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Amy Bower 6 April 2018

APPROVAL SHEET

“The Gothic Marriage Plot”: Gothic Realism as Resistance to Patriarchy in the Fiction of Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Anne Brontë

By
Amy Bower

Master of Arts

English

____
Laura Otis, Ph.D.

Advisor

____
Paul Kelleher, Ph.D.

Committee Member

____
Catherine Nickerson, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Accepted:

____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.

Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

____________________Date

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B.A., Emory University 2017

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Abstract

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Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Grey Woman*, and Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* share an underlying anxiety about marriage in a society in which it is difficult for a woman to leave her husband. *Northanger Abbey* and *The Grey Woman* grapple with this fear by either parodying (Austen) or embracing (Gaskell) the conventions of the Gothic genre. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, generally considered a realist novel, depicts similar themes of horror and imprisonment. When one traces the similarities between the *The Grey Woman*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the ostensibly clear demarcations between the Gothic tale, the Gothic parody, and the realist novel become slippery. For women trapped in abusive marriages, the “real” and the “Gothic” are often indistinguishable. Using this framework, I contend that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, though seemingly a “realist” novel, has Gothic qualities. *Tenant* is not solely realist or Gothic, but rather inhabits a Gothic realism particular to the experiences of women. Furthermore, these three novels have pedagogical implications, as the authors warn and educate their readers about the dangers of society. Thus, Gothic realism as it operates in the Female Gothic not only allows female authors to depict the oppression of women, but also resists that same oppression.

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Introduction

In the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë asks her readers, "To represent a bad thing in its least offensive light is, doubtless, the most agreeable course for a writer of fiction to pursue, but is it the most honest, or the safest?" (10). Brontë asks this question in defense of the controversial topic of her novel: the story of a woman who leaves her philandering, alcoholic husband. Fear of marrying the wrong man and becoming trapped in an unhappy or abusive marriage is a common anxiety in women's literature of the nineteenth century. To explore such a topic in "its least offensive light," many female writers turned to the Gothic, a mode of fiction that emphasizes fear and horror, which enabled these authors to portray "bad things" in their extreme without eliciting the criticism Brontë received for depicting such themes in blunt, realistic terms. "Coarse" was a favorite word of Victorian reviewers in their criticism of *Tenant*. In an unsigned 1848 review from *Sharpe's London Magazine*, the reviewer argues that *Tenant*'s moral message is hampered by "the profane expressions, inconceivably coarse language, and revolting scenes and descriptions by which its pages are disfigured" (Allott 265). For writers working in the Gothic genre, however, "coarseness" is an expectation rather than a flaw. The Gothic allows female authors to more freely grapple with the issues afflicting women as Gothic themes of imprisonment and oppression lend themselves to the experiences of womanhood in the nineteenth century. The similarities between such Gothic novels and *Tenant*, which is ostensibly "realism," illuminate how nineteenth century depictions of female subjectivity are entrenched in the Gothic.

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Grey Woman* (1861), and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) share an underlying anxiety about marriage in a society in which it is difficult for a woman to leave her husband. *Northanger Abbey* and *The*

Grey Woman grapple with this fear by either parodying (Austen) or embracing (Gaskell) the conventions of the Gothic. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, generally considered a realist novel, grapples with similar themes of horror and imprisonment. When one traces the similarities between the *The Grey Woman*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the ostensibly clear demarcations between the Gothic tale, the Gothic parody, and the realist novel become slippery. For women trapped in abusive marriages, the "real" and the "Gothic" are often indistinguishable. Thus, I contend that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, though seemingly a "realist" novel, has Gothic qualities. *Tenant* is not solely realist or Gothic, but rather inhabits a Gothic realism particular to the experiences of women.

In the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Brontë explains that her "object in writing the following pages" was not merely to entertain the reader, but to "tell the truth" (9). Brontë's artistic vision fits well with the definition of realism: "a broad tendency in literature that emphasizes fidelity to the observable and complex facts of life" (*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*). A "fidelity to the observable and complex facts of life" may seem at odds with the Gothic, a genre often associated with the supernatural. However, the Gothic genre is rather flexible and is not limited to supernatural tales. Carol Margaret Davison notes that the "ongoing fixation with issues of gender and sexuality" in the Victorian Gothic extended "that genre's range, in tandem with the Victorian novel's forays into social realism, sensation fiction, science fiction, and beyond, to an interrogation of the patriarchal social structures that shaped Britain's political and domestic life" (125). Indeed, a closer examination of the definition of "Gothic" reveals the possibility for the genre to overlap with realism:

> A mode of narrative fiction dealing with supernatural or horrifying events and generally possessed of a claustrophobic air of oppression or evil…the literary tradition confusingly

> designated as ‘Gothic’ is a distinct modern development in which the characteristic theme is the stranglehold of the past upon the present, or the encroachment of the ‘dark’ ages of oppression upon the ‘enlightened’ modern era. (*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*)

While the supernatural is certainly common in the Gothic, it is not necessary to the genre. Rather, societal oppression is just as effective as otherworldly threats in creating the “claustrophobic air” characteristic of the Gothic. For Gothic literature that focuses on the female experience, it is patriarchal oppression that has a “stranglehold” upon the “enlightened’ modern era.” If societal oppression can become the origin for Gothic horror, then it becomes apparent how the Gothic can coincide with the real. That is not to say, however, that all realistic fiction that portrays issues of oppression qualifies as Gothic realism. Themes of imprisonment and claustrophobia distinguish Gothic realism from realism. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is an example of Gothic realism not simply because it deals with patriarchal oppression, but because that oppression creates a claustrophobic reality for its heroine.

In naming *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as “Gothic realism” it is not my purpose to delineate a specific list of characteristics that qualify a novel as Gothic realism. On the contrary, Gothic realism highlights that genre is an inherently slippery and nebulous form of categorization. My definitions of realism, Gothic realism, and the Gothic are purposefully and necessarily broad in order to account for the variety within these genres as well as their shared qualities. In *The Grey Woman*, for instance, Gaskell employs more conventional Gothic tropes, and thus the novel is best categorized as “Gothic.” However, the fact that Gaskell wrote a novella about a woman escaping an abusive marriage at a time when divorce laws were changing in

England implies that when a heroine's autonomy is in jeopardy, even the most traditionally "Gothic" tale is never far from the "real."

Not only do *Northanger Abbey*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *The Grey Woman* all fall into the genre of Gothic, but specifically they fall within the Female Gothic. Ellen Moers first coined the term "Female Gothic," and her definitions of both the Gothic and the Female Gothic are quite broad:

> What I mean by Female Gothic is easily defined: the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic. But what I mean—or anyone else means—by 'the Gothic' is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear. In Gothic writings fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite auctorial intent: to scare. (90)

Since Moers termed the sub-genre Female Gothic, there have been many critical attempts to identify characteristics that unite the "Female Gothic" as a coherent genre. Although there is certainly variation within attempts identify shared characteristics in Female Gothic literature, generally such definitions of the sub-genre agree that "the transgressive male becomes the primary threat to the female protagonist" and the heroine's "experiences are represented as a journey leading towards the assumption of some kind of agency and power in the patriarchal world, or alternatively as a search for the absent mother" (Punter and Byron 279). While these characteristics apply to the three main texts on which I focus, my project does not endeavor to argue for a new definition of the Female Gothic, but rather to identify Gothic realism a trend within the Female Gothic and to explore how Gothic realism operates in Female Gothic literature. "Female Gothic" as used in this project will refer to Moers' broad definition of the

Female Gothic as Gothic fiction written by and about women. However, I do diverge from Moers' definition of Gothic as a genre in which "fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural." In *Northanger Abbey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* the strange does not predominate over the commonplace in order to evoke fear, but rather, the authors draw attention to the horror that can be found in the commonplace. My purpose in categorizing *Northanger Abbey*, *The Grey Woman*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as specifically *female* Gothic texts is to establish that these three authors are approaching the Gothic genre from a uniquely female point of view and are contributing to a tradition of female writers writing Gothic tales.

Not only are the Gothic and Gothic realism apt genres for portraying female marginalization, but the Female Gothic also serves as a tool for challenging patriarchal oppression. As Anne Brontë describes in the preface to the second edition of *Tenant*, her purpose in writing the novel is not simply to tell the "truth," but to tell the truth in order to educate: "I know that such characters do exist, and if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain" (10). Brontë is invested in using her novel to create social change. Helen Graham, the novel's heroine, resists harmful gender roles through her parenting strategies. Between the lessons Helen teaches her son and Brontë's explicit desire to have her readers learn from this novel, Brontë is interested in pedagogy as a means of dismantling patriarchal oppression. Similarly, *Northanger Abbey* and *The Grey Woman* also impart warnings and lessons on the reader, although Austen and Gaskell's pedagogies are not as explicit as Brontë's. The Female Gothic genre specifically is an effective vehicle for enacting social change through pedagogy, as it enables women to dramatize the horrors of patriarchy, and through the heroine's escape from her oppressive situation the author posits a means of challenging this oppression.

Similar to Brontë, Austen and Gaskell are invested in drawing attention to female marginalization. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's parody of the Gothic is not necessarily a condemnation of the Gothic: "*Northanger Abbey* does not refute, but rather clarifies and reclaims, Gothic conventions in distinctly political ways" (Johnson 34). Austen's satire deconstructs the Gothic in order to highlight the horrors of mundane female marginalization. Austen's novel is just as much a parody as it is a guide for how to read the Gothic, revealing that a familiarity with Gothic novels can help a young woman better understand the horrors and dangers of the real world. Gaskell was also aware of the usefulness of the Gothic genre for exploring the oppression of women:

> [Gaskell's] powerful stories use Gothic motifs and conventions…to figure repressed anxieties and desires and to symbolise and explore the psychologies of oppression. They offer a searing proto-feminist indictment of the vulnerability of women and children within structures which support and even encourage male power and violence. (Wallace 67-68)

In the first section of this project, I will put into conversation Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Gaskell's *The Grey Woman*. Although Austen parodies the Gothic motifs Gaskell employs, she is thematically in tandem with Gaskell. In drawing attention to the absurdity of Gothic conventions, Austen reveals that the true Gothic horrors are the societal "structures which support and even courage male power and violence." Austen's satirical approach allows her to collapse the Gothic and realist genres: the differences between the Gothic tale and the Gothic parody are simply differences in style and convention. Though Austen wrote before Gaskell, *Northanger Abbey* can serve as a guide for how to identify the real-life implications of *The Grey Woman* (and indeed, other Female Gothic novels), thus destabilizing the distinction between "Gothic" and "realism."

My analysis of the instability of genre in *Northanger Abbey* and *The Grey Woman* will provide the framework for my reading of the Gothic realism in Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Similar to Austen and Gaskell, Brontë exposes the societal "structures which support and even encourage male power and violence." My examination of the Gothic in *Tenant* will examine Brontë's use of space and her depiction of female subjectivity within an oppressive, patriarchal society. The section will conclude with a discussion of Brontë's radical vision for parenting, in which she challenges the nineteenth-century view that girls and boys should be raised differently.

Pedagogy, whether through parenting or writing, plays a crucial role in Brontë's vision of social reform. My final section will examine pedagogy not only in *Tenant* but also in the Female Gothic more widely. An analysis of narrative structure in *Tenant*, *The Grey Woman*, and *Northanger Abbey* will illuminate how the Female Gothic operates as a genre that warns and educates its readers through amplifying the voices and stories of women. It may seem counterintuitive to end this project with an examination of the narrative structure of these texts, however, my analysis of narrative structure is dependent on my interpretation of the Gothic themes in these texts as presented in the first two chapters. Although the narration of each text differs, in all three texts narrative voice subverts patriarchal oppression through equipping women with the knowledge necessary to navigate a society that actively restricts female agency. Thus, my discussion of narrative structure unifies the ideas presented in the first two chapters by examining the subversiveness of the Female Gothic.

