

Gothic Heroines and Cultural Trauma in 20th Century Literature
and Film

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I analyze how 20th Century British writers and Hollywood filmmakers have adapted common features of the Gothic literary tradition – the attractive but coercive villain, the imperiled but investigative heroine, and the portrait of her female predecessor – to address massive cultural traumas. “Cultural trauma” is, of course, a metaphor, implying that a nation or a people suffer the same kinds of symptoms that psychologists or psychoanalysts have identified in individuals who have unconsciously repressed experiences of overwhelming stress. One immediate danger of this metaphor is that ascribing an unconscious to a culture might lead one, for example, to view its silence regarding an overwhelming event, in its aftermath, as a purely involuntary action. That is, one might view this silence as a benign symptom of a culture’s need to protect itself from a painful past, rather than note the ways that agents within a culture suppress wide-scale disasters for political reasons. As E. Ann Kaplan argues in *Trauma Culture* (2005), the paucity of films that addressed American veterans’ physical and psychological injuries after World War II can be taken as evidence that Hollywood largely suppressed mention of such damages, complicit in a narrative of nationalist triumph. By contrast, each of the fictional works I analyze mimics and critiques popular discourses that strive to redeem or suppress wide-scale cultural trauma. However, they not only mobilize the Gothic to insist on the past’s haunting of the present but also to underscore the limits of their own narratives’ responses to cultural trauma.

Rather than a project on exclusively canonical Gothic works, I offer a study that focuses on the mobility of the Gothic heroine across genres, from a modernist novel, to

two midcentury film melodramas, to a horror film. This trajectory is in keeping with the spirit of the Gothic, which transgresses the boundary between high and low culture. The appearance of a Gothic heroine in a range of works that respond to cultural trauma suggests that her combination of curiosity and victimhood, privilege and confinement, provides a useful balance for narratives attempting to address events that defy representation. As their characters' investigative efforts inevitably fall short, so too do these works' claims to allegorize history. Ultimately, allegory becomes an inappropriate term to describe these works' relationship to history because, as Steven Bruhm insists, the Gothic and trauma are both premised on the impossibility of narrating overwhelming experiences. Instead, as I demonstrate, these works present us with scenes that provocatively collapse or confuse the present and the past through the relationship between the heroine and her predecessor and between the heroine and the villain.

In essence, these works figure crises in modernity in the shattering of their heroines' identities; the way these identities are ultimately remade (or left undone) gives us an outlook on a new era. In each work, the Gothic heroine over-identifies (or is over-identified) with her female predecessor, a confusion that mimics the culture's "acting out" of the repressed trauma underlying the work's narrative. This confusion is critiqued because of its tendency to render the heroine complicit in a forgetfulness of past violence. Indeed, these heroines are often scapegoated for national sins, allowing the sympathetic reader or viewer to feel guilty by association, while not directly responsible. However, displacing mass experiences of victimization into narratives in which the heroine is

subject to serial or cyclical violence, these works simultaneously critique (and connect) public and domestic forms of oppression.

These narratives dramatize the consequences of a culture's repression of trauma through the repetition of past violence in the present, which inevitably manifests in scenes that mirror, and even confuse, the heroine and villain. The heroine's feelings toward this Svengali-like figure, a mixture of admiration, attraction, and disgust, draw her close to both danger and knowledge. However, the Gothic villain then attempts to transform the heroine from an investigator into a mirror for his lack, his needs, or as Michelle A. Massé suggests, his compensatory "self-representations" (682). The mirroring of the heroine and the villain represents a return to a traumatic scene that Bruhm notes in many Gothic narratives; that is, the villain's earlier, horrifying experience of lack is often the putative origin of the Gothic horrors seen throughout these works. Indeed, the villain is often revealed to be a victim as well. Thus, the climactic mirroring of the heroine and villain comes to resemble the confusion "of self and other" that trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra notes as a symptom of "post-traumatic acting out," a confusion these works mobilize not only to critique the oppression of women but also to challenge any nationalist, morally unambiguous narrative of heroism (21).

In his effort to control both the heroine and the narrative, the villain often attempts to harness the power of a visual representation. However, portraits in the Gothic commonly foreshadow the surprising return of the sitter's spirit, which resists confinement within the false "frame" narrative circulated by those in power. Furthermore, in the works I analyze, the "otherness" of portraiture, whether in opposition

to text or to film, comes to stand for the “otherness” of trauma, its evasion of representation and its refusal to remain consigned to the past. That is, Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and, later, Clive Barker’s story “The Forbidden” (1985), align the “black hole” metaphor that critic W.J.T. Mitchell uses to describe the effect of a work of visual art on an ekphrastic text with the “black hole” metaphor that psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk uses to describe traumatic experience in relation to conventional memory. Likewise, in the films I analyze, traumas are alluded to through the appearance of portraits, which, as film theorist Thomas Elsaesser (2001) suggests, commonly present “a black hole,” “a notable gap” that films’ narratives must struggle to fill; this echoes Bruhm, who argues that the frantic proliferation of Gothic narratives in the 20th Century indicates a compulsive yet vain effort to fill gaps produced by traumatic losses. As I demonstrate, the Gothic, through both its excesses and its gaps, is the vehicle through which these works amplify the intensity of their responses to trauma, foreboding the return of past violence, while ultimately disavowing claims to adequately allegorize traumatic experience.

My project contributes to, and critiques, feminist scholarship on the literary and cinematic Gothic. By prioritizing the heroine’s self-forgetful identification with her foremother, much feminist psychoanalytic criticism has ironically recapitulated the repression of cultural trauma that these texts set out to expose. On the other hand, biographical and sociological approaches, by regarding these works as mirrors for the lives of their female authors or audiences, have underplayed their responses to recent or historical catastrophes. My attention to the heroine’s shifting relationship to her

foremother *and* the villain allows me to analyze how these works both mimic and critique the repression of cultural trauma. The flexibility of my approach offers an important corrective to trauma theory as well. That is, I substantiate Bruhm's claim that modern traumas explain "why we need" the Gothic in the 20th and 21st Century; however, by unshackling the concept of identification from psychoanalytic narratives of tyrannical fathers and monstrous mothers, I offer a more nuanced assessment of these works' mirroring of cultural and personal traumas (259).

In my first chapter, on Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, I synthesize an analysis of the novel's relationship to both the Gothic tradition and to fascism. I argue that Woolf, through the domineering character of Mr. Ramsay, uses the Gothic to link nascent fascism's oppression of women to its inability to mourn losses of the Great War. However, I analyze how the novel's unmarried painter, Lily, produces an elegiac, abstract portrait of the matriarchal Mrs. Ramsay to divorce virtues of prewar civilization from its proto-fascist tendencies. I depart from biographical criticism that reads Woolf's novel in relation to her mourning of her family members, particularly her mother. However, I also challenge Tammy Clewell's recent response to such criticism, which argues that the novel practices a form of "anticonsolatory" mourning of Great War losses that seeks to keep traumatic wounds open, rather than "work through" grief (199). Instead, I argue that Lily's haunted, liberating painting signifies Woolf's interest in a process of "Gothic mourning" that both acts out, and works through, the trauma of British war losses. However, through its Gothic depiction of Mr. Ramsay as a figure haunted by a past he is unable to mourn, the novel foreshadows the repetition of the war's violence in the future.

In my second chapter, on Joseph L. Mankiewicz's 1946 "female Gothic" film *Dragonwyck*, I analyze how Mankiewicz displaces the cultural trauma of fascist mass-murder into his Gothic narrative of a husband who serially murders wives who fail to provide him a male heir. At the beginning of the film, the heroine's narcissistic identification with a portrait of her husband's female ancestor renders her blind to signs of his villainy as well as to his family's recurrent victimization of women. I argue that the film, by foregrounding the husband's espousal of beliefs that echo Nazi ideology, transforms the heroine's protracted period of blind fascination into a mirror, and an indictment, of the American public's blindness to early warning signs that the Holocaust was taking place. My chapter on *Dragonwyck* challenges cultural studies scholarship that suggests that the female Gothic cycle has no significant relationship to the Second World War, and that these films can only be read, historically, as reflections of American women's wartime and post-war anxieties about work and marriage. Furthermore, in contrast with ahistorical feminist psychoanalytic criticism that exclusively focuses on the heroine's over-identification with a maternal figure, I demonstrate how the heroine's late, momentary identification with the villain allows the film to underscore Americans' complicity in contemporary evils, while ultimately consigning fascism, safely, to the past.

In my third chapter, I offer the first interpretation of *All About Eve* (1950) in relation to the female Gothic film cycle, arguing that Mankiewicz adapts the mode's narrative and visual conventions to liken McCarthyism and the American culture industry to fascist forms of power. Through the deceitful ingénue Eve's self-styled narrative of war grief and regenerative fascination with celebrity culture, the film mimics the nation's

hasty forgetfulness of its recent confrontation with fascism. However, this repressed trauma, which involves Americans' horror at (and early complicity in) fascist violence, manifests through the film's climactic mirroring of its all-American heroine with a spying, attention-seeking, dictatorial villain. This mirroring implies that postwar American culture, unable to meld wartime damages to its worldview and its self-identity, compulsively echoes fascism's drives for conformity and mass fascination.

In my fourth and final chapter, I argue that *Candyman* (1992), a film that British director Bernard Rose adapted from Clive Barker's 1985 story, "The Forbidden," should be placed within the female Gothic film tradition to better understand its relationship to the cultural trauma of American slavery. Synthesizing foundational criticism on the silent horror film and the female Gothic film, I argue that the villain, Candyman, solicits both the heroine's desire and identification. By analyzing the white female academic's relationship with the violent villain, the ghost of a postbellum African American man killed by a white mob, I argue that the film adapts the Gothic to trace connections between present and past racism and sexism. However, I argue that, instead of discovering an external truth, the heroine's endeavor to understand why the legend of Candyman persists increasingly mirrors herself: her desires and fears, particularly. As Candyman embodies the legacy of anti-Black racism in the United States, the film suggests that, beneath analytical or academic jargon, the deepest way one can relate to others' pain is through one's own individual pain or nightmare scenarios. Thus, through the collapse of the heroine's epistemological framework, the film insists on its own necessarily limited response to wide-scale trauma.

Chapter 1

The Great War, Gothic Fascism and Gothic Mourning in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

Virginia Woolf, in a 1921 review of Henry James' ghost stories, measures fictional Gothic horrors of the past against then-contemporary horrors printed in newspapers. She suggests that, as the modern reader is accustomed to learning about daily atrocities, the prospective writer of ghost stories must find new ways to frighten: "we breakfast upon a richer feast of horror than served our ancestors for a twelve-month...we are impervious to fear" (qtd. in Wilt 62). Judith Wilt interprets Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* as Gothic not because they horrify with violence nor simply because they raise awareness of moral evil, but because they uncover and strike the modern reader's fear of the death of the ego. That is, Woolf wants the reader to experience moments of ecstatic terror, of suddenly expanded consciousness, at the dissolving of boundaries that divide self and others, present and past. By sensitively exposing the modern reader to such moments of fear, Woolf inculcates a new kind of fearlessness.

Fear is, of course, a characteristic element of not only the Gothic but also of fascism. In Mark Neocleous' recent article, he characterizes fascism as not merely frightening but frightened itself, which he regards as its Gothic dimension. Neocleous argues that fear, particularly the fear of a monstrous "other," is not a weakness of

fascism, but rather something it “fabricates in order to sustain itself” (133). In this chapter, I will argue that Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, through its depiction of a variation on a haunted Gothic portrait, guides the reader through a process of facing the fears fascism refuses to face, particularly the trauma of the Great War past and its power to haunt and unsettle the present; this process counters what Lisa Low, in her recent article on *Mrs. Dalloway*, regards as the “artificial self-presence” fascism demands of its subjects (101). That is, Woolf opposes the egotism of fascism by insisting that modernity is haunted by the otherness of its recent past, as dramatized through the anxious interchange between a young painter, who ultimately becomes associated with the postwar period, and her writerly, prewar elder.

My chapter participates in two recent dialogues: one addressing Woolf’s works in light of the Gothic and another interpreting her fiction in relation to fascism. In his essay from *Gothic and Modernism*, Paul K. Saint-Amour suggests that, despite her proclamations regarding “the obsolescence of traditional Gothic romance,” Woolf adapts the suspense of the Gothic mode to address contemporary fears of “impending ruination” that grew out of the Great War (217). Similarly, critics have begun analyzing how fears related to fascism manifest in Woolf’s novels preceding *Three Guineas*, in which the topic is explicitly addressed. In her introduction to the recent collection of essays *Virginia Woolf and Fascism: Resisting the Dictators’ Seduction* (the title of which, incidentally, echoes the female Gothic plot), Merry M. Pawlowski argues that Woolf’s works written before 1929 offer an “anticipatory vision of the inextricable links between power and gender and her awareness of the roles of fascism and patriarchy in the forging

of those links” (4). Like Pawlowski, I attend to the ways that Woolf underscores the link between the patriarchal oppression of wives and the political oppression of fascism. By contrasting *To the Lighthouse*’s depictions of the ever-wakeful work of Woolf’s Gothic mourning with the misogyny and somnambulism of Gothic fascism, I will demonstrate how Woolf stakes out an engaged creative practice in a period of emergent political oppression.

MR. AND MRS. RAMSAY: GOTHIC TYRANTS

While opposites in many ways, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, the novel’s consummate Victorian father and mother, are both intensely subject to, and objects of, fear. While they do not share identical fears, they are both frightened of a future they cannot control. The philosopher Mr. Ramsay, who often regards himself as an explorer of unknown regions of thought, is afraid that his expedition might reach a dead end and that he will have failed to fulfill his potential. Mrs. Ramsay worries about more tangible things like the cost of running a large household but also whether her eight children will lead happy lives. Both characters compensate for their fears by exerting control over others’ behavior. Like a pair of Gothic villains, they exert this power through irresistible, coercive gazes; while his gaze exposes the vastly unequal power relationship in their marriage, hers pacifies him while pressuring others to marry.

Mr. Ramsay, desperate for sympathy and to be returned to the material world following a philosophical sojourn, demands that his wife sacrifice her energy to sustain

him. He envisions himself as “the leader of a doomed expedition,” melodramatically anticipating a search party finding his body after he has died (36). Returning home, he approaches his wife, exercising an exacting gaze that she cannot resist or cease; Mr. Ramsay, “never taking his eyes from her face,” demands that his wife offer an extravagant display of sympathy for him (37). Although she is capable of temporarily allaying her husband’s fears, Mrs. Ramsay’s own fears about life’s indifference to people’s happiness prompt her to compensate by urging others to marry and procreate. The novel juxtaposes Mrs. Ramsay’s anxieties about her family’s future with her insistence that a young courting couple, Minta and Paul Rayley, marry. After envisioning her own children’s lives, full of “love and ambition and being wretched alone in dreary places,” Mrs. Ramsay then resolves, “Nonsense. They will be perfectly happy. And here she was, she reflected, feeling life rather sinister again, making Minta marry Paul Rayley...almost as if it were an escape for her too, to say that people must marry; people must have children” (60). Like her husband, Mrs. Ramsay coerces through her gaze. Paul notes, “He had felt her eyes on him all day,” willing and encouraging him to propose to Minta (78). Furthermore, Lily Briscoe, the unmarried painter and invited guest of the Ramsays, must contend with Mrs. Ramsay’s “serious stare from eyes of unparalleled depth,” mocking her career as an artist and enjoining her to marry (50).

As an apparent consequence of their inability to face and address their own fears, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay induce fear in others. Mr. Ramsay’s booming voice and erratic behavior scare Lily and, in the first chapter’s climactic dinner, he causes Minta to feel “terrified” (98). Furthermore, when irrational anger flies “like a pack of hounds” into

Mr. Ramsay's eyes, his wife fears that "something violent would explode" (95). Moreover, Lily regards Mrs. Ramsay, because she is "irresistible," as "frightening" in her effect on others, compelling them to act according to her will (101). A major source of their fearsomeness is the Ramsays' heedlessness to others' privacy. Mr. Ramsay, for example, repeatedly intrudes into others' private moments. His youngest son, James, exhibits great frustration at his father's interruption of his time with his mother, and later in the chapter, Mrs. Ramsay expresses embarrassment that her husband had been watching her sit and think. However, Mrs. Ramsay herself, like her husband, is regarded as intruding into others' personal affairs, essentially failing to respect their privacy. Minta's mother, for example, feels that Mrs. Ramsay has come between her and her daughter, wresting the young woman's affections from her and directing her toward marriage.

The Gothic Ramsay spouses, compelling figures who are heedless of others' privacy and autonomy, are, furthermore, likened to tyrants in the first section of the novel. In trying to sum up her varied impressions of Mr. Ramsay to his longtime friend, the scientist William Bankes, Lily acknowledges that, while "he is spoiled; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death," he also exhibits "a fiery unworldliness" and loves his children (24). Later, after Bankes pressures Lily to view Mr. Ramsay as "a bit of a hypocrite," she acknowledges, "he is tyrannical, he is unjust," but she cannot help but marvel at his and his wife's love for one another (46). While Lily's awareness of Mr. Ramsay's domestic affections offsets her distaste for his tyrannical behavior toward his wife, Mrs. Ramsay champions her philanthropy to deny accusations that she unjustly

tyrannizes others. In acknowledging others' objections to her behavior, Mrs. Ramsay admits, "people might say she was tyrannical, domineering, masterful, if they chose," but suggests that she was, in truth, neither domineering "nor was she tyrannical" (58, 57). Mrs. Ramsay disputes the notion that she is always "[w]ishing to dominate, wishing to interfere, making people do what she wished" in their personal lives, suggesting that such traits surface more in her efforts to raise awareness to public health crises (57). That is, Mrs. Ramsay deflects allegations of her desire to dominate others by portraying herself as a responsible, compassionate individual, the opposite of a tyrant.

Were these the only references to tyranny in the novel, one might be inclined to regard them as tentative, hypothetical descriptions amid the flux of the characters' various thoughts and impressions. However, in the third and final section of the novel, the words "tyrant" and "tyranny" are seriously and repeatedly emphasized, retrospectively connecting the first section's Gothic, domestic tyranny to what, I argue, is the final section's Gothic dramatization of political proto-fascism. In Lisa Low's recent article, "'Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind': Fascism and Chastity in *Mrs. Dalloway*," she argues that Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* portrays fascism taking root in postwar England through characters who seek to control others' behavior. She particularly analyzes the figure of Doctor Bradshaw, who pays no respect to the privacy of the veteran Septimus' soul. Low argues that, through figures like the doctor, Woolf underscores parallels between postwar, professional men of England and world leaders like Mussolini, suggesting that, "the demonic egotism of the dictator himself is most clearly exemplified by...Sir William Bradshaw" (97). While similar parallels to

dictatorship emerge at times in the final, postwar section of *To the Lighthouse*, its domestic, Gothic, prewar section appears to foreshadow postwar fascism in Mr. Ramsay's subjugation of his wife in an unequal marriage, an institution in which she is not only a complicit agent, but also an active recruiter. Thus, Woolf implies that the Victorian institution of marriage is not merely compatible with, but is in a way a harbinger of, postwar fascism. However, while it may contain the seeds of political tyranny, the Ramsays' marriage (and particularly Mrs. Ramsay herself) possesses other qualities that keep the pair's tyrannical impulses in check.

LILY: INVESTIGATIVE GOTHIC HEROINE

To summarize, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are initially likened to Gothic tyrants whose powerful gazes betray deep fears and exert control over others. By contrast, Lily Briscoe resembles an isolated, virginal Gothic heroine whose gaze, directed onto her canvas, allows her to face fears of the unknown and evade others' control over her. Throughout the novel, Lily is the character who most acutely senses, and resists, both Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay's fearful, coercive gazes. In the novel's first section, while she notes and fears the intensity of Mr. Ramsay's gaze, she mainly struggles to evade Mrs. Ramsay's gaze urging her to marry. To this end, Lily's painting acts as a shield, protecting her from the woman's gaze that might otherwise overwhelm and overmaster her, compelling her to submit to her will; at the first chapter's climactic dinner, Lily expresses gratitude that planning out her painting offers her an alternative to compulsory marriage: "She was

saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle” (102).

That said the act of painting is not introduced as a purely escapist act; gazing at her blank, staring canvas forces Lily to confront the demons working against her act of creation, particularly her fear of failure and her doubts about her creative abilities. Whereas the Gothic narratives I analyze in my two subsequent chapters delay the mirroring of heroine and villain until late in each work, the beginning of Woolf’s novel subtly mirrors the creative Gothic heroine with the near-mad Byronic antihero. That is, Lily’s creative process is portrayed somewhat similarly to Mr. Ramsay’s philosophical pursuits, demanding heroism to abide.

Indeed, Lily’s act of creation is initially portrayed as a perilous, sometimes horrifying, practice that takes her through a Gothic labyrinth filled with dark specters, obscure passages and secret chambers. In the first section of the novel, she describes the act of painting as follows: “the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child,” recalling the eerie corridors of Gothic architecture (19). Instead of being haunted by a portrait figure’s gaze, or disturbed by its sudden animation, Lily faces the tortuous progress her work demands. However, as suggested, the painting also offers her protection from more troubling gazes; it transposes the Gothic from a reality of interpersonal domination into a process of individual creation. While Lily may resemble a Gothic heroine in her suffering and her isolation, she attempts to use her painting as a means to resist submitting to others’ wills, to divorce Gothic heroinism from victimhood,

defined as subjugation. That is, Lily's portrait allows her to mirror the Gothic heroine's role as investigator, while struggling against that figure's archetypal fate as victim.

In contrast with her depiction of Mr. Ramsay's subordination of his wife, Woolf uses Gothic elements to portray Lily's process of discovering and respecting the otherness of Mrs. Ramsay's soul; she does so via Lily's creation of an abstract variation on the conventional Gothic portrait. Lily's view of Mrs. Ramsay as an "other" pointedly distinguishes her from not only Mr. Ramsay but also from several other men in the novel. These characters, associated with reason and language through their professional careers, associate Mrs. Ramsay with conventional visual representations. The sycophantic young philosopher Charles Tansley, accompanying Mrs. Ramsay on her errands, sees her beside a portrait of Queen Victoria and determines that she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. Later, William Bankes' outsize tribute to Mrs. Ramsay's beauty is juxtaposed with a description of her "outlined absurdly by [a] gilt frame" (30). Mr. Ramsay, identified with language through the "alphabet" metaphor used to characterize his philosophical trajectory, similarly exercises a gaze on his wife that gives him a feeling of mastery. Furthermore, despite the fact that he is, near the end of the book's first section, watching his wife read, Mr. Ramsay notes that he "liked to think that she was...not book-learned at all," shifting his attention, instead, to her visual appearance: "She was astonishingly beautiful" (121). All three men effectively transform Mrs. Ramsay into a beautiful, conventional portrait through their admiring yet confining gazes.

These men's views of Mrs. Ramsay echo the traditional power dynamic ascribed to ekphrasis, or the verbal representation of visual representation, wherein writing (or

speech) is associated with fullness and authority and visual representations are associated with silence and availability to scrutiny and interpretation. In ekphrasis, according to W.J.T. Mitchell, verbal representations have been thought to master paintings, to subsume their visual powers under the rubric of language, achieving an “overcoming of otherness” (156). Indeed, although several book-learned men may view Mrs. Ramsay as a visual “other,” her otherness reassures them of their mastery, their ability to overcome otherness through rational language. They do so, primarily, by framing Mrs. Ramsay within language praising her visual beauty.

By contrast, Lily, the visual artist, initially associates Mrs. Ramsay with the “otherness” of verbal representation, an association that deepens in the novel’s final section. Early in the novel, Lily attributes Mrs. Ramsay’s artful behavior to a secret knowledge or wisdom, imagining that, within “the chambers of [her] mind and heart,” her elder keeps “tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything” (51). Lily thus metaphorically describes Mrs. Ramsay’s private wisdom as highly desirable, yet frustratingly inaccessible, pieces of writing. By contrast, Lily’s association with painting initially draws her attention to her own weaknesses. While painting, she feels exposed to public view, utterly vulnerable to others’ judgmental gazes that recall the archetypically dominant gaze of the ekphrastic poet on a work of visual art. Initially lacking confidence in her own private “vision” that she attempts to capture on canvas, Lily instead anxiously anticipates others’ scrutiny while marveling at Mrs. Ramsay’s confidence and authority.

In Lily's momentary fantasy, an abortive attempt to discover and attain Mrs. Ramsay's wisdom, we see a twist on the power relationship conventionally ascribed to ekphrasis. In ekphrasis, according to the model set forward by James Heffernan, the writer often seeks to master the power of the painting in a struggle that is often sexualized as the (male) writer subduing the (female) painting. Here, Lily, the painter, desires to attain the power of writing she invests in Mrs. Ramsay within a context of lesbian eroticism. Her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee, Lily imagines entrance into those "chambers...of the woman who was, physically, touching her"; she conceives of emotional intimacy with Mrs. Ramsay in terms of penetration: "What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers?...Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one?" (51). In erotic terms, Woolf allows Lily to imagine the "overcoming of otherness" separating her from Mrs. Ramsay.¹

This portion of Woolf's novel, a depiction of contact between "self" and "other," moves through three distinct phases that are analogous to the three "moments of realization" that Mitchell finds germane to ekphrasis (152). The first is "indifference," the feeling that "ekphrasis is impossible" because the media of painting and writing are essentially, inherently different (152). The second phase, "hope," "is the phase when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor" (152). The third phase, "fear," is a moment of "resistance or counterdesire," a reassertion of difference in

¹ The depiction of Lily's bowed head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee presents a tableau suggestive of not only eroticism but also worship, recalling Patrick O'Malley's account of the Victorian Gothic's conjoined depictions of sexual and religious deviance.

the face of the possible collapse of the distinction between one mode of representation and its “other” (153). Lily’s passage through three analogous phases implies that she is sensitive to Mrs. Ramsay’s otherness, in contrast to the hubris of the aforementioned men’s rigid ekphrastic perspectives.

In Lily’s inverted ekphrastic fantasy, in which the painter would adopt the power of the writer, we see a sequential movement from indifference, to hope, to fear. The indifference can be detected at Lily’s presumption that Mrs. Ramsay’s secret wisdom, conceived as “tablets bearing sacred inscriptions,” is inaccessible, and hence untranslatable (51). Seemingly resigned, she laments that the tablets “would never be offered openly, never made public” (51). However, Lily hopefully imagines overcoming this barrier, summoning, in language, the visual image of “waters poured into one jar,” which would leave her and Mrs. Ramsay “inextricably the same” (51). Lily then shifts the object of her quest, and chooses to pursue “not knowledge but unity...not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself” (51). Rather than devise an “art,” or metaphor, to make contact with Mrs. Ramsay, Lily here abandons the idea of otherness entirely, imagining a perfect unity between the two women which has no need for language nor any other representation; the visual and the verbal artists would lose their characteristic identities and features and become one. The result, however, is despair, and a fearful retreat back into separate spheres: “Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing!” Lily exclaims to herself, before reassuring herself that, despite the collapse of her momentary fantasy, “she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored up in Mrs. Ramsay’s heart” (51). Thus, Lily retreats from her attempt to assert a

commanding gaze analogous to that of conventional ekphrasis, a retreat that will importantly distinguish her from the intrusive Gothic couple.

Lily's imagined journey into Mrs. Ramsay's "secret chambers" recalls instances in which Gothic heroines attempt to seize the investigative gaze and enter their husbands' private lairs (51). This action inevitably connotes a trespass that, Mary Ann Doane suggests, can only be concurrent with the heroine's punishment. In Doane's account, when Gothic heroines attempt to exercise desire and curiosity through their gazes, they are humiliated by being quickly stripped of their gaze, reverting into the object of their husbands' gaze. In *To the Lighthouse*, after Lily's attempt to work up a "desperate courage" and assert her desire to remain a single painter, she meets Mrs. Ramsay's aforementioned, humiliating, "serious stare from eyes of unparalleled depth" (50). Although Mrs. Ramsay is no Gothic husband, her association with matrimony and verbal representation place her in a dual position of power and authority over the unmarried painter, whether or not Lily mocks her values as outdated or her worldview as simplistic.

