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Ambiguous Agency: The Construction of Femininity in the Gothic Writing of Burney, Radcliffe, Brontë, and Austen

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Jie Zhuang

Dissertation Committee:

Professor James Steintrager, Chair
Professor Jayne Lewis
Associate Professor Jami Bartlett

2018

DEDICATION

To

my parents

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ambiguous Agency: The Construction of Femininity in the Gothic Writing of Burney, Radcliffe, Brontë, and Austen

By

Jie Zhuang

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor James Steintrager, Chair

This dissertation examines the configuration of feminine subjectivity under the mask of proper femininity in the Female Gothic genre and focuses primarily on the works of Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Brontë, and Jane Austen. By investigating the figure of the proper lady in the novels by these women writers, I argue that, despite the women writer's conformity to the patriarchal demands of proper femininity, they create an ambiguous discourse through their employment of gothic tropes, thereby producing a discourse of resistance that undermines their conservative stances. The ambiguity enabled by the Gothic mode allows them to create a discursive site for the construction of female agency under the mask of the proper lady. Arguing that these women writers negotiate their ideological positions through such performative strategies in response to the rigid control of patriarchy, I provide a feminist account that recognizes a form of agency that I call "ambiguous" as a by-product of the particular historical period. While performative and gender theories provide a theoretical framework for my study, my attention to textual nuances allows me to uncover the masked discourses underneath the surface texts of normative femininity. Chapter one investigates the construction of gender

through the ambiguity of the mask in Burney's *The Wanderer*. Chapter two examines the ambiguities of the veil in producing female agency in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*. Chapter three presents the figure of the ghost as a figure of ambiguity that enables the burgeoning of female subjectivity in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Chapter four discusses Austen's irony as a figure of mask and its performative function in *Northanger Abby*. By showing how my key writers all manage to embed an ambiguous discourse in their narratives through the Gothic mode, I demonstrate that the feminist aspect of the Female Gothic genre lies in the ambiguous discourse present in women's writing, and that such ambiguity enables the burgeoning of female agency, albeit ambiguously, out of the masquerade of the proper lady.

INTRODUCTION

Near the end of *The Wanderer*, a novel that deploys the Gothic convention of damsel-in-distress to depict "female difficulties" in the heroine's flight from male persecution, Harleigh utters the following words in delight and disbelief when he confirms Juliet's feelings towards him: "I was most favoured, then, it seems,...when I thought you most inexorable?," to which Juliet replies "gaily" in a typical style of feminine evasion: "Reverse, else, the medal,...and see whether the impression will be more to your taste!" (863). This is the most profound ambiguity in the novel: not only does Harleigh's use of antithesis in his remark suggest his lack of recognition of Juliet's true self, but Juliet's reply, despite its mask of female modesty, also points to an image of gaiety and cunningness contrary to her usual timidity and fearfulness. More interestingly, instead of affirming Harleigh's recognition of the contradiction between her own modest appearance and inner feelings, Juliet responds with equivocation by substituting the subject of their conversation – her feelings, which is a subjective state, with the medal, an inanimate object created through the hands of a craftsman, and states that Harleigh would not like her conduct otherwise. While Juliet's true feelings are masked and displaced here, the exchange between the two characters is full of ambiguity that opens up a new space for interpretations. While her response suggests that she has catered to Harleigh's taste by creating the "impression" of her modesty and passivity, as if her appearance is a medal on which she could easily imprint such impression, the dexterous displacement in her reply also overturns her image of timidity and submissiveness, evincing her craftsmanship in creating and performing a proper image of her self. The reader cannot help asking: who is the Juliet here? Is she the same modest, fearful, submissive heroine we've encountered elsewhere? Can we perceive her as a

female agent who dons the mask of passivity and modesty in order to advance her feminist agenda?

It is with these questions that I began my inquiry of the construction of femininity and of female agency in the Female Gothic genre – a genre that proliferates with virtuous, passive heroines who flee from domineering patriarchal figures.[1] The ambiguity in the exchange between Harleigh and Juliet demands readerly attention as it raises many questions about how we might read this feminine figure of passivity. As William Empson points out in his classic study, *Severn Types of Ambiguity*, one of the functions of ambiguity is to convey the attitude of the author to the subject, and the import of such ambiguity lies in its rhetorical impact on the reader: "they leave it to the reader vaguely to invent something, and make him leave it at the back of his mind" (23). Empson's remark pinpoints the productive function of ambiguity: ambiguity leaves marks and generates meanings. Such a view of ambiguity's productive function comes close to J. L. Austin's theory on the performative role of language: words can do things when placed in a specific social, cultural context. My study, in fact, investigates the performative function of ambiguous language in the Gothic writings by women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, arguing that such ambiguity constitutes a productive discourse that enables the burgeoning of female subjectivity and agency. My argument about female agency that is constituted through ambiguity, I hope, will add to the current debate about the nature of the genre.

