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Gothic Revelations of Marriage in *The Witch of Ravensworth* and *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey*

Monica Miller

Given the Foucauldian notion that the rise of capitalism was concurrent with a split between the public and private spheres, it has been hypothesized that part of what prepared society for this split was the domestic or sentimental novel. By focusing attention on the previously ignored female domestic sphere, the domestic novel drew attention to the previously ignored details of the household. This in turn prepared the public for the demarcation of separate spheres which precipitated capitalism. The Gothic novel, as a subgenre of the domestic novel, takes this split between private and public one step further. The Gothic novel demonstrates that what is typically considered to be the private sphere of marriage should in fact be positioned closer to the realm of the public; it reveals marriage's own hidden, private realm in which secrets are kept. These secrets are unveiled in the Gothic novel through the attempted seductions, rapes, and abductions of Gothic heroines so common to the genre. Ultimately, the Gothic novel draws attention to the "public" nature of the private sphere of marriage by revealing that there is, in fact, a dark underside of this sacred institution.

In this article, I will focus primarily on George Brewer's 1808 *The Witch of Ravensworth* and Mrs. Carver's 1793 *The Horrors of Oakendale*. These novels exemplify the kind of marriage subplot within the Gothic novel which complicates the split between the public and private spheres. In his *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault identifies this split as one which emerges with and enables the rise of capitalism in the eighteenth century (84-5). A result of this split has been what modern critics have identified as the emergence of "'women's culture' and the domestic sphere" (Newton 102). The emergent female domestic sphere is reflected in the concurrently emergent domestic novel. As the domestic novel opens up the private domestic sphere to public attention, the Gothic novel, preoccupied with the problems of marriage, moves marriage to a semi-public sphere, revealing a secret sphere underneath.

In using the phrase "secret sphere," I am referring specifically to the infidelities, seductions, and rapes (whether attempted or actualized) which take place in the Gothic novel. Where the domestic novel, in the tradition of the Shakespearean comedy, typically ends on a hopeful note with a marriage, the Gothic novel challenges this hopefulness with its portrayal of varying degrees of dishonesty, infidelity, and outright evil. Fiedler characterizes this development in the novel as one in which there is a substitution of "terror for love as a central theme of fiction" (134). The Gothic novel's revelations of such threats to the evolving institution of marriage concurrent with the division of society into gendered spheres demonstrate the complexity underlying this emergent dichotomy.

Many critics have theorized the nature of the dichotomy which emerged at this time, interrogating the basic split between the public and the private. In her discussion of marriage in Britain between 1700 and 1850, Tanya Evans notes that "recent historians of women and gender have….concentrated on detailing the ways that ideas about, and the experience of, courtship, sex, marriage, and motherhood changed over time" (57). She goes on to explicitly characterize the "rise of a domestic ideology" which emerged around the turn of the nineteenth century as one which

"encouraged the separation of the public world of work from the private sphere of home and family life" (70). Similarly, Maggie Kilgour describes the "bourgeois ideal of the separate spheres [which] separates the domestic from the political, as a female realm of love and harmony which is opposed to a male commercial jungle of strife and conflict" (75). Such separate spheres were necessary in a society which no longer consisted of self-sufficient households, but relied upon surplus value for the accumulation of capital.

Even prior to Foucault, critics noted the emergence of separate spheres which coincided with the rise of capitalism and looked at its relationship to literature. Significantly, Leslie Fiedler saw this split as tied not only to the rise of capitalism, but to the rise of the novel itself. He notes that, "The moment at which the novel took hold coincides with the moment of the sexual division of labor which left business to the male, the arts to the female" (42). It is Kilgour who most specifically identifies this gendered split within the Gothic novel: "The text appears to set up an opposition between a desire for a life of private bourgeois content (female) and one for a life of public and feudal glory (male)" (98). The Gothic novel, then, reflects a significant change in Western culture which accompanied the rise of the gendered spheres of influence which took place around the turn of the nineteenth century.