Lily's momentary fantasy of trespassing into Mrs. Ramsay's private "sanctuary," furthermore, echoes the senior Ramsays' characteristic heedlessness to others' privacy as well as Doctor Bradshaw's lack of respect for Septimus' privacy in *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, the text portrays how her act secures Lily neither knowledge nor power. Instead, to better know Mrs. Ramsay, Lily shifts her attention back to her painting, which critic Daniel Darvay has recently interpreted as a modern variation on the Gothic portrait. Lily's act of painting is epistemological, a quest to better understand Mrs. Ramsay and the secret knowledge of life that motivates her artful speech and behavior. Darvay argues

that *To the Lighthouse*, in its portrayal of painting as a means to explore Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness, resembles 19th Century Gothic sensation fiction. In those works, which include *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Woman in White*, a detective figure's examination of a character's painted portrait reveals her duplicity. These portraits, Darvay notes, differ from the supernatural portraits seen in earlier Gothic novels, the predecessors to sensation fiction. In those works, Darvay suggests, portraits that could suddenly animate served as repositories of supernaturalism against which modernity defined itself. By contrast, in sensation fiction, portraits yield to rational analysis, a modern way of seeing. By extension, Lily's modern artwork in *To the Lighthouse* raises deeper insights into Mrs. Ramsay's character than ordinary sensory perception or mimetic portraiture could reveal.

However, despite the modernity and utility of Lily's work of art, it does not yield immediate revelations into its subject's character, as does, for example, the portrait in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Instead, it sets Lily on an epistemological path, the initial premise of which is that Mrs. Ramsay is a mysterious "other." In the novel's first section, even though the imagined existence of Mrs. Ramsay's secret tablets is frustrating, Lily finds that rigidly associating Mrs. Ramsay with writing (and herself painting) is for her an enabling fiction. Without such a rigid understanding of Mrs. Ramsay as her other, Lily risks being absorbed by her, overmastered by her greater powers. Thus, Lily's desire for unity with Mrs. Ramsay is quickly discarded as untenable (and undesirable); neither mastery nor unity offers Lily a desirable model through which to understand her relation to Mrs. Ramsay (nor the relation between their respective "arts"). Lily's artistic process,

instead, becomes the epistemological, Gothic labyrinth she must travel alone to indirectly access Mrs. Ramsay's secrets, which love, scrutiny or mastery cannot unlock.

THE GREAT WAR AS CULTURAL TRAUMA

Whereas the elder Ramsays exhibit disrespect for the privacy of the soul, Lily reluctantly acknowledges the singularity, the secret essence of Mrs. Ramsay that she can neither hope to penetrate nor fully grasp. While Mr. Ramsay's needy trespassing of his wife's privacy foreshadows the melancholia he will experience after her death, Lily's respect for Mrs. Ramsay as an other anticipates the work of mourning she will perform in the novel's final section. As I will argue, the death of Mrs. Ramsay comes to stand for losses suffered in the Great War – not simply the war casualties themselves, but the many collateral, intangible losses Lily seeks to reveal through her painting. Thus, Lily's pre-war conception of Mrs. Ramsay as an other anticipates her contemplation of the otherness of the pre-war past, dissociated from the postwar present by the traumatic Great War. This perspective contradicts the proto-fascism visible in Mr. Ramsay's postwar mentality and behavior, especially in his inability to develop a practice of mourning compatible with the losses he, and the British, have suffered in the war. Unlike Mr. Ramsay's rigid, forward-looking philosophy, Lily's artistry (and by analogy, Woolf's novel) allows her to face and at least partially work through her fears of a haunting past and an unknown future.

In the novel's middle section, "Time Passes," despite the fact that the Ramsay family vacation home is nowhere near the trenches of the Great War, a nameless narrator juxtaposes, and even overlaps, accounts of the war's destruction and the house's decay. The war death of the Ramsays' son, Andrew, for example, is juxtaposed with noises and shocks around the house, such as "ominous sounds like the measured blow of hammers dulled on felt" (133). As Makiko Minow-Pinkney notes, "What is literally destroying the house is rain, rats and wind, but what is figuratively destroying it is the First World War" (99). Furthermore, images link the Gothic haunting of the Ramsay home to the war as well. Airs, or spirits, are associated with "advance guards of great armies," and range throughout the house, quietly and subtly destructive (Woolf 128-9). Thus, Woolf, I would suggest, displaces the cultural trauma of the Great War, the scope of which defies representation, into a disorienting narration of the Gothic decay and haunting of the Ramsays' remote summer home. This suggests that the trauma of the war is not localized in time and space, but rather spreads outward like the disturbing image of the "purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea" (134).²

The report of Mrs. Ramsay's death, like her son's, is juxtaposed with disturbing images, but ones that are more abstract, suggestive of chaos, fragmentation, and occluded revelation. The narrator precedes the brief account of Mrs. Ramsay's death with a description, reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," of nights "full of wind and

² The purplish stain, to my mind, anticipates D.H. Lawrence's likening, the following year, of the trauma of the Great War to a bruise in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "The bruise was deep, deep, deep...the bruise of the false inhuman war. It would take years for the living blood of the generations to dissolve the vast black clot of bruised blood, deep inside their souls and bodies" (52).

destruction” in which the sea “tosses itself and breaks itself” (128). While Andrew’s death may represent British war casualties, the novel appears to link Mrs. Ramsay’s death to metaphysical changes wrought by the trauma of war, an intrusion of trauma into a landscape of the sublime. As Tammy Clewell argues, this section of the novel dismantles the pathetic fallacy, asserting that the war has destroyed faith that nature can reassuringly reflect the soul of mankind, promising regeneration; in the paragraph preceding the account of Mrs. Ramsay’s death, the narrator writes, “no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul” (128). Thus, the text invites us to link the death of Mrs. Ramsay with the fact that poetic imagery can no longer bear witness to the kind of nocturnal stillness and harmony that she achieved at her masterful, candlelit dinner party.

Furthermore, “Time Passes” implicitly links a wartime denaturation of language to Mrs. Ramsay’s passing. While Lily had, before the war, likened Mrs. Ramsay to a possessor of sacred tablets, the narrator now attributes similar inscriptions to “divine goodness,” a deistic force that not only veils those writings from view, but also actively destroys them:

divine goodness...covers his treasures in a drench of hail, and so breaks them, so confuses them that it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth (128).

This imagery, also preceding Mrs. Ramsay's death, appears to indicate that the sort of wisdom Lily had imputed to Mrs. Ramsay, and which she had struggled to know, is now not only occluded but also fragmented. As Bazin and Lauter suggest, in *To the Lighthouse*, following *Jacob's Room*, Woolf "continues to link her personal trauma of a series of family deaths with the trauma created by World War I. She connects the effect of a mother's death on the outlook of her family and the effect of a brutal war" (20). Thus, the Ramsay family's wartime loss of its matriarch, as well as her son Andrew and her daughter Prue, offers a microcosm for broader, cultural experiences of loss and disorientation in the postwar period – disorientation mirrored in the detached narration of "Time Passes." Specifically, language, denatured by the war, can no longer hope to isolate and capture images of divinely bestowed truth in a way analogous to Mrs. Ramsay's prewar power to create and preserve shared, memorable moments.

Within this context of loss, the somnolent poet, Augustus Carmichael, although he has attained professional success after the war, appears to be the beneficiary of a public desire for nostalgia, rather than an appreciation for modern, appropriately mournful forms of expression. When he returns to the Ramsays' home, Carmichael, quiescent, is satisfied with the peaceful surrounding landscape; he fails to detect, or chooses to ignore, "something out of harmony" (133). He has no trouble accepting the present as a peaceful return to the prewar past: "it all looked...falling asleep, much as it used to look" (142). Carmichael is here portrayed as unconscious, blind to the metaphysical wartime changes that the imagery in "Time Passes" represents. This suggests that the public's appreciation

of Carmichael's poetry indicates a collective, cultural failure to mourn, instead suggesting a facile public communion. As we shall see, Woolf's satirizing of the popularity of Carmichael's poetry anticipates her text's attempt to do the work of mourning that his writing does not.

Mr. Ramsay, unable to mourn the passing of his wife, is, like Carmichael, characterized as blind. In "Time Passes," the widower arguably experiences a blind encounter with his wife's ghost: "Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty" (128). In Wilt's Gothic reading, Mrs. Ramsay's death "takes palpable form in Part II in the ghost to whom Mr [sic] Ramsay wordlessly stretches out his arms" (73). While the image of Mr. Ramsay grasping for his wife in darkness may initially seem indicative of a stage in the grieving process, it echoes the first section's recurrent characterizations of Mr. Ramsay's "blindness" and the somnambulism exhibited when he regularly behaved like "a sleep-walker, half roused" or "like a person in a dream" (46, 16, 70). Thus, the image of Mr. Ramsay grasping in darkness, suggestive of an inflexible character, appears to emblemize his constitutive inability to mourn rather than his progression through mourning.

Furthermore, the image of Mr. Ramsay futilely grasping for his wife in darkness recalls his earlier inability to conceive of her as an individual, mortal and distinct from himself: "not for a second should he find himself without her" (38). Before his wife's death, Mr. Ramsay primarily viewed her as a mirror for his own needs. As Michelle A.

Massé suggests, Gothic villains primarily see female characters as a reflection of their own self-image, a “mirror for [their] self-representations” (682). This view foreshadows the melancholia Mr. Ramsay experiences after his wife’s death. Indeed, Woolf writes, in the novel’s post-war section, “an enormous need urged him, without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy” (151). Thus, the melancholic Mr. Ramsay desires that Lily simply step into Mrs. Ramsay’s role and offer the same gesture of sympathy through which that woman sustained him. This attempted serial oppression anticipates the violence perpetrated by Gothic villains in my later chapters and, in *To the Lighthouse*, as I will argue, links an inability to mourn to fascism.

In contrast with the sleepwalking Mr. Ramsay and the dozing Carmichael, Lily is emphatically characterized at the end of “Time Passes” as “[a]wake,” foreshadowing the perceptiveness that will allow her to mourn and to explore the metaphysical changes shaping the postwar period (143). Although Mr. Ramsay’s stumbling down a dark passage may recall the similar image used to portray Lily’s creative process, the novel portrays her newfound wakefulness at the same time that it portrays her resumption of the abandoned painting; this suggests that she has entered a new, perhaps more confident or enlightened, creative phase. Indeed, despite the fact that the renovated Ramsay home and its surroundings may look very much as they did before the war, the visually acute Lily is the only character who appears sensitive to various changes that are difficult to perceive. Lily’s sensitivity, subsequently demonstrated through the searching, mournful gaze that

she directs onto her portrait, contrasts with Mr. Ramsay's heedless, coercive gaze in the novel's final section.

GOTHIC FASCISM, GOTHIC MOURNING

In "The Lighthouse," the final section of the novel, Woolf "crosscuts" between the journey Mr. Ramsay takes with his children to the lighthouse and Lily's process of completing her painting, implying parallels between these "voyages" that were both planned in the prewar period. Indeed, both characters are portrayed as isolated and brave, struggling to figure out how to survive in the postwar period and to pay tribute to those lost. However, in contrast with the improvisational retrospection that enables Lily to mourn via her painting, the linear trajectory of Mr. Ramsay's journey to the lighthouse appears to represent a heroic narrative, an over-determined metaphor of healing and recovery. In the first section of the novel, Mr. Ramsay's troubled gaze betrayed his inward epistemological quest, which initially mirrored Lily's own quest in its difficulty and its disturbing character; in the final section, though, Mr. Ramsay's melancholic, coercive gaze, seeking sympathy and power rather than knowledge, thoroughly contrasts with Lily's gaze on her painting, which she uses as a means to mourn the past and understand the character of the postwar present.

Indeed, Mr. Ramsay only "acts out," rather than works through, the traumatic loss of his wife and two children. Lily suggests, at one point, that Mr. Ramsay is acting in an attempt to compel her to offer sympathy: "he was acting, she felt, this great man was

dramatising himself” (152). On the boat, Mr. Ramsay is again described as acting “the part of a desolate man, widowed, bereft” in a “little drama” he has staged for himself (166). Thus, Mr. Ramsay’s form of mourning appears performative and facile; furthermore, he perversely bids his children “come...take part in these rites he went through for his own pleasure in memory of dead people, which they hated” (164). Woolf uses language of tyranny and militarism in her portrayal of Mr. Ramsay’s postwar oppression of his children to imply a contemporary, public equivalent to his behavior. Repeatedly labeled a tyrant by his children, James and Cam, Mr. Ramsay is associated with the suppression of others’ free will and free speech. He is also associated with militarism through the emphasis on his heavy boots, his “firm military tread” and the way he compels his children to join his “expedition,” “forc[ing] them to come against their wills” (154, 145, 163). Rather than meaningfully looking backward on the past, Mr. Ramsay marshals his children into a celebration of depersonalized, heroic death.

Mr. Ramsay’s failure to meaningfully mourn the loss of his wife (whose death, I suggested, was linked to the cultural trauma of the Great War) implies that fascism itself is incapable of mourning. Instead, like Mr. Ramsay, fascism creates a heroic narrative of the past, which it indefinitely projects into the future. The sexism native to Mr. Ramsay’s postwar behavior compares to fascism as well. He likes to imagine men struggling and drowning in an ocean storm while their wives take care of the home, a distinctly morbid division of labor. Further, rather than recall particular memories of his wife or daughter, he makes generalizations about what “women are always like,” seeing them as interchangeable providers of sympathy rather than individuals that exist apart from his

needs (167). As critics have noted, *To the Lighthouse* anticipates Woolf's *Three Guineas* in its portrayal of the development of fascist masculinity in Mr. Ramsay. Bazin and Lauter argue that Woolf's "use of war imagery" in describing men in the Ramsay circle connects "domestic and public politics within a patriarchy"; they then suggest that, two years later, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf further articulates "how sexism and its concomitant behavior can provide a foundation for either heroism (which can be admirable) or fascism (which is deplorable)" (19). However, within *To the Lighthouse* itself, Woolf, by portraying Mr. Ramsay as a brooding, domineering misogynist tyrant, offers a characteristically Gothic portrayal of fascism to insist on the link between domestic and public oppression.

While Woolf connects, through Mr. Ramsay's Gothic fascism, domestic and political oppression, she also connects Mrs. Ramsay's domestic and public accomplishments to her son's future battle against political tyranny. The absence of Mrs. Ramsay from the postwar period suggests a missing balancing principle that was once capable of keeping Mr. Ramsay's tyrannical impulses in check. Despite her own "tyrannical" impulses, Mrs. Ramsay was a civilizing agent, capable of meaningfully bringing people together despite their vast differences. Mrs. Ramsay thus offers inspiration for James' postwar public fight against fascism, as the keeper of a flame of civilization. He bears, in Cam's view, verbal "tablets of eternal wisdom laid open on his knee," associated with justice, that recall the inscribed tablets of wisdom Lily had previously ascribed to his mother (168). Furthermore, James' anticipation of his virtuous

role as a barrister or a businessman recalls the public good his mother strove to do, efforts that counterbalanced her own tendencies toward tyranny.

Unlike the tablet-bearing James, Lily does not anticipate a public dimension for her work, imagining that her painting will be rolled up under a bed or hung in the servants' quarters. Nevertheless, recalling the title of the aforementioned collection on Woolf and fascism, Lily uses her painting to resist the dictator's seduction. At the outset of the novel's final section, Lily's painting acts a shield against Mr. Ramsay's wild gaze: "She set her clean canvas firmly upon the easel, as a barrier, frail, but she hoped sufficiently substantial to ward off Mr. Ramsay and his exactingness" (149). Recalling the language Woolf uses to describe Mr. Ramsay's use of "force" against women and his children, Lily later regards her painting and Mr. Ramsay as "two opposite forces" (193). Lily's painting indeed appears expressive of an oppositional, female consciousness reminiscent of Low's characterization of Mrs. Dalloway's: associative, non-linear, and creative. The picture cradles Lily's gaze, directing it toward the past, evading attempts to subordinate its power. Whereas Mr. Ramsay's fixed gaze does not look backward onto the past, Lily uses her painting to do the difficult work of mourning, respecting Mrs. Ramsay as a lost object.

Just as Lily worked to use her painting to divorce Gothic heroinism from Gothic victimhood, she endeavors to do the same for Mrs. Ramsay: extol the woman's virtues that have inspired and shaped Lily as a postwar artist, despite her foremother's complicity in, and perpetuation of, a sexist, proto-fascist institution of marriage. Lily's painting acts like a feminist recuperative project, creating a foremother out of her elder. It does the

work of discovering and respecting the otherness of Mrs. Ramsay's soul, which her elder so readily subjugated beneath her husband's coercive, unseeing gaze. Lily is capable of such a tribute, in part, because time has robbed Mrs. Ramsay of her own authority. Particularly, the failure of Paul and Minta's marriage exposes Mrs. Ramsay's hubris in assuming they would be happy forever; Lily imagines sharing this news with Mrs. Ramsay, noting that "[s]he would feel a little triumphant, telling Mrs. Ramsay that the marriage had not been a success" (174). Furthermore, Lily no longer must contend with either the power of Mrs. Ramsay's physical presence or her gaze; after her elder's death, Lily feels, momentarily, that "now she could stand up to Mrs. Ramsay" (176). Despite Mrs. Ramsay's advocacy of the proto-fascist, Victorian institution of marriage, Lily's painting allows her to mourn her elder's prewar virtues in a symbolic opposition to Mr. Ramsay's postwar, melancholic proto-fascism.

That said, Lily must reckon with the power of Mrs. Ramsay's ghost or spirit, which, if not as powerful as her living presence, nevertheless makes demands of her. Whereas Mr. Ramsay appears to be blindly grasping after Mrs. Ramsay, painting offers Lily a conduit to sensitively experience intense encounters with Mrs. Ramsay's "haunting" of the present. The act of painting is like a séance, allowing Lily to summon Mrs. Ramsay's spirit, in contrast with Mr. Ramsay's involuntary somnambulism. Lily, finding life baffling and unyielding of its mysterious truths, imagines that, if she and Carmichael "shouted long enough Mrs. Ramsay would return" (180). In the most pointedly Gothic portion of the novel's final section, Lily finds the past has material force, to "wr[i]ng the heart" and to "grip one" (179, 180). Shortly after, she experiences

a ghostly “sense of some one there” (181). However, instead of a Gothic heroine retreating in fear upon seeing the revenant, surprisingly manifested through a portrait, Lily produces her modern portrait to volitionally face fear and make peace with the dead. Her painting allows her to confront and sensitively experience fear, ultimately giving her a fearlessness that Mr. Ramsay does not have, fearlessness that, again, contrasts with Neocleous’ characterization of the fearful, Gothic character of fascism itself.

Despite the work’s role as a conduit, Clewell suggests that Lily’s painting fails to satisfyingly substitute for the deceased Mrs. Ramsay. Instead, through Lily’s “anticonsolatory” mourning of Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf develops a way of mourning the losses of the Great War without underestimating the magnitude of the war’s effects (199). According to Clewell, “In her sustained effort to confront the legacy of the war, Woolf repeatedly sought not to heal wartime wounds, but to keep them open” (198). She argues that, had Lily produced a work of art that purported to capture or substitute for Mrs. Ramsay, this would have emphasized art’s ability to redeem traumatic experience. Instead, Clewell suggests that Woolf refuses “to engage a process of mourning aimed at ‘working through’ despair and grief” (198-9). One problem with Clewell’s argument, however, is that it claims that Lily is modeling an “endless” form of mourning, yet we never see whether, and how, her practice of mourning continues following the completion of her painting (199). Furthermore, according to Woolf, the act of writing *To the Lighthouse* allowed her to experience and be done with the grief that had been weighing on her following the death of her mother (Clewell 218). Even without recourse to biography, Lily’s completion of her painting offers support for an “art therapy”

interpretation for the relationship between the creative process and grief; the completion of the work, if not offering closure, does appear to offer Lily a cathartic release.

Furthermore, the notion that the production of a representational, substitutive portrait would imply “working through” does not take into account the role that portraits play in Gothic fiction. That is, a verisimilar art form, like portraiture, carries connotations of unfinished business in the Gothic mode. In the Gothic, commemorative art is not linked to completed mourning, but to the disturbing (if predictable) intrusion of the past upon the present. It doesn’t imply the reassuring endurance of the subject’s spirit, like a monument, but foreshadows the surprising returns of the sitter. The Gothic often uses portraiture to initially support a master narrative, while also foreshadowing the emergence of the suppressed story, the truth of what happened to the victim. Lily, acting like a self-aware Gothic heroine, produces an abstract portrait that knowingly summons the supernatural, a ghost of the past, within a context of sensitive attention, not of suppression and ignorance. Lily’s practice of Gothic mourning would not, in my understanding, negate “working through,” but rather blend the perverse “acting out” of beckoning a ghost with the partial, therapeutic “working through” this summoning allows.

Woolf’s novel, similar to Adam Lowenstein’s analysis of horror films that I discuss in my final chapter, appears to blend acting out with working through, not offering, but rather questioning our desire for, a narrative that redeems cultural trauma. In Lowenstein’s view, realist responses to cultural trauma have often been associated with acting out because they assume traumatic experience is available to representation,

whereas modernism has been associated with working through because of its interests in the limits of representation. At one point, Clewell characterizes Woolf's novel in terms that echo realism, arguing that it represents a conviction that "art must be stripped of compensatory literary tropes in order to soberly confront the horror and politics of manufactured death" (214). However, Woolf's high modernism does not participate in the stripped-down "aesthetic of direct experience" that critic Samuel Hynes finds characteristic of many wartime and post-war writers; indeed, the war itself only appears in minimal, bracketed prose (159). Instead, Woolf's novel, through the extended depiction of Lily's abstract Gothic portrait, exploits the self-contradictory nature of ekphrasis to perform both acting out and working through in response to the cultural trauma of the Great War.

EKPHRASIS, TRAUMA AND MOURNING

Whereas Carmichael's public poetry provides facile national unity, Lily's personal painting attempts the work of mourning the nation refuses. While, in the novel's final section, parallels emerge between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily's creative work, the latter is private rather than public, bringing brushstrokes rather than people together. Furthermore, unlike Mrs. Ramsay, Lily cannot offer a sympathetic gesture to pacify Mr. Ramsay; her painting, the ultimate vehicle she uses to sympathize with him, requires his physical absence. The novel, I would suggest, foreshadows the rise of fascism through the postwar artist figure's inability to involve the Gothic tyrant in a practice of collective

mourning. Nonetheless, Lily's attempts to not only mourn, but also imitate, Mrs. Ramsay's prewar capacity to create coherence out of dissimilar elements implies the potential for a partial working through of the trauma of the intervening war. Furthermore, Lily's effort to "translate" Mrs. Ramsay's writerly powers of meaning-making into her painting mirrors, in an inverted form, Woolf's attempt to "translate" Lily's visual art into her verbal medium. Ultimately, both efforts can be interpreted as balancing "acting out" and "working through" of the trauma of the Great War.

As noted, Lily's association of Mrs. Ramsay with verbal representation intensifies in the novel's final section. Despite the fact that Mrs. Ramsay is not a writer by profession and that we only see her writing a few letters in the novel, Lily finds writing to be a key metaphor to recall Mrs. Ramsay's characteristic, seemingly effortless ability to distill significance from the welter of impressions and passions of life's passing moments. Most iconically, the image of Mrs. Ramsay writing letters on the beach serves as a metaphor for her ability to create and preserve meaningful shared moments, like a "work of art" (160). After Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily recalls a memory of critical importance, a recollection that begins: "One must remember" (160). The importance of this memory is not due to any particularly vivid sights or sounds, but rather due to the presence of Mrs. Ramsay, writing. Lily notes that, "When she thought of herself and Charles [Tansley] throwing ducks and drakes and of the whole scene on the beach, it seemed to depend somehow upon Mrs. Ramsay sitting under the rock, with a pad on her knee, writing letters" (160). Through this image, the power of Mrs. Ramsay's mere presence is rendered analogous to the power of writing, powers which are simultaneously

described as, on the one hand, selective (stripping away the “angers” and “irritations” of life), and on the other hand, combinative (uniting “together this and that and then this”) (160). As Lily remembers, paying homage to Mrs. Ramsay, the good writer, “That woman sitting there writing under the rock resolved everything into simplicity,” a characteristic simplicity which Lily desires to imitate (160).

Lily’s portrait does not strive to depict Mrs. Ramsay herself, as a realist portrait would, instead trying to translate the woman’s writerly power of meaning-making into an abstract, synthetic work of visual art. Like James, Lily is heir to virtues of the pre-war past that Mrs. Ramsay represents. Whereas he inherits whole inscribed tablets of wisdom associated with the law and justice, Lily inherits words of wisdom, broken by the traumatic war, to be reassembled and translated through her painting. For example, Lily’s momentary fantasy of using her painting to piece together broken words that “wrote themselves all over the...walls” reminds of the fragmented messages described in “Time Passes,” which themselves, I suggested, recall Mrs. Ramsay’s tablets of wisdom (147). Such a fantasy of translatability is premised on the notion that painting can somehow mimic writing without losing inherent content. This fantasy runs against the grain of the first section’s insistence on the otherness of verbal representation in relation to visual representation, perhaps suggesting Lily’s regression into her earlier, untenable desire for unity with Mrs. Ramsay.

More often, Lily struggles to replicate the permanence or “feeling of completeness,” which Mrs. Ramsay’s writerly presence once allowed, through the “common feeling” she seeks to achieve through her painting (192). However, Lily

cannot create a “common feeling” analogous to Mrs. Ramsay’s collective gatherings when she and Carmichael are all alone, apart from the surviving Ramsays. Furthermore, Lily’s momentary (and perhaps naïve) expression of belief in the pathetic fallacy, when she thinks, “the cliffs looked as if they were conscious of the ships,” implies a return of prewar coherence that Woolf quickly dashes; in the next moment, Cam, looking from the boat to the shore, decides that people on land don’t feel things, breaking Lily’s momentary experience of harmony (182). Furthermore, at one point, through Woolf’s use of free indirect style, we witness a deictic confusion of Lily and Mrs. Ramsay, subject and object; Woolf’s use of the pronoun “she” produces a surprising moment of overlap in the following passage, which mimics Lily’s perspective: “She was highly conscious of that. Mrs. Ramsay, she thought, stepping back and screwing up her eyes” (160). Such moments suggest that Lily’s postwar identification with Mrs. Ramsay is a kind of delusion or wishful thinking, forgetful of the profoundly changed character of the postwar period.

Indeed, it is possible to interpret Lily’s moments of identification with Mrs. Ramsay as symptomatic, indicative of “acting out.” According to Dominick LaCapra, the confusion “of self and other,” as well as the confusion of present and past, “are related to transference and prevail in...post-traumatic acting out” (21). Within this context, Lily’s painting can be interpreted as allowing her, and Woolf, “a relatively safe haven in which to explore” such “post-traumatic effects” (180). While the novel’s Gothic elements permit the ghostly blurring of the pre-war past into the postwar present, Lily’s inverted ekphrasis permits a confusing interaction of the verbal and visual

representational systems Woolf associates with each period: Lily's final brushstroke, a vertical line down the center of the page, recalls the letter and the word, "I." This final stroke would appear to unite visual and verbal representations, overcoming the otherness that had motivated much of the novel and the painting's progress. Thus, Lily's merging of visual and verbal representations could in itself be a form of "acting out," a confusion of self and other akin to a post-traumatic symptom.

However, the novel clearly accommodates both symptomatic and therapeutic interpretations of its climactic description of the merging of representational systems. The brushstroke "I" anticipates the final sentence of the novel, "I have had my vision," which could as easily refer to Lily as to Woolf herself (209). Through Lily's cathartic final brushstroke, Woolf may want us to experience a climactic bridging of the past and present through the merging of the representational forms associated with each. This would suggest that Lily's painting, and Woolf's novel, successfully bridges or redeems the intervening trauma of the war. However, since we cannot see the painting that achieves the overcoming of otherness, the work cannot be said to be accomplished, or even depicted, by the novel. That is, Woolf acknowledges our desire for satisfying closure, for her Gothic, modernist narrative to redeem cultural trauma, just as Lily never relinquishes her desire that Mrs. Ramsay return and bring order to the postwar period, even though both desires are unachievable. As Clewell suggests, "*To the Lighthouse* expresses both the desire to recover the lost Mrs. Ramsay and the sheer impossibility of succeeding in the effort" (217). Similarly, both Lily's portrait of the writerly Mrs. Ramsay and Woolf's ekphrastic description of Lily's painting simultaneously sustain

desire for, but foreground the absence of, the “other” medium which each work cannot hope to capture. Thus, Woolf’s traditional ekphrasis and Lily’s inverted ekphrasis strike a balance between the acting out of bridging representational forms and the working through of acknowledging and mourning an irretrievable other.

In LaCapra’s discussion of Woolf’s oeuvre, particularly *To the Lighthouse*, he sees an attempt to convey “something broader felt as a cultural crisis” in the post-war period:

What she writes is in no sense a conventional narrative but one that both traces the effects of trauma and somehow, at least linguistically, tries to come to terms with those effects, so that they will be inscribed and recalled but perhaps reconfigured in ways that make them not entirely disabling (180).