First coined by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women*, the Female Gothic has been recognized as a genre seeking to represent female victimization and one that includes "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (90). Moers' reading of *Frankenstein* as a "birth myth," a revelation of Mary Shelley's

own "revulsion against newborn life" (93), has initiated the feminist readings of the genre as a subversive one. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwomen in the Attic* further uncovers the hidden anger of women writers who convey their secret messages in fictions; their readings of Gothic novels such as *Frankenstein* and *Jane Eyre* aim to present the figures of Other as the embodiment of the female anger. Seeking to define the genre in other terms, critics such as Claire Kahane and Juliann Fleenor insist that the Female Gothic presents "the conflict with the all-powerful devouring mother" as the enigma of female experience (Fleenor 16). Other critics such as Kate Ellis and Alison Milbank propose social-cultural readings of the genre by considering it as a genre challenging the ideal domestic ideology through the transgression of the heroine (Ellis) and viewing the genre's focus on the heroine and the house as a plot "critical of the claims of patriarchal control" (Milbank 11). While these earlier definitions of the genre remain consistent in viewing it as a subversive genre representative of female experience under patriarchy, there has been an increasing criticism of the assumptions both of the femaleness of the genre and of its subversive nature. Critics such as Michelle Massé view the genre as conservative, deeming its depiction of female victimization a promotion of female passivity, arguing that such endorsement of female passivity leads to female masochism.

Diane Long Hoeveler's *Gothic Feminism* complicates the debate on the nature of the genre in its response to the critical trend regarding female victimization as passive and self-defacing. Arguing that Female Gothic promotes "Gothic feminism" and "seeks to escape the female body through a dream of turning weakness into strength" by pretending weakness and passivity (183), Hoeveler sees the genre's representation of female passivity as a "professionalization of femininity." Contending that women adopt a masquerade of docility and use their victimization to empower themselves, Hoeveler views this gender masquerade as a

deliberate strategy "through pretended and staged weakness" (7). Hoeveler's study opens up a

new avenue to reading female victimization through the psychoanalytic concept of masquerade,

and her use of the term "passive-aggressive" to describe the female writers' feminist strategy

seemingly breaks down the binary opposition between "conservative" and "subversive," the

essentializing vocabulary that has dominated the critical discourse. However, her eagerness to

define the genre in feminist terms – "Gothic Feminism" and to equate "Gothic Feminism" with

the post-modern "Victim Feminism" carries the same essentializing tendency shared by the

earlier critics.

Instead of defining the genre in fixated terms, I propose to read the genre's feminist

aspect through the lens of ambiguity. While I agree with the general reading of the Female

Gothic as a subversive genre representing female victimization and critiquing patriarchal

oppression, I view the genre as more ambiguous and contradictory than earlier perceived; it is "a

protean entity" (Fleenor) that appears in various forms that might contradict each other if we

unmask the passive "skin" of the feminine and examine the tensions between female passivity

and textual complexity. The Female Gothic, I will argue, is a masked figure if we unveil the

meaning of passive femininity and probe its complexity. In considering the genre's feminist

aspect, I'm following Benjamin Brabon and Stephanie Genz's definition of the genre as

"postfeminist" in their 2007 publication of *Postfeminist Gothic*. They propose resisting

"universalizing standpoints" and avoiding "an essentializing positioning of women as innocent

victims" (7). Questioning the critical tendency to view female victimization as a single form of

patriarchal domination, they remain critical of the totalizing feminist assumptions about the

genre and propose to open up the meaning of the terms used to define the genre. Yet their

reading of the genre focuses on the discussion of films or televisions in the twentieth century and

they pay little attention to the earlier Gothic fictions. In contrast, my study is historically sensitive: it investigates the Gothic writings by women writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for this period is a time in which women writers write under immense social constraints and therefore write with ambiguity in response to the social expectations of normative femininity. The passage I analyzed at the beginning of this introduction is precisely an illustration of ambiguity embedded in women's writing in this period, which is a result of their "ideological negotiations."[2] By examining such a masked discourse of ambiguity, I hope to offer a new insight into the women writers' construction of femininity under the constraints of patriarchy.

My study builds upon but extends Hoeveler's view of feminine weakness as a gender masquerade and examines the paradoxical position of masquerade from which agency springs: while masquerade invites paradoxical interpretations, which allow both positive interpretation of female empowerment and negative interpretation of female disempowerment, it is precisely these paradoxes that offer a view of agency worthy of examination. Unlike Hoeveler, who focuses on the psychological state of the heroines in her analysis and misses the textual construction of femininity as a masked, ambiguous discourse, I will focus on the narrative as a form of masquerade and examine the configuration of feminine subjectivity under the mask of normative femininity. Through a careful reading of textual nuances, I show how women writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries produce an ambiguous discourse of resistance in the mode of Gothic. It is through the attention to narrative ambiguity that I arrive at an understanding of the Female Gothic as "a harbinger of feminist politics,"[3] as I come to believe that the feminist aspect of the genre lies in the ambiguous discourse present in women's writing in the time period, and that such ambiguity itself constitutes a discursive site for the construction

of female agency that has been neglected by most critics. It is a performative site that enables women writers to configure femininity in response to the rigid control of patriarchy, which enables the production of ambiguous agency, as I will show in my study.