In addition to this gendered split in spheres portrayed in the Gothic novel, there is a similarly gendered split in the characterization of desire which occurs in this genre. Cynthia Griffin Wolf has noted that, particularly in the Gothic model, "Many men have a tendency to divide 'love' into two components: an affectionate (and asexual) element; and a passionate (sexual) element" (98). This dichotomy is not limited to men, however, as Wolf goes on to identify "a 'Devil/Priest' syndrome exists which is an analogue in women to the 'Virgin/Whore' syndrome in men" (99). Thus, what has typically been seen as a simple split between the private realm of marriage and the home and the public realm of "feudal glory" is complicated by these additional perspectives in terms of what kinds of love or desire are being referred to, or what definition of success in a relationship is in play. The juxtaposition of the complexities underlying desire with the private, domestic sphere of marriage points to the inherent instability of what is typically considered the homogenous nature of the private, domestic sphere.

Certainly, the Gothic novel, as a form of the domestic novel, reflects the domestic novel's preoccupations with household concerns. This preoccupation with household issues is highlighted in both *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey* and *The Witch of Ravensworth*, even as both novels begin by introducing their domestic servants as fleshed out characters. In Oakendale Abbey, Laura's primary companion at the abbey is her servant, Mary. In addition, practically the entirety of Chapter Three of *The Witch of Ravensworth* is spent introducing the household servants, including the Baron's esquire, steward, butler, housekeeper, and domestic (9-10). Janet Todd describes the important role of the manservant in the Gothic: in contrast to the "servant problem" in reality in Britain during this time period, the "Gothic manservant of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries forms part of the fantasy of the Gothic novel" (270). Though a fantasy, the attention given to servants in the Gothic novel emphasizes the significance of household details to the genre.

Besides the attention given to domestic matters in these novels, the Gothic also has a preoccupation with marriage, a primary focus of the domestic sphere. In the Gothic novel, the courtship plot has a more complicated existence than in the more generic domestic novel. However, the very nature of the domestic sphere contains Gothic possibilities: Barbara Welter, when describing what she characterizes the "cult of true womanhood" which reached it zenith in domestic novels of the eighteenth century, demonstrates the Gothic nature of the wife's role when she compares being a wife to being a "hostage in the home" (151). Welter continues, describing a woman's role as being completely unchanging: "one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found. If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper

with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization and of the Republic" (152). As one of John Ruskin's famous characteristics of the Gothic is, in fact, "rigidity" (5), the stringency of the role of the "true woman" itself contributes to the rise of the Gothic mode.

From the earliest Gothic novels of Walpole and Radcliffe, marriage, though still the romantic goal of the novel, is presented as an unstable entity. Horace Walpole's 1764 *Castle of Otranto*, considered to the first Gothic novel, from the very beginning shows marriage as doomed. First, after having his arranged marriage delayed by his infirmity, the sickly Conrad is killed on his wedding day, crushed by a giant helmet which falls from the sky. His father, the already-married Lord Manfred, subsequently pursues his late son's fiancée, the Princess Isabella. The primary reason given for all of the drama surrounding marriage in the novel is given to be Manfred's "dread of seeing accomplished an ancient prophecy" which curses his line (17). Thus, from the first page of the first Gothic novel, marriage is presented as a cursed state.

Similarly, in Radcliffe's 1791 *Romance of the Forest*, Madame La Motte assumes that the innocent Adeline is being pursued by her husband, simply because Adeline is a beautiful young woman. Norman Holland and Leona Sherman trace this Gothic subversion of marriage directly back to Walpole, the father of the genre: "In its marvels and terrors, *The Castle of Otranto* actively subverts the prosaic vision of the world implicit in novelistic conventions of probability and verisimilitude"(301). The purpose of many Gothic tropes, then, is at least partly to reflect these themes of subversion: "The crumbling walls of Otranto are not the only structure imperiled by Manfred's design" (Holland and Sherman 306); certainly, such subversion is an example of grotesqueness, another of Ruskin's characteristics of the Gothic (5). In other words, from its very beginning, the Gothic novel functions as a "coda of corruption" to the "happily ever after" of the conventional marriage endings of the domestic and sentimental novels of the period, revealing marriage's unstable foundation.