Linguistically, one way that the novel “comes to terms” with the intervening trauma of wartime losses is by invoking ekphrasis in its final chapter. In the portrayal of Lily’s painting, the work deploys what John Hollander calls “notional” ekphrasis – that is, a description of an imaginary visual object, rather than an existing work with which the reader may be familiar. Unlike the latter (“actual” ekphrasis), in notional ekphrasis, the reader cannot summon the image before his/her mind’s eye as a reference point while reading the verbal text (4). Notional ekphrasis is predicated on the absence of the visual image; furthermore, Woolf makes little effort to give us the illusion that we are ever looking at the whole image itself, by, for example, juxtaposing a spatial description of its

various parts. The use of notional ekphrasis allows the form of the work to mimic its content; at the same time that the novel narrates the loss of Mrs. Ramsay and her children, it also foregrounds absence as a structuring principle of its narrative language (LaCapra 196).

As Allison Booth suggests in her discussion of *To the Lighthouse*, “the dislocations of war often figure centrally in modernist form, even when war itself seems peripheral to modernist content” (4). Ekphrasis is indeed a form predicated on the reader’s “dislocation” from the object of reference. Even more dizzyingly, however, Woolf is writing about a painter who is painting a writer who once had the power to still moments into scenes resembling tableaux vivants. The mise en abyme of this inter-artistic mirroring is not a postmodern, playful gesture, but rather a mournful retreat from a world in which language can no longer intervene, for both metaphysical and political reasons. The former reasons are linked to the war, which has, as suggested, broken the mirror, and invalidated the literature, that once reflected humanity in nature. The latter reasons are tied to the rise of fascism, which Woolf portrays, through Mr. Ramsay’s domestic “tyranny,” as horrifying but inevitable, though still worthy of opposing through symbolic, if ultimately ineffectual, art.

Lily’s process of identifying with Mrs. Ramsay via a painting reverses the narrative trajectory of my next chapter’s more conventional Gothic heroine, Miranda, from Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s 1946 film, *Dragonwyck*. In that chapter, I argue that the film’s allusions to serial violence against women echo the mass violence of the Holocaust; thus, the heroine’s climactic dis-identification with the portrait image of her

predecessor permits a forgetfulness of past violence and allows the film's tacked-on happy ending to consign fascism to the past. By contrast, Woolf, by mirroring the heroine and her prewar predecessor at the climax of the story, implies the potential for art to confront and at least partially work through the intervening trauma of the Great War. Furthermore, whereas the Gothic heroines I describe in my two subsequent chapters experience a climactic, horrifying moment of identification with the villain figure, Lily does not face Mr. Ramsay when he demands sympathy from her, unwilling to see herself mirrored in his gaze. This refusal, while it prevents her from pacifying him as his wife once did, allows her to remain an autonomous artist. Thus, while Lily's inability to "civilize" Mr. Ramsay may forebode the rise of fascism, her refusal to sacrifice her autonomy allows her to attempt the work of mourning he refuses.

CONCLUSION

As in the works I discuss in my later chapters, Woolf displaces mass oppression into a narrative of serial oppression: both Mr. Ramsay's attempted subordination of Lily into his wife's role and his unfettered, postwar oppression of his children. Woolf's inventive, productive summoning of Gothic clichés is appropriate to mourn a past that has not been properly mourned by the culture at large and is threatening to return in the form of future violence. Unlike the conventional Gothic heroine, Lily doesn't confront a troubling portrait of a female predecessor, but instead produces one. Instead of over-identifying with a female predecessor, or fully dis-identifying with her elder, she balances

the acting out of over-identification with a working through of grief through personal expression. Through her ekphrastic depiction of Lily's painting process, Woolf, rather than consolingly mirroring humanity and nature, concludes her novel by complexly mirroring (prewar) verbal and (postwar) visual representations. Thus, whereas the Gothic blurs the boundary between the living and the dead, Woolf's mournful ekphrasis witnesses the intermittent blurring of the representational forms she associates with the prewar and postwar periods. This blurring simultaneously echoes the confusion of self and other involved in "acting out" but also facilitates the working through of grieving Mrs. Ramsay, whose death is linked to the metaphysical changes effected by the cultural trauma of the Great War.

Chapter 2

Gothic Serial Murder as Fascist Mass Murder in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's

Dragonwyck

Nicholas Van Ryn, a Dutch patroon driven to madness after the death of his infant son and the emancipation of his tenant farmers, flees from his Gothic manor to his ancestral throne in the forest of the Hudson Valley. A mob of farmers approaches, led by Nicholas' long-suffering wife, Miranda, the country doctor, Turner, and the town mayor. Miranda begs Nicholas to return to his senses. Growing angry, Nicholas points a pistol at Turner, but the mayor fires first. As the patroon slumps back into his former seat of power, his ex-tenants remove their hats as a sign of respect. "That's right," Nicholas declares, "take off your hats in the presence of the patroon," and dies.

So runs a late scene from 1946's *Dragonwyck*, the first film directed by longtime Hollywood writer-producer Joseph L. Mankiewicz. By the mid-1940s, the film's naïve heroine, her brooding husband, and their spooky, imposing mansion would have been familiar features to audiences who had seen earlier iterations in the "female Gothic" film cycle, a term feminist critics have applied to 1940s films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) and George Cukor's *Gaslight* (1944). However, among these films, *Dragonwyck* is unique in that it merges Gothic melodrama with historical fiction, chronicling the Anti-Rent movement and the subsequent emancipation of landless, tenant farmers in 1840's New York. At the end of the film, following the Yankees' victory over

the effete, delusional despot, a familiar wartime image appears in the lower right corner of the screen, reading, “For Victory – U.S. War Bonds and Stamps – Buy Yours In This Theatre.” This image serves as a reminder that, although *Dragonwyck* was released in 1946, it was produced between February and May 1945, during the late stages of the Second World War (Hanson & Dunkleberger 649). Furthermore, the image implicitly connects the events of the film to contemporary history, reminding viewers of the United States’ enduring struggles against autocracy, both past and present, at home and abroad.

Despite the fact that *Dragonwyck* would appear to readily lend itself to historical readings, no critic has rigorously interpreted the film in relation to contemporary global events. This is in part because, as I will argue, the film initially disguises its relationship to contemporary history. As in most female Gothic films, the husband, although introduced as a mysterious and attractive aristocrat, appears increasingly villainous as the film progresses. However, in *Dragonwyck*, as signs of the husband’s villainy increase, his resemblance to a fascist dictator becomes increasingly apparent as well. It is my claim that *Dragonwyck* displaces the cultural trauma of fascist mass murder into its narrative of Gothic serial murder. By analyzing the heroine’s fascination, and disenchantment, with an increasingly Hitlerian tyrant, I argue that Mankiewicz solicits the audience’s awareness of, and participation in, his film’s deliberate displacement of cultural trauma. However, before pursuing my argument, I must first provide background on the female Gothic film cycle, as well as the criticism that has addressed it thus far.

THE FEMALE GOTHIC

Ellen Moers, in her 1976 book, *Literary Women*, coined the term “Female Gothic” to refer to works in the Gothic literary tradition that were written by women and which spoke to concerns shared by women. Feminist film scholars have since appropriated the term to designate a cycle of suspenseful 1940s films that share similar narratives and common stylistic features. The archetypal plot of the female Gothic film involves a naïve young woman who hastily marries a charming, yet mysterious, aristocrat. After a brief honeymoon period, the couple begins their life together in his or her ancestral home. However, the young bride soon begins to suspect that her husband is either trying to drive her mad or is planning to kill her; rumors or traces of her deceased predecessor often provoke these suspicions.³ Whereas, in early female Gothic films, such as Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940) and *Suspicion* (1941), the heroine finds her suspicions to be unfounded, in later films in the cycle, the young woman, with the help of a potential suitor, unmasks her husband’s villainy and defeats him, opening up the possibility of a new life and a new marriage outside the Gothic prison-house. Stylistically, these films, like the *film noir*, owe a debt to German Expressionism, with extensive use of shadows and high-contrast lighting; however, unlike *film noir*, a term that often calls to mind the image of streetlights reflected on rain-slicked city streets,

³ Several critics (Elsaesser 1987, Doane, Waldman, Tatar, Hanson 2007) have published lists of female Gothic films, and there are some variations in these lists; for example, not all films that have been designated “female Gothic” involve a marriage between the Gothic heroine and villain.

female Gothic films mainly take place within the claustrophobic confines of the Gothic house.

Whereas the plots of *films noir* were commonly adapted from detective fiction, the female Gothic cycle often took inspiration from the literary Gothic romance. The inaugural film in the cycle, Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, was adapted from Daphne DuMaurier's bestselling 1939 Gothic romance novel of the same name. The '40s also saw adaptations of other classic and contemporary Gothic novels, such as Robert Stevenson's version of *Jane Eyre* (1943) and Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Dragonwyck*, which was based on Anya Seton's eponymous 1944 novel. Though their narratives were often drawn from popular "feminine literature," female Gothic films proliferated through mutual imitation, with nearly every major Hollywood studio vying to replicate producer David O. Selznick's phenomenal box-office (and critical) success with *Rebecca* (Waldman 29). Although traces of the female Gothic can be seen in later 20th Century films, the genre reached its apex of popularity during World War II and in the immediate postwar years.

Because female Gothic films feature heroines and were often marketed to women, critics have tended to place the cycle in the broader context of 1940s "women's pictures." In the wake of Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," women's pictures offered psychoanalytic critics writing in the 1980's the opportunity to question how to conceptualize female spectatorship differently from Mulvey's fetishistic model of male spectatorship. Mary Ann Doane, in her influential 1987 book, *The Desire to Desire*, noted that female Gothic films solicit female spectators' over-identification with their imperiled heroines, while these heroines are often shown over-identifying with images of

feminine beauty; thus, the “paranoid woman’s film” (as she then termed the female Gothic) offers a meta-textual meditation on women’s spectatorship of 1940s women’s pictures more generally (142). Tania Modleski, in her article, “‘Never to be Thirty-Six Years Old’: *Rebecca* as Female Oedipal Drama,” discusses the difficulties that the film’s second Mrs. DeWinter experiences in her attempt to maintain an identity wholly separate from her predecessor’s, interpreting the film as an allegory about a woman’s entrance into the symbolic order. Such psychoanalytic approaches made few references to the historical moment in which the female Gothic cycle proliferated.

Whereas Doane, Modleski, and others pursued psychoanalytic interpretations of the female Gothic to illuminate the problematics of female spectatorship and subjectivity, others investigated the relationship between these films’ narratives and the experiences of their contemporary female audiences. Andrea Walsh, a sociologist, regarded the popularity of Gothic narratives as a reflection of American women’s anxieties about the return of their husbands from the war, virtual strangers whom they may have married in haste. However, Walsh’s argument does not account for changes that appear in later female Gothic films’ narratives. In her 1983 article, “‘At Last I Can Tell It to Someone!’: Feminine Point of View and Subjectivity in the Gothic Romance Film of the 1940s,” Diane Waldman questions why later wartime and postwar female Gothic films, in contrast to early ‘40s female Gothic films (and most 19th Century and contemporary Gothic novels), concluded by confirming their heroines’ suspicions of their husbands’ villainy. She argues that this “affirmation of feminine perspective” allowed these films to offer a more pointed critique of men’s patriarchal domination over women; furthermore,

she suggests that this critique was “perhaps made possible by the exigencies of war-time activities,” namely, American women’s increased wartime responsibilities within and outside the house (38). Nevertheless, the replacement of the Gothic tyrant with a “more democratic” new suitor reflects the limited changes experienced within the average late-1940s family, in which sociologists note “some relaxation of the father’s authority in the family,” while, nevertheless, “the basic sexual division of labor is retained” (38).

Waldman prefaces her argument relating female Gothic films to contemporary American women’s experiences by acknowledging that there are few significant references to contemporary events in the films themselves. Although she concedes that “several of the [female Gothic] films make specific reference to their time of production,” and notes, in particular, references to World War II in *Undercurrent* (1946) and *The Secret Beyond the Door* (1948), she suggests that such references are “the exception rather than the rule, and consequently we must look elsewhere for an understanding of the relationship of the Gothics to history” (31). This sentiment is echoed, more recently, in Thomas Schatz’s 1997 book, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*. Although Schatz does briefly address the possibility that allusions to contemporary history, specifically in Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt*, suggest the female Gothic cycle’s links to the Second World War, he downplays their importance. He argues that:

like the hard-boiled detective film, the female Gothic deals with a troubled, wartorn world, but without attributing those troubles to the war itself. Indeed, the conflicts and tensions addressed in these cycles were in many ways deeper and

more profound than those of the geopolitical struggle at hand, and they certainly were more endemic to the American experience. Both the female Gothic and the hard-boiled detective film, like the film noir style itself, tapped into social conditions and anxieties that not only preceded the war but would gain even greater currency in the postwar era (239).

Thus, Waldman and Schatz read female Gothic films “historically” as they reflected tensions related to American culture’s fluctuating gender relations. While I do not dispute the validity of their interpretations, I will demonstrate that the female Gothic cycle’s insistent (if indirect) references to fascist violence, especially in films made immediately after the war, suggests that several directors employed its conventions to meaningfully engage with contemporary global history.

TRAUMA AND FEMALE GOTHIC MELODRAMA

In E. Ann Kaplan’s “Melodrama and Trauma: Displacement in Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*” from her 2005 book *Trauma Culture*, she discusses the ways that 1940s film melodramas could respond to contemporary cultural traumas. Melodramatic narratives, according to Kaplan, allowed films to obliquely address a recent cultural trauma, only to “seal it over” with a happy ending (85). She claims that Alfred Hitchcock’s postwar, psychoanalysis-themed melodrama, *Spellbound* (1946) “displaces” American veterans’ war traumas onto its veteran-protagonist’s childhood trauma, an event that left him

suffering from flashbacks and amnesia. According to Kaplan, the protagonist's amnesia mirrors the nation's willful forgetting of war suffering, a forgetting that most Hollywood films, by not addressing veterans' post-traumatic symptoms, were complicit in; somewhat paradoxically, she suggests that the happy ending of *Spellbound* allows spectators to forget what they have just been asked to remember. The film could thus manage war trauma in an indirect fashion, tacking on a happy, curative ending to the protagonist's struggle with the effects of his childhood trauma, a surrogate for a cultural trauma so recent and so massive that the filmmakers were hesitant to address it directly.

The female Gothic cycle has often been understood as a subgenre of film melodrama (Doane 1987, Elsaesser 1987). However, rather than feature a character suffering from flashbacks, it offers rumors or traces of past physical or psychic violence, and, in typical Gothic fashion, forebodes the heroine's victimization by that violence's return. Whereas *Spellbound* displaces the cultural trauma of Americans' war suffering, I find that female Gothic narratives more often displace the cultural trauma of the Holocaust. While, as Kaplan suggests, the effects of veterans' traumas were rarely depicted in postwar Hollywood films, references to the Holocaust were perhaps even scarcer; it could even be argued that Hollywood was complicit in the United States' postwar repression of its knowledge of the Holocaust. This repression is perhaps understandable not only because of Americans' desire to move on from the war but also because of the enormity of the Holocaust, the difficulty of integrating genocide into a marketable film, and the fact that its victims were, predominantly, not American. However, a handful of directors found female Gothic conventions useful in addressing

the Holocaust because, while they could obliquely address fascist mass murder through the actions of the serially murderous Gothic husband, they could “seal” it over with a happy ending that looks forward to the heroine’s new life, often with a new suitor.

Those rare female Gothic films that made explicit reference to the Holocaust could confront and educate viewers about its horrors in its aftermath. Two very different variations on the female Gothic, Orson Welles’ Gothic-*noir* hybrid *The Stranger* (1946) and Robert Wise’s late entry in the cycle, *The House on Telegraph Hill* (1951), not only made direct reference to the Holocaust, they were among the first Hollywood films to incorporate non-fictional footage to educate viewers about the concentration camps and the United Nations’ role in assisting refugees. Welles’ film was, in fact, the first Hollywood film to include documentary footage showing what scenes Allied troops encountered at the camps (McBride 88). Five years later, Wise’s film shows its Polish heroine boarding a United Nations ship transporting WWII refugees, incorporating documentary footage (at the UN’s request) to educate the American public about its activities (Gevinson 471). The inclusion of documentary footage in these films speaks to their shared pedagogical intent; both films were overtly instructive about the evils of Nazism, especially pertaining to the Holocaust.

Although these films make direct reference to the Holocaust, their distinctly Gothic displacement of its affect can be seen when past, historically-contingent violence “returns” in the form of a Gothic threat to the heroine’s life. In Welles’ film, the villain is a former high-ranking Nazi official, a mastermind of genocide, who is living in disguise as a New England professor, married to an American woman who is unaware of his past.

In Wise's film, the heroine is a Polish concentration camp survivor who, having assumed the identity of a deceased friend, moves to the United States after the war and marries an American. Late in each film, these heroines face near-death experiences at the hands of their husbands. However, rather than attempt to portray a trauma, which Freud understood as an invasion of stress that the mind is unprepared for, female Gothic films acclimate their heroines to horror through a film-length buildup of anxiety, triggered by their husbands' suspicious behavior. Kaplan suggests that the psychoanalytic treatment featured in *Spellbound* recalls Freud's early advocacy of hypnosis as a way for trauma victims to mentally "return" to a harmful experience and discharge its affect. The female Gothic, with its resurfacing of an evil from the past, proves therapeutic for these films' heroines as well; confronting and overcoming Gothic horror, they free themselves from the effects of a traumatic past. Thus, while Welles and Wise's films openly refer to cultural traumas related to fascist aggression, they use Gothic horrors to mimic the effect of repetition compulsion. Each heroine's bravery in facing these horrors consigns both the original, historical, violence and its Gothic, traumatic aftereffects to the past through a happy ending that ensures the end to a cycle of repeating violence. While female Gothic heroines often must remember a violent past in order to conquer it, these two films' happy endings allow them to "seal" the cultural trauma that this violence stands for, thereby allowing the spectator to forget.

Through the short-lived relationship between the heroine and villain, certain female Gothic films could allude to the West's victimization by fascism, yet consign this cultural trauma to the past. However, because the two aforementioned films make direct,

and early, reference to the Holocaust, they are constrained in their characterizations of their villain, as well as their heroine's relationship to him. In *The Stranger*, Welles' villain is never portrayed as sympathetic, as we learn from the outset that he is a murderous former high-ranking Nazi officer. Welles' film eschews the indirectness of many female Gothic films' relationship to history. In its portrayal of an American woman married to a Nazi, the film, in fact, recalls Irving Pichel's deliberately anti-Nazi propaganda film, *The Man I Married* (1940), in which the heroine marries a man who gradually becomes an adherent of Nazi ideology. However, in that film, Pichel solicits our identification with the wife before her husband's transformation so that we might share her horror at discovering his Nazi sympathies; in *The Stranger*, because we do not witness the couple's courtship, and because we know of the husband's past at the outset, it is more difficult to share his wife's denial and horror. Furthermore, Welles' film features a detective who attempts to persuade the heroine of her husband's villainy, offering the spectator a more detached investigative character with whom we may identify.

Like *The Stranger*, *The House on Telegraph Hill* portrays its villain as unsympathetic, a cold-blooded child killer motivated by greed and self-interest. As his violence represents the return of the heroine's traumatic experience at the Belsen camp, he is associated too directly with Nazism to solicit the spectator's sympathy. At the end of the film, believing that he has successfully poisoned his wife, he marvels, "you Poles must be made of iron"; Wise's villain, like Welles' villain in *The Stranger*, thereby exceeds what I will later regard as the female Gothic's characteristically indirect

relationship to fascism. Furthermore, *The House on Telegraph Hill*, like *The Stranger*, does not solicit the spectator's investment in its heroine's enchantment and shocking disillusionment with her husband. Unlike most female Gothics, Wise's film features a heroine who marries for a strategic interest, citizenship, and not because she is fascinated with her fiancé nor because she believes she is in love with him. Hence, the film lacks the powerfully conflicted emotions of most female Gothic films; while Wise's heroine expresses pity for her husband, even after he has attempted to kill her, she is more detached and less shocked by his behavior than the average female Gothic heroine. Although *The Stranger* and *The House on Telegraph Hill* have a clear pedagogical intent, their direct references to Nazism actually constrain them from offering more complex depictions of the relationship between their heroine and villain, thereby preventing them from asking more difficult questions about the West's relationship to fascism.

While most female Gothic films do not openly refer to the Holocaust, certain films in the cycle obliquely associate their villain's past perpetration of violence with fascist mass murder. Such films, which displace the Holocaust into Gothic narratives without making direct reference to contemporary history, could thereby explore the potential motives behind, and attractions of, fascism, as well as Americans' early conflicted emotions about entering the war. As Linda Williams argues in her article, "Feminist Film Theory: *Mildred Pierce* and the Second World War," that film's lack of direct reference to World War II allowed its heroine to mirror newly empowered American women, without having to submit to the postwar imperative of women's patriotic self-sacrifice. Williams compares the "repression" of history in *Mildred Pierce*

to the purported absence of historical references in the female Gothic cycle, in which, although there is an “avoidance of specific reference to contemporary history,” nonetheless, “there is a peculiar sense in which these films are able to be ‘about’ that history in ways that more obviously contemporary films could not be” (24). While Williams is alluding to the female Gothic’s consequent ability to illuminate American women’s wartime anxieties, I adapt her insight to address these films’ relationship to the global conflict with fascism as well. That is, those female Gothic films that did not make direct reference to contemporary history could often address deeper issues related to fascism by exploring heroines’ relationships to villains who were, if not wholly sympathetic, at least more complex.

Two female Gothic films that displace the Holocaust into narratives of serial murder, but avoid direct reference to Nazism, feature more complexly characterized villains. These are Alfred Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt*, released in 1943, and Robert Siodmak’s *The Spiral Staircase*, released in 1946. Although these films’ villains may initially appear suspicious, unlike *The Stranger*, it is only gradually that we learn of their serial killings, as well as their basis in motives that resemble Nazi ideology. Late in these films, we discover that they have killed women they perceive as imperfect or worthless, and each gives a speech justifying his behavior with reference to genocidal ideology that echoes Nazism. However, the absence of direct reference to contemporary history allows these films to solicit the spectator’s identification or sympathy with the villain, whether through the heroine’s fascination with him, or through a reference to his childhood that portrays him as a victim of trauma. Through both means, these films confront us with

villains that disturbingly mirror their heroines, trespassing the aforementioned female Gothic films' starker distinction between the two figures.

Shadow of a Doubt, instead of depicting a wife's fascination with her fiancé, features a teenage girl, Charlie, who adores the uncle she was named after. Her Uncle Charlie is attractive because he is unmotivated by her family's suffocating drive for conformity; young Charlie likes to believe that she and her uncle have the most in common among them. The fact that Charlie idolizes her uncle and sees him as a mirror for her own independence makes her all the more disturbed and disgusted when she learns of his crimes. As the film portrays Uncle Charlie as attractive, and dwells on young Charlie's interest in him, it solicits the spectator's fascination with him before linking his crimes to contemporary history. However, although set in the present day, Hitchcock's film, like *Mildred Pierce*, avoids direct mention of World War II. Nonetheless, the film makes an indirect reference to fascism's genocidal philosophy in Uncle Charlie's surprising rant against wealthy widows, whom he considers "fat, wheezing animals." His characterization of these women as greedy social parasites clearly echoes Nazism's vicious anti-Semitic stereotypes.

However, as Robin Wood notes, Uncle Charlie's choice of victims, wealthy widows, does not directly correspond to the populations targeted by fascist ideology; Charlie's personal ideology is "grounded in misogyny" and is therefore distant "from any directly political application" (34). Were Uncle Charlie directly associated with Nazism, he would obviously be less sympathetic, because of the wartime public's attitude toward the enemy, and, consequently, because Hitchcock would likely not be allowed to portray

a Nazi in an ambiguous light in 1943. I do not suggest that Hitchcock primarily intended to use Uncle Charlie, or his niece's close bond with him, to humanize the Nazis. Rather, he likely alluded to fascist ideology, indirectly, to underscore the banality of evil, Americans' potential to exhibit bigotry and commit violence based on it, and the need for constant vigilance. As the detective tells a shaken young Charlie at the end of the film, the whole "world needs watching" because it "goes crazy now and then, just like your Uncle Charlie."

In Robert Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase*, rather than wealthy widows, a serial killer preys on women with physical or mental disabilities. According to Lutz Koepnick, in contrast with its 1941 source novel, Ethel Lina White's *Some Must Watch*, in which the villain targets working-class women, "Siodmak's film presents the killer as an obsessed zoologist, Professor Albert Warren (George Brent), whose Darwinist quest for authenticity and social hygiene is fueled by Nazi rhetoric" (184). The heroine of Siodmak's film, Helen, has been unable to speak ever since the day she witnessed a fire in which both of her parents died; because of her muteness, she becomes the latest (and last) target of Albert's genocidal aggression. In Vincent Brook's analysis of Albert Warren's relationship to contemporary history, he notes that "Nazi associations become explicit in the black gloves Warren puts on before strangling his victims, and in the rant he delivers," a speech in which he voices his intention to "dispose of the weak and imperfect of the world" (120). However, despite such pointed references to Nazism, the film takes place entirely in the past, specifically turn of the century New England. Ironically, this remove from the present day allows the film to offer an implicit critique of

United States' foreign policy. At the end of the film, after we have learned of the villain's genocidal pattern, his stepmother kills him before he can kill Helen. The elderly matriarch then declares, "Now it's been done. Ten years too late," likely indicting Americans' for their early hesitance to join the war.⁴ It is doubtful that such a judgment could have been offered in a film that addressed the war directly.

Furthermore, the absence of direct reference to contemporary history allows Siodmak and Hitchcock's films to craft fictional narratives to explore the potential psychological motivations behind Nazism at greater depth than those female Gothic films that overtly reference the Holocaust. We learn, for example, that the memory of his impossible-to-please father, one who regarded his sons as weaklings, provides the implicit motivation for Alfred's murder of women "weakened" by various afflictions; thus, Nazism's genocidal ideology is framed as a projective defense against an unbearable experience of "lack." Albert's childhood experience constitutes a Freudian, family trauma similar to Uncle Charlie's in *Shadow of a Doubt*. In that film, we learn of a childhood sledding accident that wrought dark changes in his demeanor; along Freudian lines, Wood argues that this accident represents Uncle Charlie's loss of innocence, a "shock...of discovering sexuality" that lingers in his "sexual (self-)disgust," which he then projects onto his victims (35). Thus, both Uncle Charlie and Albert are portrayed as

⁴ It is not clear who was responsible for transforming the villain of White's novella *The Spiral Staircase* into the crazed eugenicist of Siodmak's film. Some have speculated that it could have been MGM production chief Dore Schary's co-producer, Joan Harrison, "who had worked on *The Lady Vanishes*, which turned White's *The Wheel Spins* into an anti-Nazi allegory" (Frodon and Harrison 162). Of course, Siodmak was a German Jewish émigré and, according to Vincent Brook, was responsible for at least one other 1940s film with a clear anti-Nazi message; even if he were not directly responsible for all of the anti-Nazi elements in the film, he chooses to foreground them (119).

victims of childhood traumas that “explain” their serial killings. Whereas Charlie and her uncle are mirrored through their names, their familial relationship, and their scorn for conformity, the villain and heroine of *The Spiral Staircase* are mirrored through past experiences of childhood trauma. Helen’s muteness and Albert’s morbid fascination with “weak” women are paralleled as symptoms of trauma, symptoms that exert control over their behavior. While Albert is not portrayed as attractively as Uncle Charlie, both films displace Nazi ideology into their villain’s personal pathology and, by mirroring the villain with the heroine, solicit identification with or sympathy for him.

These villains’ childhood traumas allow each film to create a kind of mythical narrative about what motivated Hitler’s genocidal philosophy. However, at the same time, allusions to these traumas nominally aid in the displacement of fascist mass murder by providing a psychopathological, Freudian explanation for ideology that otherwise resembles the shared, historically specific ideology of fascism. This displacement of cultural trauma is aided, in both cases, by that most familiar of female Gothic visual tropes: the portrait. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, the presentation of a photographic portrait of a young Uncle Charlie brings back memories of the accident that, shortly after the picture was taken, irrevocably changed his personality. And in *The Spiral Staircase*, a portrait of the villain’s Oedipal father, pictured as a game hunter with a rifle in hand, looms over the household.⁵ Feminist psychoanalytic critics have argued that portraits in female Gothic films manifest their heroines’ futile struggles to assert an identity distinct from a maternal

⁵ In *Gaslight*, a film with less clear ties to contemporary history, the Gothic villain’s fascination with priceless jewels drive him to murder in pursuit of them; the jewels offer an implausibly tidy motivation for his murder, but also, in their intimation of family jewels, imply fetishization, a defense against castration anxiety (Tatar 95).

figure depicted in a portrait, with whom the young women irresistibly over-identify. However, these ahistorical, psychoanalytic approaches have repressed the parallels that develop between certain female Gothic heroines and villains, and, furthermore, have overlooked portraiture's role in these films' displacement of cultural traumas.