The Historical Context: The Proper Lady and Novel Writing

Some influential studies by feminist critics such as Nancy Miller, Jane Spencer, and Mary Poovey have shown that the historical and social changes in the mid-eighteenth century promoted the "change in the literary market" and resulted in the promotion of feminine delicacy and propriety: The Proper Lady became "a familiar household companion" and the "heroine's text" a conventional paradigm that inscribes "the commonplaces of the culture" (158).[4] In order to ensure their survival in the literary market, women writers have to write with discretion and with strategies. They are expected to present normative femininity, promoting the patriarchal ideal of female passivity and constructing the Proper Lady as the cultural ideal, but they weave their own voices of dissent into their narratives. In their struggle to make their voices heard in conforming to cultural demands of female propriety, they write with "the female imagination" under the hegemony of male literary tradition.[5] As Mary Poovey observes, "the legacy of this period is a repertoire of the strategies that enabled women either to conceive of themselves in two apparently incompatible ways or to express themselves in a code capable of being read in two ways: as acquiescence to the norm and as departure from it" (41). The women writers, then, engage in the process of making a double-voiced text, resorting to novel writing as a means to achieve "ideological negotiation."

Novel writing, therefore, becomes an essential tool for women writers to negotiate cultural demands and their desire for self-expression and to construct their own complex

ideological positions in their novels. As Mikhail Bakhtin argues, the novel is the ideal form for

the production of double-voices; its dialogical nature allows the writer to create a plethora of

divergent voices in their narratives, creating heteroglossia with a multitude of competing voices.

If the women writers have to adhere to the convention of modesty and passivity in their novels,

the novel as a form also allows them to exploit the convention of modesty and express their

ideological positions through narratives that disrupt the dominant discourse of conventions. As

they negotiate through their narratives and weave their voices into the conventional narrative,

they utilize the novel as "a form of cultural resistance" to begin their resistance to the male

domination.[6] As Rachel DuPlessis similarly points out, such act of negotiation is feminist in its

nature:

> One may assert that any female cultural practice that makes the 'meaning production
>
> process' itself 'the site of struggle' may be considered feminist. These authors are
>
> 'feminist' because they construct a variety of oppositional strategies to the depiction of
>
> gender institutions in narrative. A writer expresses dissent from an ideological formation
>
> by attaching elements of narrative that repeat, sustain or embody the values and attitudes
>
> in question. (239)

The "site of struggle," as I argue in this study, manifests itself as narrative ambiguities, becoming

a discursive site through which the women writers negotiate their ideological positions and

produce "fictions of authority" underneath the "feminine style of the surface text."[7] In a sense,

they perform "fictions of modesty,"[8] and through the very performance of such gendered

masquerade in their narratives, they produce opportunities for the emergence of feminine

subjectivity and female agency. As I will show in this study, women writers turn to the Gothic

mode as a means to infuse ambiguities into their narratives, for the Gothic novel is essentially a

genre whose defining characteristic is ambiguity and a genre obsessed with the language of modesty in the portrayal of the gothic heroine.[9] The Gothic mode is particularly fitting for the construction of ambiguity, as it is a genre fond of masquerading, exemplified by its frequent emplotment of concealment and revelation, by its masking and unmasking of the female mind,[10] by the prevalence of the veil imagery in the representation of the female body. It is therefore a useful tool for the women writers who seek to find their own voices within or beneath the conventional, surface text of ideal femininity. My key writers, Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Charlotte Brontë, all manage to construct an ambiguous discourse through their engagement with the Gothic mode, thereby performing their "ideological negotiation" of gender and producing a masquerade of female agency through the mask of normative femininity.

Masquerade as a Trope of Ambiguity

The concept of masquerade is important for my study as it is closely related to the theories of gender and performance, and being an emblem of ambiguity, it is a prominent trope in the production of agency. As a non-gender specific disguise that contains a "false" outward show,[11] the masquerade obscures and displaces the body underneath with a false appearance, blocking the public gaze completely and enabling the masquerader to transform into another person in appearance or gender. Aligned with social and public activities, the masquerade suggests pleasure, playfulness and secularity. Such carnivalesque nature enables the masquerade to become a popular form of entertainment in the early eighteenth century, providing momentary pleasure and freedom to those who seek relaxation at the moment of excess. Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque in her groundbreaking study of this eighteen-century phenomena, *Masquerade and Civilization*, Terry Castle, discusses the transgressive nature of the

masquerade and its threat to the eighteenth-century social structures: "Like the world of satire, the masquerade projected an anti-nature, a world upside-down, an intoxicating reversal of ordinary sexual, social, and metaphysical hierarchies" (6). For women specifically, Castle notes, the masquerade provided an opportunity for female emancipation, since masks and disguises protected their reputations and removed social and sexual constraints (33); the masquerade "suspended the archaic pattern of Western gender relations" and "symbolized a realm of women unmarked by patriarchy, unmarked by the signs of exchange and domination, and independent of the prevailing sexual economy of eighteen-century culture" (255). For Castle, then, the masquerade is an emblem of liberty, allowing masqueraders to transgress social, sexual, class boundaries through the violation of the sartorial code. It is particularly liberating for women, since masks and costumes offer anonymity for women and free them from rigid patriarchal control. The masquerade thus overturns patriarchal structures and becomes a liberating tool for the search of female identity. The masquerade scene occurs frequently in the fictions of the earlier female writers such as Eliza Haywood, which delineate heroines who mask themselves to resist constraints and acquire the freedom otherwise denied to them, becoming a handy tool to delineate and celebrate female transgression.