A primary function of the Gothic, then, is to interrogate the assumption of marriage as a stable institution. For example, a primary preoccupation of the Gothic novel is to demonstrate that marriage, which was typically considered to exist in a more private, domestic sphere, in fact should be considered to have a much more public orientation. Its public nature is mostly explicitly seen in George Brewer's *The Witch of Ravensworth*, which, rather than taking the sentimental novel's strategy of ending with a wedding, instead begins with the very public wedding of the Baron de La Braunch to the Lady Bertha:

The baron had given orders that the castle should be open for a month to every stranger, and that his tenantry and vassals should be entertained during that period….The castle itself assumed a different appearance. The seven draw-bridges had been raised, and every gate was thrown open to the traveler, the pilgrim, and the minstrel (11).

From the very beginning, Brewer orients marriage in an overtly public space. Marriage, rather than representing the kind of "marriage [in which] heterosexual genitality is revealed as the reality principle before which the problematic pleasures of the female body yield" (Masse 680), instead provides a public persona for the Baron, underneath which are many skeletons from his past.

As a Gothic novel, *The Witch of Ravensworth* reveals the hidden realms of both the evil underbelly of marriage generally, as well as the Baron's secret past specifically, primarily through the occult work of the Hag. The novel actually opens with a paragraph-long, hyperbolically stereotyped description of the Hag (who is also known as Ann Ramsay), who is summarized as, "in short… so horrible ugly, that no one would come within two yards of her" (3). A monstrous, unmarried woman, she can be seen "the greater part of the day, bent nearly double, with her elbows fixed upon her knees, and her chin resting upon the props made for it by the palms of her hands. It was in this attitude that it was supposed Dame Ramsay designed her mischievous machinations" (3-4).

Such a description ostensibly shows the horrors which develop when a woman lives an unnatural, solitary, unmarried life. However, once Ann Ramsay's true identity as Gertrude, the woman whom the Baron scorned for lack of money, is revealed, her decadent surroundings and appearance instead demonstrate the depraved, secret sphere underlying marriage. In fact, around her cottage, "not even a blade of grass would grow"; rather, only "hemlock, and other poisonings, rank, and unwholesome weeds," with a "stagnant pool…in the midst" (5). This entire description is evocative of not only non-productive but lethal sexuality, from the stagnant pond to the toxic herbs.

Similarly, the Baron's current marriage is shown to have corruption at its heart. The Hag, as a symbol of this secret sphere of corruption, makes a memorable appearance at the Baron's wedding, declaring a curse on the marriage. More specifically, she "uttered a curse—a horrid curse: —'Misery to the Bride'" (14). Ultimately, the depravity at the heart of the Gothic shows that marriage is a less-than-ideal state, especially for women, as the Hag's curse is directed specifically toward the bride. Nina daVinci Nichols notes that "female powerlessness was built into eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social institutions of which marriage was the cornerstone" (194). However, one of the appeals of the Gothic novel is the agency which women are at times allowed, despite (or because of) the extreme circumstances provided by the plot. For example, in his discussion of *The Witch of Ravensworth*, Allen Grove suggests that "Brewer ultimately suggest that the wife, not the patriarch, governs the unfolding events" (ix). Certainly, the revelations of the Hag's identity at the end of the book, and the safety which the Baron's seeming victims ultimately find, support this hypothesis of female agency allowed in the Gothic.

Women in the Gothic novel often utilize the public façade and protection afforded by marriage to provide for their own ends. This is apparent in Miss Rainsford's decision to marry Lord Oakendale in *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey*, as "the idea of being a Countess, with all the flattering appendages of a title, gave a preponderancy to the scale of grandeur, and made her accept Lord Oakendale's proposals, and her father's commands, without any seeming reluctance," despite her "heart [being] devoted to Vincent" (118). In her discussion of eighteenth century marriage, Evans notes that "social status remained a crucial determinant in the experience of marriage during this period" (62); for women such as Miss Rainsford, pragmatism takes priority over emotion when it comes to making decisions about marriage.

Such mercenary motives for marriage are not limited to women, however, as Lord Oakendale "found himself so embarrassed and his fortune so little equal to his expenses, that he was under the necessity of repairing it by a marriage, in which love formed no part of the contract"(Carver 38). Unlike the more straightforward relationships in earlier Gothic novels such as Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which "the narrative of romantic love and theme of malevolent sensuality are expressed in opposition: impeccably good gentry marry and exceedingly wicked foreigners fall prey to exoticism" (Nichols 188), the sides of good and bad are not so clearly defined in these later Gothic novels. For example, while Lady Oakendale's rejection of her baby, the sight of which caused her to give "a shriek of abhorrence" (122), emphasizes her failings as a proper woman, the baby's guardian's use of her secret as a basis for extortion shows that even apparent agents of charity are not wholly motivated by altruism.