While I only focus on three works of literature in this project, this framework of “Gothic realism” can be applied more broadly to understand nineteenth century women’s literature. While designating novels as “realism” and “Gothic” is helpful in certain contexts, ultimately such categorizations are unstable. Through identifying the “real” in the Gothic and the “Gothic” in the real, we can better understand not only the experience of being a woman in the nineteenth century, but also the way in which literature helped women to navigate the patriarchal society in which they lived.

Chapter 1: The Patriarchal Horrors of Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Gaskell's *The Grey Woman*

At the heart of every Gothic novel is horror. Gothic horror often stems from supernatural or phantasmal terrors; however, authors do not always have to look to otherworldly forces to instill fear in their readers. For female writers of the Gothic, simply the experience of existing as a woman in a patriarchal society is fraught with sufficient horror to inspire a Gothic tale. In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen parodies the more outlandish elements of the Gothic genre not to dismiss the genre completely, but rather to underscore the very real terrors faced by ordinary women. Elizabeth Gaskell's novella, *The Grey Woman*, also speaks to the struggles faced by real nineteenth century women, particularly at a time when divorce laws were changing in England. Unlike Austen, Gaskell embraces Gothic tropes. The outlandishness of the Gothic genre provides Gaskell with the freedom to more overtly critique the patriarchal and heteronormative constraints that trap women in unwanted marriages. Although Gaskell employs many of the conventions that Austen parodies, these texts are complements as Austen deconstructs the Gothic to uncover the mundane misogyny that lays the groundwork for the more extreme abuse that Gaskell's heroine faces.

Austen's rendering of the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey* directly engages with the Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe, who is regarded as "one of the Gothic's most prestigious producers and proponents" (Davison 124). Among other things, Radcliffe's novels are known for their courageous and virtuous heroines. In the opening paragraphs of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen describes Catherine Morland as the antithesis of the archetypal Radcliffean Gothic heroine. The Radcliffean heroine is an impossible ideal; she is virtuous, beautiful, clever, talented in poetry and music, and often an orphan. Her role in the narrative is that of "simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine" (Moers 91). Catherine Morland, on the other hand, is not a lonely orphan, but rather, has two healthy, loving parents and nine siblings. She is not beautiful, but "had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features" (Austen 5). Nor does Catherine Morland excel at music, drawing, or French. Catherine Morland is, in other words, an everywoman. On the surface Austen's ironic rendering of this average heroine can be read as a critique of Gothic conventions, but as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that there is a deeper irony to Austen's assertion that "no one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born a heroine" (Austen 5). Catherine is at once an anti-Gothic heroine and a Gothic heroine. This liminal space that Catherine inhabits allows Austen to collapse the boundary between the Gothic and realist genres, illuminating the Gothic elements of "real" life.

Northanger Abbey simultaneously parodies and replicates the Gothic plot. As Claudia Johnson argues, "*Northanger Abbey* does not refute, but clarifies and reclaims, gothic conventions in distinctly political ways" (34). Austen's treatment of setting, for instance, both imitates and diverges from Gothic tropes, consequently revealing the "Gothic" aspects of the "real." The heroines of Radcliffe's Gothic novels typically find themselves in foreign landscapes, particularly France and Italy: "In Mrs. Radcliffe's hands, the Gothic novel became a feminine substitute for the picaresque, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction" (Moers 126). Similar to the heroine of a Radcliffean novel, Catherine's tale begins with a journey. However, rather than travelling to a foreign country, Catherine travels to Bath. While it may be tempting to laugh at Catherine's remark that she cannot look at Beechen Cliff "without thinking of the South of France," it is not so far-fetched that for the inexperienced Catherine, Bath is as foreign as France.

Catherine herself puts it best when, in response to Henry Tilney's comment that Bath is "the most tiresome place in the world," she says:

> Well, other people must judge for themselves, and those who go to London may think nothing of Bath. But I, who live in a small retired village in the country, can never find greater sameness in such a place as this, than in my own home; for there are a variety of amusements, a variety of things to be seen and done all day long, which I can know nothing of there. (Austen 56)

The foreignness of a city is relative to the experiences of the individual perceiving the location. Furthermore, Catherine and Henry's disagreement over Bath is gendered. As a young man, Henry can easily maneuver through Bath with little fear. For Catherine, however, Bath is as foreign and mysterious as the landscape of a Gothic novel, and just as those conventional foreign locales hold dangers for the Gothic heroine, so does Bath hold dangers for Catherine. One such danger is John Thorpe.

Although he is a far cry from the foreign aristocrats who terrorize the heroines of conventional Gothic novels, John Thorpe is equally frightening. In an attempt to convince Catherine to go on a carriage ride, Thorpe lies to her, saying that he saw Henry Tilney out with another young woman. Catherine agrees to the carriage ride because Thorpe has promised that their destination is Blaize Castle, a name that sounds as though it came from a Gothic novel and thus appeals to Catherine's imagination. The trip sours when Catherine sees Henry and Eleanor Tilney and consequently realizes Thorpe's lie. Catherine pleads with Thorpe to stop the carriage, but Thorpe "only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on" and Catherine "angry and vexed as she was, having no power of getting away, was obliged to give up the point and submit" (Austen 62). Although Thorpe continues against Catherine's wishes, they never reach Blaize Castle. However, the Gothic castle is unnecessary as Catherine, whether she realizes it or not, is already living a Gothic nightmare. Trapped in a carriage with a reckless young man who is willing to lie to get her alone with him, Catherine is as scared and powerless as a conventional Gothic heroine who has been locked in a decrepit castle or abducted by a sinister villain. Catherine's disastrous carriage ride with Thorpe highlights how vulnerable young women are to men with devious intentions, even in "tiresome" Bath. The fundamental difference between Catherine and the Radcliffean heroine is that "Austen allows Catherine to be any middle-class woman…what happens to her could equally happen to other women readers" (Jerinic 139). Thus John Thorpe, a character who resembles a type of young man whom Austen's readers would likely encounter in their real lives, becomes the story's villain.

When Thorpe, Isabella, and James again try to convince Catherine to break her plans with the Tilneys to go on an outing with them, Catherine is not so easily persuaded. Catherine is so resolute in her refusal to cancel her walk with the Tilneys that Thorpe and Isabella turn to physical restraint: "Isabella, however, caught hold of one hand; Thorpe of the other; and remonstrances poured in from all three" (Austen 72). Thorpe and Isabella's turn to physical aggression heightens the danger of this dispute from commonplace to Gothic. That the conflict at the root of this altercation is so mundane underscores the powerlessness women face on a daily basis. The pattern of Catherine's refusal being ignored or refuted by the men around her has serious repercussions when Thorpe proposes to Catherine, or, more accurately, presumes an engagement to Catherine.

Catherine is incredulous when Isabella mentions that Thorpe is in love with her. For the reader, to whom Thorpe's intentions are obvious, it is tempting to laugh at Catherine's ignorance and believe Isabella when she says, "his attentions were such as a child must have noticed"

(Austen 104). However, for Thorpe to have assumed that Catherine reciprocated his feelings is absurd. During the exchange in which Catherine gave Thorpe “the most positive encouragement” (Austen 104), Catherine responds to Thorpe’s flirtations with banal pleasantries. Thorpe’s clear flirtation, “And I hope—I hope, Miss Morland, *you* will not be sorry to see me,” is met with “Oh! dear, not at all. There are very few people I am sorry to see. Company is always cheerful” (Austen 91). This exchange renders Thorpe’s following observation that he and Catherine “think pretty much alike upon most matters” ironic (Austen 91). Catherine interprets Thorpe’s flirtation as a friendly comment, and Thorpe interprets Catherine’s general pleasantry as a reciprocation of his flirtations. Thorpe’s misinterpretation of Catherine’s feelings for him is just as laughable as Catherine’s inability to recognize that Thorpe is flirting with her. This particular exchange between Thorpe and Catherine seems to lend credibility to Isabella’s harsh comment that a “child” would have recognized Thorpe’s feelings for Catherine. However, a consideration of the *whole* of Thorpe’s and Catherine’s interactions paints Catherine’s misunderstanding in a more sympathetic light. Thorpe is consistently rude and disrespectful to Catherine. He lies to Catherine. He not only ignores Catherine’s wishes to leave his carriage, but also laughs at her distress. He and his sister physically restrain her when she refuses to spend the afternoon with them. If this is how Thorpe expresses his affection for Catherine, it is no surprise that Catherine is blindsided by the realization that Thorpe wants to marry her.

A consideration of Thorpe’s cruelty resists a reading of Catherine as naïve for missing Thorpe’s flirtations. Yet the irony of Isabella’s assertion that Thorpe’s “attentions were such as a child must have noticed” lies not in its falsity, but in its truthfulness. To the reader, Thorpe’s desire to marry Catherine is clear from the onset of their relationship. Thorpe’s vulgarity and aggressiveness are inextricably tied to his desire for Catherine, and are more often than not a consequence of his determination to keep Catherine away from his rival, Henry Tilney. We laugh at Catherine for not seeing Thorpe's interest in her, but our laughter dies away when we realize that the most obvious indicators that Thorpe is courting Catherine are exchanges in which Thorpe blatantly disrespects Catherine's feelings and wishes. Thorpe's desire to marry Catherine is obvious to Isabella, and should be to Catherine as well, because they live in a society in which a man's romantic interest in a woman and his disrespect towards that woman are not mutually exclusive. That "a child" would have recognized Thorpe's feelings for Catherine is not just true, but terrifying.

Thorpe's aggressive courtship of Catherine refutes Henry Tilney's belief that women have the "power of refusal" (Austen 54). On the contrary, throughout the novel "women's power of refusal is severely compromised" (Johnson 36). Catherine never has the power to refuse because she is never given the opportunity to refuse. Thorpe never formally proposes to Catherine, nor does he even explicitly express his desire to marry her. Rather, he assumes that Catherine understands his intentions. Worse, he interprets Catherine's politeness toward him as "the most positive encouragement" of his feelings (Austen 104). The man's proposal of marriage is preceded by an assumption that the proposal will be accepted, and consequently the woman loses her ability to refuse. Catherine is not persuaded by Henry's comparison of marriage to a country dance because "people that marry can never part, but must go and keep house together. People that dance, only stand opposite each other in a long room for half an hour" (Austen 54). Indeed, a more apt analogy for marriage in *Northanger Abbey* is Catherine and Thorpe's Gothic carriage ride. The woman reluctantly agrees to the engagement on false pretenses, and by the time she realizes her mistake she is unable to escape her situation.