However, as Castle points out, women writers have to use the masquerade trope discreetly and strategically due to its transgressive nature:

The masquerade remains problematic precisely because it is the gynesium. It cannot, in the end, be reconciled with any patriarchal geography; it threatens that real world of masculine domination with which, to uphold its mimetic and didactic pretensions, eighteenth-century narrative must always negotiate. However much the woman writer may be drawn to the scenery of female power, she must also contend with a world right-

9

side-up, the prevailing symbolic order, in which women are given names, guarded and

cherished, and exchanged as objects by men. (258)

Castle's remark pinpoints the dilemma of women writers in negotiating the demands of the

patriarchal society and their desire for self-empowerment. Since the female masqueraders are

frequently identified as whores in the eighteenth century, women novelists of the time period are

often obliged to present a virtuous heroine whose conduct is devoid of such misdemeanor. As the

change in the literary market demands an ideal of feminine model based on passivity and

delicacy, the masquerade becomes marginalized in later fictions.[12] To ensure their literary

success, the woman writers have to represent their fictional subjects in accordance with the male

ideology of modest femininity. Women writers avoid overt transgression of patriarchal laws

through the themes of masquerade, and if the masquerade scenes do appear, they are often

represented as a form of corruption that the virtuous heroine shuns. Burney's *Cecilia*, for

example, contains a masquerade scene in which the heroine expresses her displeasure at the

corrupted nature of such assembly. As Castle rightly observes, such novel exhibits "a theater of

female desire," and she regrets that the final suppression of such desire suggests "a haunting

incapacity to free oneself from the scenarios of loss, deprivation, and mourning" (289).

Despite her conception of masquerade as "a master trope of instability" and despite her

recognition that the masquerade "migrates" into the Gothic genre,[13] Castle has overstated the

subversive function of the masquerade and paid little attention to its ambiguity and to its function

in the Gothic genre; her emphasis on its liberating function makes her miss the opportunities

embedded in the ambiguity of the concept. Contrary to Castle's pessimism, I deem the

suppression of the female desire a mask the women writers don in configuring normative

femininity, and I argue that the masquerade becomes a performative gesture, which allows the

women writers to create an ambiguous discourse in the Gothic mode to undermine patriarchal ideologies. In general, I conceive of the mask as a powerful metaphor that permeates the Female Gothic genre. It is not only a prevalent imagery associated with the female body but also a metaphor for many things: the mystery inherent in the plot of the novel; the mask of femininity; the ambiguity associated with the female body; the atmosphere surrounding the innocent heroine. The masquerade is thus not only a form of disguise, but also a transformative entity, embodying artifice, femininity, ambiguity, liminality, and spectrality that is associated with the feminine in the novels of Radcliffe, Burney, Austen, and Brontë. As this study shows, these texts all engage with masking in its construction of femininity. It is precisely the ambiguity of the mask that allows these women writers to maintain the status quo of society while challenging it through their use of the masked figure in their fictions of modesty. Rather than deploying the trope of the masquerade to delineate female transgression outwardly like Haywood does, the women writers in my study each resort to normative femininity as a masking strategy, using narrative ambiguities to undermine patriarchal ideologies about the feminine ideal their novels seemingly endorse.

The concept of the masquerade is useful as it provides an insight into the women writers' constructions of femininity. On the one hand, the women novelists (re)produce dominant ideologies that endorse an ideal femininity in order to maintain their own image as a proper lady, a narrative mask they wear to ensure their success. Such texts seem to be complicit in the dissemination of dominant male values. Nonetheless, the ambiguities in their texts suggest that such masks should not be read simply as representations of their ideological stances. Instead, the tension between the masquerade of normative femininity and the women novelists' desire for self-expression reveals itself in the ambiguous discourse I aim to uncover in this study.[14] The

masquerade, in fact, suggests an unauthentic expression of the female self and should be seen as a performative act that women writers conduct in responding to the pressure of maintaining the ideal femininity. The masquerade, as an emblem of ambiguity, which suggests both subordination and liberation, enables women to subvert standard social roles in their performance. Their performance of proper femininity is a balancing act that negotiates social demands and their own aspirations. While their masks undermine an essentialized notion of womanhood both diegetically and extradiegetically, the ambiguities in their narratives allow them to resist male domination and to configure female subjectivity and agency in diverse terms.