Certainly, the public pressure to marry someone of a similar station, as well as the necessity of wealth, drives many of the marriages in Gothic novels. As what I am referring to as "public-oriented marriages," or those which were primarily arranged to fulfill societal expectations, did not have love as their foundation, marriage partners looked elsewhere to fulfill their romantic or sexual needs. The necessity for public-oriented marriages, then, resulted in the creation of a secret, private sphere underneath the public realm of marriage; it is within this secret sphere that romantic and sexual love was relegated. The Gothic novel is rife with romantic alliances contained in secret, such as that between Miss Rainsford and Vincent in *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey*. Miss Rainsford loves

Vincent, even though he is an inappropriate marriage partner for her station: "she knew he could not introduce her into the rank in life her ambition led her to suppose she must fill, and she could not endure the sound of plain Mrs. Vincent; yet the idea of a tender lover, encouraged in secret, and met by stratagem, enraptured her imagination" (117-8). Certainly, the secrecy and strategy involved function to heighten the excitement for the participants, especially when compared to the drudgery of a public-oriented marriage: in the case of the Oakendales, "neither of them had endeavored to render the marriage state happy," as the "fortune she had brought him was the only inducement he ever had for making her his wife" (125).

Such mercenary marriages exist in *The Witch of Ravensworth* as well. Like Lord Oakendale, the Baron admits that he married Bertha "to obtain the splendor and advantages of wealth; I was not enamoured with her, I had not true regard"(26). The result of these loveless marriages is infidelity and adultery. In *The Witch of Ravensworth*, even before the Baron pursues Lady Alwena while he is still married to Bertha, there was a "confused tale of his infidelity to a lady of the name of Gertrude…spoken of" (Brewer 8). In addition, even after the Baron successfully marries Alwena, she herself has a poorly-concealed affair with the white knight, Alaric.

By showing these various instabilities underlying marriage, *The Witch of Ravensworth* in particular draws attention to the Gothic novel as a tragedy of household, through its heavy-handed allusions to the famous Shakespearean tragedies of household, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. Brewer evokes the tragic figure of Gertrude in *Hamlet* by having a character with the same name. Additionally, he evokes the opening of *Macbeth* by opening *The Witch of Ravensworth* with witch imagery similar to that used by Shakespeare. As in the first act of *Macbeth*, the Weïrd Sisters speak of meeting "upon the heath" (I:1), so the first sentence of *The Witch of Ravensworth* situates the Hag's home as being "on the extremity of a wild heath" (3). From the very first sentence, then, Brewer uses a similar setting and scene of witchcraft to evoke the tragedy of *Macbeth*.

Also like the Shakespearean tragedies, both *The Witch of Ravensworth* as well as *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey* use occult imagery and castles with hidden spaces to develop their themes. The use of such settings and imagery—what Wolff describes as the "highly stylized paraphernalia that we now associate with the Gothic-novel—a castle or abbey that is for the most part a safe place, but which has as its foundation some complicated maze of underground vaults or dark passages and in its bedrooms sliding panels and trapdoors" (100)—emphasizes the covert nature of the infidelities occurring beneath the surface of the societal-approved marriages in these novels. With regard to this kind of Gothic setting, Nichols has suggested that "Gothic novels rely upon place not only to situate plot but to evoke the terror of Gothic themes….Since Gothic danger lies in susceptibility as much as in circumstance, tenebrous settings and mysterious places victimize heroines as fully as do villains and other specific perils" (187). What Nichols sees as the victimization potential of Gothic spaces, I read as also representing a hidden realm of depravity and corruption, underlying the public space of marriage.

Both *The Witch of Ravensworth* and *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey* rely upon spaces of depravity also to illuminate the characters which they represent. Knowledge of the hidden recesses of a traditionally Gothic space is one way in which characters can wield power in these novels: as Nichols notes, with respect to the Gothic house, "only its owners…are privy to the unlit passageways and recesses of 'house,' its center and source of strength as well as mystery (189). *Oakendale Abbey* takes this even further, as even Lord Oakendale, the current owner of Oakendale Abbey, is not aware of all the horrors which have taken place (and continue to do so) in the abbey. Nevertheless, Lord Oakendale is very much aware of the Abbey's potential for hiding crime; in fact, he notes that that "the Abbey was a place well calculated for the very worst designs" (55). Certainly, sending Laura there under false pretenses, attempting to use it as a weapon against her virtue, and holding her there against her will qualify as "bad designs."