Catherine does, of course, ultimately refuse Thorpe. However, the ease with which she almost becomes engaged to Thorpe underscores the ease with which a woman may unwittingly find herself married to a cruel husband. Anna Scherer, the Gothic heroine of Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Grey Woman*, is one such woman. Written about forty years after the publication of *Northanger Abbey*, *The Grey Woman* is a Gothic tale of which Catherine Morland would not want to be the heroine. *The Grey Woman* is told through a frame narrative: an Englishwoman travelling in Germany comes into possession of a letter written by Anna to her daughter, Ursula. In the letter, Anna warns her daughter from marrying and recounts her escape from her first marriage. At first glance, Anna seems to have more in common with the archetypal Gothic heroine than Catherine, but she differs from the conventional Radcliffean heroine in one important way that Catherine does not. Catherine Morland, despite her plain appearance and healthy family, has all the pluckiness of a Radcliffean heroine. As a child, Catherine "was fond of all boys' play" (Austen 5). While this characterization may seem at odds with the feminine Radcliffean heroine, Ellen Moers observes the way in which heroines of Radcliffe's novels paved the way for "tomboy" characters: "in the long, dark, twisting, haunted passageways of the Gothic castle, there is travel with danger, travel with exertion—a challenge to the heroine's enterprise, resolution, ingenuity, and physical strength" (129). It is thus no surprise that Catherine is drawn to Gothic novels, as through her favorite characters she is able to vicariously keep alive that adventurous spirit of her childhood. The seemingly flippant detail that "from fifteen to seventeen [Catherine] was in training for a heroine" is at once satirical and true. Catherine's stalwart refusal to cancel her walk with the Tilneys, despite the physical force used on her, shows that Catherine has the resolve of a Radcliffean heroine. Unfortunately, Gaskell's Anna Scherer has not been equipped with any "Gothic training."

The Grey Woman could perhaps be read as an exercise in the fate Catherine Morland might have faced had she felt pressured to marry John Thorpe. Like Catherine, Anna's story begins with her leaving her family to visit an unfamiliar city. However, unlike Catherine, Anna has little agency in this decision. Invited to Carlsruhe to visit her friend, Sophie, Anna herself neither accepts nor denies the invitation: "I don't think I wanted to leave home, and yet I had been very fond of Sophie Rupprecht…somehow the affair was settled for me" (Gaskell 293). That Anna's trip to visit Sophie is settled for her is just the first example of many in which other characters make decisions for Anna. During her time in Carlsruhe, Anna's agency is further diminished by societal conventions. While at a social gathering, Anna longs "for the time when [she and Sophie] might have supper and go home, so as to be able to speak together, a thing forbidden by Madame Rupprecht's rules of etiquette, which strictly prohibited any but necessary conversation passing between members of the same family when in society" (Gaskell 295). With her ability to speak strictly regulated, Anna is a prisoner of the patriarchal society in which she lives before she is a prisoner in the novella's actual Gothic castle. Indeed, her inability to form and articulate her own opinions is the very reason why she becomes trapped in a Gothic nightmare.

Much as Catherine's politeness to Thorpe encourages his flirtations, an adherence to etiquette and social convention trap Anna in a marriage with Monsieur de la Tourelle. Upon first meeting M. de la Tourelle, Anna is enamored with him; however, by the end of the night she begins to tire of him. Anna's inability to discern whether she cares for M. de la Tourelle is directly related to the limits placed on her by social conventions. When Anna hears that M. de la Tourelle is going to call on the Rupprechts, she is unsure about her feelings towards him: "I do not know whether I was more glad or frightened, for I had been kept upon the stilts of good manners all evening" (Gaskell 296). "Good manners" not only prevent Anna and M. de la Tourelle from truly knowing each other, but this image of Anna on the "stilts of good manners" also implies that Anna's adherence to good etiquette keeps her at a distance from her ability to think critically and form clear opinions. Madame Rupprecht encourages the relationship between Anna and M. de la Tourelle, and much as Anna's trip to visit Sophie is settled for her, Madame Rupprecht settles Anna's marriage to M. de la Tourelle. As with Catherine and Thorpe, there is no formal proposal between Anna and M. de la Tourelle. Anna is so far removed from the decision of her own marriage that when Madame Rupprecht writes to Anna's father to inform him of Anna's engagement, Anna "had not realized that affairs had gone so far as this" (Gaskell 297). Though Anna has reservations about marrying M. de la Tourelle, she feels pressured by Madame Rupprecht to accept: "what could I do but hang my head, and silently consent to the rapid enunciation of the only course which now remained for me if I would not be esteemed a heartless coquette all the rest of my days?" (Gaskell 297). Anna's situation further underscores the absurdity of Henry Tilney's belief that women have the "power of refusal." Though Anna theoretically *could* reject M. de la Tourelle, the social consequences of doing so are such that refusing is not a viable option. Both Austen and Gaskell are keen to the danger of precluding women's ability to speak. Thorpe's treatment of Catherine is a more commonplace example of the male entitlement and social pressure that traps Anna in an abusive marriage with M. de la Tourelle.

Anna's continued inability to speak her mind compounds her danger while she is married to M. de la Tourelle. Lonely and unhappy in her new marriage, Anna finds a friend in her Norman waiting-maid, Amante. When Anna confides in Amante and tells her she misses her family, Amante aids Anna in retrieving from M. de la Tourelle's room a letter from Anna's father. Anna and Amante's excursion is put in jeopardy by the arrival of M. de la Tourelle and his friends. A dead body and an allusion to M. de la Tourelle's previous wife who "has gone a long journey—longer than Paris" reveals M. de la Tourelle to be the wife-killing Gothic villain Catherine Morland accuses General Tilney of being (Gaskell 313). M. de la Tourelle declares that if Anna discovers his criminality, she will meet the same fate as his first wife. Henri, one of M. de la Tourelle's fellow villains, is certain that Anna will be a danger to them: "She'll outwit you yet…those silent ones are the devil" (Gaskell 313). The previous events of the novel show that Anna's silence stems from "good manners" and social pressure. Female silence is expected of women, yet here it is seen as treacherous. Anna lives in a society in which it is difficult for her to form her own opinions, much less express those opinions, and consequently the men around her are able to project their own desires and fears onto her silence. Whether Anna's silence is an indication that she desires to marry M. de la Tourelle or an indication that she will betray him is wholly dependent on M. de la Tourelle's state of mind; Anna's actual desires and feelings are never taken into account.

Successful communication between men and women is precluded by male entitlement, and thus Gaskell champions relationships between women above heterosexual marriage. At the revelation that M. de la Tourelle is a ruffian, Amante jumps into action, arranging for her and Anna to escape the château. Anna never tells Amante what she saw and heard in M. de la Tourelle's room; Amante either overhears M. de la Tourelle and Henri, or instinctively knows that Anna is in danger. Anna and Amante's escape is marked by silence, but a different silence than that which is imposed on Anna in earlier scenes: "We had not spoken a word; we did not speak now. Touch was safer and as expressive…I had such faith in her that I did not venture to speak" (Gaskell 317). This is the first scene in the novella in which a character makes a decision for Anna that is in her best interest. Furthermore, Anna is fully in accordance with the decision to escape. Though Anna and Amante are silent, they are not uncommunicative. In a society in which women's words and lack of words alike are misinterpreted, women create their own language through touch and mutual understanding. For Gaskell, the only escape from the patriarchal horrors of heterosexual marriage is through a union between two women.

Anna and Amante disguise themselves so they may safely avoid M. de la Tourelle and his band of ruffians. Amante, who disguises herself as a man, poses as Anna's husband. Though this union begins as a disguise to protect Anna, Gaskell treats their marriage with as much legitimacy as Anna's marriage to M. de la Tourelle and her later marriage to Dr. Voss. Anna and Amante's marriage is queer and bigamous, and thus exists outside the confines of society's definition of marriage, offering an escape from the patriarchal, heteronormative society that thwarts Anna's agency.

Although Gaskell set *The Grey Woman* in the early eighteenth century, the contemporary relevance of this Gothic tale is clear when one considers the changes in marriage law happening in England during the mid-nineteenth century. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which made divorce more realistic for people of the middle class by changing divorce from a legislative procedure to a judicial procedure, preceded an "explosion of bigamy novels in the early 1860s" (McAleavey 6). Many of these bigamy plots could be found in sensation novels. The genre of sensation fiction arose in the 1860s as a result of the public's interest in "sensation journalism," which detailed "cases of bigamy, divorce and murder…to the ever-widening readership of a rapidly expanding newspaper press" (Pykett 7-8). A cousin of the Gothic novel, sensation novels have "complicated plots of secrecy, mystery, suspense, crime and horror" (Pykett 5); in sensation novels "the matter and manner of the Gothic tale, the crime novel, and domestic fiction meet and mingle in a modern English setting" (Pykett 8). In discussing the prevalence of bigamy in sensation fiction, particularly the novels of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Karen Chase and Michael Levenson argue:

> Bigamy is the imaginative manifestation of the postdivorce culture because it is the preferred 'quiet' alternative to the divorce pandemonium…in the uncertain new world of the Matrimonial Causes Act, love for a second spouse, while the first spouse lived, was bound to seem an infidelity. In this respect, the bigamy novels of the sixties are all divorce novels, which is to say, novels about the failure of divorce to achieve a true separation. (203)

Although divorce became relatively more accessible, it was not necessarily regarded by society at large as legitimate. The Matrimonial Clauses Act ensured that "divorce altered the law so that divorce was no longer a male prerogative, the Act allowed husbands to divorce their wives on the grounds of adultery, and granted wives the right to divorce husbands if the man compounded his adultery with cruelty, bigamy, incest, or bestiality" (Nayder 442). While the Act legally granted women the prerogative to file for divorce, it is easy to see how the stipulations required for a woman to do so would render filing for divorce an unrealistic option for many unhappy wives.

Although bigamy in Victorian literature is typically associated with sensation fiction, bigamy can be found in a variety of Victorian novels. Maia McAleavey's reading of bigamy in Gaskell's 1863 historical novel, *Sylvia's Lovers,* not only locates Gaskell in this tradition of writing about bigamy in the wake of the Matrimonial Clauses Act, but also shows that this preoccupation with bigamy was not limited to more outlandish genres such as sensation fiction and the Gothic. Before *Sylvia's Lovers,* Gaskell grappled with anxieties about divorce in post-

Matrimonial Causes Act England in *The Grey Woman*, originally published in 1861. If fear of social rejection can cause a woman to marry a man she does not love, it is easy to imagine that the social baggage associated with separating from one's spouse would be more than enough to dissuade a woman from petitioning for divorce. More important than the social repercussions of divorce, however, is the physical danger Anna risks in leaving her husband. Anna considers the possibility (or rather, impossibility) of divorce after Amante is killed: "a divorce from [M. de la Tourelle] would have been easily procurable by German law both ecclesiastical and legal, could we have summoned so fearful a man into any court" (Gaskell 339). In just one sentence Gaskell encapsulates the insufficiency of divorce for women in abusive marriages. The suggestion that a divorce from M. de la Tourelle, a man who murdered his previous wife, could be "easily procurable" if only he could be summoned to court verges on Austenian satire. The legality of divorce does not necessarily mean that divorce is accessible to the women who need it most. To say that Anna has the option of divorcing M. de la Tourelle is akin to Henry Tilney saying that women have the "power of refusal." In a theoretical sense both of these statements are true, but in practice the feasibility of divorcing one's husband or refusing a potential suitor is often precluded by the patriarchal oppression that robs women of their voices.

As divorce is impossible, Anna enters into a bigamous union with Dr. Voss. Within the eighteen months from the time she married M. de la Tourelle to when she marries Dr. Voss, Anna appears to be a much older woman, unrecognizable from the "fresh-coloured, bright-haired young woman" she once was (Gaskell 339). She is known as "Grey Woman" because of her grey hair and "ashen-coloured" complexion (Gaskell 339). Though at this point she is safe from M. de la Tourelle, the trauma of her first marriage leaves a physical, indelible mark on her. This physical change in Anna speaks to the mid-nineteenth century anxieties about "the failure of divorce to achieve a true union." The horror of Anna's story does not die with M. de la Tourelle, but is something with which Anna must forever live; regardless of what the future holds, her first marriage will always haunt her. Anna's inability to escape her marriage to M. de la Tourelle would no doubt have been relatable to many women of Gaskell's time. Although Jane Austen would remind us that there are not as many wife-killing husbands in England as Catherine Morland would have us believe, for women who faced emotional or physical abuse at the hands of their husbands, divorce would no doubt be an impossibility despite the Matrimonial Causes Act.