In fact, it is precisely the liminality and ambiguity of the masquerade itself that produces the opportunities for the resistance of dominant discourses. As Victor Turner posits, although liminality dissolves one's identity to some extent, it also helps to construct identity by creating possibility of new perspectives through its very ambiguity (156). The masquerade of femininity, or the mask of the "heroine's text," although suggesting self-effacement, enables these female characters and writers, the "nobodies" in their society and in their own stories,[15] to engage in the process of reintegration into their community, thereby allowing women to move from one state to another in structuring their identities through the masquerade of proper femininity. The masquerade thus gives rise to transformative opportunities for female writers, characters, and readers, as its liminal nature opens up interpretative possibilities in constructing female subjectivity. The transformative potential of the mask offers a new site of agency: from the seeming dissolution of one's identity emerges a new identity; in the ostensible withdrawal from social action lies the transgressive spirit that defies the normative structure of their society. The masquerade as an emblem of ambiguity, with its paradoxical function – both liberating and

constraining, thus helps explain the extent of the women writers' feminism and my view of agency as ambiguous in the texts I discuss.

Femininity, Masquerade, and Gender Performance:

As my study seeks to dissect the relationship between femininity and masquerade and to examine the importance of narrative masquerade in the configuration of femininity, I want to give a brief overview of the feminist theories on gender and masquerade. Theoretical discussions of femininity as masquerade emerged as early as in Joan Riviere's 1929 essay, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," in which Riviere argues that womanliness is a mask a woman has to wear in order to survive in a male-dominated society. The notion of femininity as masquerade was subsequently developed by Jacques Lacan, who considers masquerade as a definition of femininity since it represents a "lack" in relation to the male sign, a "non-identity" that pretends to hide what is not there. Such negative theorization of femininity was later overturned by Luce Irigaray, who argues that women can exploit the gender stereotypes that perceive women as weak and insufficient, thereby turning these stereotypes into their advantages through the strategy of mimicry. By presenting femininity as a mask, both Riviere and Irigaray question normative femininity as the essence of the female self; femininity thus becomes a mask that women can play with. Riviere and Irigaray's conception of femininity as masquerade is useful for my study, as my study seeks to examine how women's masquerading of normative femininity allows them to counter patriarchy and to tell a story different from the conventional "heroine's text."

While the French feminists propose to view femininity as a performative mask that conceals the truth about the female self, through which they believe that women can combat

patriarchy, Judith Butler's theory on gender construction further complicates the concept of femininity as masquerade by questioning the assumption of the ontological status of the female subject behind the mask of femininity. She asserts that gender is an effect of performance, discursively constructed through "a stylized repetition of acts," and that "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (*Gender Trouble* 191, 195). Butler's conception of gender as performative, through which the gendered subject comes into being, rather than representative of a prior, existing self, provides a theoretical avenue for my understanding of how women writers construct female subjectivity and female agency through their configurations of femininity. As Butler further explains in *Bodies that Matter*, "Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm…there is no 'one' who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a 'one,' to become viable as a 'one,' where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms" (232). In Butler's terms, agency is "a reiterative or rearticulatory practice" (15). As Lois McNay points out, Butler's idea of performative agency proposes a model of agency as a result of "materialization in which the constructs of social structures are reproduced and partially transcended in the practices of agents" (34). Butler's notion of gender performativity as constitutive of subjectivity helps to explain how the women writers generate possibilities of agency in their novels through their "reiterations" of normative discourses of femininity. In their constructions of normative femininity, the gendered subject comes into being through the very reiteration of the norms. Thus, not only does novel writing become a performative act,[16] through which women writers resist patriarchal hegemony with their literary performance of the conventional text, but the novel itself is also a performative entity that produces the subjectivity of the individual. While

my analysis builds on Butler's concept of performativity, my attention to the interaction between historical context and textual details distinguishes my project from a simple Butlerian cultural analysis, for my study puts emphasis on the productive function of words situated in historical context – the performative language of the novel as a narrative form, for which Butler's theory does not account.

J. L. Austin's performative theory, hence, becomes more relevant here if we consider the novel as a performative form that enables the production of female agency. Austin's view of linguistic utterances as performative – words do things rather than merely represent reality – establishes the agency of narratives in making the world.[17] Narratives, as David Rudrum believes, "carry many of the hallmarks of performative utterances" and can 'do things' through its adherence to conventions and its 'perlocutionary effects' (268, 270). Narratives not only express ideology but also "do" ideology in the text that represents and contests it.[18] I argue that it is ultimately through the performance of the heroine's narrative, the novel provides a form for the creation of textual ambiguities, thereby generating female agency through the mask of the conventional text. In other words, women writers perform their ideological task and achieve "ideological negotiations" through the use of narratives. The novel/narrative, the Gothic novel in particular, with its "cognitive and theoretical nature,"[19] provide women writers with a form that resists male domination, for the novel can "think like individuals" and produce the modern subject through its thinking.[20]