Pam Cook has recently challenged feminist psychoanalytic critics who, assuming that female Gothic films address female spectators, have interpreted the heroine's identification with her predecessor as a reflection of the spectator's over-identification with the heroine. Cook argues that these films, because they portray masochism as an experience commonly found within the pasts of both their heroine and villain, often solicit identification with both figures that has "No [f]ixed [a]ddress" to one specific gender (229). Rather than masochism, I find that female Gothic films more often portray multiple victims of trauma: the heroine, her predecessor(s), and, quite often, the villain himself. Furthermore, I would clarify that, while female Gothic films posit the heroine as the audience's principal figure of identification, many subsequently assert an affinity between the heroine and the villain. Whereas portraiture mediates the heroine's identification and dis-identification with her female predecessor, certain female Gothic films identify the heroine with the villain through visual and narrative references to the silent horror tradition. An analysis of these devices is necessary to better understand how these films solicit the spectator's participation in the displacement of cultural trauma.

According to Linda Williams, in silent horror films, as in the female Gothic, heroines are punished for attempting to exert an active, investigative gaze. In silent films, this punishment takes place in scenes in which the heroine encounters the

monster's physical deformations; the monster thereby confronts her with a distorted reflection of the castration women represent within patriarchy. Beyond this monstrous mirroring, however, Williams also notes the "affinity" that links heroine and monster closer than heroine and hero; she notes that many silent horror films portray a "flash of sympathetic identification" between heroine and monster, which registers the fact that his status as an object of horror and hers as an object of desire are not all that dissimilar (88). Despite Mary Ann Doane's acknowledgement of the generic "miscegenation" of the female Gothic cycle, its links to *film noir* and the horror film, she makes the following distinction between Williams' account of the silent horror film and her own analysis of the female Gothic film:

in the horror film, what the woman actually sees, after a sustained and fearful process of looking, is a sign or representation of herself, displaced to the level of the nonhuman. In the paranoid woman's film, on the other hand, the female character does not encounter a mutilated signifier of herself but, instead, the traces of another woman who once occupied her position as wife (125, 142).

However, feminist psychoanalytic criticism's emphasis on the heroine's over-identification with her predecessor has essentially repressed moments of identification between certain female Gothic heroines and villains by overlooking these films' references to the silent horror tradition.

References to silent horror film abound, for example, in *The Spiral Staircase* and *Shadow of a Doubt*, two female Gothic films that, I argued, foreground the mirroring of heroine and villain. As Mark Jancovich recently argued, *The Spiral Staircase* was received by many contemporary critics as a “thriller” or horror film, rather than a “women’s picture” (161). The very first scene of *The Spiral Staircase* intercuts the heroine’s reactions to a silent horror film exhibited in a hotel lobby with a murder taking place in an upstairs room. Later, in this film’s most famous shot, which stylistically echoes the silent horror tradition, the villain’s gaze causes the heroine’s mouth to “disappear” as she looks at herself in the mirror, a projection of his feelings of impotence. This shot clearly recalls the silent film heroine’s encounter with a “nonhuman” representation of herself in the mirror of the monster. By contrast, in *Shadow of a Doubt*, references to silent horror allow the film to portray a sympathetic affinity between Charlie and Uncle Charlie. James McLaughlin points out the many visual and narrative references linking the villain in *Shadow of a Doubt* to that quintessential silent horror villain, Dracula. For example, young Charlie appears to have a kind of telepathic link with Uncle Charlie, predicting his arrival in town; this link between villain and heroine is highly reminiscent of Williams’ discussion of the heroine’s telepathic connection to the vampire, as well as her fascinated, helpless gaze upon him, in F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) (143). References to silent film thus allow Siodmak and Hitchcock to amplify the horror of the heroine’s affinity with a villain who, despite his links to Nazism, is not entirely different and distinct from her.

If, as I have suggested, certain female Gothic films displace the trauma of fascist mass murder into narratives of Gothic serial murder, the way that these films solicit a complex identification with the heroine *and* villain is crucial to understanding the way spectators were invited to participate in this “displacement.” To help untangle the way that identification functions within a female Gothic film’s displacement of cultural trauma, my methodology focuses on portraits and other “figures of spectatorship,” to use a term coined by Judith Mayne (154). In her chapter, “Textual Analysis and Portraits of Spectatorship” from *Cinema and Spectatorship*, Mayne explores the range of potential positions a film offers its spectators, contrasting her approach with those that claim to uncover a film’s unconscious. In her reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), Mayne argues that, whenever it appears, “portraiture is a figure of spectatorship to the extent that, in each case, a mode of observation is foregrounded” (154). Mayne then outlines how, further, “spectatorship as it is defined in the film operates on two levels. The first has to do with the portrait itself and the responses to it,” while “the other has to do with how the film constructs a scenography that evokes certain codes and conventions of painting, but in ways more diffuse than merely using literal portraits within the film” (145). These various figures of spectatorship do not mirror the film’s configuration of an ideal spectator, but rather offer “a series of hypotheses about the varieties of spectatorship” available to the viewer (140). In my subsequent analysis of Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s *Dragonwyck*, the film I have selected for extended analysis, I adapt Mayne’s strategy to synthesize an analysis of spectatorship with an analysis of the displacement of cultural trauma. As I will demonstrate, figures of spectatorship solicit

our awareness not only of the heroine's fascination with a female predecessor, but also of her horrified realization of her similarities to the tyrannical villain.

My approach, analyzing portraiture and other figures of spectatorship, addresses a weakness in Kaplan's treatment of displacement: namely that it does not consider the role of the spectator. In her 2001 article, "Trauma and Screen Studies: Opening the Debate," Susannah Radstone cautioned that the importation of trauma studies' terminology into film studies could potentially return film critics to a passive model of spectatorship that negates the role of fantasy. This concern offers a serious danger. In Kaplan's chapter on *Spellbound*, she does not thoroughly address the spectator either as inscribed by the film or as an active agent of reception. Kaplan neither highlights the conscious knowledge nor the unconscious processes of the spectator; instead she uses knowledge and the unconscious as metaphors to discuss the film itself, considering the knowledge of traumatic wartime events as "what the text cannot know" and suggesting, instead, that "war and its traumas were present in the film's unconscious" (74, 84). Thus, rather than a study of spectatorship, she offers a form of textual analysis that claims to uncover what the film is really about: "the real topic of the film, namely a World War II veteran's traumatic memories" (80). Furthermore, Kaplan's study, while it explores the filmmakers' possible motives in displacing cultural trauma, is consequently more focused on production than reception; she considers, at length, the potential role that the film's producer, David O. Selznick, had in shaping the film, as well the studio's likely considerations about its audiences' tastes. However, in Kaplan's model, spectators

ultimately become the passive recipients of a film in which the studio has already displaced the trauma of war suffering for them.

I will now turn to *Dragonwyck* to determine how portraits and other figures of spectatorship might have positioned the postwar spectator in relation to the film's heroine and villain, and what they might indicate about the spectator's solicited participation in the film's displacement of trauma. In *Dragonwyck*, Mankiewicz uses both a portrait and the silent film iris as framing devices that mark the heroine's movement into, and out of, a spell of fascination; this spell blinds her not only to women's victimization by their husbands in the past, but also her own husband's threat to her life. Whereas the first "frame" scene portrays her complicity in her husband's repression of a violent past, I argue that the second frame scene links the heroine's complicity to the United States' relationship to the cultural trauma of the Holocaust.

DRAGONWYCK

I have chosen *Dragonwyck* because it is the most conventional female Gothic film among all the films I have analyzed thus far; unlike *The Spiral Staircase* and *Shadow of a Doubt*, it features a heroine and villain who are married to one another, and unlike the latter film, *The Stranger*, and *The House on Telegraph Hill*, it is set in the distant past. These conventional elements place *Dragonwyck* firmly in the tradition of earlier female Gothics like *Rebecca* and *Gaslight*, whereas, for example, *The Stranger* has sometimes been classified as a *noir* and, again, many critics reviewed *The Spiral Staircase* as a

horror film (Biesen 206, Jancovich 161). Thus, I argue that the displacement of cultural trauma in *Dragonwyck* is, at least initially, fully disguised by recognizably female Gothic conventions. This cloaking allows Mankiewicz to offer a strong critique of the West's relationship to fascism, as well as the fullest articulation of portraiture's role in the female Gothic's displacement of the Holocaust.

A secondary reason I have selected *Dragonwyck* is that Mankiewicz's visual style, in contrast to Hitchcock, Welles, and Siodmak's, has been largely ignored or maligned by his critics. Andrew Sarris once counted himself among the critics who "deplore the limitations of [Mankiewicz's] visual style" (qtd. in Dauth 33). Pauline Kael, in reference to two of the director's subsequent films, suggests that they have "almost no visual dimension" (qtd. in Marks 5). However, despite Mankiewicz's reputed stylistic limitations, he was consistent in his use of one visual motif: the visual arts, and, especially, the portrait. As Kenneth Geist notes, in his Mankiewicz retrospective *Pictures Will Talk*:

Almost every one of the twenty films that Joe Mankiewicz has directed contains a centrally enshrined icon that stands in mute reproof of its possessor's achievements. The motif is nearly constant from the portrait of the great grandmother, the siren of doom in *Dragonwyck* (1946), the first film he directed, to the diminutive mantelpiece bust of Edgar Allan Poe in his most recent picture, *Sleuth* (1972) (13).

As I will argue in my next chapter, Mankiewicz continues to develop the relationship between portraiture and cultural trauma in his most famous film, *All About Eve* (1950), the Gothic dimensions of which have gone unnoticed. For now, however, I will proceed with a synopsis of *Dragonwyck*.

Dragonwyck is a film about a young woman named Miranda who lives on her family's small Connecticut farm with her pious, authoritative father, her deferent mother, and her dutiful siblings. One day, her mother receives a letter from a distant cousin, a Dutch patroon named Nicholas Van Ryn. He invites her to select one of her daughters to join him and his wife at his Dragonwyck manor and to serve, if she likes, as his young daughter's "companion." Miranda, desperate to see the world beyond the farm, pleads with her parents to allow her to go, which they reluctantly do. While initially charmed by life at Dragonwyck, and after engaging in flirtation with Nicholas, Miranda is then informed by a servant, Magda, that the house is haunted by the ghost of Azilde, Nicholas' great-grandmother. Azilde, she tells Miranda, committed suicide after her husband mistreated her. Katrine, the Van Ryns' daughter, sometimes hears Azilde's ghostly voice emanating from the music room at night, but because only those with Van Ryn blood can hear Azilde's ghostly singing, Miranda, a relative by marriage, cannot. Azilde, we learn, once prayed for disaster to befall the Van Ryns, and her ghost now sings immediately before someone in the family is about to die.

Azilde's song is heard on the night that Nicholas fatally poisons Johanna, after he has become convinced that his wife is incapable of producing him a male heir. That same night, he confesses his love for Miranda, whom he soon marries, despite his

society's disapproval of his wife's class. Miranda gives birth to a son but he soon dies of a heart defect. Around the same time, Nicholas loses his control over his tenant farmers. He then begins spending more and more time isolated in his private tower room. Disregarding the cautions of Peggy, a disabled Irish woman she has chosen as her personal maid, Miranda bravely ventures to the tower room, and finds out that Nicholas has become addicted to opium; in a rambling speech, Nicholas claims that he has freed himself from conventional morality. Shortly after, Nicholas tells Miranda that it would be a shame if she couldn't produce a male heir. After she claims that that is a matter of the Lord's will, he tells her that she lives the life that he, and not God, has given her. Azilde's ghost begins to sing, and Nicholas cannot disguise the fact that he hears it. Miranda, suddenly frightened, appears to realize that Magda's story about Azilde was true, that Nicholas killed Johanna, and that he is about to kill her as well. The country doctor, Turner, who has independently discovered the cause of Johanna's death, arrives, and he and Nicholas fight. Nicholas eventually flees to the woods, where Miranda and group of farmers find him and interrupt his boastful speech to an imaginary audience. Nicholas is fatally shot after he points a gun at the doctor. In the film's final scene, Miranda and Turner share a moment of tenderness that hints at their eventual marriage, before she leaves Dragonwyck to live with her family once again.

Similar to Hitchcock's manipulation of the spectator in *Rebecca*, Mankiewicz, from the beginning, solicits the spectator's sympathetic identification with his film's heroine, Miranda, through several cinematic techniques. Most striking among these are his repeated depictions of Miranda looking through various "frames" in the early portion

of the film. These frames include the window of the Astor House lobby where she is to meet Nicholas, a window overlooking a courtyard dance, the telescope iris through which she first sights Dragonwyck, and the mansion's schoolroom window through which she spies an arriving count and countess. These shots clearly mimic the voyeuristic pleasures of film viewing and work to suture the spectator to Miranda, providing Miranda (and the spectator) with windows onto the pleasures of Miranda's future that advance the narrative. Tacitly self-reflexive, these moments call attention to the act of looking, mirroring the spectator's pleasurable gaze. Thus, these frames position both Miranda and the spectator as self-conscious voyeurs who are both, presumably, eager to see her bridge the distance that separates her from her objects of desire.

THE PORTRAIT OF AZILDE

However, the first appearance of a portrait in the film foregrounds two contrasting spectatorial positions, the one naïve and the other critical. On her first night at *Dragonwyck*, Miranda joins Nicholas and his wife, Johanna, in the mansion's red room, or music room. While Johanna works on her embroidery in the lower corner of the frame, Nicholas plays a song on the harpsichord. Miranda, standing, listens to the music but faces the camera in perfect posture. Above her hangs the portrait of a young woman. Before we learn the identity of the painting's subject, we are visually invited to compare her with Miranda. Both are young, dark-haired women who stand, stiffly facing forward,

with their hands in front of them. Miranda appears as if unconsciously mimicking the young woman's posture pose, a tableau vivant of beauty and propriety.

Next, curious, as if hearing a whisper, Miranda turns and glances furtively at the portrait behind her. Nicholas, becoming aware that Miranda's attention has wandered from his music to the portrait, stops playing. In response to her inquiry, he tells her that the woman in the painting, Azilde, was his great-grandmother. Childlike, Miranda begs her "cousin Nicholas" to tell her the story of his great-grandparents' courtship, asking, "did they fall in love at first sight?" Instead of a sweeping romantic narrative, however, Nicholas informs Miranda that, shortly after her arrival at Dragonwyck, Azilde died after giving birth to a son. Miranda is visibly moved by this story, suggesting that she had begun to identify with the young woman, as one might identify with a character in a book. However, she resumes gazing on Azilde's picture, seemingly fascinated. Meanwhile, Nicholas spends as much time looking on Miranda as she spends looking at the painting. Indeed, the portrait constructs a triangulated network of gazes, from which the wife, Johanna, is excluded. Nicholas gazes on Miranda as she gazes up at Azilde. This circuit of fascination suspends Miranda between Nicholas' admiring gaze upon her, and the attractiveness of the image on which she fixates. Standing next to Azilde, Miranda's age and appearance suggest to the audience that she is a better "match" for Nicholas, a better impersonation of the archetypal Van Ryn wife, than Johanna.

The portrait of Azilde provides a figure of identification for Miranda, one that reminds of her childhood dreams of romance and that gives her the illusion of adult agency and volition. However, the portrait functions like a subject position Nicholas has

prepared for Miranda: a supplied “I” that she mistakes for her authentic self. Similar to the way that he instructs her to sing, “I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls,” a song that casts her as a woman who dreams of attaining both love and luxury, Nicholas, by bringing Miranda into the red room, brings her face to face with what he knows will be an image she cannot resist over-identifying with. Of course, he wants her to identify with the ideal image of a Van Ryn wife to prepare her to eventually take his wife’s place; the portrait of Azilde offers him a tool with which he can fascinate Miranda.

However, after Nicholas and Johanna have retired for the evening, a servant, Magda enters the red room and briefly interrupts Miranda’s fascinated gaze on Azilde’s image. When Miranda resumes looking at the image, Magda informs her that Azilde killed herself at the harpsichord after her husband forbade her to sing, play the harpsichord, and spend time with her recently born son. Miranda reacts defensively, dismissing Magda’s narrative as “kitchen gossip.” However, in the next scene, Magda persists in her attempt to divest Miranda of her belief in the nobility and glamour of Dragonwyck. She does so by pointing out the irrationality of Katrine’s need of a companion, implying that there may be a more devious reason why Miranda was summoned to Dragonwyck. Clearly, Magda is aware of Nicholas’ plan to kill Johanna and take Miranda as his wife, and is disgusted that Miranda is so blinded by vanity that she ignores the inconsistencies in the “companion” narrative she chooses to believe.

Miranda’s attitude toward the portrait is one that represents naïve visual fascination, whereas Magda is associated with memory, a scrupulous attention to narratives and narrative inconsistencies. These are two approaches the film offers to the

spectator of the film: the one credulous, and the other critical.⁶ Interestingly, Miranda and Magda's attitudes in this scene correspond neatly to the two spectatorial alternatives Mary Ann Doane suggested are available to women: absorption or transvestism. The absorbed Miranda, incapable of fetishizing the image of feminine beauty, as men do, instead over-identifies with it, confusing Azilde's identity with her own; she appears to desire Azilde only insofar as she imagines the pleasures of taking on her role. By contrast, Magda, after entering the red room, leeringly gazes on Miranda, as if she has stepped into Nicholas' subject position and assumed the male gaze; the un-fascinated Magda thereby achieves that critical distance that women, in Doane's psychoanalytic model, have difficulty maintaining.

Whereas Miranda's gaze is associated with proximity to the image, Magda's is associated with detachment. Miranda and Magda not only correspond to Doane's two alternatives for female spectators, absorption and transvestism, they also resemble two spectatorial positions Oliver Harris has recently identified in *film noir*: a "gaze distorted by desire" and a "dispassionate, analytical eye" (4). As he notes, in several *noir* films, different characters embody these contrasting spectatorial positions. He argues that, when modern critics approach a *film noir*, they often attempt a hermeneutic reading that does not contend with the fact that, while some *noir* characters may be fascinated (for example, by the femme fatale), others may be critical and aloof, anticipating our critical distance. Harris' suggestion that the "gaze distorted by desire" is "unhistorical," whereas the "dispassionate, analytic eye" is "hermeneutic or historical" helps illuminate the

⁶ Magda's critical attitude toward the flimsy Gothic narrative is in keeping with an ironic vein visible in many female Gothic films (see Tatar).

contrast between Miranda and Magda (4). Miranda's fascination with Azilde's image indeed appears "unhistorical," as it compels her to repress Magda's narrative of Azilde's victimization and the possibility that this history may repeat itself in the present. Magda, by contrast, through her aggressive and sarcastic gaze, betrays an awareness of two kinds of repetition compulsion relevant to the 1940s female Gothic cycle. The first form refers to Magda's knowledge of the victimization of Azilde, and her knowledge of its predictable repetition in other women's lives; as she tells Miranda, "one day you will wish with all your heart that you never came to Dragonwyck." The second form of repetition compulsion also relates to the victimization of women; this is the 1940s' female Gothic cycle itself, a series of films in which young heroines, inevitably heedless of the early warning signs, marry a murderer and face a mortal threat. Magda's gaze is therefore doubly historical because of its critical perspective on these two kinds of repetition compulsion, within the film and within the female Gothic cycle.

In *Dragonwyck*, Magda is ultimately unable to dispossess Miranda of her image of desire; midway through the film, Magda will disappear entirely. Although the early portrait scene manifests two opposed spectatorial positions, the spectator has been prepared to, and is asked to continue to identify with Miranda. That is, for the film to succeed, the spectator must share in Miranda's fascination with Dragonwyck, which means becoming vicariously complicit in her repression of a history of male violence. However, whereas Magda is associated with age, skepticism, and permanent servitude, Miranda is associated with youth, hope, and the potential for social mobility. Thus, by soliciting identification with Miranda, the film solicits the spectator's pleasurable

suspension of disbelief, a forgetfulness of narrative conventions and a vicarious repression of a traumatic past. Nevertheless, the ghost of Azilde, like Nicholas' (and Miranda's) unheeded conscience, continues to watch the events of the film, a ghostly spectator-in-the-text with a gaze if no longer a body.

NICHOLAS' MESMERIZING GAZE

The film's early interest in Azilde's portrait, as a fascinating object, is eventually supplanted by its investigation of Nicholas, the fascinating subject. Early in the film, Miranda and Katrine go into the woods to secretly watch the kermis, a ceremony at which Nicholas' tenant farmers each approach and pay him rent and tribute. At this ceremony, Nicholas is seated on his ancestral throne on a stage. Although one of the older farmers initially refuses to pay, he is so overwhelmed by the force of tradition, and its manifestation in Nicholas' visual presence, that he backs down. At the kermis, Miranda meets the country doctor, Turner, who is surprised that a Connecticut farm girl is staying at Dragonwyck, given Nicholas' usual antipathy for the lower classes. However, the next time they see one another, at Dragonwyck, Miranda has utterly transformed, having traded her simple clothes for an elegant costume and now affecting an upper-class accent. Turner comments on Miranda's startling transformation, but Miranda simply ignores him, asking if he would like "some more sherry wine." In a line of dialogue Mankiewicz included in the final draft of his screenplay but chose not to film, Turner says to Miranda, "You know, it's my guess that you're fascinated. As if you're looking into a strong

bright light and can't see where you're going. But you keep on" (81). Thus, Mankiewicz suggests that both the tenant farmers and Miranda are under Nicholas' spell of fascination.

Miranda's heedlessness to Turner's critique speaks to her recent transformation from outsider to participant in life at Dragonwyck. This transition occurs on the night of Nicholas' Fourth of July ball, which he terms the "kermis of the upper classes." Until this point, as I have suggested, Miranda has been characterized as a voyeuristic spectator through the various frames she peers through in the beginning of the film, through her gaze on Azilde's image, and in her spying on the events of the kermis. On the night of the ball, Miranda acutely feels her status as an outsider, as she is ignored or dismissed by the upper-class guests. Magda seizes the opportunity to offer one final jab at Miranda's envy of the upper classes, telling Miranda that "all the servants" think she's the prettiest lady at the ball. Visibly hurt, Miranda complains to Nicholas that, though the ball is fun "to watch," she regrets not being an equal participant. When Nicholas takes her onto the dance floor, this is the moment in which she completes her transformation from spectator to participant, erasing the distinction between herself and the image of the ideal Van Ryn wife. As Miranda gazes hypnotically into Nicholas' eyes, Mankiewicz does not neglect to film Johanna and Magda's reactions, watching in disbelief from the sidelines as Miranda and Nicholas waltz across the dance floor.

While Miranda and Nicholas dance, the screen fades to black as the waltz music gently fades; by contrast, the next shot shows the exterior of Dragonwyck in a thunderstorm, with the diegetic music replaced by thrumming, off-kilter strings, an

appropriately ominous beginning to the night of Johanna's sudden death. The juxtaposition of these scenes, the one enchanting and the other horrifying, implies the close link between Miranda's fascination and her suppressed awareness of her proximity to danger. Late that night, Miranda discovers Katrine out of bed, listening to a woman's voice singing from the red room. As Miranda cannot hear the voice, she reassures Katrine that she is imagining things, despite Magda's warning that Azilde's ghost sings whenever disaster is about to befall a member of the Van Ryn family. While only those with Van Ryn blood can hear Azilde sing, Miranda's deafness to the song nevertheless resonates with her willful ignorance of dangers, cautions and criticisms. Her inattention to Magda's warnings, Turner's critique, and Katrine's fear portray her fascination with Nicholas, and life at Dragonwyck, as blinding and deafening. After Katrine expresses relief that the singing has finally stopped, Miranda, gazing blankly into the darkness, replies, "of course it has. It never started, really." However, rather than sounding convinced, Miranda appears as if deliberately suspending her suspicions so that she does not have to relinquish her idealized views of Nicholas and herself. The imminent death of Johanna, and the unexplained disappearance of Magda from the film, suggest Nicholas' deliberate removal of two perspectives that might challenge Miranda's immersion in naïve fascination.

Indeed, shortly after Nicholas and Miranda marry, Nicholas bristles at the mere suggestion of a gaze superior to his own. Throughout the film, Mankiewicz stages and shoots many scenes to emphasize Nicholas' height, as he towers over Johanna, Miranda, the farmers, and the servants; furthermore, his private retreat, the "tower room,"

associates his panoptic view with his desires for secrecy and power. Early in the film, when Johanna implies that Azilde's ghost continues to watch over Dragonwyck, Nicholas rebukes her, gazing contemptuously down at his much shorter wife; he suppresses the rumor of Azilde's presence as one might suppress a guilty conscience. Later, after her marriage to Nicholas, a pregnant Miranda, feeling concerned about Nicholas' future role as a father, tries to talk to him about her faith in God. In reply, he barks, "Do you believe there is a God who spends eternity snooping on human behavior?" He later adds, "I believe in myself and I am answerable to myself." Whereas Miranda's pious, authoritative father had watched over his family as surely as God watched over them all, Nicholas bristles at the notion of a gaze, and hence a power, superior to his. These instances clearly imply a link between Nicholas' gaze and his need for total control.

However, as the film progresses and events in Nicholas' personal and public life expose the limits of his control, we increasingly see his confident dismissals of contending gazes transform into allusions to his own "evil eye." These manifest after complications arise in Miranda's pregnancy and after Nicholas' tenants gain the right to own their own land. When Nicholas goes into town to ask Turner to hurry to Dragonwyck to make sure that Miranda's delivery will not endanger the child, he finds the doctor in a tavern, among Nicholas' recently emancipated tenant farmers. One of these farmers is seated on a chair placed on the bar, mimicking Nicholas' haughty behavior at the kermis ceremony. This carnivalesque reversal marks the end of Nicholas' period of control over his tenants. However, Nicholas simply chooses to ignore these proceedings, escorting Turner back to Dragonwyck. There, Miranda's obstetrician

privately complains to Turner of the patroon's imperious behavior, telling him, "[Nicholas] watches me all the time through those icy eyes of his. Sometimes I think he's mesmerizing me." Later, after the death of his infant son, Nicholas begins his descent into madness. Peggy, Miranda's personal maid, reports to Turner that "There's a blackness in that house and in him. His comin' and goin' and the look in his eye when he watches her." Whereas the portrait of Azilde and the kermis ceremony had manifested the power of the Van Ryn patriarchy to control and fascinate both wives and workers, the increasing references to Nicholas' evil eye portray these powers in decline.

Miranda's selection of Peggy, an Irish maid who walks with a limp, provokes a tellingly bitter reaction from Nicholas. After meeting her, he refers to Peggy as "it," rather than "she," and calls her an "untidy little cripple," a description borrowed from a line of dialogue in Seton's novel. In both the novel and the film, Nicholas tells Miranda that Peggy will be dismissed. However, in the film, when Miranda protests, he declares, "deformed bodies depress me." This line suggests a categorical bias against people with disabilities not seen in Seton's novel (in which Nicholas groups Peggy, instead, with "all the sluts who've led miserable lives") (229). Later, Nicholas' desire to dismiss Peggy takes on a eugenic resonance. Immediately after Miranda's newborn son dies of a heart defect, Nicholas tortures the grieving Peggy, asking her, "loathsome little cripple, why should you have been permitted to live and not my son?" Unable to accept the end of his reign over his tenant farmers, and his inability to pass his power to a male heir, Nicholas projects his feelings of powerlessness onto Peggy's disability. This defense mechanism echoes Albert Warren's projection of his own feelings of inadequacy onto disabled

women in Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase*. As I mentioned, in that film's famous scene, while the mute heroine looks at herself in the mirror, the villain's gaze on her reflection causes her mouth to "disappear." Thus, Albert's evil gaze is portrayed as the vehicle through which he projects lack. And, as we will see, in a climactic moment in *Dragonwyck*, Nicholas' evil gaze on Miranda behaves much the same way.

As I suggested earlier, portraiture aids in many female Gothic films' displacement of contemporary cultural trauma by locating the villain's motive within his personal past, usually originating from a childhood trauma associated with lack. In *Dragonwyck*, the portrait of Azilde, who was valued only as a vessel to produce a male heir, "explains" Nicholas' murder of Johanna as a fundamental necessity to maintain his patriarchy; according to its logic, women must be disposed of if they cannot produce a male heir. Thus, although Nicholas' pathology is not traced to an ahistorical, childhood trauma, his victimization of women is nevertheless regarded as a historical constant rather than a contemporary aberration; furthermore, like the Freudian traumas in *The Spiral Staircase* and *Shadow of a Doubt*, Nicholas' motivation is related to lack – not his personally, but a constitutive lack in the patriarchy of the power to perpetuate itself without women.