Bigamy becomes necessary because divorce is insufficient. Anna's bigamous marriage to Amante in particular allows Anna a degree of freedom that was unattainable while she was engaged in aristocratic society. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bigamy was not uncommon among the poor, "who needed to create substitutes for insurmountably expensive official divorces" (McAleavey 5). This historical detail is quite significant in the context of *The Grey Woman* as, in disguising themselves, Anna and Amante present themselves as members of the lower class, posing as "a travelling pedlar and his wife" (Gaskell 324). By entering the lower class, Anna and Amante enter a social sphere in which the laws of marriage are more generous, thus enabling them to more easily pass their bigamous union as legitimate. When she escapes the château, Anna not only leaves behind a cruel husband, but also leaves behind aristocratic society, thereby evading the social consequences that a woman of her standing would face if she were to publicly leave her husband.

In addition to posing as members of the lower class, Amante and Anna pose as husband and wife. Before her marriage with M. de la Tourelle, Anna "had no notion of being married" (Gaskell 293). Her escape from the château is not only an escape from her terrible husband, but it also an escape from the heteronormative pressures placed on women to marry a suitable man. Amante's role as Anna's husband lends itself to both lesbian and transgender readings, and indeed, Amante's gender is quite blurred. As Ardel Haefele-Thomas observes: "Through the use of 'her wife' and constant switching between 'her' and 'husband' Gaskell creates a space where gender categories elide creating neither a specifically heterosexual nor a specifically homosexual marriage" (69). Regardless of how Amante's gender is read, her marriage to Anna exists outside the confines of normative heterosexual marriage. The fluidity of Amante's gender reflects the freedom this marriage allows both Anna and Amante. Haefele-Thomas cites Henry Fielding's *The Female Husband* as a possible influence on Gaskell's development of Amante's character (71). Though we cannot be certain whether Gaskell had familiarity with this text, the way in which *The Grey Woman* diverges from the portrayal of queer sexuality in Fielding's work is significant.

The Female Husband is a fictional retelling of the case of Mary Hamilton, a woman who was arrested for cross-dressing as a man and deceiving a woman into marriage. Fielding presents Hamilton's sexuality as "Monstrous and Unnatural;" she is a deceitful figure who is a threat to the "Natural Innocence and Purity" of young women. With Amante, Gaskell turns this narrative on its head. Anna is not tricked into marrying Amante, but rather, willingly enters into her union with Amante. Far from being a threat to Anna, Amante rescues Anna from the real threat: the *male* husband. It is M. de la Tourelle, not Amante, who deceives and endangers Anna. In some respects, M. de la Tourelle is more similar to Fielding's female husband than Amante. Anna is first attracted to M. de la Tourelle because of his effeminate appearance: "His features were as delicate as a girl's" (Gaskell 295). However, upon marrying him, Anna realizes that M. de la Tourelle is not the angelic gentleman that he appears to be at first glance. Consequently, Gaskell portrays the “Monstrous and Unnatural” marriage between Amante and Anna as a safer, preferable option to Anna’s normative, heterosexual marriage to M. de la Tourelle.

Unlike Anna’s final marriage to Dr. Voss, her union with Amante is not simply one of convenience. Anna reflects on her relationship with Amante: “I cannot tell you how much in these doubtings and wanderings I became attached to Amante. I have sometimes feared since, lest I cared for her only because she was so necessary to my own safety; but, no! it was not so; or not so only, or principally” (Gaskell 352). Anna does not stay with Amante simply for protection, nor does Gaskell reduce their marriage to a plot device that allows her to extricate Anna from M. de la Tourelle’s château. Rather, Anna and Amante’s union underscores the lack of options for women who do not want to marry. From the very beginning of the novella, Anna is constantly being pursued by a man. First it is Karl, the “rough-spoken” man from her hometown who relentlessly courts her (Gaskell 292), then it is M. de la Tourelle, and finally Dr. Voss. Anna’s marriage to Amante is an escape from the pressures of the heteronormative society in which Anna lives, but even this transgressive union is not a true escape as the fear that M. de la Tourelle will discover them constantly hangs over the couple. Indeed, Anna and Amante’s marriage is ultimately untenable. M. de la Tourelle’s men kill Amante, and Anna immediately finds herself married to Dr. Voss: “I can hardly tell you now by what arguments Dr. Voss…at length persuaded me to become his wife” (Gaskell 339). Again, Anna does not seem to have any voice or opinion in this decision, but rather gets swept into marriage with a man she may or may not love. Of course, Dr. Voss is no M. de la Tourelle, and his motives in marrying Anna seem well intentioned. However, the immediacy of Anna’s marriage to Dr. Voss after Amante’s death underscores the impossibility for a woman to live on her own terms.

Although Gaskell embraces many of the Gothic conventions Austen parodies, both authors are interested in portraying the patriarchal oppression women face on a daily basis. M. de la Tourelle may be an archetypal Gothic villain; however, he alone is not the novella's Gothic horror. M. de la Tourelle can be killed, but the patriarchal society that he represents is not so easily vanquished. Although Dr. Voss tries to "persuade [Anna] to return to a more natural mode of life, and to go out more…the old terror was ever strong upon [her]" (Gaskell 340). The "old terror" that never leaves Anna is the trauma of her first marriage. The persistence of this "old terror" also indicates the possibility that Anna's marriage to "the good doctor" is not a truly content union (Gaskell 339). Although Dr. Voss appears to be a good man, Anna lives with the "terror" that he could become a cruel husband. As "good" as Dr. Voss is, he is still complicit in the same patriarchal system that traps Anna in her marriage to M. de la Tourelle. Anna writes to her daughter that after marrying Dr. Voss: "He made me give you his surname" (Gaskell 339). This statement is followed by a positive description of Dr. Voss as a good father. The forceful diction of this description, Dr. Voss *made* Anna give her daughter his name, leading into a more positive portrayal of Dr. Voss may seem incongruous. However, this juxtaposition underscores the inability for women to find true freedom within heterosexual marriage. Although Dr. Voss is a good husband and father, he still participates in a society that robs women of their voice and agency. Dr. Voss "making" Anna give her daughter his name is a stark contrast to Anna and Amante's female family unit, in which they decide their names and identities.

The frame of the novella as a letter to Anna's daughter, Ursula, warning her about marriage, further reinforces that the terror of the novella is society as a whole, not just M. de la Tourelle. Even if Anna is happy in her marriage to Dr. Voss, she continues to live in a "state of life-long terror" because she not only lives in fear for herself, but in fear that what happened to her will also happen to her daughter (Gaskell 289). The big revelation at the end of the novella is that Henri Lebrun, the man Ursula wants to marry, is actually Maurice de Poissy, presumably a relation of the man M. de la Tourelle murdered. Maurice de Poissy justifies hiding his identity because he fears his name will be considered “too aristocratic” (Gaskell 340). Certainly, for Anna, de Poissy’s French, aristocratic name raises the possibility that he will be similar to M. de la Tourelle. That de Poissy was willing to change his name to manipulate other people’s perceptions of him draws parallels to how M. de la Tourelle’s effeminate and polite demeanor masks his cruelty. The reader knows from the opening of the story that Anna’s letter will dissuade Ursula from marrying de Poissy, and indeed, she will not marry at all: “there are papers…Anna wrote for putting an end to her daughter’s engagement—or rather facts that which she revealed, that prevented cousin Ursula from marrying the man she loved; and so she would never have any other good fellow” (Gaskell 290). The implication of this explanation is that Ursula decides not to marry at all because she could love no man as much as de Poissy. However, this information is conveyed through a male relative of Ursula’s; Ursula’s own voice is never presented in the narrative. It is impossible for the reader to know if Ursula’s relative voices Ursula’s actual feelings or, like so many men in this novella, projects his own interpretation onto a woman’s lack of voice. This ambiguity allows for the possibility that Anna’s letter is not simply a warning against marrying one of “those hellish Frenchmen” (Gaskell 290), but a more general warning against heterosexual marriage. In other words, Ursula may have decided never to marry not because her mother disapproved of de Poissy, but because her mother’s story frightened her away from any man at all.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen subtly grapples with the same disillusionment with marriage that Gaskell more overtly presents in *The Grey Woman*. The novel ends with Catherine marrying Henry Tilney. Like Dr. Voss, Henry is a better choice than the villainous suitor (Thorpe), but he still participates in the same male entitlement from which Thorpe's aggressiveness originates. When Henry and Catherine first meet, Henry remarks that he will make a "poor figure" in Catherine's journal (Austen 15). Catherine protests that she does not keep a journal, but Henry refuses to believe her. As Johnson notes, Henry "simply believes that he knows women's minds better than they do, and he dismisses any 'no' to the contrary as unreal" (37). While Gaskell demonstrates how men project their own interpretations onto women's silence, Austen demonstrates that the same thing happens when women speak up for themselves. Men reinterpret and refute women's words, with little care for the validity of what the woman has just said. Even when she speaks up for herself, the woman is functionally silent. That *Northanger Abbey* ends with Catherine marrying a man who refutes her words is unsettling. Although Catherine's adventures in *Northanger Abbey* are not nearly as dangerous or terrifying as Anna's escape from M. de la Tourelle, both women are Gothic heroines trapped in a society that does not value their voices and opinions.

The persistence of patriarchal horrors in *Northanger Abbey* is furthered through the character of General Tilney. Although Tilney does not kill his wife like M. de la Tourelle, he is still "a gothic villain…manipulating everyone heedlessly in order to fulfill his own whims" (Jerinic 141). When refuting Catherine's theory that Tilney killed his wife, Henry assures her that his father loved his mother: "He loved her, I am persuaded, as well as it was possible for him to—We have not all, you know, the same tenderness of disposition—and I will not pretend to say that while she lived, she might not often have had much to bear, but though his temper injured her, his judgment never did" (Austen 145). Although this explanation is enough to satisfy Catherine, Henry's description of his parents' relationship is disturbing. The form of General

Tilney's temper and the manner in which it "injured" his wife are frighteningly unclear. General Tilney's "temper" could range anywhere from raising his voice to physical violence. This terrifying ambiguity speaks to the core horror in both *Northanger Abbey* and *The Grey Woman*: that a woman cannot be entirely certain what type of husband a man will be until she marries him. John Thorpe, Henry Tilney, General Tilney, M. de la Tourelle, and Dr. Voss, though all products of the same patriarchal society, are very different, and the manner in which their misogyny manifests itself differs, and to varying degrees of danger. The Gothic horror of being a woman in the nineteenth century is the uncertainty of whether the man you marry will be a Dr. Voss or a M. de la Tourelle. And if he is indeed a M. de la Tourelle, fleeing that marriage comes at a great cost.

Though their treatment of the Gothic differs, Austen and Gaskell ultimately underscore the same patterns of male entitlement and female marginalization. With her satirical approach, Austen continuously brings the reader to the brink of outlandish Gothic horror and stops short, instead revealing mundane patriarchal horrors that are equally, if not more, unsettling than the thrills of a conventional Gothic novel. Gaskell, on the other hand, takes the patriarchal horrors that Austen identifies and brings them to their fullest Gothic potential. With this approach, Gaskell is not only able to emphasize through exaggeration the direness of being a woman trapped in an abusive marriage, but also has the leeway to present a safer alternative to the pressures of heteronormativity: the bigamous lesbian marriage. These two texts serve to illuminate one another as Gaskell presents what is un-representable in *Northanger Abbey* and Austen uncovers the routine patterns of marginalization that allow for a story like *The Grey Woman* to take place. A reading of these two texts together calls into question the categorization of “Gothic” as a genre distinct from realism as, for women, the “Gothic” and the “real” are dangerously similar.