While performative and gender theories provide a theoretical framework for my study, my reading of the texts largely depends on my attention to textual nuances as a site of construction sensitive to historical conditions. By paying homage to textual richness and recognizing its intersection with cultural and historical commands, I hope to provide a feminist

account sensitive to historical moments – an account that recognizes a form of agency that I call "ambiguous" as a by-product of the particular historical period. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I hope my research will contribute to the scholarship on female authorship and performance of gender as well as the conversation about female agency in different fields. While the concept of masquerade develops out of psychoanalytic and feminist theories, I hope my attention to the mask as a narrative construct will add to the current scholarship on gender and masquerade. Moreover, by considering the mask in the Gothic genre and linking it to the construction of the feminine, I hope to demonstrate the Female Gothic genre as a veiled genre whose meaning is to be explored. As the feminist scholarship on the Female Gothic genre has been divided in evaluating the nature of the genre as fundamentally conservative or ultimately subversive, I hope my study will add to this debate by viewing the genre as one that produces ambiguous agency. We just need to lift the veil, or rather, "reverse the medal" as Juliet suggests, to discover the ambiguous agent beneath the mask of proper femininity.

Chapter Overviews

In my first chapter, I examine femininity as an ambiguous mask in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*, a novel that exposes the constructed nature of femininity through its engagement with gothic tropes. Burney's excessive concern with feminine propriety transfers into the gothic trope of fear in her novel, crystalizing itself in the passive, modest, and distressed heroine, Juliet. However, Burney's construction of the flawless, ideal feminine figure undercuts itself in the gothic narrative of female distress, for the distressed heroine embodies a non-essence. By depicting the gothic heroine as a masked figure who is nonetheless a proper lady, the novel explores the performative nature of femininity. Engaging with theories of femininity as

masquerade proposed by feminists such as Joan Riviere, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler, I find a parallel between the feminist theories on gender construction and the novel's configuration of femininity as a mask. I contend that the novel, like its writer and its heroine, acts as a performative agent through its narrative mask. Female masquerading is essential to the construction of agency in the novel, as the writer, the heroine, and the novel all rely on the masquerading strategy to ensure their survival. Ultimately, it is the novel's ambiguous, gothic narrative that enables a discourse of female agency.

Chapter two investigates the veil as an ambiguous symbol in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* and examines its relation to the construction of femininity in the two novels. I argue that, the figure of the veil, like the masquerade in Burney's novel, acts as an emblem of ambiguity as well as a transformative agent, despite its melancholy connotation. Dwelling primarily on the construction of feminine sensibility in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and examining the ambiguities embedded in the novel's ostensible critique of feminine sensibility, I argue that Radcliffe's configuration of feminine sensibility as an epistemological barrier is a narrative mask/veil that opens up a discourse of agency. By depicting her heroine as a paragon of feminine sensibility whose overactive imagination veils her reasoning faculty and leads to her cognitive errors, Radcliffe constructs a passive feminine model whose feminine sensibility needs to be supplemented by masculine rationality. But even so, the construction of gender identity is complicated by its ambiguous rendition of Emily's overactive imagination. I show how, by playing with the instability of sensibility and imagination, Radcliffe endows her heroine's imagination with a fictional power that is embedded in the novel's delineation of her imagination as a feminine weakness. Conceived first as a means of restricting female agency, the melancholy veil is carinvalesque in its nature: it is a mask that produces female agency underneath the mask

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of proper femininity. A comparison between the veiling in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* further allows for a reading of gender construction as an ambiguous discourse that produces female agency in Radcliffe's novels.

Chapter three engages with another gothic figure, the figure of the specter, in considering Brontë's construction of femininity in *Jane Eyre*, and examines the specter's liminality in relation to the Victorian conception of womanhood. I argue that authorship becomes "an act of performance" in Jane's narrative, and that it is through the ambiguity of the spectral figure that Brontë and Jane successfully perform their female authorship. The dynamics in the text, enabled by the figure of the specter, produce a subtext that suggests female empowerment through storytelling. Using Peter Brooks' theory about the construction of plot through desire, I discuss *Jane Eyre* as a masked narrative in which the female writer utilizes the spectral figure to master the plot of her story. Although *Jane Eyre* appears to be a Bildungsroman in which the heroine conforms to the male ideology by repressing her desires and transforming herself into a socially accepted woman, her ambiguous ghost story reveals that this tale of conformity is likewise a masquerade: the heroine performs her feminine role while identifying herself with the demonic woman, which enables her to propel the plot of her own story. In this sense, Jane Eyre's ghost narrative can be seen as a performative strategy through which the female writer/character constructs her own subjectivity through the ambiguous figure of the ghost.

My final chapter turns to *Northanger Abbey*, a superficial anti-gothic text, to further investigate the masquerading strategy employed by women writers who choose to write in the Gothic mode with ambiguity. The figure of the mask culminates in Jane Austen's ironic mode of storytelling. Jane Austen's novel likewise follows the paradigm of Bildungsroman, depicting the growth of its protagonist, Catherine, who learns from her erroneous readings of social reality and

becomes the proper heroine who embraces male wisdom at the end, but this ostensible female Bildungsroman is complicated by the novel's ironic mode of storytelling. Engaging with the theories on irony, I show that the novel's ironic portrayal of Catherine's growth into a proper woman, not only satirizes the ideal femininity upheld by the Gothic/sentimental novels, but it also becomes an ambiguous site for the production of female agency. Situating the novel in the satirical tradition of the eighteenth century, Austen's engagement with the gothic genre allows her to endow Catherine with an ambiguous agency. Irony, then, becomes a figure of mask in constructing an ambiguous tale of female education. By adopting such a form of performative language, Austen produces an empowering tale under the mask of her decorum. She could therefore be seen as the master of masquerades, "the most Shakespearean novelist in the language" (Bloom, *Jane Austen* 7). Her tale, ambiguously gothic and anti-gothic, epitomizes the productive function of ambiguity that characterizes the writings of the women novelists I have discussed.