However, while he knows some of its tragic history, he is completely unaware of its monstrous current use as a rendezvous point for grave-robbers. When the abbey's current use as a place of storage for corpses is coupled with its history as a weapon against women, the result is an overall gestalt of evil, vice, and corruption. What Oakendale Abbey demonstrates, then, is how the monstrosity of the Gothic setting, originally a part of the villain's plan, can escape even his control, and ultimately wreak horror upon the villain as well as his victim, as Lord Oakendale is confronted with " the site of human body, apparently dead, but sitting upright in a coffin!" in his own abbey (113). Unexpected manifestations of the dreadful are the result of unchecked evil.

Despite his ignorance of the extent of the horrors taking place in the abbey, though, Lord Oakendale uses the abbey's desolation to threaten the novel's heroine, Laura, hoping that it will scare her into reconsidering his proposal to keep her as his mistress. This particular type of threat highlights the Gothic novel's tie to the sentimental novel, as it the same threat faced by Pamela, the title heroine of Samuel Richardson's 1740 seminal sentimental novel of seduction. In Richardson's novel, *Pamela* is sent to a "handsome, large, old, and lonely Mansion, that looks made for Solitude and Mischief" as punishment for rejecting the advances of her master, Mr. B (108). Like the perfidious Mr. B., Lord Oakendale expects that Laura's imprisonment in Oakendale Abbey will cause her "spirits [to] become so depressed, and her mind so enervated, that she would gladly fly to him for succour and friendship, rather than be condemned to a hateful solitude, like that of Oakendale Abbey" (55). The abbey, in fact, has a history of being used as a weapon against unruly women: after her escape, Laura learns that Lord Oakendale's mother "was sent down to this Abbey as a punishment, or rather mortification" (108). Further, as Lord Oakendale originally misrepresented himself to Laura, his secret identity as a married man, is also mirrored in the secrets held within the walls of the crumbling abbey.

Similarly, *The Witch of Ravensworth* contains a decadent space which reveals the corrupt nature of its owner in the setting of Lady Alwena's "bower of bliss" (53). Hers is not the domestic space of a Welternian "true woman." A widow, she is described as singularly depraved: she "was not only abandoned to the lust of unchaste desires, but her mind was also impure and wicked….she was ever…seeking to demolish the fair structure of female chastity, wherever she found it erected" (51). In a continuation of the novel's theme of feminine witchcraft, Lady Alwena's seduction of the Baron is compared to magic after she has "overpowered the functions of his mind" through "her endearmeants and caresses" in her bower of bliss (54).

Such "sex magic" further demonstrates the occult potential of these secret spaces. The Baron himself is aware of the corrupt nature of Alwena and her abode: reflecting on his crimes as he goes to see her, he asks himself, "whither…am I going? To a gilded palace, wherein resides a corrupt and hateful harlot, whose beauty and wantonness may invite me to dalliance, but whose embraces are death!" (87). As the Baron reflects on and even questions his own actions, he recognizes that it is his own infidelity which has contributed to the existence of evil in his realm, which is made palpable in both the bower of bliss and the Hag's hovel.

As the Baron realizes in *The Witch of Ravensworth*, the appearance of the occult is a direct result of infidelity. After the Baron attempts to first seduce and then murder his young love, Gertrude, she in fact adopts a completely new identity as the Hag. The Baron, knowing that Gertrude possesses virtue but not wealth, realizes that marrying her would require him to sacrifice his own ambition, in a decision similar to that made by Miss Rainsford in *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey*. As a man, however, he has more options at his disposal than Miss Rainsford does, and attempts to trick Gertrude into a "false ceremony of the marriage ritual in Normandy." Once she realizes this insult to her honor and refuses to comply with the Baron's wishes, "The baron laid a plan to poison her. It was the monk, Velaschi, who was entrusted with the plot." However, Velaschi is not the villain he appears to be. Rather than kill Gertrude, he instead saves her: "Lady Gertrude left the

world alive. It was in the deserted castle, that the monk, Velaschi, furnished her a retreat" (102). Yet again, a man is able to take advantage of the secret spaces of a castle in order to facilitate a secret plan; this time, however, its depravity functions as a place of sanctuary for a woman for once, rather than a place of terror. As in *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey*, knowledge of the hidden spaces within the Gothic setting allows the acquisition of power by those who otherwise might lack it.