Thus, at the same time that the attractiveness of Azilde's portrait helps Nicholas suppress his family's history of psychic and physical violence against women, the portrait also helps suppress that violence's relationship to the cultural trauma of the Holocaust. However, as the film progresses, Mankiewicz increasingly associates Nicholas', and his family's, acts of violence with fascist mass murder. Nicholas' unwarranted antipathy for Peggy provides the first link between the Van Ryns' violence and the Holocaust; her

disability, as well as her Irish ethnicity, would mark her as physically and racially “inferior” in the eyes of the Nazi regime. Furthermore, the film’s gradual characterization of Nicholas as a delusional, power-mad, anti-democratic tyrant likens him to the Führer himself. Nonetheless, Miranda remains loyal to Nicholas, actively trying to help him reconcile himself to changes in their lives. However, despite her attempt to assert subjectivity and agency, when Miranda becomes aware of Nicholas’ acts of violence, Mankiewicz borrows visual conventions from the silent horror tradition to mirror his evil gaze with her passive, horrified gaze. Thus, the film underscores parallels between the two characters at the same time that it portrays Miranda’s momentary awareness of her repression of, and complicity in, his crimes. As I will argue, these choices allow us to interpret this moment as an indictment of Americans’ repression of their knowledge of the Holocaust.

SILENT HORROR AND THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

Despite Nicholas’ increasing isolation, after the death of their son, Miranda bravely decides to enter his tower room, where he spends most of his time alone. While she ascends the staircase, the lighting becomes quite expressionistic, with crisscrossing and splintered shadows. Mary Ann Doane notes this scene’s stylistic shift, suggesting that, “film noir lighting intensifies the sense of foreboding” (136). I would suggest that, beyond *film noir*, the lighting and setting recall German Expressionist silent film, particularly the shadowy staircase in F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922). When Miranda

enters the tower room, she finds Nicholas lying flat on his back, in shadow, quite like Dracula in his coffin. In the background, we see an image of the Catskill Mountains through a Gothic window frame, recalling the mountainous setting of, for example, Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). As Siegfried Kracauer would famously argue the year after *Dragonwyck*'s release, Weimar film reflected on the cultural conditions that ultimately gave rise to Nazism; in particular, he interprets Nosferatu's tyrannical power over his victims as a premonition of Hitler's rule. By stylizing Nicholas as a German Expressionist villain, Mankiewicz traces a similar connection between his character flaws, especially his maniacal need for control, and Hitler's. In a more overt reference to the foundations of Nazism, in response to Miranda's inquiries into his odd behavior, Nicholas treats her to a vulgar-Nietzschean monologue, presenting himself as a person freed from conventional morality: "I will not be chained into a routine of living which is the same for others. I will not look to the ground and move on the ground with the rest...not so long as there are those mountaintops and clouds and limitless space." Nicholas thus characterizes himself as a Nietzschean *Urbemensch*, amid a setting that makes the Catskills into the Alps.

If Nicholas is indirectly associated with Nazism via references to German Expressionist villains and Nietzschean philosophy, the film's further visual references to silent film, and especially silent horror, assert an affinity between Nicholas and Miranda. Like many female Gothic heroines, Miranda assumes an investigative role by entering Nicholas' chamber. Furthermore, she attempts to assert her subjectivity by looking Nicholas in the eye and begging him to love her and to let her love him. However,

Nicholas distances himself from Miranda and her “farm-bred, prayer-fattened morality” and refuses to meet her desiring gaze; at the end of the scene, Miranda appears as if she is about to realize something, but she quickly turns away from the camera. A few scenes later, Miranda, reading the Bible in her bedroom, is interrupted by a rare visit from Nicholas. As he stands haughtily above her, he is filmed like a silent film villain, in an arc of shadow. Miranda, at first, though she is amidst shadows, is filmed conventionally, in keeping with the typical style of the film thus far. Nicholas at first notes her frail beauty, and then states, “It would a pity if we were not to have another...if you were barren.” Despite the iciness of this statement, Miranda does not react in fear or horror, but rather turns aside, reasoning, “That’s a matter of the Lord’s will”; similarly, the style of the film remains consistent. However, the style in which she is filmed changes when Nicholas asks her, “Why do you suppose you are here, Miranda? By the Lord’s will or by mine? What you are is the reflection of what I wanted you to be. You live the life I gave you...Now you do look frightened.” The reaction shot of Miranda now echoes the previous shot of Nicholas, surrounding *her* in an arc of shadow familiar to the silent horror film. Her gaze at Nicholas is terrified, her eyes wide open, in an exaggerated acting style reminiscent of a silent horror film’s heroine.

Like the silent horror heroine’s confrontation with the physically deformed monster, this scene portrays the heroine’s punishment for her attempt to exert an active, investigative gaze. Although this scene does not depict a literal movie projection, it is analogous to the projection scenes that Doane analyzes from Max Ophüls’ *Caught* (1949) and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*. In those films, the Gothic villain dispossesses a woman

of her agency, humiliating her for her attempt to express desire through her gaze on an image of female beauty. Here, Miranda is punished for her attempt to assert her own will and claim an autonomous subjectivity. Nicholas confronts her with the truth behind her enchantment with Dragonwyck: she has fallen prey to a trap in which she is nothing more than an image – or a reflection – of his desire; when she thought she was actively choosing to identify with Azilde, she was actually becoming ensnared in a plot of Nicholas' design. It has been argued that, in Gothic literary fiction, the ultimate horror that confronts the heroine is that, while she believes she has been acting volitionally, she has unwittingly transformed herself into little more than a mirror. As Michelle A. Massé suggests, in the Gothic novel, “the horror from which the heroine cannot escape is the limitation of her identity to a mirror for the self-representations of father and husband” (682). Indeed, Nicholas holds up a mirror to Miranda, one that exposes her as a product of his desires. In effect, Nicholas “projects” the silent horror film style onto Miranda, manifesting the power of his fascinating gaze, not only to witness her transformation, but also to bend her will to his.

A mirror for Nicholas' “self-representations,” Miranda further mirrors the lack he defensively projects on to her. When Nicholas asks her what she is thinking, Miranda, looking aghast into his eyes, finally replies that she is thinking “of Johanna.” Indeed, at this moment, Miranda realizes that she and Johanna are, to Nicholas, equivalent in their inability to produce a male heir; though Miranda had believed herself special in Nicholas' eyes, she now realizes her affinity with her female precedents. In this scene, Nicholas, by implying that Miranda may be “barren,” projects his own feelings of powerlessness onto

Miranda, both his inability to produce an heir, as well as his recent loss of power over his former tenant farmers. Looking at Nicholas, Miranda becomes aware of the lack she represents in his eyes.

However, most disturbingly, Nicholas offers Miranda a distorting mirror of her own desires. As mentioned, Linda Williams notes “the strange sympathy and affinity that often develops between the monster and the girl” in silent horror films, arguing that this affinity may “be less an expression of sexual desire...and more a flash of sympathetic identification” (88). Through two complementary iris shots reminiscent of silent horror films, this scene underscores the extent to which Miranda and Nicholas can be seen as mirror images of one another. Though the film focuses on Miranda’s identification with Azilde, it has also allowed us to see how Miranda and Nicholas mirror one another, in the sense that they see themselves, and their desires, as exceptional. Early in the film, Miranda expresses herself as an anomaly, in her character and her desires. She states, “I try to be like everyone else and want what I’m supposed to want, but then I start thinking about people I’ve never known and places I’ve never been.” Echoing but expanding on Miranda’s protestation of her independence, Nicholas states, “I will not live by ordinary standards. I will not run with the pack. I will not be chained into a routine of living which is the same for others.” Thus, it is not only Miranda’s recognition of her lack of agency and subjectivity that is horrifying; it is also this mirroring of herself and Nicholas at the precise moment she becomes aware of his crimes.

In this scene, Miranda discovers that her chief interest in her own desires rendered her complicit in Nicholas’ suppression of his family’s violent past as well as his plot to

murder and replace Johanna to secure a male heir. As the film has gradually associated Nicholas' violence with fascist mass murder, this moment can be seen as an exposure, and indictment, of Americans' repressed knowledge of the Holocaust, despite early reports of its occurrence. This moment is one of pure, silent horror; Miranda appears shocked, but not in full possession of knowledge. After a long period, she can only name Johanna, Nicholas' most recent victim. Soon, Azilde begins to sing, and although Nicholas appears momentarily disturbed by the sound, he then insists that he didn't hear anything. However, Nicholas' suppression of Azilde's voice compels Miranda to finally recognize the truth of Magda's account of the ghost's presence. Miranda appears to have a wider awakening, declaring, "It's from the red room. The harpsichord! Azilde! Then Katrine did hear her that night when Johanna...and you must have heard her, too, and you must have been listening the night our little son...I never believed it really, but now I do." Thus, whereas Nicholas hurries to the red room, closing his eyes and plugging his ears below the haunted portrait, Miranda acts as though she is finally hearing, and seeing, the truth. However, while Miranda appears momentarily aware of the whole truth, she declares, "I don't believe it," in the next scene, after the doctor confronts Nicholas about the evidence that suggests he fatally poisoned Johanna. Thus, although the prior scene suggests that Miranda is no longer suppressing her knowledge of the Van Ryns' serial violence, this moment is brief and highly unstable, suggesting, at best, an impartial appreciation of the depth of Nicholas' pathology, or of Miranda's own guilty complicity. Nonetheless, this moment signals the limit of Mankiewicz's attempt to mobilize female

Gothic, and silent horror, conventions to address the United States' repressed knowledge of, and hence complicity in, the vast cultural trauma of the Holocaust.

While Miranda discovers her complicity in Nicholas' crimes after he has been repeatedly, yet indirectly, linked to Nazism, she is distanced from him in a subsequent scene in which he is most overtly compared to Hitler's tyranny. After Peggy accompanies Turner to Dragonwyck, he meets and fights with Nicholas, knocking him unconscious before leaving with Miranda. In the next scene, Nicholas is seated in his ancestral throne, speaking to an imaginary audience about the security of his hereditary power and his son's future role as patroon. Nicholas scorns his imagined audience's belief in "lives, liberties, happinesses," presenting himself as a deluded, effete European tyrant, opposed to American egalitarian principles and unwilling to admit defeat. Soon, Miranda and the doctor approach with a group of farmers and the town's mayor. The mayor informs Nicholas that he is under arrest. In contrast with the intimacy of the prior scene's staging, and its parallel iris shots of Miranda and Nicholas, Miranda is here distanced from Nicholas, as she stands amid the audience of Yankee townspeople. Despite her pleas, Nicholas refuses to be taken into custody and is shot by the mayor after he points a gun at Turner. The Yankee mayor is therefore ultimately responsible for the death of the anti-American tyrant.

Bernard Dick suggests that Anya Seton, the author of *Dragonwyck*, likely chose to set her novel in a period in American history that would "in some way reflect the struggle between the forces of tyranny and self-determination" (31). In the figure of Nicholas, the film appears to conflate feudalism and fascism as similarly anti-American.

Thus, while Miranda's affinity with Nicholas ultimately becomes consigned to her past, the global confrontation with fascism is similarly displaced as a dark chapter in American history that was overcome through a commitment to democratic principles. While the film displaces the contemporary cultural trauma of fascist mass murder into a Gothic narrative of serial murder, it also projects recent history, safely, into the distant historical past. Though the postwar spectator, identifying with Miranda, may be implicated in her suppression of a violent past, the film solicits the spectator's ultimate identification with the virtuous American crowd that finally puts an end to a cycle of repeating violence.

CONCLUSION

Through its early portrait scene in the red room, *Dragonwyck* makes the spectator aware that the solicited identification with Miranda entails a vicarious repression of reports of the Van Ryn patriarchy's violent past. Through its gradual characterization of Nicholas as a delusional, serially murderous tyrant with an antipathy for persons with disabilities, the film ultimately associates that violence with fascist mass murder. Thus, Miranda's momentary, horrified awareness of her long-standing repression of a violent past, and even of her blind complicity in Nicholas' violence, ultimately can be seen as an indictment of Americans' continuing repression of knowledge that fascist mass murders took place, as well as their early failure to respond, even when presented with evidence of these acts. However, the film, by then visually separating Miranda from Nicholas, strongly asserts distance and difference between the enemy onstage (the effete, European

tyrant) and the good guys in the audience (the Yankee farmers, Miranda, and, by extension, the postwar American spectator). And ultimately, by showing Miranda disregarding her time at Dragonwyck as a “nightmare,” the film consigns the Holocaust, and America’s relationship to it, to the past, allowing the spectator to “forget” what s/he has just been asked, albeit indirectly, to remember. Nonetheless, Mankiewicz, like Hitchcock and Siodmak, was able to marshal visual and narrative conventions from the female Gothic cycle and the silent horror tradition to address, obliquely and consequently deeply, the implications of a cultural trauma few other contemporary directors were willing to approach.

Chapter 3

Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*, Fascism, and the Gothic Tradition

Near the end of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* (1950), the conniving young actress, Eve Harrington, chats with the equally conniving theatre critic, Addison DeWitt, in her hotel room, hours before her debut in a play by the promising young playwright, Lloyd Richards. Eve informs Addison of her intention to steal Lloyd from his wife so that she can marry him and star in his future plays. Addison decides that it is finally time to use his knowledge of Eve's past deceptions to blackmail her, stating, "I have come to tell you that you will not marry Lloyd – or anyone else – because I will not permit it." Eve then asks, "What have you got to do with it?" to which Addison replies, "Everything. Because after tonight, you will belong to me." In a state of shock, Eve stammers, "Belong – to you? That sounds medieval – something out of an old melodrama," to which Addison curtly responds, "So does the history of the world for the past twenty years."

What might this brief dialogue imply about the plot of *All About Eve*'s relationship to the medieval and to the melodrama? And how does Addison's "medieval" possession of Eve relate to the history of the world in the 1930s and '40s? To answer the first question, it will be instructive to trace the film's links to the Gothic, a narrative tradition steeped in the (pseudo-)medieval and closely related to the melodrama. It will be especially illuminating to analyze the film's relationship to a series of 1940s film

melodramas dubbed the “female Gothic” cycle, which included Mankiewicz’s first directorial effort, 1946’s *Dragonwyck*. To answer the second question, I will build on my second chapter, which analyzed how Mankiewicz and other directors used female Gothic conventions to indirectly address Nazism in the 1940s by displacing its mass-murders into Gothic narratives of serial murder. Thus, while tracing *All About Eve*’s links to these female Gothic films, I will also be able to analyze its relationship to World War II and, in particular, fascist aggression. In short, I will use the female Gothic as a code to crack *All About Eve*’s subtextual relationship to fascism.

All About Eve has, in fact, never been discussed in relation to the female Gothic film cycle. In her 1984 study, *Women’s Film and Female Experience: 1940-1950*, sociologist Andrea Walsh did link Mankiewicz’s prior Academy Award-winning “woman’s picture,” *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), to the female Gothic, despite its lack of conventional Gothic trappings. Walsh suggests that this film, rather than portray a heroine who fears that her husband may be trying to murder her or drive her insane, instead foregrounds three modern women’s suspicions of their husbands’ infidelity. Thus, instead of a narrative that depicts a woman’s fears that she will be murdered by her Bluebeard husband and replaced with another woman, such as we saw in *Dragonwyck*, the film portrays women’s fears of being deserted by their husbands for another woman, fears that Walsh suggests were heightened among American women in the wartime and postwar periods.

Like *A Letter to Three Wives*, *All About Eve* portrays a woman’s anxiety about being “replaced” in her marriage, but the film also foregrounds her fear that a younger

woman will usurp her career. However, rather than the naïve young wife of the typical female Gothic film, *All About Eve* stars Bette Davis as the outspoken, experienced actress Margo Channing. And rather than an older, dissembling Gothic husband, Channing is paired with her younger, forthright director, Bill Sampson, played by Gary Merrill. In a curious twist, at the beginning of the film's lengthy flashback, it is the infamous ingénue, Eve Harrington, performed by Anne Baxter, who first resembles a stereotypical Gothic heroine; as the film progresses, however, she gradually transforms into a female variation on the male Gothic villain, attempting to replace her predecessor herself. Ultimately, though, she is outmaneuvered by Addison DeWitt, a power-hungry, effete snob, a wry caricature of the typical Gothic villain played by the urbane George Sanders. These elements suggest that the film, rather than depart from the Gothic, deliberately refigures its narrative conventions.

As I concluded in my previous chapter, in his 1946 film, *Dragonwyck*, Mankiewicz foregrounds his Yankee heroine's fascination by a serially murderous despot to indict the United States for its ignorance to early signs that the Holocaust was taking place. Late in that film, visual references to silent horror film, and especially German Expressionism, shockingly mirror the villain and the heroine at the moment she becomes aware of her complicity in her husband's crimes; this moment represents the film's most pointed indictment of Americans' willful ignorance to evidence that the Holocaust was taking place. However, I argued, the film tacks on a happy ending that starkly distinguishes the heroine (and her Yankee suitor) from the punished villain, and consequently Americans from Nazis, while also displacing fascism, safely, into the past.

In this chapter, I argue that *All About Eve*, by contrast, offers a “meta-Gothic” narrative that, by quoting and reworking female Gothic conventions, revises *Dragonwyck*’s easeful consignment of fascism to the past. Instead, *All About Eve* implies that America’s confrontation with the horrors of fascism, and its own early complicity in fascist mass violence, has shattered the nation’s self-identity. Repressing this traumatic encounter, the postwar United States compulsively and ironically mimics the fascism it had previously defined itself against. Ultimately, the film projects fascism indefinitely into the future by likening both the American culture industry and the mutual surveillance advocated under McCarthyism to fascist forms of power. Whereas, through Margo Channing, the film may conservatively mirror and endorse American women’s “patriotic” surrender of work for marriage, increasingly overt references to the Gothic suggest the surprising irruption of fascism in postwar American life, ultimately mirroring Eve, the all-American “heroine,” and Addison, the dictatorial villain.

SARAH SIDDONS AS THE TRAGIC IDOL

Although, as I stated in my second chapter, Mankiewicz has attained a reputation as a brilliant writer and director of actors, his films are often denigrated for their lack of visual style. However, as in *Dragonwyck*, portraits in *All About Eve* provide a variety of meaningful “figures of spectatorship,” a phrase Judith Mayne uses to indicate how a film’s inclusion of the visual arts can offer the spectator a range of interpretations of the film (154). In *Dragonwyck*, Mankiewicz repeatedly foregrounds a portrait of Azilde, the

great-grandmother of the aristocratic Gothic villain, Nicholas Van Ryn. This portrait serves as an object with which Miranda, the film's young heroine and hired companion to the Van Ryns' daughter, pleasurably over-identifies, fantasizing about becoming the "mistress of Dragonwyck." The image's beauty blinds Miranda to signs that her own life might be in danger, compelling her to suppress rumors that Azilde committed suicide after suffering her husband's abuse. The portrait, while it initially associates Azilde with value and irreplaceability, is ultimately revealed as a ruse, a tool of Nicholas' seduction; as Miranda discovers after marrying Nicholas (shortly after his first wife's death), Van Ryn wives are only desired as producers of male heirs, replaceable if they cannot fulfill this function. At the last moment, Miranda must dis-identify with the portrait of Azilde (and all this image represents of honor, aristocracy, and desirability) so that she can awaken from her narcissistic spell of fascination before her husband tries to kill her.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the first appearance of Azilde's arresting portrait prompts a debate between two metanarrative interpretations of the film's plot thus far: naïve and skeptical. The former interpretation belongs to Miranda, who is fascinated with the portrait image of Azilde. Miranda looks on Azilde and imagines the romance and glamor of her life at Dragonwyck, a life she has likely dreamt of living herself. By contrast, the elderly servant, Magda, is not fascinated by the image but rather moved to tell Miranda the story of Azilde's tragic life and suicide. Unable to shake Miranda out of her spell of fascination, Magda slyly cajoles her, asking, "why do you think you have been brought to Dragonwyck?" exhibiting skepticism about the flimsy "companion" narrative Miranda so naively accepts. However, Magda's critical

comments are rudely swished aside, and once Miranda herself becomes “mistress of Dragonwyck,” Magda disappears from the film entirely.

In the first scene of *All About Eve*, at the annual Sarah Siddons society’s awards ceremony for “distinguished achievement in the theatre,” tens of portraits adorn the exclusive club’s walls. While none features a figure like Azilde who will play a major role in the film’s plot, the scene nevertheless portrays competing perspectives on the film’s events that are analogous to those foregrounded in the first “portrait scene” in *Dragonwyck*. However in *All About Eve*, the scene appears to foreground naïve and suspicious perspectives on Eve, the ostensible heroine, rather than on the Gothic husband’s intentions or the life of a portrait figure. The naïve perspective belongs to the awards presenter, an aged actor who sings Eve’s praises before presenting her with her Siddons trophy. As a speech act, his introduction of Eve summons her into the pantheon of great theatre actors that appear in portraits behind her. Furthermore, his earnest perspective on Eve itself mimics the naïve reception of portraiture. For example, he associates her with values commonly ascribed to painted portraits, such as originality, faithfulness, and tradition. He also naively assumes that he is “privileged to know her” simply by viewing her (onstage and offstage) performances, similar to the way portraits are often thought to image forth a person’s spirit, even though the sitter is (to varying degrees) performing as a subject. Like Miranda’s gaze on Azilde, the actor’s fascination with Eve is narcissistic in that his praise of her is also praise for the noble values of the theatrical society of which he is a member and spokesman.

By contrast, Addison's view of Eve, detectable both in his over-voiced narration and in his skeptical facial expressions, is detached and pointedly suspicious. Dripping with sarcasm, his monologue suggests that, "You all know all there is to know about Eve. What could there possibly be that you don't already know?" suggesting, of course, that there is much more to her than has been "covered," "revealed," and "reported" by the fawning fan magazines. Instead of mimicking the naïve reception of portraiture, Addison's view of Eve appears attuned to her manipulation of her public image. It is as if Addison alone wears the x-ray glasses that allow him to see the truth about Eve than none other fully knows. In fact, rather than appear like a portrait figure, Eve appears, in the context of Addison's monologue, as a monstrous hybrid of high and low culture. The staging of the awards ceremony itself initially helps distinguish Eve from the portrait figures behind her. When we are finally allowed a good look at Eve, after the awards presenter finishes his speech, our look is obscured by the bursting of flashbulbs from the press photographers' cameras. These flashes cast dark shadows on the portraits behind Eve, likely implying her celebrity's "overshadowing" of the fame of her stage thespian predecessors. Eve literally stands between mass culture's cameras and the portraits of her predecessors, introduced by the film as a transitional or liminal figure.

As Theresa Sanders points out, in Addison's wry freeze-frame composition, when Eve reaches out to grasp the statuette, her pose is frozen in an involuntary tableau, made to resemble that of the Biblical Eve reaching for the fruit of the tree of knowledge in several classical paintings (53). As we learn at the end of the film, Eve is the pseudonym of Gertrude Slescyński; she likely chose the name "Eve" because of its associations with

femininity and originality, perhaps in order to compensate for her occasionally butch offstage demeanor as well as her studied mimicry of Margo. However, in Addison's composition, Eve is associated with her namesake's sin of betrayal. While his freeze-frame image foreshadows Eve's series of betrayals throughout the film, the nature of the image is itself transgressive. That is, while this freeze-frame mimics classical painting, it equally mimics the photographs of celebrity culture that will develop from the press' manic picture taking. In Addison's ironic composition, the rite of succession between the old actor and the young actress is interrupted before it can be completed. Although the aged award presenter believes he is witnessing theatrical tradition seamlessly passed down to the next generation, Addison intervenes, suggesting that Eve is radically unlike her predecessors. Whereas they were associated with portraiture, she is portrayed through an image that hybridizes a mechanically reproducible image from mass culture with an original painting. Although Addison suggests later in the film that "there never was, and there never will be another" like Eve, his ironic composition portrays her as an original, monstrous hybrid of the unique and the derivative, not an original portrait figure.

Addison's monologue subtly associates Eve with another travesty of a famous painting, the statuette reproduction of Sir Joshua Reynolds' portrait, *Sarah Siddons as the Muse of Tragedy*. The symbolic heft of this statuette is signaled by its appearance in the very first shot of the film, a close-up on the award. When the award appears a second time, before we have even been given a clear shot of Eve, the camera zooms in on it slowly as Addison repeats her name four times: "Eve Harrington. Eve...but more of Eve, later. All about Eve, in fact." This mismatch between the audio and the image is

foretelling; at the end of the film, a dialogue between Eve and Addison suggests a mutual understanding that Eve and the award are interchangeable – “the same thing,” in fact. However, even at this early moment in the film, Mankiewicz (via Addison, his directorial proxy) slyly identifies Eve with the award statuette. Like Addison’s freeze-framed composition of Eve with her arms outstretched, the Sarah Siddons award offers a travesty of an original painting, while Addison’s comparison of Eve to the award introduces her as an unfaithful mimic, both duplicitous and inauthentic. Furthermore, as a 360 degree version of a painted portrait, the award mimics the press’ purportedly comprehensive view of Eve, while also foreshadowing Eve’s consuming, all-seeing gaze on Margo she exerts later in the film. However, through Addison’s introductory monologue, Eve already appears to represent a transition to a new era of voracious visual consumption, one in which both public and private lives are subject to scrutiny.⁷

The transformation of Sarah Siddons into a mechanically reproducible statuette, similar to the portrait of Azilde in *Dragonwyck*, emblemizes a woman marshaled into serving under a regime in which she becomes replaceable. In the case of *Dragonwyck*, the beautiful portrait of Azilde helps sustain the cruel Van Ryn patriarchy by fascinating young women like Mirada into marriage; in *All About Eve*, as I will later elucidate, the award fascinates women like Eve into participating in the culture industry. Drawing on portraiture’s associations with originality and irreplaceability, the Van Ryn men use the image of Azilde to hide their view that wives are expendable. Similarly, drawing on the

⁷ While tattling gossip columns did not appear suddenly in the 1950s, the decade did see the rise of magazines like *Confidential* which differed greatly from studio-linked fan magazines in their search for the most lurid or shocking details of celebrities’ private lives.

prestige and fame of the actress Sarah Siddons, the award statuette attempts to conceal the fact that modern celebrity is more fleeting than theatrical fame, and that, after Eve's brief reign, the award (and the attention) will simply be given to the next young actress. In *Dragonwyck*, Azilde's haunted portrait can "sing," bearing witness to the suppressed truth of violence against Van Ryn wives; in *All About Eve*, the smothered Siddons is silent, and it is up to Addison to deflate, through satire, the awards ceremony's pretensions. Furthermore, as I will later elucidate, Eve's own silence in the opening scene foreshadows her objectification by the culture industry via Addison, its sinister embodiment.

Despite the fact that Eve is repeatedly regarded as a genuine talent, she ultimately sacrifices autonomy to attain celebrity. In her canny attempt to become famous without giving up power, Eve initially crafts a fictional private past to maximize her public appeal; however, she fails to concoct a fiction watertight enough to survive Addison's penetrating gaze, which is even stronger and more consuming than her own. Eve's fictional backstory is one Addison will later sarcastically label "tragic." Appropriately, Mankiewicz selected a tragic figure for his award statuette; it is hard to believe such a choice is arbitrary, given that an engraving of Siddons will appear, in close-up, midway through the film, and that the award multiplies in the film's mirrored, final shot (all appearances indicated in the screenplay). If Addison's early monologue subtly likens Eve to the Siddons award, the comparison does not only associate her with mimicry, betrayal, and an uncanny blend of originality and reproducibility. It also introduces her as a fraudulent imitation of a tragic figure.

“BLOODHOUNDS SNAPPIN’ AT HER REAR END”: TRAGEDY INTO
MELODRAMA

If the opening scene of *All About Eve* repeatedly foregrounds the image of a tragic figure, it also structures the film in a way that echoes tragedy. As Robin Swicord suggests, “Unlike most films, *All About Eve* does not suspend itself from ‘Will the protagonist succeed?’, but takes the more provocative line, ‘How does she succeed?’ Because we know where the story is going this brilliant comedy unfolds with the sensibility of tragedy” (59). While the film’s lengthy flashback, which shows how Eve rises to success, is narrated by a series of characters, it is Addison’s perspective that is dominant. As Bernard Dick notes, “Although Mankiewicz appeared to be using three narrators, he made one of them, Addison De Witt, the supreme consciousness; a surrogate director to whom he delegated authority” (154). Only Addison is privy to all of Eve’s deceits and, although he “directs” Karen to narrate the first section of the flashback, it is his over-voice that ultimately concludes it. Thus, it could be said that it is Addison who infuses the film with the “sensibility of tragedy.” Just as his freeze frame, portraying Eve as her Biblical namesake, paid mock-obeisance to her crafted public persona, his choice to structure the film as a “mock-tragedy” pays ironic tribute to her early performance as a tragic figure.