CHAPTER 1

Femininity as Masquerade in *The Wanderer*: Constructing Gender through the Narrative Form

In the preface to *The Wanderer*, in which Burney includes a letter to her father regarding the publication of *The Wanderer*, Burney speaks of her own ambiguous status as a female writer in a patriarchal society, figuring herself as one "wrapt up in a mantle of impenetrable obscurity" (3). The metaphor of the mantle, one that she also used in the preface to *Evelina*, denotes her concern with her own fictional status as nobody, one "wrapt up" and therefore obscured and rendered non-existent by the stifling patriarchal mantle. This deep concern with her imperiled position as a woman in the patriarchal society later manifests itself in the narrative of *The Wanderer*, a narrative dedicated to the depiction of "female difficulties" and delineates a nameless heroine who, like her author, is "wrapt up in a mantle of impenetrable obscurity" and remains a "nobody" for the most part of the novel. The metaphor of the mantle, likewise, transfigures into a persistent trope of the mask in *The Wanderer* and becomes a major site for the construction of femininity.

While Burney represents herself as a modest daughter under the scrupulous eyes of her father in the letter, she voices her conflicting emotions in presenting her first novel, *Evelina*: "The earliest pride of my heart was to inscribe to my much-loved Father the first public effort of my pen; though the timid offering, unobtrusive and anonymous, was long unpresented; and ... reached its destination through a zeal as secret as it was kind..." (3). Evident in this description is her desire to appeal to the male authority and her fear to displease him, as well as the image of herself as a compliant daughter who subjects herself to the laws of the father. Nevertheless, if we examine the carefully phrased description, we would notice that despite Burney's compliant

gesture, there is also a contradictory undertone in Burney's expression of her compliancy. By revealing that the incongruous emotions – pride and timidity – are at work simultaneously, Burney calls attention to her own compliant attitude as a repressed effort on her part, and to her own consciousness that she is producing a public image of herself as a "timid," "unobtrusive and anonymous" daughter. Although as Catherine Gallagher observes, Burney refers to her own status as an imitator of her father's writing, hence a deficient representation of him,[21] Burney is signaling here her deficient condition under the laws of the father, revealing the conflict between the public demand for female propriety and her "secret" yet "kind" desire for self-expression. Despite Burney's alleged declaration that she is deeply submissive to her father's authority, her language here suggests that there is a different story to be told, a hidden female heart waiting to be discovered, and a female "beast in the jungle" ready to jump out under the duress of patriarchal laws.

Burney's self-representation in the letter exemplifies and adumbrates her performative narrative strategies in *The Wanderer*, as I will argue in this chapter, for she is the paragon of female propriety, a woman writer who rigidly adheres to the convention of proper femininity.[22] As Mary Poovey points out in her influential study of the eighteenth-century gender ideology, *The Proper Lady and The Woman Writer*, as the Proper Lady becomes an established model of femininity sanctioned by the bourgeois patriarchy that requires women to be modest and self-effacing, the women writers of the period have to abide by such social demands and produce a feminine model of passivity and modesty in their works. A proper lady herself and a writer known for her strenuous attention to the matter of female propriety in her work, Frances Burney often embellishes her novels with heroines who are beleaguered by the apprehensions of impropriety in making their debut into society and whose social lessons ensure their growth into

proper ladies. Such thematic concern with proper femininity again manifests itself in *The Wanderer*, *or Female Difficulties*, a novel that deploys the gothic convention of the distressed heroine to depict the female protagonist, Ellis/Juliet, as a paragon of propriety who is incessantly plagued by fears of misconstructions of her behavior in her struggles for freedom.[23] And the novel follows a conventional romantic paradigm: *The Wanderer*'s love plot endorses the notion of proper femininity by constructing a decorous heroine whose propriety ensures a happy marriage. In depicting a love triangle among the novel's two female characters, Ellis/Juliet and Elinor, and the hero Harleigh, the narrative rewards the heroine who displays proper feminine behavior with the heart of the hero and ostracizes Elinor, a radical feminist who openly defies patriarchal codes of feminine behavior. Such conservative and conventional positioning of the romantic relationship seems to confirm the critical evaluation of the novel as a promotion of male-coded femininity and of Burney as a conservative icon.