The Gothicism of *The Witch of Ravensworth* is particularly noteworthy for its shocking portrayal of the occult: "ghastly visions had appeared, smeared with blood; and the ghost of a lady, who was supposed to have been murdered in one of the rooms…seen after it was dark looking through the windows, with streams of blood running from her throat" (36). Like Macbeth's vision of Banquo and Lady Macbeth's bloody hands, these bloody visions are all a direct result of vice and crime. Ironically, those who seem to possess the greatest appearance of evil, whether Gertrude, in her disguise as the Hag who sacrifices babies, or the monk Velaschi, who at one point appears in the guise of a fiend, all "by means of aiding the impulse of vice, [in fact] retarded crime" (103). In *The Witch of Ravensworth*, there is a literally existent secret sphere of satanic figures engaged in "occult" (in both the supernatural and hidden meanings of the word) work, which was both brought about and reinforced by the Baron's infidelity.

It is this secret sphere, brought into existence by an instable marriage, which provides the sense of the Gothic world described by Ann Tracy as "melancholy, menacing, shot through with guilt and fear…[but still,] despite some bizarre embellishments, recognizable as the grimmer side of the human condition" (104). In fact, Ruth Anolik links the conventions of the Gothic novel directly to the legal effects of marriage on women. She says that "in substituting a literal death for a metaphorical death, the Gothic strategy…encourages the reader to see more clearly the horrible implications to the wife of a metaphoric civil death" (27). When looking at these particular novels, what Anolik sees as the "conflation between marriage and death in the Gothic novel" (27) can be extended to adultery as well. In fact, the entire evil underbelly of marriage revealed by the Gothic novel can generally be linked to the predatory nature of men.

These predatory men are the face of the secret, dangerous underside of marriage, which represents the most immediate danger to the innocent Gothic heroine. It is notable that the Hag who appears at the marriage of the Baron to Bertha as the "misshapen figure" drinks "not a health—not a blessing—a horrid curse—'Misery to the Bride'" (14). Marriage is itself a curse upon the bride, regardless of her identity. Anolik notes that the "The trope of the dangerous male relative reflects the legal reality that the father and the husband, who promote marriage, whose economic plots and possession of the woman are supported by marriage, are the primary causes of the civil death of the woman" (27). Eighteenth and nineteenth century women were on their guard against this dangerous nature of men: "all True Women were urged…to maintain their virtue, although men, being by nature more sensual than they, would try to assault it" (Welter 155). This explains at least part of the appeal of the Gothic novel to women: it functions as an encoded warning about the dangers of men to its female readers.

The portrayal of such predatory men also provided a cathartic release for the female readers of the Gothic novel. In their discussion of the Gothic tropes portrayed in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Holland and Sherman note that,

for heroines like Emily [in Udolpho], the basic role is resistance. In the fictional as in the real world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a young woman had to resist objectionable marriages, seduction, jealousy, and rape. Men dominated their world with these tactics. Women had few means with which to defend themselves, and defeat meant ruin. Gothic novels enabled literents, especially women, to experience these conditions in the gothic castle at the hands of gothic mothers, fathers, and lovers (286)

Certainly, such malevolence is seen in both *The Witch of Ravensworth* and *The Horrors of Oakendale*

Abbey. Lord Oakendale, in particular, illustrates this type of Gothic villain in his behavior toward the orphaned Laura. Once she realizes his immoral intentions toward her, she explains that, "I at once saw my ruined situation; and I exclaimed on the cruelty of his conduct, demanding immediate release. [Nevertheless,] he pleaded the most ardent love, protesting that he could not live without me." Laura, an innocent, virtuous heroine, rejects his advances, even more strenuously once she learns that Lord Oakendale is already married. When she rejects him, Lord Oakendale reveals his villainous side, warning Laura, "silly girl…you are in my power; and if you provoke that power, I warn you to take the consequence" (104).