However, while the visual arts and reproductions are crucial to the opening scene’s foreshadowing of Eve’s questionable character, a subsequent reference to the

performing arts solicits the spectator's emotional over-identification with Eve. In the flashback's first scene, Eve ingratiates herself with Margo and her backstage circle by telling them the story of her humble upbringing, the tragic death of her husband in World War II, and her consequent obsession with stage actress Margo Channing. Although no one initially appears to doubt the veracity of Eve's narrative, Mankiewicz chooses to foreground the performative dimension of this story by positioning Eve's listeners as a backstage "audience" facing the central performer. Nevertheless, while watching Eve's monologue, everyone appears moved to silence and sympathy. While Miranda's gaze on Azilde was openly narcissistic, expressing her desire to see herself as the "mistress of Dragonwyck," Margo and her circle's gaze on Eve is also narcissistic, in that Eve's narrative of tragic loss and compensatory theatergoing validates their profession as sustaining and culturally important. Eve, we will later discover, has cleverly crafted a backstory that will provoke her backstage audience's feelings of sympathy, pride, and superiority.

However, like the aforementioned early scene in *Dragonwyck* that contrasts a naïve, fascinated perspective with a skeptical, detached one, this scene in *All About Eve* similarly portrays a markedly lower class character's verbal interruption of another character's narcissistic gaze. Birdie, Margo's sharp-tongued attendant expertly played by Thelma Ritter, upsets Margo and her company's stunned silence following Eve's sorrowful monologue. Although her eyes are full of emotion, Birdie turns to Eve, remarking, "What a story. Everything but the bloodhounds snappin' at her rear end." As Mankiewicz's screenplay notes, "[t]hat breaks the spell," producing a similar effect to

Magda's momentary intrusion into Miranda's hypnotized gaze on the image of Azilde (26). Like Magda in *Dragonwyck*, Birdie is, as Judith Roof calls her, the "conscience and metanarrative acumen" of her film, standing outside the story so that she can comment on it (101). However, just as Miranda swatted away Magda's warnings as "kitchen gossip," effectively putting Magda in her place, Margo diminishes Birdie as a "fifth-rate vaudevillian" who should nevertheless "understand and respect" human experiences that take place outside a "vaudeville house." Thus, although the joke momentarily breaks Eve's "spell," Birdie is belittled for it, foreshadowing the difficulties she will experience in trying to get Margo to see the truth about Eve, once everyone's infatuation with Eve has set in.

Birdie's likening of Eve's tragic narrative to vaudeville recalls Addison's association of Eve with the mechanically reproduced statuette and the press' photography: it undercuts the self-seriousness and false genuineness of her crafted public image. Addison and Birdie momentarily dethrone Eve from her claims to high culture, dissociating her from the grandeur of portraiture and tragedy, respectively. However, both characters (at least at this point in the film) appear to be outside observers, incapable of effecting change or altering other characters' perspectives. Interestingly, both Magda and Birdie (and Addison, for that matter) are coded as queer⁸ and their ironic perspectives on others' earnest investments recall a role of camp. In David Halperin's recent book, *How to be Gay*, he notes one function of camp: to turn "tragedy into melodrama" (297). Indeed, that is quite literally what Birdie's joke does to Eve's tragic backstory: it

⁸ Regarding Magda, see my previous chapter. Regarding Addison and Birdie, see Corber.

translates personal tragedy into the idiom of stage melodrama, specifically referring to the stage version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Camp, according to Halperin, functions as a queer defense against the culturally dominant (and heteronormative) genre of tragedy; camp's perspective is essentially aristocratic, refusing to take middle-class tragedies seriously. While Birdie, as she later states, did not intend to hurt Eve's feelings, her joke nevertheless exposes the cultural capital associated with tragedy. Eve, by linking herself to tragedy, and especially the nation's war grief, positions herself as a figure with whom one *must* sympathize and take seriously. In Halperin's view, while a rivalry between men of different generations is often the substance of tragedy, female intergenerational rivalry can never rise above the level of melodrama; in *All About Eve*, Eve initially styles herself as a tragic figure and plays at loftiness throughout much of the film, refusing to engage when Margo provokes her with her cattiest dialogue. Eve's embrace of tragedy (and refusal to stoop to melodrama) is as utilitarian and calculated as her love of the theatre (and her purported scorn for Hollywood). She recognizes that her private life, publicized in print, is as important as her onstage performances in crafting an embraceable public identity.⁹

EVE, THE CANNY CINDERELLA

⁹ Thus, Eve, like Sarah Siddons, creates opportunities by associating herself with tragedy, allowing her to pursue her acting career while maintaining a public image of chaste femininity; this behavior reminds us how Siddons cannily leveraged the grandeur of tragic performances to rise above the low reputation actresses enjoyed in her time (see Asleson). Furthermore, like Eve, Siddons was expert in exploiting details of her private life to appeal to popular "audience sentiment" (West 6). In both instances, original and reproduced images helped Siddons communicate her crafted public image to her adoring public.

Although Eve initially elects to associate herself with tragedy and the theatre, she in fact resembles heroines of film melodramas, particularly female Gothic films. While only Birdie exhibits wariness of her familiar-sounding life story, the relationship between Eve's fictional past and melodramatic narratives becomes clearer as the film progresses, especially in its Gothic depiction of Eve's ultimate entrapment. Just as references to the silent horror film haunted, and fully emerged at the end of, *Dragonwyck* to foreground parallels between the Gothic villain and heroine, so too does the female Gothic melodrama simmer beneath, and gradually manifest in, *All About Eve*.

Despite the fact that Margo and her circle initially see Eve as a guileless, authentic person, Eve's early monologue recalls the backstories of several heroines of Mankiewicz's melodramatic "women's pictures." For example, Deborah, the Navy veteran and postwar newlywed in *A Letter to Three Wives*, delivers a similar monologue about her humble upbringings and travels, set to a heart-tugging score (also by Alfred Newman) that anticipates Eve's winsome theme. However, in the end, Eve more closely resembles Lora Mae from the same film, a young woman who grew up on the wrong side of the tracks but, in part by feigning innocence and obsequiousness, seduces the owner of the company she works for. At one point in that film, when Deborah is about to read a fairy story to an underprivileged child, Lora Mae interjects that she "grew up on" fairy stories, but that she ultimately "wrote her own," conniving (and starring in) a tale of rags to riches. Eve not only resembles Lora Mae because of rumors that she had an affair with her boss at the brewery; she also shares that character's canny ability to play off others'

investment in fairytale narratives that depict the rise of sincere and beautiful women out of poverty.

It is almost as if Eve had studied Mankiewicz's prior women's pictures for performances of meek femininity, ultimately selecting Miranda from *Dragonwyck* as her chief role model. Both Eve and Miranda are introduced as the young, feminine daughters of poor farmers; as children, both were prone to dream and make believe, and would confuse their fantasies with reality. Miranda, unsatisfied with the prospect of marrying a farmer and settling down in her hometown, sees her distant cousin's invitation to live at Dragonwyck as a dream come true. Eve, like Miranda, holds onto desires that will eventually take her beyond the drudgery of the world she was born into. Having moved to Milwaukee, working as a secretary in a brewery to help support her parents, Eve finds a small theatre company, a "drop of rain on the desert," that gives her the chance to express herself onstage. Ultimately, Miranda's dreams of romance and Eve's love of make-believe lead them to narcissistically over-identify with female ideals; in Miranda's case, she becomes fascinated with the portrait of Azilde, whereas Eve, ostensibly, becomes obsessed with Margo Channing.

Although Eve's fascination with Margo can be linked back to her childhood escapes into fantasy, Eve differs from Miranda in that a personal trauma ostensibly precipitated her over-identification with Margo. According to Eve's story, the death of her husband in the war's South Pacific theater prompted her to transfer her affection from him to Margo. Thus, Eve (self-consciously, as we later discover) stands for all American war widows, and American war suffering more generally. Her fascination with Margo

implies and plays on an ambient pop-psychological idea about how, in the postwar period, popular culture and identification with celebrities offered refuge from recent war grief. In *Dragonwyck*, Miranda's narcissistic fascination with Azilde's image is not motivated by an experience of trauma; quite the opposite, Miranda's fascination compels her to suppress Magda's narrative about Azilde's tragic life and suicide, and the possibility that a series of Van Ryn wives endured such traumas at the hands of their husbands. Thus, whereas Miranda's fascination was ahistorical, blinding her to a history of Van Ryn wives' perpetual personal traumas that extends into the previous century, Eve's fascination with Margo (and Margo's circle's fascination with Eve) is openly predicated on the recent trauma of World War II.

Whereas *Dragonwyck* manifested Americans' blindness to the Holocaust through Miranda's willful ignorance to her husband's past violence against women, *All About Eve* initially foregrounds Eve's obsession with Margo as a post-war, post-traumatic symptom. Eve's compulsive returns to the theatre echo Freudian repetition compulsion. In many female Gothic films, Gothic horror represents the return of psychic or physical violence from the past, violence that is often linked, directly or indirectly, to the war itself; thus, certain female Gothic films' narratives offer microcosms in which global catastrophes replay themselves.¹⁰ By contrast, instead of compulsively returning to a scene of trauma, Eve returns to a source of pleasure. Margo, as a star, is immortal, and her repeated

¹⁰ Female Gothic heroines often have personal traumas in their pasts. Eve's tragic past resembles those of the second Mrs. DeWinter from *Rebecca* (1940), Paula from *Gaslight* (1944), and Helen from *The Spiral Staircase* (1945). However, Eve's tragic backstory is linked to a recent cultural trauma, and in this she resembles Leslie from 1944's *Dark Waters*, and anticipates Victoria from *The House on Telegraph Hill*, released in 1951.

performances of *Aged in Wood* offer Eve comfort and predictability. Eve, by marking herself with a national catastrophe, conceives of her eventual success as a metaphor for national survival, a testament to faith in the power of entertainment.

Thus, while Eve's widowhood presents her as a metonym for American war suffering, her rise to fame parallels the country's postwar regeneration. A similar interpretation has been applied to the 1946 novel by R.A. Dick, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, that Mankiewicz adapted into his 1947 film of the same name. That film also features a young widow and exhibits Gothic overtones. In Margaret Stetz's article on the novel, she notes the work's generic heterogeneity. She coins the term "Gothic comedy" to reflect the novel's mixture of suspense and humor in its indirect response to serious issues like women's postwar widowhood (94). Stetz argues that the character of Lucy, a mourning but fiercely independent widow, represents both the losses and the opportunities facing many among the book's British female wartime readers. In his adaptation of the novel, Mankiewicz continued the author's use of the Gothic to address the cultural trauma of war grief and, especially, widowhood, and likewise added comedy. That film, like the novel on which it was based, turns personal tragedy into "Gothic comedy," or melodrama, because it would be difficult to address the complexity of postwar women's lives using the Gothic or comedy alone.

The Ghost and Mrs. Muir displaces the trauma of war losses into a turn-of-the-century woman's grief for a husband she never loved, allowing the novel and the film a frankness and lightness of touch that would be impossible were the heroine a war widow. By contrast, *All About Eve* initially displaces war trauma into the narrative of Eve's tragic

loss of her pilot husband, a kindred spirit who, as it is later revealed, never existed. Eve is thus a meta-Gothic heroine, a self-aware travesty of a widow, who plays this role to her advantage while initially escaping detection as a fraud. However, as Eve begins showing signs of villainy, it is Margo who becomes the film's main Gothic heroine; in contrast with Eve (and in resemblance to Lucy from *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*), Margo is not presented as a tragic heroine, but rather a heroine who, by blending elements of tragedy and comedy, provides a broader perspective on postwar women's lives – and who ultimately provides them an alternate, morally upright figure of identification.

MARGO, THE TRAGICOMIC CINDERELLA

Shortly after Bill, Margo's director and boyfriend, leaves New York to direct a film in Hollywood, Eve's suspicious behavior shifts the film's focus onto Margo, who becomes its central, Gothic heroine. This transition begins when Bill, before getting on the plane, calls out "Hey – junior..." to both Margo and Eve. Though Eve assumes he's talking to her (as he had twice called her "junior" that night), Margo also looks up, suspecting he may be continuing a playful joke about her age; then, when he calls out, "Keep your eyes on her. Don't let her get lonely. She's a loose lamb in a jungle," he's using the phrase Margo had just used to describe Eve ("loose lamb"), instead, to describe Margo. Thus, the tables are turned, with Margo becoming the vulnerable childlike woman and Eve assuming the role of the protector. As Robert J. Corber notes, Eve takes Bill's place, walking with Margo away from the tarmac, their arms linked. Furthermore,

following Bill's instructions to an extreme, Eve will indeed keep her "eyes on" Margo, studying her every move.

Margo unknowingly alludes to her new status as heroine after Eve moves in to her apartment and begins serving as her personal assistant; Margo notes, in an over-voice, that her life has become a "fairy tale" in which she enjoys the role of "Cinderella in the last act." Although Eve herself had initially appeared as the film's meek, feminine Cinderella, Margo's simile now casts Eve as Prince Charming. However, as we will see, Eve will increasingly resemble a female variation on the "Bluebeard" Gothic husband. This shift echoes the archetypal female Gothic plot in which, according to Helen Hanson, "Prince Charming [b]ecomes Bluebeard" (67). Eve, like many female Gothic husbands, becomes characterized by the disturbing power of her gaze and her ability to cause Margo, the Gothic heroine, to question her sanity. Like the surveilling Gothic husband (and rather like Mrs. Danvers, her predatory foremother) Eve is often secretly present in Margo's scenes before appearing onscreen. Furthermore, when Margo's phone rings at 3AM and the operator tells her that she placed a call to Bill, Margo then asks, "Am I crazy, Bill?" unaware that Eve had requested the call; this moment, in which appliance malfunction leads a woman to question her sanity, ironically recalls Cukor's *Gaslight* (1946), fueling Margo's suspicions about both Eve's, and Bill's, intentions.

If Margo becomes the film's heroine, the spectator's new principal figure of identification, she resembles the Gothic heroine at a later stage in that character's conventional arc. Whereas Eve first appears naïve and isolated, much like Miranda in early scenes of *Dragonwyck*, Margo resembles the married Gothic heroine who begins to

suspect her husband's malicious intentions.¹¹ Slowly heeding Birdie's warnings, Margo becomes suspicious of Eve's possible romance with Bill (while not yet anticipating Eve's designs on her roles onstage). After Margo repeatedly accuses Bill of having an affair with Eve, he diagnoses her with "paranoia," further likening her to the Gothic heroine; indeed Mary Ann Doane first termed the female Gothic cycle the "paranoid woman's film" (142). Unlike the typical female Gothic husband, however, Bill appears to have no intention of betraying Margo. Margo's anxiety about Bill's fidelity, and her related identity crisis at approaching the end of her stage career, nonetheless reflect the film's female audiences' anxieties about their husbands' fidelity and their ultimate surrendering of work for marriage. Whereas Eve directly links herself to the war through her experience of widowhood and loneliness, Margo's fear of abandonment and her changing sense of identity position her as the film's central figure of identification for a wider range of postwar American women. As we shall see, she takes on this role by adopting a contrasting relationship to tragedy, melodrama, and the visual arts.

Eve, through her choice of her pseudonym and through the awards presenter's introduction, initially posed as an original actress associated with high culture; by contrast, Margo repeatedly, and comically, compares the events of her life to various low narrative genres such as Hollywood B-films ("Do I get dragged off screaming to the snake pit?"), comedy ("I'll wear rompers and come in rolling a hoop"), and Dickensian melodrama ("little Nell from the country"), refusing to take herself entirely seriously and aware of the farcical roles one inevitably plays in life. Notably, Eve never compares

¹¹ Corber suggests that Eve's fascination with Margo, with its lesbian undertones, is reciprocated.

herself to another fictional character, presenting herself as a true original until the very end of the film, when she finally realizes she's been irrevocably cast as a character in Addison's melodrama. Although Margo doesn't obsess over her utter originality, the film's visual style pays tribute to her as an original. Near the end of the film's climactic party scene, right before going to bed, Margo bitterly engages Eve. She is standing several steps above Eve and the others, next to a large oil portrait of an elegantly attired woman, likely a theatre actress herself.¹² Below, Eve is standing in front of a framed and matted reproduction of what appears to be a French Impressionist painting of a young woman. The contrast between the two women, literally high and low, older and younger, star and soon-to-be understudy, is complemented by the contrast between the two works, one original, the other a reproduction. Margo here appears as the original, imperious queen while Eve is the derivative, servile princess.¹³

This exchange takes place on the night of Bill's birthday and homecoming party, a scene that uses a range of artworks and reproductions in its complex tribute to the talents of Margo and, by extension, Bette Davis herself. The first is a Sarah Siddons award on Margo's mantelpiece. The offhanded appearance of the award among Margo's other possessions, including a reproduction of Toulouse-Lautrec's *Aristide Bruant dans son cabaret*, makes it clear that she is not over-identified with the award the way the film has characterized Eve. Rather than identify her with the award statuette, the film

¹² This is likely one of the "sixty oil portraits of bygone stars" that Little, the art director, commissioned for the film, as far fewer than this number appear in the opening scene (Moore, Tait, and Johnson 9).

¹³ Indeed, in this scene, Margo asks Eve to stop treating her like the "Queen Mother," and, in the next scene, will refer to Eve as "Princess Fire-and-Music."

indirectly likens Margo to the actress Sarah Siddons herself, who was best known for her tragic roles. The first moment of identification arrives when Lloyd notes tension in Margo's behavior and asks her about the "Macbethish" foreboding in the air. Of course, one of Siddons' most famous roles was Lady Macbeth. However, Margo's evening, although seen by her as a tragic prelude to Bill's abandonment, offsets tragedy with comedy, producing the memorable line, "fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy night." Indeed, the fact that Margo is acting, as Addison says later, "maudlin and full of self-pity" renders her both sympathetic as a comic figure and ridiculous as a tragic figure.¹⁴ Thus, while the film indirectly compares Margo with Sarah Siddons, it portrays Margo, and Bette Davis herself, as original, appealing melodramatic heroines.¹⁵

Margo is further ironically associated with Sarah Siddons when she greets Addison DeWitt at the door, accompanied by an ambitious young actress, Miss Caswell, played by Marilyn Monroe. Although Margo is holding a cocktail in one hand and a cigarette in the other, Addison rudely drapes Miss Caswell's white fur coat over one of her arms after directing the ambitious Miss Caswell to a theatrical producer. As Birdie takes the coat from Margo, Margo hoists her cocktail glass in the air, declaring "Ah, men!" as a private toast to their obsequiousness before female beauty. With one arm raised and the other still extended, Margo looks like a tableau vivant of Reynolds' *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, which the viewer will notice, in a print taken from an etching, behind Margo's left shoulder. Margo's pose, however, does not offer the

¹⁴ As Ed Sikov notes, Addison's enjoyment of Margo's performance mirrors many gay spectators' pleasures in Bette Davis' melodramatic performances.

¹⁵ In contrast with Siddons' reputation as a tragedienne, Bette Davis was, and is, seen as a successful comedic actress.

conventional tableau vivant of the painting that Bette Davis herself would perform years later; this is an ironic tableau, a mirror image of the painting, with a cocktail and cigarette in place of the visages of terror and pity (Asleson xvii). Furthermore, it is an unconscious performance. A drunken Margo, in the next sequence, will declare that her final wish is to be “buried sitting up,” immortalized, perhaps, like the seated Siddons. Whereas Eve is over-identified with the Siddons award statuette itself, Margo transcends the smallness of the representation on the wall, performing as a camp, exaggerated, seemingly uncalculated take on Siddons herself.

Ultimately, the film’s use of the visual arts characterizes Margo as a figure who blurs tragedy and comedy, a blending manifested in two juxtaposed shots. The final shot of the party scene, and of the film’s first act, is an unmotivated close-up on the small print from Francis Haward’s engraving of Reynolds’ portrait, which appears after Eve reminds Karen of her promise to talk to Lloyd about allowing Eve to be Margo’s understudy. Thus, the act’s concluding image portends the potentially tragic consequences Eve’s rise to fame will have on Margo’s life and marriage. If the film’s first act depicts Margo’s reign, the second act portrays the beginning of Eve’s; its first scene depicts Margo’s reaction to hearing about Eve’s successful last-minute substitution for her at Miss Caswell’s audition. Margo, furious with Eve, and with Lloyd and Bill for suspected deception, stands next to a large poster of her character from *Aged in Wood* in the theatre lobby. This figure, bug-eyed and carrying a gun, appears like an expressionistic depiction of Margo’s rage at this moment, while also looking like a caricature of Bette Davis herself. The caricature mirrors the size of Margo’s anger, but

also how Eve has turned her into a foolish figure. It also serves as a thorough contrast from the Siddons portrait. It is a comic image, rather than tragic, an advertisement rather than a tribute. Taken together, Howard's engraving and the poster of Margo's character form a diptych, recalling the iconic dramatic image of the masks of tragedy and comedy. However, in Margo's performances of tragedy and comedy, there is an element of the other in each. Her variation on camp, or melodrama, is one that transgresses the supposed division between tragedy and comedy, high and low culture.

Visual arts thus portray both Eve and Margo as figures who blur elements associated with high and low culture, but in very different ways; Eve blends pretense and mimicry, whereas Margo blends theatricality and accessibility. While the end of the first act may have foreshadowed tragedy, Margo conjures her own "happy ending" by retiring from the stage and accepting Bill's longstanding marriage proposal. Marriage has a magical stabilizing effect on Margo's identity, freezing her oscillation between performances of tragedy and comedy. This is in keeping with female Gothic films, which often resolve conservatively, with the heroine relinquishing desires that exceed matrimony and domesticity. While Margo Channing is a larger than life figure, she accepts a fate common to many postwar American women: surrendering work for marriage. Her blending of tragedy and comedy captures the complexity of postwar women's situations: their shaken identities associated with dramatic changes in life and work. If Margo becomes a Gothic heroine, hers is, like *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, a Gothic comedy, and Margo's story ends in marriage.

In my previous chapter, before advancing my argument that the 1940s female Gothic husband often embodies Americans' horror at fascist aggression and even their early complicity in it, I noted that other critics (Modleski, Waldman, Walsh) have persuasively interpreted the Gothic husband in relation to American women's anxieties about work and marriage prompted by the return of their veteran husbands. However, it is important to note that anxieties about gender roles were not exclusively felt by women in the postwar period; *film noir* criticism, for example, has dwelled on the figure of the femme fatale as an expression of men's anxieties about newly empowered women. I would suggest that interpreting shifting gender roles in the wartime and postwar periods as a collective anxiety, or even as a cultural trauma, avoids the naïve assumption that, for example, a female character's anxieties reflect *only* female audience members' anxieties. Indeed, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, collective, national crises are often displaced onto Gothic heroines' traumas and anxieties. That is, just because the confident, understanding Bill in *All About Eve* isn't troubled by his wife's acting career, that doesn't mean the men in the audience felt the same way about their wives, nor that audience members of both genders weren't relieved by Margo's voluntary retirement.

Through Margo, the film recalls the female Gothic heroine's suspicions of her husband, but reveals these to be unfounded by making him a strong, loyal partner looking out for her best interests (with no direct role in her retirement, nor forcing her into an overtly oppressive marriage). This reverses the trend Waldman notes in 1940s female Gothic films, in which, as the war went on, heroines' suspicions about their husbands were increasingly correct, mirroring the female audiences' increasing empowerment.

Instead, Margo is judged “paranoiac,” blunting the female Gothic films’ implicit critiques of patriarchal marriage and devaluing women’s powers of perception. Unlike the 1940s’ Gothic heroine, whose initial over-identification with a portrait makes her vulnerable to her husband’s violence, Margo must contend with her own larger-than-life celebrity image, a name “spelled out in light bulbs,” which she is jealous of, has confused herself with, but which must dis-identify with to achieve her own identity. That is, to stop being a gender-neutral object like “*something* with a French provincial office,” and to become “a woman,” Margo must surrender her career and get married (emphasis mine). She thereby escapes the “tragedy” represented and foreshadowed by the engraving of Siddons that appears at the end of the film’s first act. Furthermore, if Margo views retirement as achieving womanhood, Eve’s rise to fame appears more like a hollow victory, a surrender of personhood for objectification.

All About Eve, operating on two levels, appears to displace the mystery of postwar American identity onto the mystery of its two lead female characters’ identities; in the case of Margo, it must contain the question of what America means post-Rosie the Riveter within marriage, whereas, as we will see, through Eve, it contains the question of what America means post-fascism within commodity culture. Instead of a tyrannical Gothic husband who can be interpreted both as an embodiment of anxieties about shifting gender roles and Americans’ horror at fascism (and their complicity in it), *All About Eve* addresses these issues separately: domestically, through Margo’s retirement and marriage to the benevolent Bill, and publicly, through Eve’s entrapment by the dictatorial Hollywood Svengali, Addison.

EVE MIRRORS ADDISON

As Ann Morey has recently argued, *All About Eve* can be interpreted as an elegy for both Old Hollywood and women's wartime independence, implying that "Rosie the Riveter" is a role from which it is American women's duty to retire. If Margo's retirement from acting reflects and endorses this "patriotic" sacrifice, Eve gradually transforms from an all-American heroine to a duplicitous (and ultimately quasi-treasonous) victim/villain. Thus, although the film initially solicits the spectator's identification with, and investment in, Eve, its gradual exposure of her evil urges the spectator to identify, instead, with the increasingly down-to-earth Margo. In contrast with *Dragonwyck*, the existence of a second heroine in *All About Eve* allows the spectator to distance herself from the guilt of the film's initial figure of identification. That said, having initially linked Eve with the United States, the film leaves open the horrifying possibility that it is Eve, rather than Margo, who best represents the modern American ethos; in this case, her ruthless self-interest, cloaked under a deceptively innocent cover story, portrays the nation in a highly unflattering light.

However, rather than continue to solicit sympathy and identification from the postwar American spectator, Eve increasingly mirrors the villainous Addison DeWitt, recalling the structure of Mankiewicz's *Dragonwyck*. In that film, an early scene foregrounds Miranda's fascination with an image of beauty that blinds her to a cycle of traumatic violence. Later, the mirroring of the American heroine and the dictatorial

villain in the film's climactic scene indicts Americans for their ignorance to early warning signs of the Holocaust, even characterizing their willful blindness as complicity. In *All About Eve*, Eve's early backstage performance as a war widow solicits her backstage and movie-going audiences' fascination and sympathy. After her backstory is exposed as a fiction, the mirroring of Addison and Eve, as we shall see, implicitly likens elements of American culture and politics to European fascism. Thus I would suggest that the scenes that begin and end *All About Eve*'s lengthy flashback propose two different relationships between the film's narrative and recent history. That is, Eve initially presents herself as an all-American girl with dreams of stardom whose war grief makes her a representative of a shared national trauma and whose survival represents postwar American regeneration. However, as Addison finally reveals Eve backstory, the mirroring of these two characters links postwar Americans' conformity and mutual surveillance to fascism.

Eve, in her early monologue, implied that the loss of her husband led to her idolatry of Margo, presenting herself as a vulnerable, fascinated Gothic heroine. If that monologue marked the beginning of Eve's reign, her calculated fascination of, and control over, her backstage "audience," the final scene of the film's lengthy flashback marks the end of her unfettered power. This scene takes place on the day of Eve's debut performance of Lloyd Richards' *Footsteps on the Ceiling* at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven. Just as the opening scene of incipient fascination reworked elements of the early "portrait" scene from *Dragonwyck* to portray Eve as a conscious performer of Gothic femininity, this late scene reworks a climactic scene from that film to underscore parallels

between Eve, the Gothic “heroine,” and Addison, the Gothic villain. As I argued in my previous chapter, references to silent horror film ultimately supersede *Dragonwyck*’s interest in Miranda’s over-identification with her predecessor, directing focus, instead, onto similarities between the heroine and villain. In the shadowy hallway of New Haven’s Taft Hotel (as in the shadowy staircase leading to the tower room in *Dragonwyck*), Mankiewicz forebodes a similar moment of identification in *All About Eve*.