Chapter 2: The Gothic Realism of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

As is perhaps true of all literary genres, critics often disagree on how to define the "Gothic." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, constructs her definition of the Gothic around recurring tropes such as the "wild landscape" of Gothic novels or archetypal characters such as the heroine with "trembling sensibility" and the "tyrannical older man" who poses danger to the heroine (8). While my definition of the Gothic deemphasizes the specific tropes that Sedgwick identifies, her strategy of defining the Gothic through shared scenes provides a helpful framework for approaching the Gothic elements of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Considering the similarities in plot between "Gothic" and "realist" novels allows for the possibility of restructuring our understanding of both genres. The Gothic elements of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* do not negate the novel's "realism," but rather the Gothic tropes and themes of the novel coexist with Brontë's realism to create a Gothic realism.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall in many ways bears a striking resemblance to Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Grey Woman*. Like *The Grey Woman*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* tells the story of a young woman who rashly marries a charming young man, soon finds herself trapped in an abusive marriage, escapes her husband and lives in hiding until her husband dies, at which point she remarries. Similar to Gaskell's protagonist, Anna Sherer, *Tenant*'s Helen Graham is concerned about the future of her child. Both stories are also told through frame narratives, specifically through letter writing. *Tenant* is framed as a letter written by Gilbert Markham, Helen's second husband, to his friend Halford. Markham narrates how he met Helen, and the bulk of the novel is Markham's transcription of Helen's diary, which tells the story of her marriage to her first husband, Arthur Huntingdon. The similarities between *Tenant* and *The Grey*

Woman demonstrate how the distinction between “realist” and “Gothic” novels is sometimes blurry.

Slippage between realism and the Gothic happens when a realist narrative takes place in an oppressive society. Robert Mighall challenges typical approaches to the Gothic that focus on the interiority of the protagonist, and instead proposes that “the ‘Gothic’ by definition is about history and geography” (xiv). Mighall focuses on the Victorian connotations of the Gothic as “uncivilized, unprogressive, or ‘barbaric” and thus posits that “the Gothic dwells in the historical past, or identifies ‘pastness’ in the present, to reinforce a distance between the enlightened now and the repressive or misguided then” (xviii). With this understanding of the Gothic, the slippage between realism and the Gothic becomes more apparent. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is not a historical novel, but it does present the Gothic realities of Brontë’s time, that is as Mighall says, a Victorian England that is “repressive or misguided.”

The misguided and repressive culture against which Brontë pushes in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a patriarchal society that has little recourse for women trapped in abusive marriages. Brontë’s societal critique alone does not qualify the novel as Gothic. Rather, it is the way in which the repressive, patriarchal society Brontë describes traps the female characters in a Gothic reality. In *The Contested Castle*, Kate Ferguson Ellis links “the ‘safe’ sphere of home inseparably to its dark opposite, the Gothic castle” (x). Although Ellis primarily focuses her study on eighteenth-century Gothic literature, the “inseparable” link between the Gothic castle and the home persists in nineteenth-century Gothic literature. The distinction between the home and the Gothic castle becomes increasingly blurred as the “Victorian Gothic is marked primarily by the domestication of Gothic figures, spaces and themes: horrors become explicitly located within the world of the contemporary reader” (Punter and Byron 26). As the foreign Gothic castle of the eighteenth century transforms into the domestic spaces of the nineteenth century, it becomes harder to delineate the distinction between realism and the Gothic.

The Gothic Castles of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

The two central settings in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* Grassdale Manor (the house Helen Graham shares with her first husband, Arthur Huntingdon) and Wildfell Hall (the house she lives in after her escape from her marriage) are at once realistic domestic spaces and Gothic "castles." One characteristic of the Gothic manor is its seclusion. In *The Grey Woman*, Anna Scherer is unable to visit or even communicate with her family, and with the exception of Amante, the servants treat her "more as if [she] were an intruder than their master's chosen wife" (Gaskell 301). Not long after she marries Huntingdon, Helen's life in Grassdale Manor is characterized by long periods of solitude, as Huntingdon often spends months away in London, insisting that Helen remain at Grassdale Manor so he can partake of disreputable activities with his friends. However, feelings of seclusion and oppression persist even when there is company in the manor.

As with the castles of Ann Radcliffe's novels, which are notable for their mazelike geographies, Helen's relationship to Grassdale Manor is not stable. Maia McAleavey observes how after Helen "witnesses her husband's infidelity, her knowledge refigures the space of their house" (61):

> Much of my newborn strength and courage forsook me, I confess, as I entered [the house], and shut out the fresh wind and glorious sky: everything I saw and heard seemed to sicken my heart—the hall, the lamp, the staircase the doors of the different apartments,

> the social sound of talk and laughter from the drawing room. How could I bear my future life? In this house, among those people—oh, how could I endure to live? (Brontë 269-70)

McAleavey notes how Helen's description of the house "unites the house's floor plan with its social and specifically marital context" (62). Helen's perceptions of the house are analogous to her perceptions of her marriage to Huntingdon. The image of Helen shutting the door on "the fresh wind and glorious sky" and entering the house that "sickens" her heart underscores the hopelessness Helen feels in her marriage. The "social sound of talk and laughter from the drawing room" convey not only her dislike of her husband's friends, but the social pressures that keep Helen trapped in her marriage. It is significant that Helen ends her description with this "social sound" before lamenting, "How could I bear my future life?" The behavior of Huntingdon's social circle directly contributes to Helen's misery, but the sound of people chattering additionally serves as a reminder of the gossip and social rejection that would ensue if she were to leave her marriage. In Helen's description of her house, both the private (her marriage) and the public (the "social sounds") converge to create the oppressiveness of the Gothic mansion. Brontë's emphasis on sound heightens the claustrophobia she feels in her marriage; though Helen is not in the drawing room (the origin of the "social sounds") she cannot escape its effects, thereby heightening the sensation of imprisonment. Helen is unable to escape the "social sounds;" thus Grassdale Manor is paradoxically both a location of painful seclusion and intense social scrutiny. This contradiction indicates that Helen's experience is not particular to her situation, but rather is symptomatic of an oppressive society.

Even when Helen is able to leave Grassdale Manor, her husband controls her actions and behavior. The first time Huntingdon tells Helen that he will be leaving to go to London, Helen insists on going with him. He acquiesces, but says they will only be staying a short time because he does not want Helen “to be Londonized, and to lose [her] country freshness and originality by too much intercourse with the ladies of the world” (Brontë 193-4). Huntingdon’s true intentions in keeping the trip short are that he wants to carry on with his friends without Helen in the way, however, the reasoning he gives Helen reveals his expectations of how a wife should act. Furthermore, while in London, Huntingdon dictates how Helen must dress and act: “I must sparkle in costly jewels and deck myself out like a painted butterfly…I was continually straining myself to satisfy his sanguine expectations and do honour to his choice, by my general conduct and deportment” (Brontë 195). Such behavior contradicts Helen’s typical disposition, and thus to please her husband Helen must “violate [her] cherished predilections” (Brontë 195). Helen’s true personality is at odds with the wife Huntingdon expects her to be, and Helen can only become Huntingdon’s ideal wife by compromising her agency. Helen and Huntingdon’s trip to London exemplifies how the Gothic oppression of the novel is not solely contained within the walls of the Gothic house. Helen’s marriage to Huntingdon creates her Gothic imprisonment, and the physical space of Grassdale Manor only serves to exemplify her seclusion and lack of agency.

Much as in *The Grey Woman*, literal imprisonment within the house of the first marriage is superseded by a more pervasive and inescapable societal imprisonment. For both Anna and Helen, the escape from the Gothic home is only a partial escape. Anna must disguise herself to avoid being discovered by her husband; similarly, Helen must go into hiding. With the help of her brother, Lawrence, Helen moves into Wildfell Hall. However, Helen’s new home is not the sanctuary from the Gothic Grassdale Manor that one would expect. Gilbert Markham’s description of Wildfell Hall in his letter to Halford details the sinister appearance of the hall:

> Near the top of this hill…stood Wildfell Hall…venerable and picturesque to look at, but, doubtless, cold and gloomy enough to inhabit, with…its too lonely, too unsheltered

> situation, —only shielded from the war of wind and weather by a group of Scotch firs, themselves half blighted with storms, and looking as stern and gloomy as the Hall itself…before it, (enclosed by stone walls, and entered by an iron gate with large balls of grey granite—surmounting the gateposts), was a garden…the castellated towers of laurel in the middle of the garden, the gigantic warrior that stood on one side of the gateway, and the lion that guarded the other, were sprouted into such fantastic shapes as resembled nothing either in heaven or earth, or in the waters under the earth; but, to my young imagination, they presented all of them a goblinish appearance, that harmonized well with the ghostly legends and dark traditions our old nurse had told us respecting the haunted hall and its departed occupants. (Brontë 27)

With "goblinish" laurel sculptures that resemble "nothing either in heaven or earth" and recall "ghostly legends," Gilbert's description of Wildfell Hall is the most overtly Gothic moment in the novel. That the hall is "cold and gloomy" connotes the loneliness and solitude of imprisonment in a Gothic castle. The garden, which is "enclosed by stone walls" and "entered by an iron gate," is not described as a place of growth and beauty, but is secluded and foreboding. That the strange laurel sculptures resemble nothing on earth or even "in the waters under the earth" create a sinister atmosphere that verges on the supernatural.

Lee A. Talley contrasts Gilbert's description of Wildfell Hall with the supernatural aspects of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*: "Gilbert has no reveries and sees no vision of the otherworldly…The beginning of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* evokes the openings of both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* to counter their invocation of the supernatural with very worldly lessons about temperance and gender" (138). The location of the hall on the top of a hill and the stone wall that enclose the garden suggest the seclusion of a Gothic mansion. However, Wildfell

Hall is not just gloomy and lonely, but also exposed to the "war of wind." This vulnerability to the wind recalls *Wuthering Heights*, as the titular Gothic household is aptly named for its exposure to the elements: "'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (Emily Brontë 4). *Jane Eyre* similarly begins with an evocation of isolating weather: "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day…the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question" (Charlotte Brontë 6). In *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, the windy, gloomy weather foreshadows supernatural occurrences: Lockwood's encounter with the ghost of Catherine Earnshaw and Jane's fear of Mr. Reed's ghost while locked in the red room. Through this description of Wildfell Hall, Anne Brontë evokes the same sense of impending horror that her sisters evoke in their novels. However, Anne Brontë's Gothic description of Wildfell Hall does not foreshadow an encounter with any "ghostly legends," but rather, a cruel society.

While Brontë certainly diverges from her sisters' impulse towards the supernatural, her evocation of the Gothic inextricably ties *Tenant* to the same tradition as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Anne Brontë's focus on "worldly lessons" does not negate the Gothic aspects of the novel, but rather the description of Wildfell Hall illustrates that the Gothic can exist without the supernatural. Wildfell Hall's simultaneous seclusion and vulnerability reflect Helen's new situation. Although she is far away from her husband, Wildfell Hall cannot provide assured security; she lives with the fear that Huntingdon will find her. Thus, Wildfell Hall itself is not inherently Gothic, but Helen's marriage keeps her in a perpetually fearful state. Additionally, the seclusion of the hall reflects Helen's seclusion from her neighbors. Although she is isolated both geographically and socially, she is still vulnerable to town gossip. In fact, it is her very seclusion that leaves her susceptible to harmful rumors.