Lord Oakendale's actions toward Laura are, indeed, an expression of his attempt to exert his power. As he suffers through his unhappy marriage, he finds himself wishing that his wife would die, "when he might be at liberty to marry some beautiful young creature, without fortune, whose gratitude would secure to him her affections, and whose youth and health would add herself to his possessions" (147). Lord Oakendale's desire for a young woman who would be completely dependent on him, coupled with his perceiving such a young woman as a "possession" to be collected, further illuminates his villainy and demonstrates the danger to women inherent in the unequal dynamic which existed in marriage at the time. In fact, his duplicity in dealing with Laura began with their first meeting, as he introduced himself to her under the assumed name of "Mr. Thornaby." Laura later admits her naiveté in her dealings with him, characterizing herself as "young and hasty…with the arts of man" (101).

While Lord Oakendale is willing to ruin the reputation of an innocent woman, Baron de La Braunch in *The Witch of Ravensworth* belongs to an entirely different category of villain, in his willingness to be the perpetrator of multiple murders, including infanticide. Over the course of the novel, he plots the death of his beloved Gertrude, hands over the infant Edward to the Hag as a human sacrifice, takes part in an occult ritual in which he believes he is stabbing his wife, Bertha, three times, and subsequently stabs the Lady Alwena. Despite the vast differences in their degrees of depravity, both Lord Oakendale and the Baron de La Braunch demonstrate what Michelle Masse characterizes as the "Ur-plot" of the Gothic novel:

> a terror-inflected variant of Richardsonian courtship narrative in which an unprotected young female in an isolated setting uncovers a sinister secret. After repeated trials and persecutions, one of two possible outcomes usually follows. The master of the house is discovered as the evil source of her tribulations and is vanquished by the poor-but-honest (and inevitably later revealed as noble) young male, who marries the female; or the master of the house, apparently the source of evil, is revealed to be more sinned against than sinning (99)

Both Lord Oakendale and the Baron fall in the former category, as one of the evil villains who is vanquished by the noble young man; only, the Baron is capable of much greater depths of depravity than Lord Oakendale.

Even Lady Oakendale, prior to her struggle within a loveless marriage, must fight against predatory men who would view her as a possession. When Vincent, for whom she feels genuine affection, realizes that he is in danger of losing her to a more titled rival, he tries to force the issue of marriage upon her: "she found herself four months advanced in her pregnancy, by the man whom she had sacrificed to her ambition" (121). Despite her affection for Vincent, her responsibility to the public duties required by her socioeconomic status wins out. While she does bear the child, she ultimately gives it to the doctor to raise. Lady Oakendale is subsequently haunted by her past, another way in which the spectre of the unacknowledged realms of marriage and adultery exist in the Gothic. As Holland and Sherman observed in *The Castle of Otranto*, "the crumbling walls are not the only structure imperiled by [the Gothic villain's] design" (306). In *Oakendale Abbey*, infidelity, both attempted and realized, are represented by the crumbling Gothic structure, as it

unsuccessfully tries to contain the secrets of the Oakendale family.

Thus, the sense of isolation, desolation, and fear evoked in the Gothic novel work to highlight both the anxiety provoked by the instability of marriage at the time, as well as to show marriage to have both a much more public aspect to it, by revealing a heretofore hidden realm underlying marriage. As Kilgour explains, "A valorization of the bourgeois ideal of marriage, as the quest for a higher purpose, is shown to be destructive….the conflict is itself produced by a separation of public and private that is bourgeois….The modern world reveals, however, a fear of women and the home it creates as an ideal separate from the public sphere" (99). This dichotomy between the public and the private spheres which coincided with the rise of capitalism produced anxieties which were vented through the catharsis of the Gothic novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as George Brewer's *The Witch of Ravensworth* and Mrs. Carver's *The Horrors of Oakendale Abbey*. By dramatizing the anxiety provoked by the existence of the unacknowledged, secret side of marriage through their Gothic excesses and secret occult goings-on, the Gothic novel provided both a catharsis for its readers, who could find expression for their fears vicariously along with its heroines, as well as be grateful that their reality, while changing, did not, in fact, include witches, evil barons, or crumbling abbeys.

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