Once inside the also-shadowy hotel room, Addison tells Eve that he wants to talk to her, “killer to killer” (and not “champion to champion,” as Eve suggests), again foreshadowing the horrifying moment of identification the scene is about to supply. In response to Eve’s confessed ambition to steal Lloyd from Karen so that she can star in all his future plays, Addison, as I quoted earlier, declares that he “will not permit it,” adding that, “after tonight, you will belong to me” to which Eve replies, “Belong – to you? That sound medieval – something out of an old melodrama.” As I suggested, Eve’s references to the “medieval” and to “melodrama” all but articulate the Gothic, a narrative mode often associated with both terms. Indeed, Addison has transformed into the tyrannical Gothic villain, but in contrast to Miranda in *Dragonwyck*, Eve is neither sympathetic nor able to escape; she is imprisoned by his blackmail.

Nonetheless, this scene echoes *Dragonwyck* in its mirroring of villain and heroine. A late scene in that film portrayed Miranda’s horror at Nicholas’ declaration that he was never interested in her apart from her role as a child bearer. Thus, Nicholas dispossessed Miranda of her narcissistic identification with Azilde, former mistress of

Dragonwyck, whom she had once imagined was greatly loved by her husband. In two parallel iris shots, I argued that Mankiewicz implied her awareness of her complicity in his violence and the extent to which his self-interest mirrored her own. Here, Eve's horrified look at Addison recalls Miranda's horrified gaze on Nicholas. However, Addison's dialogue goes much further than *Dragonwyck* in articulating parallels between the Gothic villain and heroine; he suggests, "You're an improbable person, Eve, and so am I. We have that in common. Also a contempt for humanity, an inability to love or be loved, insatiable ambition – and talent. We deserve each other." Addison can see through Eve's fraudulent offstage performances, in part because of his research, but more because it "takes one to know one." Addison and Eve are mirrored, inhuman ciphers of the theatre, but, as we shall see, this scene marks the beginning of their perverse Hollywood partnership, their departure for a road paved with stars. Before Eve can attain Hollywood celebrity, however, the devilish Addison requires that she sacrifice her autonomy.

HITLER AND HOLLYWOOD

Prior to this climactic scene, and even after the point in the film at which Eve begins acting evil, it remains possible to sympathize with her, interpreting her ruthless drive for fame as a compensation for the loss of Eddie, her pilot husband, in the war. Although Addison at one point asks Eve her deceased husband's last name, he drops this

line of questioning after she changes the subject.¹⁶ However, at the beginning of the flashback's final scene, the appearance of a "U.S. Army Recruiting Service" sign behind the Shubert Theatre marquee foreshadows Eve's inability to keep Addison's inquiry into her war widow narrative suppressed. Furthermore, Addison jokingly compares the day of Eve's debut performance to "D-Day," suggesting that, by the next morning, she "will have won [her] beachhead on the shores of Immortality." Addison's metaphor sarcastically associates Eve with a successful Allied military offensive. Whereas the loss of her husband had linked her to a broader American experience of victimhood, Addison now sardonically associates her talent and artful cunning with American tactical aggression. He thereby pays knowing, mock-tribute to Eve's dual, elective associations with American heroism: her story of her husband's heroic sacrifice of his life in the war, as well as her self-designed, metonymic relationship to postwar American regeneration.

However, Addison's later insistence that Eve is (like himself) a "killer" rather than a "champion" portrays her cunning not as moral or heroic (on the order of D-Day) but ruthless and unprincipled. He then explicitly dissociates Eve from American military heroism when he exposes her widowhood narrative as a fraud, insisting that her lie was "an insult to dead heroes and to the women who loved them." Despite the uncharacteristic earnestness of this line, Addison, mirroring Eve, appears utterly antithetical to presumed American values in this scene. As I quoted earlier, when Eve suggests that Addison's language of medieval domination sounds like "something out of

¹⁶ Thus the innocent interpretation of Eve's backstory requires us to suspend disbelief. Then again, Mankiewicz might have presumed his audience would hesitate before believing that anyone, even someone as conniving as Eve, would stoop so low as to invent a dead war hero husband.

an old melodrama,” he replies, “So does the history of the world for the past twenty years.” Assuming that the film is set in the present (1950), the “past twenty years” include the recently referenced war and D-Day, but more closely mark the rise and fall of European fascism. Through his veiled allusion, Addison appears to suggest that his conquering of Eve, likely motivated by his “contempt for humanity,” mirrors contemporary fascists’ “medieval” aggression, their subjection of people within and outside their nation’s borders.

Addison, exposing Eve’s exaggeratedly un-Hollywood, probably-Polish (and possibly Jewish) surname of “Slescynski,” and declaring that she “belong[s]” to him, implicitly associates Eve with victims of Nazi occupation, conducted under the pretense that their land rightfully “belong[ed] to” Germany. However, Eve is, of course, not purely a victim, but a villain/victim, who had attempted to conquer Margo as ruthlessly as Addison conquers Eve. Thus, Mankiewicz’s association of Eve with the victims of fascism is partly ironic, in that her behavior is equally comparable to fascism herself; she has been beaten at her own unprincipled game. As in *Dragonwyck*, in *All About Eve*, mass experiences of oppression are displaced into a narrative of serial persecution. Whereas Judith Roof suggested that Birdie was the master of the film’s metanarrative, Addison has not only taken her place as ironic commentator, but has also taken control of the narrative, turning it into a perverse variation on the Gothic that mirrors the rise of fascism. The Gothic is capable of addressing fascism because of the mode’s atavistic contrariness to narratives of modernity or progress, its manifestation of, in Christine Gledhill’s phrase, “a past that could be recalled to reincarnate moral conflict

contemporary society believed it had outgrown” (32). Addison refers to cruelty in recent global history to justify, or perhaps explain the logic behind, his taking control of Eve. If Eve, in Addison’s coy D-Day metaphor, initially represents the victorious Allies, her transformation into a victim through his victory over her allegorizes an alternate history in which fascism is victorious.

Crucially, just as Addison manifests resemblance to a foreign dictator, he is ascending into the role of Eve’s Hollywood Svengali. This ascension was foreshadowed by earlier references to the Svengali figure. When Eve had unsuccessfully attempted to seduce Bill by giving him the illusion of total power over her, he replied, “Names I’ve been called but never Svengali.” Shortly afterward, Addison, dressed like a sinister dandy, with a cane, a black hat and a long cigarette holder, emerges, as if arriving from the era in which female Gothic films like *Gaslight* were set. Once he suggests that he can use his connections to spread the word of Eve’s performance, she recognizes an opportunity to re-cast the part of Svengali. At first, it appears as though Eve is successfully wielding the role of the duped, hypnotized Gothic heroine. After Addison publishes an article with cruel quotes by Eve about Margo, Eve claims to Karen that Addison put her under a kind of spell and that she began speaking his words rather than her own; this is highly reminiscent of Svengali, who was able to control Trilby’s voice with the hypnotic power of his mind. However, while Eve attempts to only give Addison the illusion of control, he eventually takes control over her through blackmail.

Ultimately, the film encourages us to view Eve, who will no doubt succeed as a Hollywood actress, as a representation of a new type of celebrity, distinct from the Old

Hollywood studio system that Bette Davis represents. Thus, Addison's role as her Svengali-like manager suggests that he represents the postwar culture industry itself. Indeed, he is invisible to the public, yet will become a power player in Hollywood, essential to it in a more obvious way than that in which he once judged himself "essential to the theatre." Metonymically, he can be seen to represent the system that limits actors' powers, that controls what they can and cannot choose to do. To borrow a phrase from Daniel Pick's analysis of the term "Svengali" in modern culture, Addison wields the power to "catapult stars into the limelight, and to dictate the terms on which they appear" (8).

Mankiewicz's likening of Addison, Hollywood Svengali, to a fascist aggressor echoes Horkheimer and Adorno's roughly contemporary critique of the culture industry. In *Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood*, Lutz Koepnick explicates the connection between Hitler and Hollywood in "The Culture Industry" as follows:

Similar to the coordination of cultural life in German fascism, the studio system streamlined products and homogenized audiences. Assembly-line entertainment films imprinted the stamp of absolute sameness on their recipients. In both the Hollywood culture industry and Nazi Germany the modern formalization of rationality resulted in nothing other than a terrorist regime of identity. Everyone was effectively provided for with one and the same product. Every possible response was preordained by the film itself (7).

Interpreted in light of Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis, Mankiewicz's statuette of Sir Joshua Reynolds' portrait of Sarah Siddons stands as an icon for the application of "Fordist principles of production to the realm of cultural expression," negating the preindustrial "autonomous art" that Siddons, and Reynolds, can be taken to represent (7).¹⁷ Furthermore, the film's ultimate equation of Eve with the award statuette reflects the lack of autonomy experienced among performers in the culture industry. After her acceptance speech, Eve declines Addison's invitation to join him at a party thrown in her honor; holding the award, she says the party is not for her, but "for this." Addison responds, "It's the same thing, isn't it?" to which Eve replies, "Exactly." Thus, whereas the presenter's speech in the opening scene of the film likened Eve to the enduring fame of her thespian predecessors, Eve now appears a mere pawn in Addison's, and the entertainment industry's, game.

Like the portrait of Azilde in *Dragonwyck*, the Siddons statuette encourages women to mimic their predecessors. Miranda's mimicry of the portrait of Azilde, the image of the ideal wife, keeps her ignorant of her husband's intentions, mirroring Americans' ignorance to Nazism's atrocities. Eve's mimicry of Margo (in pursuit of the celebrity the Siddons award represents) echoes the imitation advocated by the culture industry in postwar America. As Koepnick explicates, Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis regarding the culture industry's enforced sameness applies both to its products and

¹⁷ One key difference between Mankiewicz and Horkheimer and Adorno is that Mankiewicz obviously looks back with nostalgia on the Old Hollywood system, as elegized through Bette Davis' performance as Margo.

audiences; that is, all are “homogenized” through compulsory imitation. This point is emphasized through the late appearance of Phoebe, a young woman Eve finds asleep in her armchair after returning home from the Siddons award ceremony. When Eve asks, “who are you?” the surprised young woman blurts out, “Miss Harrington!” a coy indication of the young woman’s over-identification with Eve, and a sly mirroring of the two characters as equivalents. This would-be actress, who has, like Eve, adopted a pseudonym, also resembles Eve in her petite frame and her short hairstyle. Thus, the mechanical reproduction of the Siddons statuette not only resembles Eve herself but also foreshadows the monstrous reproduction of Eve through Phoebe’s mimicry.

Furthermore, the inquisitive Phoebe recalls the film spectator described and addressed in Addison’s initial monologue, the one who, he presumes, desires to know “all about Eve.”

Thus, at the same time that Eve is objectified, Phoebe is portrayed as her carbon-copy replacement, implying the aforementioned homogenizing of audiences. Eve, like any fictional monster, does not reproduce biologically. Instead, she spawns an endless series of manipulative imitators, as foreshadowed by the endless mirroring of Phoebe (clutching the Siddons award) in the mirrored final shot. “Eve” is thus an ironic name, as Eve is no mother of humanity; she is a model of inhumanity. The equation of Eve with an inanimate object, furthermore, recalls and reflects Addison’s recent possession of her. Addison, like the typical Gothic villain, takes control of his “wife,” not because he is sexually interested in her, but because of a will to power. In other female Gothic films, the villain’s motive to marry is jewelry (*Gaslight*) or a male heir (*Dragonwyck*); these female Gothic villains are often effeminate aesthetes, usually contrasted with the

heroine's masculine rescuer. Addison's motive is control, or perhaps vanity; Eve's fame will shine on him as well. In Bernard Dick's perspective, "Addison is not hetero-, homo-, or even asexual; he is metasexual. His desire to possess Eve is like Waldo's desire to possess Laura in the film of that name – as an art object, not as a woman." (156).

The final equation of woman and object is a reversal of the conventional female Gothic ending. As stated, in many of these films, the heroine is horrified to discover that she is not special in her husband's eyes, as he had killed a series of wives before her and/or had an ulterior motive in marrying her. The heroine survives by, at the last moment, dis-identifying with the image of her female predecessor(s), thereby breaking and escaping a cycle of Bluebeard-like violence. In *All About Eve*, Eve earns her own fame and thereby initially dis-identifies with Margo, stepping out of her shadow. However, at the end of the film, Eve finds herself trapped, over-identified with the award statuette, imitated by her inevitable replacement, Phoebe. That is, whereas the end of *Dragonwyck* allowed Miranda to dis-identify with her female predecessor and escape her husband's clutches, the end of *All About Eve* over-identifies Eve with her award statuette and forebodes further punishment for her sins. Thus, Eve ends the film where other female Gothic heroines begin, over-identified with an image, living under the thumb of an effete tyrant.

MCCARTHYISM: EVE, PHOEBE, AND ADDISON

All About Eve's conflation of Hitler and Hollywood in the dictatorial Svengali of Addison might seem particularly ironic or provocative, given the fact that Svengali was originally a Jewish character and that Jewish émigrés were essential to the success of the Hollywood studio system. However, whereas the original Svengali, of George Du Maurier's invention, was a vicious anti-Semitic caricature, Addison is not coded as Jewish. It appears that the film likens him to the figure of Svengali, as used in common parlance, to indicate his role as a behind-the-scenes manipulator, rather than ascribe him the religion of the original literary figure. Furthermore, Addison is thoroughly distinct from the film's main Jewish character of "sweet, loveable" producer, Max Fabian. Although John Howard Lawson, former Hollywood Ten member, regards Fabian as "an offensive caricature of a Jewish theatrical producer," he is, unlike Addison, hapless and vulnerable to manipulation, rather than cunning and manipulative (65). If anything, Max appears to represent simpler times, out to "make a buck" but not accrue power for its own sake.

That said, the fact that Eve's possibly-Jewish surname is revealed within the context of Addison's "witch hunt" suggests a connection between Eve's duplicity and Americans' fears about Jews' associations with Communism. Lawson, in his Marxist critique of Hollywood filmmaking, *Film in the Battle of Ideas* (1953), writes:

The Eve of the picture is a conscienceless liar. She is willing to violate every canon of decency in order to become a famous actress. It turns out that Eve's real name, which she has concealed, is foreign, Polish or Jewish. Thus the picture

associates her conduct with an attack on the foreign born and a touch of anti-Semitism (65).

However, Addison, Eve, and, ultimately, Phoebe are portrayed as commensurate, dirty-dealing spies, and they all have gender (and possibly sexual) non-conformity, rather than Judaism, in common. Thus, instead of depicting a Jewish Hollywood conspiracy, the film portrays, as Corber elucidates, a queer conspiracy.

In the subtly lesbian relationship between Eve and the upstart Phoebe, *All About Eve* appears to link modern Hollywood and McCarthyism by suggesting that both produce conformity – in the first case, through the mass fascination with and imitation of stars, and in the second, through fears of being reported for subversive activities. At the end of the film, Phoebe says that she has been examining Eve’s possessions so that she can write a report on her. Eve paranoiacally reacts, “what report? To whom?” While Phoebe explains that she is only writing a report for her high school’s Eve Harrington club, Eve’s visceral reaction to the word “report” suggests Cold War paranoia, recalling a line from Mankiewicz’s prior Academy Award-winning “woman’s picture,” *A Letter to Three Wives*. In that film, a professor delivers a tirade against radio broadcasting to his wife’s boss, a producer of radio programs, in which he argues that the so-called “literature of the masses” is intellectually bankrupt, simply a means to sell products. Later that night, after his wife rebukes him for his tactlessness, he responds, “what can she do? Report me as being un-American?” This joke, clearly about being reported to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, is premised on the idea that criticizing

the culture industry evidences a lack of patriotism, perhaps even an anti-capitalist attitude.

In *All About Eve*, Eve's overreaction to the word "report" is less straightforward; Eve is apolitical, and, although she is duplicitous, she has not done anything suggesting that she might be a Communist. However, it is readily possible to interpret Eve's treachery in indirect or metaphorical relation to Americans' fears over domestic Communism. Corber argues that Eve resembles the perceived threat posed by Communists because, as a lesbian who can convincingly perform femininity, she can stealthily "pass" as heterosexual, infiltrating mainstream society by evading detection. Similarly, Eve uses her rural Midwestern background and invented Anglo-Saxon surname to render herself "unmarked," a blank screen onto which Americans, and especially women, can project their own life stories. Thus, the exposure of Eve's backstory feels like a revelation of treason, of unpatriotic behavior, even if her sins are not specifically anti-government or anti-capitalist. As mentioned, Addison exposes Eve's creation of an Anglo-American surname in the same scene in which he reveals that she invented her deceased husband, a military hero. That is, Eve's attempts to make herself America's sweetheart betray a cynical, cunning attitude toward American culture in general.

Meanwhile, Phoebe's close surveillance of Eve's belongings associates the young would-be actress with McCarthyism. Interestingly, in a treatment Mankiewicz produced for the film, he overtly associates *Eve's* prior surveillance of Margo's belongings with McCarthyism. According to Sam Staggs:

In the treatment, Mankiewicz has Eve tell Margo, in a cab from La Guardia after they've put Bill on the plane, that she – Margo – needs galoshes. Eve knows this because she has watched Margo's comings and goings so closely. Referring to Eve's surveillance, Margo quips, 'You're not on one of those congressional committees, are you?' This sly political reference must have given [producer Darryl] Zanuck the willies, for he slashed through it with a heavy pencil – markedly heavier than elsewhere – as though the House Committee on Un-American Activities were reading over his shoulder (46-7).

Thus, in the treatment and in the final script, Mankiewicz comically compares Eve and Phoebe's acts of voracious surveillance to McCarthyist witch-hunts. Zanuck's reaction to the bolder reference to McCarthyism likely explains the comparatively subtle allusion Mankiewicz was ultimately able to include.¹⁸

Of course, Addison DeWitt is the third, and consummate, investigative figure whose surveillance invades people's private lives. As described, he delivers his own verbal "report" on Eve to her, filled with comprehensive information gleaned from his research. In *Dragonwyck*, I argued that Mankiewicz displaces fascist mass murder into a

¹⁸ In the film Mankiewicz made the year following *All About Eve* (1950), *People Will Talk* (1951), his critique of McCarthyism was more pronounced. The film, which rails against the American medical profession, is often interpreted as an allegory for the House Un-American Activities Committee's witch-hunts. This film was clearly informed by Mankiewicz's personal experience opposing the adoption of an anti-Communist pledge among Hollywood film directors (see Geist). In contrast with *All About Eve*, *People Will Talk* does not share the 1940s female Gothic's concerns with World War II, and European fascism in particular.

narrative of a husband's serial murder of his wives. In *All About Eve*, Mankiewicz displaces postwar Americans' mass, mutual surveillance and imitation into a narrative of actresses' serial surveillance and imitation of one another. That said, Addison reigns supreme, as he outdoes Eve at her own spying game and is immediately, and correctly, suspicious of Phoebe. Thus, despite the film's differences from prior female Gothic works, *All About Eve* retains the figure of the panoptic Gothic villain, in his towering height if no longer in his "tower room." Addison, watching over a system of mutual surveillance while remaining supreme to it, thereby appears to represent McCarthy himself. Eve, although initially associated with committees investigating un-American behavior, becomes the object of such an investigation. She becomes the film's ultimate embodiment of modern postwar America, not a sympathetic war widow but a paranoid, surveilling spectacle. The relationship between Eve and Addison ultimately portrays the culture industry and McCarthyism as un-American, antithetical to the values that won the day on D-Day.

CONCLUSION

Through Eve, the film gradually transforms the meek Gothic heroine into the spying Gothic villain, but punishes her for her surveillance and oppression of Margo through her surveillance and oppression by Addison. Through Eve's self-styled narrative of war grief and regenerative fascination with celebrity culture, the film mimics the nation's facile forgetting of its traumatic confrontation with fascism. This narrative

attempts to fill the gap produced by the trauma of war, shallowly allegorizing American war grief and recovery. However, Addison exposes Eve's inhumanity, her ruthless self-interest and voracious spying, preventing her story from reaching its "marriage plot" conclusion. But he still can't tell us "all about" Eve because her drive for fame lacks an origin in her childhood or in the historically contingent loss of her husband; instead it is a drive without a traceable origin, mimicking the structure of trauma rather than patly allegorizing it.

I would suggest that the repressed trauma of Americans' horror at (and early complicity in) fascist violence manifests through the film's climactic mirroring of its all-American heroine with a spying, attention-seeking dictatorial villain. This mirroring implies that postwar American culture, unable to mourn wartime damages to its worldview and its self-identity, compulsively echoes fascism's drives for conformity (via McCarthyism's mutual surveillance) and mass fascination (via the culture industry). Thus, whereas Margo's marriage conservatively addresses a national identity crisis related to shifting gender relations, the film displaces the mystery of what America means post-fascism onto the mystery of Eve's identity; this identity turns out to be a void, which it must contain within commodity culture. Unable to tell us "all about Eve," the film must contain this mystery, like the smothered Siddons statuette, lacquering over Eve's black hole of lack. The statuette suggests that the postwar culture industry contains a traumatic lack of meaningful national identity via a hollow spectacle, rather than offer a sufficient story to explain it away.

Traumatized, without knowing why, the postwar nation embraced both old-fashioned marriage and popular culture as normalizing reassurances. However, rather than unite and compare an oppressive marriage with oppressive fascism (as Woolf and Mankiewicz, in *Dragonwyck*, did), here Mankiewicz contrasts patriotic, healthy yet patriarchal marriage with the pathological, perverse voyeurism of Hollywood and McCarthyism. The film invites identification with the former and allows distance from the latter. However, while it may scapegoat Eve for national sins, the film makes the spectator aware that it's doing so, implicating us in this scapegoating by initially soliciting our fascination with and identification with Eve. Whereas, in *Dragonwyck*, we identify with a young woman, only to see her exposed as complicit in evil, in *All About Eve*, we initially identify with a woman who is not merely complicit in, but is actively, evil. As a celebrity, Eve is foregrounded as a figure to-be-looked-at even more overtly than Miranda, yet Miranda was both a fascinated character and a character with whom the film solicited the audience's fascination. Thus, *All About Eve* clarifies something *Dragonwyck* had left implicit: movie going is a form of passive fascination that can blind spectators to their complicity in contemporary forms of oppression. At the same time, movies, like *Dragonwyck* and *All About Eve*, can expose to audiences, in a brief, indirect, and hence palatable way, such complicities.

The horror of *All About Eve* – that Eve might represent America at its worst – is mitigated by the film's revelation of the pathological (rather than historical) motives for her behavior. However, just because the film (near its final moment) severs the narrative link between war trauma and postwar Americans' mutual surveillance and fascination

with celebrity does not mean that it intends the viewer to forget these links. As E. Ann Kaplan suggests regarding Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), melodramatic films can invite us to forget difficult truths that they have previously asked us to remember. Unlike that film, *All About Eve* does not do so through a conventionally "happy" ending. While the film punishes Eve and portrays her as an original, singular monster, it also suggests that she is infinitely reproducible, and that the viewer is complicit in institutions that guarantee that there are many more spying, spied-upon Eves to come.

Chapter 4

Through the Looking Glass: Trauma and Academia in Bernard Rose's *Candyman*

For all its narrative complexity, one thing that might seem clear about Bernard Rose's *Candyman* (1992) is that it is a horror film. Given the film's hook-handed villain and ample blood and gore, as well as its origin in a short story, "The Forbidden" (1985), by famed horror scribe Clive Barker, this would appear a difficult point to dispute. A violent narrative that addresses both postbellum racist violence and modern inner-city violence, *Candyman* would appear to sit easily alongside those films Adam Lowenstein analyzes in his 2005 book *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*. However, amid its robust horror conventions is a narrative about a woman suspecting her husband's intentions toward her, recalling the archetypal 1940s female Gothic film plot. While *Candyman* has been understood as a Gothic work (Botting 2001), it has not been linked to the female Gothic film tradition. As I have demonstrated, several of those films critically engage with the traumas of fascism, particularly the Holocaust. Furthermore, by addressing fascist mass murder through a young woman's suffering under an oppressive husband, several female Gothic films offer a simultaneous critique of geopolitical and domestic oppression. Given *Candyman*'s interests in the aftermath of American slavery and a modern woman's professional and marital woes, it begs the question: how does the film reshape female Gothic conventions to simultaneously address both racist violence and sexist oppression?

And how do its pronounced horror conventions complicate attempts to interpret it as a female Gothic film?

It is important to note, at the outset, that the categories of horror and female Gothic are not, and have not been, mutually exclusive. Indeed, as I noted in my second chapter, “female Gothic” is a term borrowed from late-20th Century feminist literary criticism, and it has been retrospectively applied to a group of 1940s films never before classified as such; Mark Jancovich and others have recently challenged assumptions about the gender of the targeted or actual audiences of films we now call “female Gothic,” emphasizing that some of these films were marketed as “thriller[s]” rather than melodramatic “women’s picture[s]” (161). Furthermore, in my second chapter, I outlined the many visual and narrative conventions linking 1940s films labeled “female Gothic” to the silent horror film tradition.

That said, foundational analyses of the silent horror film and the female Gothic film have asserted differences between the modes’ archetypal narratives. As Linda Williams argues in “When the Woman Looks,” the silent horror monster is primarily a figure of identification for the heroine, mirroring her “lack” in relation to the patriarchy. As Mary Ann Doane analyzes in *The Desire to Desire*, the female Gothic heroine, by contrast, sees herself mirrored in the image of a female predecessor; the Gothic husband, rather than a figure with whom she identifies, is a figure of desire, in that the heroine futilely asserts her desire to be desired by him. In my second chapter, I challenged Doane’s assertion that the heroine of the female Gothic film does not, as in the horror film, see herself mirrored in the villain, “displaced to the level of the nonhuman” (142).

In fact, I argued, such a climactic mirroring scene is crucial to Mankiewicz's addressing of cultural trauma. Furthermore, recent critics on the silent horror film have implicitly challenged Williams' emphasis on the identification of the heroine with the villain, noting evidence of her desire for him as well (Schneider 2004). Such discussions are critical to this chapter because, as we have seen thus far, the Gothic heroine's processes of identification and desire, in relation to both her female predecessor and to the male villain, are crucial to understanding how these works address both cultural trauma and its repression.

In my previous chapters, the heroine's early over-identification with a female predecessor signified an inability to recognize the otherness, the separate identity, of her elder, which each work linked to a broader confusion of past and present. This confusion mimicked the acting out, rather than the working through, of the repressed trauma underlying these narratives. By contrast, the heroine's belated, horrifying moment of identification with the villain suggested the return of the nightmare of cultural trauma via the mirroring of self and other, trespassing the distinction between the "victim" and the "villain." *Candyman* departs from this narrative pattern, delaying the heroine's momentary identification with an image of her female predecessor until late in the film, while repeatedly drawing connections between the heroine and the villain. Furthermore, unlike the narratives I have addressed thus far, *Candyman* offers several interpretations of the events it depicts; at the end of the film, we don't know whether the heroine or the putative villain, Candyman, is responsible for a kidnapping and a series of murders, nor whether the events onscreen are happening or are merely expressions of the heroine's

fantasy. As the narrative gradually offers multiple interpretations, the film increasingly directs attention onto the heroine's motivations, desires and fears, portraying the collapse of her initially disinterested investigation of the traumatized, traumatizing Candyman figure.

At the outset, the character of Helen, an academic neophyte, offers a figure through which the film can question non-traumatized individuals' occasionally self-centered, even voyeuristic, interest in others' traumas. While the film never expressly articulates the concept of "cultural trauma," it asks academics pertinent questions about our motives in studying trauma, and the inevitable biases and projections we bring to such a study. What does it mean, for example, for one to further one's career by writing about others' suffering? Must academics believe in a concept of "cultural trauma" to validate our work? That is, is a "cultural trauma," to an extent, an academic fiction? Do trauma theorists, like authors or filmmakers, run the risk of crafting our own falsely redemptive narratives? And to what extent do we inevitably write our own lives and experiences into others' stories, over-identifying with aggressors, victims, or both?

THE LEGEND OF *CANDYMAN*

At the beginning of the film, Helen, a white graduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago, sets out to investigate the "urban legend" of Candyman, a figure who kills his victims with a hook. Helen and Bernadette, an African American colleague, go to the Cabrini-Green housing projects to take pictures and interview residents about

Candyman. After Helen surveys a murdered woman's abandoned apartment – and the adjacent apartment purportedly belonging to Candyman – they meet Anne Marie, a young mother who lives next door. Anne Marie tells them about how her neighbor, Ruthie Jean, was killed, how the police did nothing to intervene, and how scared she is of Candyman returning. Helen and Bernadette then meet with Helen's feckless husband Trevor's senior colleague, Purcell, who condescends to tell them the original legend of Candyman. This professor tells them that, as the story goes, after the Civil War, Candyman's father, a freed slave, became wealthy as an inventor. He sent his son to the best schools, where Candyman excelled as a portrait painter. He was later hired to paint the daughter of a wealthy white landowner, to, in the professor's phrase, "capture her virginal beauty." She and Candyman fell in love and she shortly afterward became pregnant. When her father found out, he sent a mob of men to kill his daughter's lover. First, they cut off his right hand and jabbed a hook into the stump, covered him with honeycomb, released bees on him, and finally burned his body, scattering his ashes on the present-day site of Cabrini-Green.