Wildfell Hall does not provide a perfect sanctuary for Helen, as she is perturbed by “the haunting dread of discovery” (Brontë 346). The specific word choice of “haunting” links Helen’s experience in Widlfell Hall to Gilbert’s Gothic description of the hall. For Helen, Wildfell Hall is haunted not by the “ghostly legends and dark traditions” that Gilbert heard from his old nurse, but rather by the fear that her husband will find her and take her son. Helen expresses frustration at her neighbors’ determination to befriend her: “their curiosity annoys and alarms me: if I gratify it, it may lead to the ruin of my son, and if I am too mysterious, it will only excite their suspicions, invite conjecture, and rouse them to greater exertions—and perhaps be the means of spreading my fame from parish to parish, till it reach the ears of someone who will carry it to the lord of Grassdale Manor” (Brontë 348). Whereas in a conventional Gothic tale the source of horror often originates from within the house, the source of Helen’s fear comes from the outside. Although there is nothing inherent in Wildfell Hall that renders it haunted, for Helen the hall becomes inextricably tied to fear and isolation as Helen lives in in self-imposed seclusion:

> I shall be expected to return [the neighbors’] calls, but if, upon enquiry, I find that any of them live too far away for Arthur to accompany me, they must expect in vain for a while, for I cannot bear to leave him, unless it be to go to church; and I have not attempted that yet, for—it may be foolish weakness, but I am under such constant dread of his being snatched away that I am never easy when he is not by my side. (Brontë 348)

Helen’s greatest fear is not just that Huntingdon will find her and Arthur, but that Huntingdon will kidnap Arthur and that under his father’s influence, Arthur will grow up to become a philandering alcoholic like his father. Helen’s predominant reason for leaving Huntingdon was to protect her son, and thus her son's safety is paramount. Consequently, Helen's freedom becomes inextricably tied to Arthur's physical capabilities. Helen refuses to let Arthur out of her sight, and Helen's ability to move about town is dictated by how far her young son is capable of walking. The Gothic seclusion, then, is mostly concentrated in Wildfell Hall, as Helen feels most safe when she and Arthur are together in the hall. However, Wildfell Hall is not a perfect sanctuary as there is always the risk that it will be discovered by Huntingdon.

Helen is certainly afforded more freedom at Wildfell Hall than at Grassdale Manor. She is able to raise her son in accordance with her morals and away from her husband's damaging influence. However, even while hidden from her husband, Helen is still haunted by the knowledge that Huntingdon could discover her at any time and regain custody of their son. Although she has left her husband, legally she is still married and consequently her marriage still limits her ability to enter freely into society.

The "Unspeakable" Woman

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies "unspeakable" as a "favorite Gothic word" that not only appears frequently in Gothic writing, but also constitutes a theme in itself (3). For instance, "it is possible to discern a play of the unspeakable in the narrative structure itself of a novel that ostensibly comprises transcriptions of manuscripts that are always illegible at revelatory moments" (Sedgwick 3). The narration of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* is comprised of a manuscript within a manuscript: Helen's diary is transcribed in Gilbert's letter to Halford. Far from "illegible," these two manuscripts clearly recount Helen's experiences. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* the "unspeakable" is not represented through fragmented or interrupted narration, but rather through the silencing of women's speech.

The experience of being a woman trapped in an abusive marriage is inherently Gothic because women in such situations are rendered "unspeakable." Helen's friend, Milicent Hargrave (later Milicent Hattersley), is characterized by her inability to express her desires. When Helen hears that Arthur's disreputable friend, Ralph Hattersley, plans to marry Milicent, Helen is certain her friend will refuse. To Helen's surprise, Milicent becomes engaged to Hattersley. In anticipation of Helen's confusion, Milicent explains how she became engaged:

> I didn't know I had accepted him; but mamma tells me I have, and he seems to think so too, I certainly didn't mean to do so; but I did not like to give him a flat refusal for fear mamma should be grieved and angry, (for I knew she wished me to marry him) and I wanted to talk to her first about it, so I gave him what I thought was an evasive, half negative answer; but she says it was as good as an acceptance, and he would think me very capricious if I were to attempt to draw back. (Brontë 199)

Milicent's engagement to Hattersley bears a striking resemblance to the circumstances under which Anna Scherer becomes engaged to M. de la Tourelle in *The Grey Woman*. This scene also recalls Catherine Morland's near engagement to John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*. Like Austen before her and Gaskell after her, Brontë is acutely aware of the ways in which women's desires are ignored, silenced, or misinterpreted by the men around them. Milicent's response to Hattersley's proposal becomes an "illegible" text in which she gives Hattersley an "evasive, half-negative answer." In giving Hattersley an answer that is neither fully positive nor fully negative, she obscures her true desires in vague language. Milicent's response is rendered illegible by the social pressures placed upon her as a woman. She does not want to give Hattersley a "flat refusal" for fear of angering her mother, who is eager to have Milicent married. The pressure Mrs. Hargrave puts on her daughter to marry Hattersley reflects the larger societal pressure put on women to marry. Milicent's "half negative" response is interpreted as a positive response, as the "illegible" speech becomes open to interpretation. When the "half negative" becomes positive, the possibility of a clear refusal becomes impossible without social repercussions (Milicent risks seeming "capricious").

The inability to speak, usually due to fear, in Gothic fiction is typically conveyed through use of the em dash in dialogue. In *The Grey Woman*, Anna overhears M. de la Tourelle say that his previous wife "has gone a long journey—longer than Paris" (Gaskell 313). Here, the em dash interrupts the dialogue, standing in for information that is too horrible, or unspeakable, to be explicitly conveyed. The "unspeakable" horror implicit in the em dash is that M. de la Tourelle murdered his previous wife. M. de la Tourelle's fragmentary speech instills fear in Anna, alerting her of the danger her husband poses. When recounting to Helen the circumstances under which she became engaged to Hattersley, Milicent does not transcribe the exact words of her conversation with Hattersley. However, the description of her response as a "half negative answer" signifies the fragmentary quality of Milicent's response as Milicent literally gives Hattersley "half" of the response she truly wants to give. For Milicent, her fragmentary speech does not instill fear, but rather is the product of fear, specifically, the fear of her mother's anger. Her illegible response to Hattersley does not conceal a Gothic horror, but rather is the catalyst for Milicent becoming trapped in an abusive marriage and facing the horrors that such a marriage entails. Thus, fragmentary speech works somewhat differently in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* than it does in more conventional Gothic narratives. However, that women's speech is inherently bound up in fear and rendered unclear by an oppressive environment speaks to its Gothic qualities.

Milicent is unable to voice her true desires because she feels pressured by the social expectations thrust upon her to respond to Hattersley in a way that pleases everyone except for her. It is not impossible for a woman to express her desires clearly, but doing so often comes at a cost, risking social or even physical repercussions. While she is married to Hattersley, Milicent's feelings and desires are still rendered "unspeakable;" now, Milicent is unable to express herself for fear of angering her husband. Hattersley confesses to Helen, "I positively think I ill-use [Milicent] sometimes, when I've taken too much—but I can't help it, for she never complains, either at the time or after. I suppose she doesn't mind it" (Brontë 256). Hattersley's assumption that Milicent does not mind his abuse because she "never complains" is yet another example of a male character projecting his own (often incorrect) interpretation onto a women's silence. Helen, in whom Millicent confides about Hattersley's behavior, defends her friend: "I can enlighten you on the subject, Mr. Hattersley…she *does* mind it; and some other things she minds still more, which, yet, you may never hear her complain of" (Brontë 256). Hattersley's reaction to Helen's response illustrates why Milicent is so reluctant to complain to her husband of his behavior: "How do you know? –does she complain to you' demanded he, with a sudden spark of fury ready to burst into flame if I should answer 'Yes'" (Brontë 256). If Milicent does not voice her objections to her husband's behavior, he assumes that she does not mind his behavior and he will consequently continue it. If Milicent *does* voice her concerns, she risks escalating the situation, as Hattersley's "spark of fury" may "burst into flame." As an outsider in Milicent and Hattersley's marriage, Helen is able to talk to Hattersley somewhat more freely than Millicent, as Hattersley is less likely to hit a woman who is not his wife. Yet Hattersley's response to Helen shows that he is unwilling to listen to any woman.

The volatility of Hattersley's anger renders Milicent's voice and, to a degree, Helen's, functionally "unspeakable." Later in this same conversation Hattersley says he would prefer a wife who speaks her mind: "I sometimes think I should do better if I were joined to one that would always remind me when I was wrong, and give me a motive for doing good and eschewing evil by decidedly showing her approval of one, and disapproval of the other" (Brontë 258). Hattersley claims he wants a wife who will speak her mind, but his anger at Helen shows that he is unwilling to listen to any woman who challenges his behavior. Helen realizes that Hattersley's "spark of fury" will "burst into flame" if she confirms Milicent's displeasure with him. In reacting angrily to an opinion he does not like, Hattersley attempts to silence Helen by bullying her into speaking the answer he wants to hear. Helen, however, continues to speak her mind and defend her friend. But Hattersley will not be swayed by Helen's words and makes excuses for his behavior. That both quiet Milicent and outspoken Helen are rendered "unspeakable" by Hatterlsey seems to imply that Brontë has a rather bleak outlook on women's ability to find happiness in marriage. However, through the development of Hatterlsey's character, Brontë shows the possibility for men to reform their ways.

In a chapter entitled "Reformation," Hatterlsey tells Helen that he plans on breaking his friendship with Huntingdon, as he has tired of Huntingdon's bad behavior. Helen encourages Hatterlsey, telling him that "it is never too late to reform, as long as you have the sense to desire it, and the strength to execute your purpose" (Brontë 332). As their conversation continues, Hatterlsey again assumes that Milicent likes him "all the same" regardless of his bad behavior, to which Helen responds: "Impossible, Mr. Hatterlsey! you mistake her quiet submission for affection" (Brontë 333). Again, Hattersley reacts with anger, exclaiming, "fire and fury," before Helen cuts him off and admonishes him (Brontë 333). Though angry, Hattersley indicates a desire to be a better husband. Helen shows Hatterlsey two letters Milicent wrote to her, one in which Milicent despairs over her husband's misconduct, and another in which Milicent expresses her love for her husband but wishes that their marriage "were based on a surer foundation" (Brontë 334). It is Milicent's own words that finally convince Hatterlsey that he must become a better man and husband. Hatterlsey tells Milicent of his plans to reform, and Milicent is overjoyed. Helen predicts that in the future, Milicent "will doubtless be somewhat less timid and reserved, and [Hattersley] more kind and thoughtful" (Brontë 336). The woman becomes "unspeakable" when she, like Milicent, feels unsafe expressing her true opinions and desires, or when, like Helen, her words are ignored. Through Milicent and Hattersley's marriage, Brontë shows that a woman speaking her mind is not enough to reform a wayward husband. Rather, the husband must be willing to listen to his wife and take the initiative to change his ways. For many women like Helen and Millicent, marriage may become a Gothic existence; however through her portrayal of Milicent and Hattersley's marriage, Brontë retains optimism that for some unhappy marriages, reform is possible. However, if such a reform is to happen, a husband must be "kind and thoughtful," creating an environment in which his wife is able to feel comfortable speaking her mind. However, while reform is possible, Brontë ultimately envisions a world in which girls and boys are raised in such a way that women never find themselves in the positions in which Milicent and Helen find themselves.

