers like Macherey and Pratt on Gothic tropology which they both utilize and revise, suggests its continued vitality and its power as a model for structuring subjectivities and literatures. Romantic theories of tropology relied on defining the cultural and figurative nakedness of Literature's others and on rejecting these debased others: women, the primitive, the upstart and rebellious. Romanticism claimed for itself the magical power of figuration. Returning the Gothic to center stage both foregrounds those figures which Romanticism and its attendant fetish Literature and Culture disregard and restores to our understanding of literarity its founding moment. However, the ease with which feminist writers have assimilated rhetoric most closely associated with Romanticism can also suggest that feminism and Romanticism could be seen as deriving from and relying on the founding moment of modern Literature, the Gothic. Given the cultural power magically associated with Literature as it was defined by the Romantics, it is not surprising that women writers have sought tropologically to take back that power. The reliance of feminist writing on Romantic rhetoric can suggest a kind of renaissance of Gothic romanticism, and an attempt to teach old tropes new tricks. Political tropology works far beyond the boundaries of Romantic Reading; it forms the basis and
practice for a feminist writing which has for twenty years used Romanticism's revolutionary potential for its own ends.
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