Soon, Helen returns to Cabrini-Green, alone, and meets a young boy, Anthony, whom she asks to show her where she can find Candyman. He directs her to a public restroom where he says a boy was once violently attacked and castrated. There, Helen is attacked by a group of men, led by a hook-wielding man in a trench coat. She later identifies this man, a notorious gang leader, in a lineup, and he is put away. After healing, she returns to the university, but is soon confronted by a tall, elegantly dressed, hook-handed black man, who appeals to Helen, "be my victim." She fights to resist

being hypnotized by his voice and his presence, but she blacks out, and awakens in Anne Marie's apartment, in a pool of blood, with a knife in her hand. Anne Marie's dog has been killed and her baby is missing. When she sees Helen, Anne Marie attacks, and Helen defends herself. The police enter and find the women struggling, with Helen poised over Anne Marie with the knife. Helen, who has no memory of the period in which she had blacked out, is incarcerated and released on bail. One day, while looking at slides taken from her photographs at Cabrini-Green, Helen spies a figure she thinks is Candyman in one of the pictures. She goes to the bathroom and looks in the mirror. After she looks away, Candyman's hook jabs through the mirror. Helen runs out of the room but soon encounters Candyman standing before her. Bernadette then rings the doorbell, enters, and is killed by Candyman, as Helen blacks out once more.

As no one believes Helen's story about Candyman murdering Bernadette, she is institutionalized. During an interview with a psychiatrist, Helen summons Candyman, who kills the doctor, thereby allowing Helen to escape. She first goes to her apartment and finds that her husband is now living with a young female student, with whom he had been engaging in an affair. Next, she goes to Cabrini-Green to try and find Anne Marie's missing baby. Grabbing a hook hanging from a chain, she ascends into Candyman's Gothic lair, where he tells her that he will let the baby live if she sacrifices herself in his place. She agrees, the two kiss, and she again passes out. When she awakens, Candyman is gone; however, on the wall of his lair, she views a mural featuring his 19th Century lover (who closely resembles Helen), with the words, "IT WAS ALWAYS YOU, HELEN" painted next to her image.

Helen then ventures out to the housing projects' courtyard, believing that the kidnapped baby has been deposited within a large mountain of refuse. Soon after Helen, with the hook, begins crawling through this pyre, the projects' residents light it on fire, believing Candyman is inside. Helen successfully reaches the baby, but Candyman appears and prevents her from leaving. She protests that they had a bargain, and then ultimately kills him with the hook. While she successfully rescues the living baby, her hair catches fire and she dies. At Helen's funeral, residents from Cabrini-Green approach and pay tribute, led by Anne Marie, carrying her baby. The young boy, Anthony, tosses Helen's hook into her grave. Later, Helen's former husband, still living with his student, guiltily stares into the bathroom mirror, repeating Helen's name several times. Eventually, Helen's ghost appears, in her funeral garb, and violently kills him with the hook. The young undergraduate fearfully enters the bathroom, carrying a knife from the kitchen, and screams when she discovers his body – but no Helen.

CREDULOUS VS. CRITICAL SPECTATORSHIP

Although Helen may not initially over-identify with an image of her predecessor, she does, at the film's outset, exhibit both the naiveté and the perceived invincibility of the conventional Gothic heroine. At the beginning of the film, Helen discovers the existence of two distinct Candyman narratives: one known among the white university students she interviews and one told to her by a black custodian. The former narrative takes place in the suburbs and involves a teen girl's summoning of the supernatural killer

by saying his name five times in a mirror. The latter takes place in the inner city, specifically at Cabrini-Green. In that narrative, Candyman enters a woman's apartment through the wall. Whereas, in the students' narrative, the putative murder victim is an anonymous friend of a friend, in the custodian's narrative, an actual murder victim is identified. Despite the custodian's fear and her belief in the Candyman narrative she tells, Helen receives it as she does her students' trite narratives: as yet another urban legend.

Helen's dismissive attitude in listening to gruesome oral tales recalls an early scene from *Dragonwyck*; in this scene, after hearing a servant, Magda, recount a story about a Van Ryn husband's mistreatment of his wife, the heroine, Miranda, dismisses the tale as "kitchen gossip." Both *Dragonwyck* and *Candyman* contrast workers' oral tales with the official narratives circulated by those in power. Miranda, by dismissing Magda's narrative because it is passed among the servants, aligns herself with the Van Ryn patriarch, Nicholas, who has an interest in keeping the young woman ignorant to his family's past. Miranda's disbelief, which protects her romantic illusions, places her in danger of meeting the same fate as Azilde. More extraordinarily, despite her reasonable suspicion about the janitor's tale of a hook-handed villain who bursts through the wall, Helen's disbelief in Candyman later appears to prompt the supernatural being to manifest. That is, her alignment with academia's text-based knowledge production renders her, ironically, vulnerable to the horrendous oral narratives it tries to document and contain.

In my chapter on *Dragonwyck*, I regarded Miranda's visual fascination with the portrait of Azilde as naively credulous and the servant Magda's detached perspective as critical. Magda's critical position is historical because, I suggested, it is aware of two forms of repetition compulsion: both the Van Ryn husbands' repeated persecution of wives and the female Gothic cycle's recurrent interest in narratives of serial victimization. By contrast, Miranda's fascinated gaze on the beautiful portrait of Azilde implies her suppression of Magda's narrative of the woman's tragic death. As I argued, this suppression comes to mirror Americans' suppressed knowledge of the Holocaust. Thus, the initial opposition between critical and credulous gazes contrasts the awareness of and the suppression of a traumatic past, a past that takes on an increasingly overt historical resonance as the film progresses. Likewise, Helen's dismissive, superior attitude toward the custodian's tale foreshadows a corresponding suppression of a traumatic past; Candyman (as we later discover, when we encounter the professor's third, postbellum narrative) represents the traumatic return of violence from the American past. Helen's later likening of him to a fictional monster like Frankenstein or Dracula suggests not simply a rational disbelief in monsters but also a failure to respect the historically specific context that produced the Candyman narrative and its abiding relevance as a way to make sense of present violence.

Helen, like Miranda, appears to see herself as superior to the working class, oral tale teller. However, she does resemble the servant from *Dragonwyck* in her apparent metanarrative acumen. That is, Helen's familiarity with tale types, including those that closely echo modern horror films, makes her appear more like Magda than Miranda.

Furthermore, rather like Birdie's reaction to Eve's sorrowful monologue in *All About Eve*, Helen suspects the fictitiousness of narratives that others regard as nonfiction. This attitude extends, however, to her treatment of real events as mere texts. Rather than react in horror to a microfiche image of a newspaper report on Ruthie Jean's death, Helen looks visibly pleased to have discovered textual evidence for her thesis. Later, when she sees graffiti covering Anne Marie's doorway at Cabrini-Green, Helen reacts, "this is great!" heedlessly taking flash photographs without considering whether she is disturbing the occupant. That is, Helen appears rather shallow, interested in surfaces but lacking in appreciation for the depth of lived human experience. That is, the film characterizes her initially knowing posture, her academic pretensions, as naïve.

Although Helen may share Magda and Birdie's ironic detachment and narrative-mindedness, she does not share these figures' role as cautioners to dangers they perceive. Instead, Bernadette, Helen's African American colleague, is the figure who regularly urges caution. While she primarily emphasizes the physical harm that could come to the women at Cabrini-Green, Bernadette also voices concerns about Helen's confusion of fiction and nonfiction; at one point, remarking on the newspaper reporting on Ruthie Jean's passing, Bernadette notes, "This is sick, Helen. A woman died. This isn't one of your fairy tales." Later, when Helen wishes to enter Ruthie Jean's abandoned apartment, Bernadette cautions, "A woman died in there. Leave it." However, if Bernadette has reservations about Helen's research method, she does not articulate these; for example, while she may urge restraint before the women later enter Anne Marie's apartment, she doesn't explicitly disavow the participant-observer relationship this entering establishes.

That is, Bernadette's objections are more simply humane, an innate respect for the privacy of the living and the dead that Helen mindlessly trespasses in her quest.

The film suggests that Bernadette has gained understanding of the world through life experiences that Helen has not. For example, whereas Helen assumes that dressing "conservatively" would render the women unmarked, allowing them to blend in at Cabrini-Green, Bernadette correctly predicts that they will be perceived as cops; the film implies that Bernadette, as an African American woman, has greater experience anticipating how she will be marked in others' eyes. Furthermore, Bernadette carries what Helen regards as an "arsenal" of self-defense, including pepper spray, whereas Helen naively assumes such defenses are unnecessary. However, the fact that Bernadette does not challenge Helen's research methods outright allows Helen to regard her colleague's cautions as cowardice. Furthermore, Helen's headstrong attitude appeals to Bernadette as it challenges the ivory tower-confined research of their senior, male colleagues; Helen asks Bernadette at one point, "if Trevor and Archie [Purcell] were in on this, do you think they'd chicken out?" to which Bernadette responds, "in a second."

Helen's recklessness can be understood as an effort to compensate for the pair's subordinate status, not only as graduate students, but as women in a profession that Rose and Barker portray as male-dominated. Within this context, Helen's arsenal of technologies – her tape recorder, microfiche, word processor, business card, and her ever-flashing camera – can be viewed as over-compensating supplements. In psychoanalytic terms, these devices appear to represent an attempt to secure the phallus that would allow for the detached, fetishizing gaze which, Doane rehearses, only male spectators possess.

Whereas the various windows Miranda gazes through in the first half of *Dragonwyck* suggest her voyeuristic distance from a world that the heroine desires to bridge, Helen wishes, on a conscious, professional level, to maintain the gap separating her from her objects of study.

TRAUMA AND THE FASCINATED GAZE

Whereas Bernadette's "arsenal" offers practical protection against dangers, Helen's arsenal of technology acts as a symbolic over-compensation for the barriers that sexism places on her professional ambitions. At the same time, these technologies allow Helen to resist the emotional over-identification that is characteristic of women in psychoanalytic models of spectatorship. However, the film foreshadows Helen's inability to maintain a critical, detached perspective in her reaction to both a graffiti image of Candyman and the professor's recounting of the Candyman legend. Helen may not initially over-identify with an image of female beauty; however, her gaze on the screaming, graffitied face of Candyman she finds at Cabrini-Green does recall Miranda's fascinated expression while gazing on the portrait of Azilde. Furthermore, while Miranda's narcissistic gaze foreshadowed her overcoming of the distance between herself and the image of a female ideal, Helen's gaze on Candyman's face also forebodes the erasure of the distance between subject and (putative) object. After Helen's camera abruptly runs out of film, she first stares at the image but soon reaches toward her eye as if something has entered it. Her inability to take a photograph of this image suggests the

failure of her fetishizing, detached gaze, foreshadowing the fascinated gaze that will later confuse her with Candyman, an object of both desire and identification. Helen's fascination by, and with, Candyman is likewise foreshadowed by the shape of the image itself, which surrounds a hole in the wall Helen passes through; rather than capture the image as an object in her camera, Helen is captivated by the image.

Helen is introduced as an academic writer; thus, following W.J.T. Mitchell's discussion of ekphrasis, the graffiti image represents otherness in relation to her project. I would suggest that *Candyman* mobilizes the otherness of imagery, in relation to text, to stand for the otherness of traumatic experience in relation to the ordinary processes of memory. Helen's subsequent returns to the housing projects and to the graffitied portrait within, whether in her mind or in reality, are indeed characterized as a form of repetition compulsion; Helen is entranced, fascinated by the painted face staring back at her, and cannot help but return. In "The Forbidden," Clive Barker's short story from which the film was adapted, Helen compulsively returns to the graffitied portrait and finds that its "impact" is not "dulled by re-acquaintance"; the image, like a traumatic moment, retains the power of its original experience, compelling compulsive returns while losing none of its power (11). This recalls how traumatic flashbacks are often characterized as faithful to the original experience, neither dulled nor tamed by the conventional apparatus of memory. In his later work, Bessel Van der Kolk, in fact, uses the metaphor of an image etched directly onto the amygdala to convey traumatic memory's difference from conventional memory (LaCapra 107). He suggests that the healing process involves translating this image into repeated verbal approximations that do not fully capture its

affect but gradually tame the experience and prevent it from overtaking the victim's mind and memory. Notably, Helen does not perform such an ekphrastic translation of the graffiti image; as we will see, her ekphrastic thesis goes unwritten.

Thus, the graffiti image's intrusive and unmotivated appearances throughout the film mimic traumatic flashbacks rather than voluntary memories. Similarly, when she hears the professor Purcell's narrative of Candyman's death, Helen appears to be involuntarily hearing the sounds of the murder he describes. That is, despite the professor's introduction of the narrative as a "legend," and despite Helen's earlier treatment of nonfiction as fiction, here she appears to experience the story as an historical event that she is, involuntarily, "replaying" in her mind in the present. The context in which Helen receives this story is important: Purcell, before telling her the legend, mocks her academic ambitions and her ignorance to his paper on Candyman from "ten years ago." That is, his attitude (and Helen's husband's obsequious complicity) dispossesses Helen of the apparatus of her original thesis, which, it could be said, is the "device" that all of her sundry technologies stand for.

I would suggest that, during Purcell's recounting of the legend, Helen's involuntary fascination, her emotional over-identification with Candyman's traumatic suffering of racist violence, owes to her experiences of sexism. That is, before the film portrays Helen's confusion about whether she or Candyman is responsible for crimes, it mirrors these figures as victims. Whereas Helen had attempted to seize technology to rise above the barriers sexism had placed on her professional ambitions, the African American man who would later become Candyman, by taking up the paintbrush, was

briefly able to transcend barriers of racism; he not only negated stereotypes about African Americans as poor visual artists (voiced by many, including Thomas Jefferson in “Notes on the State of Virginia”), but also gained wealth and fame through his art, which required close relationships with white clients. Like Helen’s initial, detached gaze, Candyman’s portraiture allowed him the proper distance from his subjects that permitted fetishization. That is, Candyman’s romance with the daughter of a wealthy landowner was potentiated by the distance that the painting of her portrait allowed. Candyman, by creating an image of this woman, took on the stereotypical role of (white) suitor, with its implicit power imbalance between the male gaze and the woman-as-object.

Somewhat similarly, Helen, as thesis writer and photographer, initially wields the power of academic knowledge production. However, sexism strips Helen of her phallic apparatuses, whether through the white senior professor’s mocking of her thesis or, later, through the African American gang members that destroy her camera. In the latter incident, after Helen has entered the men’s bathroom at Cabrini-Green, the leader chides Helen to put her in her place, “I hear you’re looking for Candyman, bitch,” and then beats her unconscious with a hook. This sexist attack mirrors, to an extent, the racist attack suffered by Candyman, which also took place at Cabrini, violently deprived him of his painting hand, and forced on him the hook he would wield in the afterlife. After their attacks, Helen and Candyman are both unable to maintain fetishizing, empowering “distance” from their objects of interest. Helen soon loses her putatively objective stance, confusing herself with Candyman and appearing to victimize Cabrini-Green

residents rather than study them. Candyman, equipped with the hook, no longer seduces; his hook enters his victims – men, women, and children – in violence that echoes rape.

Whereas the seizing of Helen's technologies can be seen as an attempt to manage the threat of castration that woman represents under patriarchy, Candyman's hook, which has the power to enter and radically transform bodies, was ironically forced upon him. While Helen and Candyman may mirror one another as victims of sexism and racism, respectively, his hook complicates Linda Williams' understanding of the classic horror villain as monstrously mirroring woman's "non-phallic" sexuality (90). Indeed, Williams' discussion of a scene from Rupert Julian's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) appears to suggest a paradoxical coexistence of non-phallic *and* hyper-phallic sexuality in the monster; in that scene, women debate whether the Phantom has no nose or an exceptionally large nose. Somewhat similarly, in *Candyman*, the villain's hook is larger than a hand, but not a true substitute for a hand, in utility or sensation. In line with Steven Jay Schneider's discussion of racially marked silent horror villains in his 2004 article, "Mixed Blood Couples: Monsters and Miscegenation in U.S. Horror Cinema," Candyman's hook appears to represent not the threat of female sexuality but the fear and appeal of black male sexuality; indeed, it was paranoia about a black man's power to seduce a white woman that motivated his murder and the implantation of the hook in the first place. His is a threat which, the film suggests, cannot be as easily managed as the threat of female desire; the product of racist paranoia, it retains its monstrous excess even after the man's murder.

DESIRE AND IDENTIFICATION

Like silent film heroines, Helen transitions from investigative subject to beautiful object when the villain appears and fascinates her. Like the Phantom, who beckons the heroine from the other side of a mirror, Candyman appears capable of dispossessing Helen of her mediating lenses; in addition to the aforementioned camera failure, once she begins inspecting the photographs Bernadette has miraculously retrieved, Helen is confronted by Candyman, who knocks off her sunglasses and hypnotizes her. The actress playing Helen, Virginia Madsen, notes that the director not only hypnotized her in this scene, but had mascara and lip stain applied to her face to make her appear “suddenly beautiful.” Whereas Helen had set out to make a (last) name for herself through her study of Candyman, his repeated voicing of her first name reduces her to a beautiful object, like her Trojan namesake. Helplessly staring at Candyman, Helen exhibits the gaze of the fascinated horror film heroine; indeed, according to Williams, in those films, “the monster or the freak’s own spectacular appearance holds her originally active, curious look in a trance-like passivity that allows him to master her through *her* look” (86).

Whereas, in my previous chapters, the Gothic villains stood for the threats of fascism, here the tyrannical gaze is wielded by a racial “other” who stands for victims of historical trauma. In E. Ann Kaplan’s 1997 book, *Looking for the Other*, she argues that Candyman’s gaze exerts a power that mirrors the oppression he suffered while alive:

In a sense, Candyman himself is a caricature-in-reverse of the imperial gaze. His huge body towers over the women in the scenes where he approaches them. The gaze of the slave's son now controls the white woman and white institutions just as the imperial gaze had controlled black lives and institutions. His literal and bloody murders symbolize white people's violent lynching of blacks and also their indirect murders (124).

While Candyman may, for example, resemble a silent film villain like Nosferatu in his fascinating gaze, his racial otherness more pointedly recalls Svengali, George Du Maurier's ruthless anti-Semitic caricature in his 1894 novel *Trilby*. Svengali clearly represented paranoia about Jewish men's power to seduce women and control commerce behind the scenes, the predecessor to the paranoia that would ultimately be used to justify the persecution and murder of Jews. Similarly, as suggested, Candyman represents paranoia about black male powers of fascination and seduction. Like Svengali, Candyman was a virtuoso, an adept portrait artist rather than a musician. However, the film suggests that, through the severing of Candyman's painting hand, his sexual and aggressive energies were "de-sublimated," recklessly released into the world; like the titular character of the 1972 blaxploitation horror film *Blacula*, Candyman was deprived of his original name and his nobility, transformed into a bloodthirsty monster after his attack by a white villain.

Thus, while Helen appears unable to resist Candyman, he appears unable to resist her as well. His fascination with Helen helps account for Diane Hoeveler's reading of the

aforementioned scene, which appears quite the opposite of Kaplan's reading: "[Helen] gazes back in such a dominating manner that instead she appears to take control of the *gaze*. Effectively, she turns the black man into the castrated object of the film's – and her – visual desire" (100). However, given my characterization of Candyman's sexuality as both non-phallic and hyper-phallic, I would not go as far as Hoeveler in characterizing Helen's gaze as castrating; while Candyman may have lost the power to fetishize, he remains a potent, sexual threat. Furthermore, Helen is clearly not in full control of herself, crying as she stares helplessly at Candyman. That is, if Helen fascinates Candyman, this act is neither fully conscious nor fully volitional; rather, she appears driven by her own conflicting conscious and subconscious desires.

From one perspective, Helen's conscious desires to learn about Candyman and to be published are thwarted by outside forces that deprive her of enabling distance. However, the film offers a parallel interpretation that suggests that Helen, like Miranda, subconsciously desires to lose her initially voyeuristic distance, to merge with her object of interest. Whereas Miranda wished to become Azilde, Helen appears to desire to possess *and* to become Candyman. In terms of desire, Candyman unleashes the sex and death drives that Helen's repressed awareness of her husband's infidelity releases, drives which had once been sublimated in her marriage. Before she ultimately kills her husband in the afterlife, Helen initially exhibits a masochistic drive for self-destruction. This explains her desire for a Candyman figure who is not only fascinated by her, but also wishes to kill her. If we view Candyman as the suspected Gothic villain, Helen is not motivated, like her predecessors, to determine his intentions toward her; Candyman,

unlike the effeminate, dissembling Gothic husband, is hyper-masculine, and he states his interests in Helen clearly: “Be my victim.” Candyman appears to love her enough to kill her, to offer her pleasure and pain upfront, rather than the dishonest blend offered by her husband.

Furthermore, while in *Dragonwyck*, Miranda desired to confuse herself with the idealized image of Azilde, in *Candyman*, Helen, wishes to overcome various “othernesses” that prevent her from identifying with Candyman. Helen’s identification with Candyman is more complex than the typical female Gothic heroine’s narcissistic over-identification with the portrait of a female predecessor. Rather than a symptom of a repressed desire to be desired, Helen’s identification with Candyman speaks to her repressed awareness of her personal and professional vulnerabilities and trespasses. Many of these relate to her gender and her desire to over-compensate for perceived weaknesses by viewing herself as inviolable. Helen’s anticipation of abandonment by her husband, for example, leads her to not only desire but to *identify* with Candyman-as-victim, who also lost his beloved. Furthermore, her possible kidnapping of the baby suggests her repressed awareness of the impending end of her marriage (indeed, she tells Anne Marie that she wants a child one day); however, it could also imply that she kidnapped the child for Candyman, to return the infant to a man who was taken from his own.

On a professional level, Helen’s repressed guilt about profiting from others’ suffering manifests in her identification with Candyman-as-villain. That is, while Helen may consciously wish to maintain distance, she, subconsciously, might be aware that it is

through her trespasses that she will achieve notoriety. Thus, while she may exhibit masochistic desire for Candyman, she may also desire to be punished for her investigative trespasses. More generally, Helen's identification with Candyman's acts of violence speaks to white guilt, a repressed knowledge of her complicity in cultural trauma; when she says "no part of me, no matter how hidden, is capable" of murder, she recalls the tentative declarations of those who look back on historical perpetrators of extraordinary violence, trying to convince themselves that, the banality of evil aside, they are constitutionally incapable of the violence associated with, for example, slavery.

This late moment, in which Helen consciously resists (but addresses the possibility of) identifying with both historical and recent acts of violence, is so unpleasant that she becomes susceptible to Candyman's offer of a different figure of identification: the mural image of his white, historical lover. That is, Helen is invited to trade a pained acknowledgement of her complicity in violence for identification with a mere helpless bystander to history. In my previous chapters, the heroine's early over-identification with a female predecessor allowed her to naively and narcissistically repress an awareness of otherness, to pleurably confuse present and past, which each work associated with the acting out of a repressed cultural trauma. Here, Candyman invites Helen to confuse herself with a beautiful historical figure who may have witnessed, but did not commit, atrocities. This confusion would remove her from her implication in the fact or the legacy of slavery. It would transform the film's narrative into a romance, with Helen starring as the lover about to be reunited with her beloved.

In female Gothic films, while the heroine may initially over-identify with an image of her female predecessor, her survival ultimately depends upon dis-identifying with this figure. In *Dragonwyck*, this dis-identification allows the film to consign the Holocaust to the past, redirecting focus onto American patriotism. *Candyman* alters this trajectory; it is only near the end of the film that Helen is over-identified with a graffiti image of her predecessor, Candyman's lover, whom she has supposedly reincarnated. Helen's refusal to passively die with Candyman (and the baby, who recalls the child of the historical, interracial couple) indeed suggests a dis-identification, a refusal to re-play the past. While she does not survive, her self-sacrifice in saving the baby's life offers a symbolic gesture suggesting that Helen has single-handedly taken on the guilt of a history of white-instigated violence and buried it, consigning a cultural trauma to the past, offering a chance for a new life. However, the film counters the naiveté of such an ending with a more typical horror film ending, portraying Helen's vengeful afterlife and foreshadowing future cycles of continuing violence.

GOTHIC EXCESS

At the end of the film, it isn't clear that Helen's dis-identification with her predecessor (and her redemptive killing of Candyman) represents a rejection of romance and a return to the "real world"; having lost her mind, she may be choosing between two fantasies, rather than between fantasy and reality. Furthermore, Helen's murder of Candyman does not provide closure to the narrative itself. Taking on the guilt of the

lynch mob and the pain of the murdered man, she appears to sacrifice her life to save the life of the black infant. While the residents of Cabrini-Green subsequently mourn Helen's passing, and bury her hook, she returns from the dead to kill her ex-husband with this weapon; rather than a martyr figure, she appears to have ultimately over-identified with Candyman himself, the victim-turned-villain. That is, Helen's "afterlife" takes on two opposed forms: the vengeful demon who kills her ex-husband and the martyred angel we finally see painted on the wall of Cabrini-Green, ascending in flames as the credits roll. Through the film's dual endings, it both offers a moving narrative of redemptive sacrifice (amplified by Philip Glass' heavenly organ music) and subsequently mocks the very idea through a typical horror movie revenge scene. In keeping with Lowenstein's analysis of horror films that address historical trauma, *Candyman* provides, questions, and even mocks our desire for a narrative of redemption.

The dual ending of the film recalls *All About Eve*, to the extent that that film offered "closure" through Eve's punishment but foreshadowed a cycle of victimization through the appearance of Phoebe, Eve's fan and future destroyer. *Candyman*, rather than a narrative of cyclical surveillance, tells a story of cyclical violence. The white mob killed the unnamed portraitist, who becomes the Candyman killer in the afterlife. Candyman, before he is vanquished, delays Helen's escape from the fire, from which she ultimately dies. Helen then becomes a killer in the afterlife, murdering her ex-husband, which may indeed motivate his new girlfriend to become a killer herself. As Kirsten Moana Thompson argues in *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium*, the film's opening shot of bees swarming over the Chicago skyline manifests

the paranoiac fear that inner-city violence will eventually spill out into the surrounding areas. Thus, it would be inappropriate for the film to provide a purely “healing” narrative that consigns violence to the past because of its insistence on foreshadowing a cycle of ongoing violence.

As Lowenstein suggests, efforts to understand cultural trauma are often efforts to disavow one’s implication in them. Horror films work differently, however. In *Candyman*, we witness the collapse of the disinterested, epistemological quest undertaken by the film’s protagonist and our chief figure of identification, Helen. She is not in full control over herself, motivated both by personal crises and an under-acknowledged cultural trauma. Thus the film suggests that, beneath analytical or academic jargon, the mind maps its own conflicts onto wide-scale conflicts to gain understanding, catharsis, and whatever pleasure it can. Naturally, the film also points out the problems with such an individual relation to cultural trauma. The elevation of trauma over suffering, the film implies, produces envy and invites transference; Helen’s investment in the Candyman narrative induces her to interpret her repressed emotional pain as trauma and act it out. If we view Helen’s ultimate over-identification with Candyman as a wish fulfillment, it allows her to adopt an odd position of power, consigning whites’ violence to the past while taking on both the pain, and the consequent authority, of the black male victim. That Helen’s epistemological journey ends not in sympathy but in potential madness suggests both an individual’s, and an individual narrative’s, limited power to comprehend cultural trauma.

CONCLUSION

In my third chapter, I argued that *All About Eve* foregrounds actresses' cyclical surveillance of one another to address postwar Hollywood audiences' state of mass fascination; the film's narrative initially portrays the latter phenomenon as a post-traumatic symptom of World War II, only to putatively discard this connection in the end. Similarly, *Candyman*'s narrative of cyclical violence addresses inner-city mass violence, which is linked, through the Candyman legend, to the aftermath of slavery. However, like *All About Eve*, *Candyman* calls into question the connections it establishes between present aggression and a past cultural trauma. That is, as powerfully as the latter film's narrative links present day violence among inner city African Americans to the aftermath of slavery, it also challenges this link through its self-reflexive, irreducibly complex plot. That is, like Barker's story, the film critiques liberal clichés and the desire for simple narratives to explain complex phenomena. Through the investigative character of Helen, whom Rose describes (in the filmmakers' commentary) as "pretty simple," and who rarely questions her motives or limitations, the film critiques its own blind spots, the limits to its understanding. Ultimately, the film balances the Gothic's tendencies toward melodramatic intensity and ironic distancing as a means to both amplify and critique its narrative of suffering and redemption.

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