Parenting as Resistance to Patriarchy

Robert Mighall notes the prevalence of "unwelcome legacies" in Victorian Gothic fiction (79). In the Gothic, the haunted house is sometimes haunted by a family curse. Mighall identifies the "ancestral portrait" as an "important convention of curse narratives" (83). *The Tenant of*

Wildfell Hall is haunted not by a supernatural curse, but by the constant anxiety that Helen's young son, Arthur, will become like his father when he grows older. This anxiety takes on a material form through an "ancestral portrait" that haunts Helen even after she has left Grassdale Manor. While settling in at Wildfell Hall, Helen notices that her maid, Rachel, who aided in her escape, brought to Wildfell Hall a portrait of Huntingdon: "she put up a portrait of Mr. Huntingdon that I had painted in the first year of my marriage. It struck me with dismay, at the moment when I took it from the box and beheld those eyes fixed upon me in their mocking mirth, as if exulting, still, in his power to control my fate, and deriding my efforts to escape" (Brontë 346). Although Huntingdon is not physically *in* Wildfell Hall, his presence still haunts Helen's new home. Huntingdon's looming presence is in part attributed to the ever present risk that Huntingdon will find Helen, in other words, his "power to control [Helen's] fate." However, his portrait also offers the terrifying possibility of the man young Arthur may become. The "mocking mirth" and "deriding" attitude that Helen sees in the painting allude not only to the possibility that Huntingdon may find her, but also to the possibility that Huntingdon's legacy of vice and misconduct will be continued in his son. Helen champions good parenting as a means of raising a virtuous son, and indeed throughout the novel the attitudes and values that adult characters hold are attributed to their respective upbringings. However, although the novel seems to depict the tendency towards vice as caused by parenting and the people with whom one associates, the possibility that a tendency towards vice could be inherited is an implied anxiety.

Helen's decision to leave Wildfell Hall was predominantly motivated by her desire to free her son from her husband's bad influence. However, even after leaving her husband, Helen fears that Arthur will develop his father's vices. Helen describes her decision to keep the portrait:

> The picture itself I have not destroyed, as I had first intended; I have put it aside; not, I think, from any lurking tenderness for the memory of past affection, nor yet to remind me of my former folly, but chiefly that I may compare my son's features and countenance with this as he grows up, and thus be enabled to judge how much or how little he resembles his father if I may be allowed to keep him with me still, and never to behold his father's face again. (Brontë 347)

The ancestral portrait often enables a character to identify the cause of the curse: "Thus when the source of disorder is from the distant past a means of recognition is necessary" (Mighall 83). Although Huntingdon is not from the distant past, and therefore a portrait is not needed to recognize *his* identity, the portrait serves as a means for Helen to recognize Huntingdon in their son. The portrait serves not to recognize a literal ghost haunting the Gothic house, but rather to recognize whether the ghost of Huntingdon's influence will affect Arthur's upbringing. In this sense, Huntingdon does cast a curse, or the threat of a curse, on Helen's son. However, Helen believes that through diligent parenting, she can vanquish Huntingdon's influence.

Helen's parenting style resists the gender norms and expectations of her time. Huntingdon's views on the nature of men and women echo prevailing cultural attitudes: "It is a woman's nature to be constant—to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and forever" (Brontë 211). To describe the nature of men, Huntingdon turns to Shakespeare, quoting *Twelfth Night*:

> Helen; you must give us a little more license, for as Shakespeare has it—
>
> > 'However we do praise ourselves,
> > Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
> > More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won

> Than women's are.' (Brontë 211)

Huntingdon references Shakespeare to gain credibility that he and other men ought to have more freedom to act badly. However, the context of this speech in *Twelfth Night* complicates Huntingdon's superficial reading of the play. Huntingdon quotes an exchange in which Duke Orsino gives advice about love and marriage to Viola, who at the time is disguised as a man. Duke Orsino's reductive statements about the nature of men and women are rendered ironic as he believes he is speaking to a man, but is actually speaking to a woman. That Huntingdon puts forth a line from this humorous scene as serious commentary on the nature of men renders Huntingdon's comment ironic as well. In quoting a play in which gender is unstable to support his reductive definitions of gender, Huntingdon unknowingly undermines his point. Helen realizes the folly in assuming that it is "woman's nature to be constant" and men's nature to be "giddy and unfirm," and resists such assumptions in the way she raises young Arthur.

Helen's approach to parenting is unconventional. Not wanting Arthur to become like his father, "Helen…works against culturally dominant ideas of gender by teaching her son Arthur to hate alcohol despite societal encouragement of male drinking; Helen even goes so far in her diary to link certain forms of bad behavior with ideals of manhood" (Talley 139). When Helen reveals to the Markhams that she has conditioned Arthur to detest wine, Mrs. Markham laughs and tells Helen, "the poor child will be the veriest milksop that ever was sopped!" (Brontë 33). Helen protests, and in return Gilbert gives his views on how young boys should be raised: "If you would have your son to walk honourably through the world, you must not attempt to clear the stones from his path, but teach him to walk firmly over them—not insist upon leading him by the hand, but let him learn to go alone" (Brontë 34). Gilbert expresses the prevailing belief that boys should not be sheltered, but rather should be allowed to navigate the world on their own. To further explain his point, Gilbert uses the metaphor of a tree in a hothouse: "and if you were to rear an oak sapling in a hothouse, tending it carefully night and day, and shielding it from every breath of wind, you could not expect it to become a hardy tree, like that which has grown up on a mountain-side, exposed to all the action of the elements, and not even sheltered from the shock of the tempest" (Brontë 35). When Helen asks Gilbert if he would raise a daughter the same way, he replies decisively, "Certainly not" (Brontë 35). Helen calls attention to the hypocrisy in Gilbert's differing views on how girls and boys should be raised: "You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience, while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others" (Brontë 36). Mrs. Markham laughs at Helen's parenting strategies, but the attitudes towards children that Helen resists have material effects on the men and women who sons and daughters become.

Helen's views on parenting challenge Huntingdon's opinions on men and women. It is not "woman's nature to be constant," nor is it men's nature to be "giddy and unfirm." Rather, women are taught to be constant, and men are allowed the freedom to be giddy and unfirm. Milicent and Hatterlsey's marriage demonstrates the damaging effects of this parenting strategy: Milicent does not feel that she can speak her mind and Hattersley feels justified in drinking too much and mistreating his wife. Hattersley's reformation shows that these traits are not inherent in men and women, but are taught and thus can be unlearned. However, such behavior cannot always be unlearned, as despite Helen's best efforts to reform her husband, "Huntingdon becomes increasingly brutish, defined by his animal nature" (Morse 118). Parenting, thus, becomes necessary for preventing such behavior to occur at all.

Helen's fear that her son will become like his father becomes the predominant "horror" of her Gothic tale. This fear is inextricably linked to the broader of issue of patriarchal oppression that traps Helen in her marriage to Huntingdon. Early in her diary entries, Helen writes of Huntingdon's flaws, attributing them to "his harsh yet careless father and his madly indulgent mother" (Brontë 202). Because Helen is still in love with Huntingdon at this point in the novel, this assessment serves as an excuse for Huntingdon's behavior. However, the implication within this assertion, and one that is supported by Brontë's treatment of parenting throughout the novel, is that good parenting could have prevented Huntingdon from becoming so disreputable. Similar to Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* and Elizabeth Gaskell in *The Grey Woman*, Brontë draws attention to patterns of male entitlement and female marginalization in society. However, Brontë also presents a means of destabilizing patriarchal oppression: good parenting. Helen's story is Gothic realism because her marriage to Huntingdon traps her in a claustrophobic existence and because the men around her render her voice "unspeakable;" however this experience does not have to be the norm for all women. Rather, in Brontë's view, parents can teach their children in such a way that little boys will grow up knowing how to resist vice and treat their wives with respect, and little girls will grow up equipped to navigate the difficulties of the world.

Chapter 3: The Female Gothic as Pedagogy

"All true histories contain instruction," Agnes Grey, the narrator and eponymous protagonist of Anne Brontë's first novel, states in the first line of her narration (*Agnes Grey* 3). Agnes's story is, of course, fiction; however, through this opening line "Brontë sets up the authentic base for her story and indicates a cogently defined balance between art and moral utility" (Berry 39). For Brontë the novel (specifically the realist novel, which endeavors to tell histories that seem "true") is a pedagogical tool. Brontë's dedication to truth and pedagogy is also evident in the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, in which she explains that her object in writing the novel was "to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it" (9). Again, Brontë presents her belief that one can always derive instruction from the truth. Of course, Brontë does not pretend that she is "competent to reform the errors and abuses of society," though she does express her hope that through writing *Tenant* she "can gain the public ear" and "whisper a few wholesome truths" (9). In a society in which women have limited opportunities to voice their opinions on a public platform, writing novels becomes a means for women to whisper their "truths" into the "public ear." Although most Gothic fiction perhaps could not be considered "true histories," Female Gothic novels often have instructional value and serve as a means for female authors to impart warnings and knowledge to their readers.[1]

To understand the instructional aspects of Female Gothic fiction, it is first important to consider the narrative structure of Gothic fiction, as narrative structure dictates how the novel is understood by its readers. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes of the structure of Gothic novels: "it is likely to be discontinuous and involuted, perhaps incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories" (8). Sedgwick links the fractured and complicated narrative structures of Gothic novels to repression and her idea of the "unspeakable" (3). I contend that in certain Female Gothic novels, complicated framing devices do not produce the inability to speak, but rather, enable the typically repressed female voice to be heard.

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[1] My purpose in drawing attention to the instructive qualities of narration in *Tenant*, *The Grey Woman*, and *Northanger Abbey* is not to make generalizing statements about the Female Gothic as a whole, but rather to identify trends within the genre. After all, the Female Gothic is an expansive and diverse genre.

Gaskell's *The Grey Woman* has a complicated narrative structure indicative of conventional Gothic novels. The narrative begins in the first-person perspective of an Englishwoman visiting a mill in Germany with her friends sometime in the 1840s. The women notice the portrait of a beautiful young woman and inquire about her story. They are given a letter written by the woman in the portrait, Anna Scherer, to her daughter Ursula. This letter, in which Anna tells her daughter the story of her marriage to M. de la Tourelle, constitutes the majority of the novella. The narrative never returns to the unnamed narrator from the beginning of the novella. Through this frame narrative, "Gaskell allows herself room to create a more subversive story" (Haefele-Thomas 63). By creating narrative distance between the reader and the story, Gaskell is able to engage in topics that Victorian readers might otherwise consider too shocking or unrealistic: "In making the Englishwoman's German a little 'rusty,' Gaskell sets up the story up so that the Victorian audience, if they found the tale too ridiculous or offensive, could merely see it as some sort of bad translation" (Haefele-Thomas 62). Thus, rather than bury or obscure information, the layers of narration allow Gaskell to tell a story that might otherwise be suppressed by society.

The narrative structure of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* recalls that of *The Grey Woman* and other conventional Gothic novels. The novel is framed as a letter from Gilbert Markham to his brother-in-law, Halford. In the first third of the novel, Gilbert recounts Helen’s arrival at Wildfell Hall, her reception by her neighbors, and Gilbert’s relationship with her. The middle third of the novel is a transcription of Helen’s diary into Gilbert’s letter to Halford. Helen’s diary recounts her marriage to Huntingdon, and stops at the point that she meets Gilbert. The final third of the novel returns to Gilbert’s point of view, and concludes Helen and Gilbert’s romance plot. Rather than serve to distance the reader, the complicated narrative structure of *Tenant* “calls all readers as witnesses” (Morse 105). In keeping a diary and sharing her diary with Gilbert, Helen asserts her voice and her story as one that is important and needs to be heard. Through sharing Helen’s story with Halford, Gilbert amplifies Helen’s voice.

The narrative structure of *Tenant* does not serve to obscure or distance the reader. While one could argue that this difference would seem to differentiate *Tenant* from Gothic novels, I posit that narrative structure operates differently in the Female Gothic than in masculine Gothic novels. For instance, while the narrative structure of *The Grey Woman* does serve to distance the reader, the narrative is never actually obscured. Although the Englishwoman’s German is “rusty” and the letter is described as being written in “crabbed German” (Gaskell 209), the narrative is presented to the reader in clear, unobtrusive English. As Haefele-Thomas notes, the possibility of mistranslation allows Victorian readers to dismiss any aspects of the novella they may find unsavory. However, if the reader decides to dismiss certain details or events because of mistranslation, this interpretation is a projection of the reader’s discomfort, as Gaskell provides no clues as to which sections of the letter may have been mistranslated, if any. Anna’s voice is presented without interruption, and for this reason I contend that the narrative structure of *The Grey Woman* operates similarly to the structure of *Tenant*, calling on readers as “witnesses.”

While Gaskell creates distance between Anna’s story and Victorian England by setting the novella in eighteenth-century Germany, the novella is not fully divorced from her contemporary time period. By introducing the story through the eyes of an Englishwoman visiting Germany in the 1840s, Gaskell positions Anna’s story as relevant to mid-nineteenth century English society. Written with the intention to prevent her daughter from marrying, Anna’s warning is one that is not only applicable to her daughter but to all young women.

When Anna’s male relative gives the women the letter, he tells them they may read it at their “leisure”; and thus the women take the letter with them: “it was our employment, during many a long evening that ensuing winter, to translate, and in some parts to abbreviate” (Gaskell 290). Though the women are able to read Anna’s story at their leisure, their process in translating the letter is not a leisurely one. Rather, this “employment” consumes “many a long evening,” indicating that this is a task that the women take seriously. This is all to say that the women’s consumption of Anna’s story is not merely for the sake of entertainment, and the women seem invested in creating a meaningful translation of Anna’s words. Through this act of dedicated translation, the women bear witness to Anna’s story and work to amplify her voice.

While the language barrier between Anna and her translators can serve as a means of dismissing shocking aspects of the story, the Englishwomen’s initial narration conversely serves to verify Anna’s story as real, even if mistranslated. The text lends itself to either reading, and it is up to the reader to decide how much they choose to believe. The precarity of narrative authority in *The Grey Woman* derives from the slippery relationship between the “real” and the “Gothic” in Female Gothic literature. That the Englishwomen’s role in the narrative can either serve to question the reliability of the narration or witness the veracity of Anna’s story indicates the paradox that Gaskell's novella is simultaneously outlandish and devastatingly applicable to the experiences of real women.

Interrupted or nonlinear temporality is crucial in the narrative structures of both *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *The Grey Woman*. Lee A. Talley argues that Brontë's use of frame narrative:

> reflects Brontë's commitment to education…Learning is rarely linear and Anne Brontë's novel reflects the necessarily circuitous route beginning to understand a difficult 'truth' takes…The insertion of Helen's diary not only impedes the progression of the romance plot, but also teaches the journal's reader—Gilbert, Halford, and the novel's reader—about the realities of alcoholism and bad marriages. (133)

Not only does Gilbert learn from Helen about "the realities of alcoholism and bad marriages," but he passes these lessons onto others, specifically his friend, Halford. In educating Gilbert, Helen endows him with the ability to educate others. It is significant that the friend with whom Gilbert shares Helen's story is a man. Brontë is explicitly clear in her preface to the second edition of *Tenant* that she is writing the novel for both women *and* men. Brontë hopes that male readers of her novel can learn from Helen's story how to be better husbands. If abusive marriages are to be avoided, men must not only listen to the stories of women like Helen, but must also discuss these issues with other men.

Many critics have viewed the framing of Helen's story within a letter between two men as a flaw that hampers a reading of *Tenant* as a proto-feminist novel. For instance, Elizabeth Signorotti argues that "Markham's appropriation and editing of Helen's history reflects an attempt to control her. In a society where possession of knowledge equals power, Markham's revealing epistle to Halford reflects the means by which Victorian men maintained power over women" (21). Signorotti's argument certainly has merit, as the thought of a man sharing his wife's private journal, which details an especially harrowing time in her life, with his male friend certainly inspires a degree of discomfort, especially for a modern reader. However, one must consider that the framing of Helen's diary was perhaps inspired by Brontë's careful reading of the *Methodist Magazine* in her youth:

> the diary also represents Brontë's fictional adaptation of a standard feature of the magazine: the published diaries of the faithful. Safeguarded within the sanctioned pages of the religious community's periodical were innumerable accounts of unconventional and successful women's lives. Many of the female diarists featured in the magazine were as intelligent as Helen Huntingdon, and found innovative ways of studying subjects normally reserved for men. (Talley 137)

That Brontë perhaps took inspiration from the practice of magazines publishing the diaries of remarkable women reveals that Gilbert's sharing of Helen's diary is not the violation of privacy that modern readers might perceive it to be. In this light, Gilbert's transcription of Helen's diary is not a show of power, but a celebration of Helen as an intelligent, faithful woman whose story is worth sharing.

Furthermore, the religious source of Brontë's inspiration for this narrative structure relates to the vision of writing that Brontë presents in the preface to the second edition of *Tenant*: "Truth always conveys its moral to those who are able to receive it." Brontë's religious point of view further bolsters her approach to storytelling as a mode of imparting morals onto the reader. For Brontë, the telling of someone's story is not an exercise of power, but a mode of instruction. Indeed, if we are to consider the power dynamics of pedagogy, Gilbert is imparting on Halford the lessons he learned from *Helen*, thereby positioning Helen as the original source of knowledge and thus the one who holds "power" in this dynamic.

Pedagogy appears in *Tenant* not only through the sharing of Helen's diary, but also through parenting as Helen does not want her son to grow up to be like his father. Parenting also plays an important role in the narrative structure of *The Grey Woman*. As in *Tenant*, Gaskell introduces a "key Gothic theme, that children are 'cursed' by their ancestors crimes" (Kranzler 366), when describing Anna's daughter, Ursula: "To be sure, the good cousin Ursula was [de Tourelle's] child as well. The sins of the father are visited on their children" (Gaskell 290). The "curse" on Ursula is her near-marriage to Henri, a "hellish Frenchman," a marriage that may have replicated Anna's marriage to de Tourelle. This marriage is avoided as a result of the letter Anna writes Ursula. At the beginning of the letter, Anna urges her daughter not to marry Henri: "But I will not decide for thee. I will tell thee all; and thou shalt bear the burden of choice. I may be wrong; I have little wit left, and never had much, I think; but an instinct serves me in place of judgment, and that instinct tells me that thou and Henri must never be married" (Gaskell 291). Similar to how Helen will do anything in her power to prevent Arthur from growing up to be like his father, Anna is determined that her daughter will not repeat her mistakes. Anna's approach for stopping the marriage between Ursula and Henri is not to forbid the marriage, but to dissuade her daughter from marriage by sharing her story. Just as Helen uses her story to educate Gilbert, Anna uses her story to educate her daughter. Anna's assertion, "I will tell thee all; and thou shalt bear the burden of choice," echoes Brontë's belief that the "truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it" (Brontë 9). Anna lets her story speak for itself, and hopes that Ursula will make the right decision after understanding her mother's experiences. Furthermore, Anna's history is shared not only between mother and daughter, but is handed down to the

Englishwomen who translate the tale and perhaps share it with others, recalling how Gilbert shares Helen's story with Halford. Although Brontë's desire to write the "truth" seems at odds with the typically outlandish Gothic, Gaskell's use of frame narrative indicates that Brontë's vision of deriving instruction through "true histories" lends itself to the Female Gothic.

Complicated narrative structures are often used in the Female Gothic as a means of bearing witness and imparting instruction; however not all Female Gothic novels utilize narrative structure in this way. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, for instance, does not utilize a frame narrative or otherwise have a fractured narrative structure. However, Austen's use of third person narration also speaks to the slipperiness between the "Gothic" and the "real." In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *The Grey Woman*, writing (specifically letter writing and diary writing) provides a means for women to tell their stories and call on others to bear witness to their stories. In *Northanger Abbey*, however, Austen narrates Catherine Morland's story in the third person. Though Austen does not utilize a frame narrative, the narrative structure of *Northanger Abbey* is far from simple. The opening line of the novel, "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine," establishes the narrator's awareness of and complicated relationship with the Gothic genre. Austen's parody "'makes strange' a fictional style in order better to determine what it really accomplishes" (Johnson 34). In "making strange" the Gothic genre, Austen makes the genre familiar, with the narrator directly appealing to the everywoman, or the woman whom no one would have supposed was "born to be an heroine." One such moment when the narrator appeals directly to the reader's experiences is when the narrator describes the anxiety Catherine feels when she fears that the disagreeable John Thorpe will ask her to dance:

> Every young lady may feel for my heroine in this critical moment, for every young lady has at some time or other known the same agitation. All have been, or at least believed themselves to be, in danger from the pursuit of some one whom they wished to avoid; and all have been anxious for the attention of some one whom they wished to please. (Austen 52)

That Catherine's anxiety that Thorpe will ask her to dance is elevated to a "danger" indicates Austen's satirical tone. However, although this emotion is exaggerated, it is an emotion with which many of Austen's readers would identify. *Northanger Abbey*, then, is not a narrative that calls on its readers to bear witness, but rather is a narrative of recognition.

Austen privileges reading as a way for women to navigate the patriarchal horrors of society. Maria Jerinic argues that *Northanger Abbey* "is a book that does ask women to trust their own 'power of interpretation' while warily encountering the conversations and ideas of reading men who wield much of the social power in Austen's world" (147). Catherine Morland is often reduced to a silly girl who cannot distinguish fiction from reality, but Jerinic identifies the ways in which reading aids Catherine, as Gothic novels "propose that women should be rationally educated so they will not succumb to [Gothic horrors]" (143). It is significant that Catherine particularly loves Radcliffe's novels: "Austen's display of human nature in *Northanger Abbey* is necessarily coupled with Radcliffe's, and is executed by showing the justification for gothic conventions, not by dismissing them" (Johnson 48). Radcliffe's Female Gothic tales provide young women with examples of clever heroines navigating perilous situations, and *Northanger Abbey* serves as a guide for how women can interpret Gothic novels and translate the knowledge gained from these novels into their everyday lives. Thus if *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *The Grey Woman* call on readers to bear witness to the stories of their respective heroines, *Northanger Abbey* shows how reading Gothic tales can perhaps help young women from falling into the situations against which Brontë and Gaskell warn. Although their strategies differ, Brontë, Gaskell, and Austen are all invested in the instructional value of the novel.

For women in the nineteenth century, Gothic themes of oppression and claustrophobia reflect the real experiences of many women. Consequently, the depiction of female subjectivity in literature defies genre; the Gothic becomes the real and the real becomes the Gothic, thus converging to form a Gothic realism. The "realism" of these Female Gothic tales lends them a degree of truth, and from this truth, the readers of these tales can take from these stories useful lessons. Such lessons may not always be readily apparent. Anne Brontë observes that the process of uncovering "morals" from the "truth" is often not simple: "But as the priceless treasure too frequently hides at the bottom of the well, it needs some courage to dive for it" (9). Gothic realism not only allows female authors to depict the oppression of women, but also resists that same oppression. For female readers who are "courageous" enough to dive into these novels and unearth the warnings they impart, or who recognize themselves in the heroines of these novels, Gothic realism stands in for the "true histories" of real women whose stories society has suppressed.

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