However, as the passage I analyze in the beginning shows, the proper lady is only a façade complicated and undermined by the writer's own ambiguous language. Critics such as Kristina Straub and Pam Perkins have observed Burney's ambivalence in upholding the image of the proper lady. As Kristina Straub argues, "as a female author Burney is insolubly 'divided' between 'challenge or acquiescence to ideological conformity'" (972). Pam Perkins similarly contends that "*The Wanderer* promotes neither the domestic femininity... nor revolutionary femininity of the 1790s, but instead explores the limitations and contradictions of both in a way that implicitly criticizes some of the major tenets of the emerging "romantic ideology" (69). Despite their notice of the discrepancy in the novel's own construction of femininity, these critics willingly acclaim Burney's feminism, paying little attention to the ambiguity inherent in

the mask of the proper lady and its contribution to the understanding of Burney's ideological stance.

Unlike critics who see the novel as another example of Burney's conservatism or an unambiguous instance of her feminism,[24] I'm convinced that a close reading of her text offers an insight into the extent of Burney's feminism, which I term as "ambiguous." I propose to do so by examining the figure of the mask in the novel's construction of femininity, by discerning instances of ambiguity in the novel's construction of femininity and discovering the opportunities embedded in such ambiguities in constructing female subjectivity and agency. I argue that it is precisely through the ambiguous configuration of femininity that the novel undermines its conservative, conformist stance and demonstrates its resistance of patriarchal ideologies. Although Burney presents a proper lady in the novel, the text complicates the image of the proper lady through the trope of the mask, deconstructing its own narrative model of proper femininity in many ways. It is by looking both at the thematic and textual construction of femininity through the trope of the masquerade that I arrive at an understanding of Burney's performative strategies in representing the feminine.

I argue in this chapter that the narrative construction of femininity as masquerade in *The Wanderer* demonstrates not only the complexity of gender construction but also the possibilities of resistance through its play with the mask. The mask appears in various forms in this novel, ranging from the ambiguity of the heroine's identity to physical disguises of the characters, and it is finally located in the narrative center, manifesting itself as a narrative construct and becoming a site for transformation and regeneration. My reading of the novel aims to interrogate the relationship between the trope of masquerade and the construction of female agency. I argue that despite the novel's ostensible endorsement of female propriety, the novel deconstructs the notion

of proper femininity and demonstrates its constructed nature, linking it with female victimization. While exposing femininity as a mask imposed by the patriarchal society, it also explores its performative nature and promotes the mask of modest femininity as a feminine strategy through its ambiguous configuration of the mask. Such construction of femininity runs parallel to the feminist theories that conceive of femininity as masquerade. Thus, female modesty is only a mask of weakness; the novel's ambiguous representation of femininity empowers its heroine, creating a space for female agency. The novel, therefore, adopts a performative strategy, wearing a mask that transforms through its ambiguity.

I. Masquerade Masked: Constructing Femininity through the Gothic Narrative of Distress

As Mary Poovey points out, by the end of the eighteenth century, women were believed by some to be naturally proper and ladylike. Modesty and delicacy were naturalized as innate female virtues, and 'female' and 'feminine' became synonymous in the collective mind of the British (6). Despite the institutional attempts to naturalize femininity, questions about the innate female nature lingered – Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *A Vindications of the Rights of Woman*, rejected the idea of modest femininity as innately given, arguing that the "false system of female manners" produced a "supposed sexual character" in women. Such questioning of the essential nature of femininity can be traced back to the masquerading culture of the early eighteenth century, which favored disguises and masquerades both on public stages and in private gatherings. As Nora Nachumi argues, especially because the eighteenth century "was also a period in which 'theatrical women denaturalized culturally prevalent models of the feminine ideal'" (2), the popularity of social outings and masquerades among upper-class women in the early century and the success of the theatrical women implied that women can appear other than

themselves. With masquerades, disguises, or theatrical performance, women can adopt a different identity, an identity other than her usual self, and act out her desires. Such possibility is also materialized in the fictions and dramas of early eighteenth century, in which heroines often mask themselves to resist constraints and acquire the freedom otherwise denied to them. The masquerade "allows the heroine to disguise her usual subservience, trepidity, and submissiveness -- those qualities of 'femaleness'-- and, instead, appear as aggressive, domineering, and controlling, characteristics usually describing 'maleness'" (Schofield 26). What follows are the collective anxieties in the age of disguise:[25] if women can adopt a different character when donning a mask, what is the true "femaleness"? Is it true that women are innately timid, modest and submissive? Gendered identity, or femininity, seems to be "an effect of character," character being a fluid term associated with surfaces and theatricality.[26]

Even though the naturalization of femininity in the late eighteenth century eventually led to the Victorian ideology of women as the angel in the house, the anxieties and questions about the essential female nature plagued the eighteenth-century mind. They persisted and manifested themselves in the late eighteenth-century writings that exposed "female energy" in conflict with the female nature of passivity and delicacy. Centering on the theme of the masquerade in its representation of femininity, *The Wanderer* apparently aims to explore the question about the essence of the female character, while being explicitly anti-theatrical and anti-masquerade in its method. After all, as Terry Castle points out, women writers of the eighteenth-century had to use the masquerade trope discreetly and strategically due to its transgressive nature. For a modest woman writer like Burney, who earns her respectability by promoting proper femininity, the masquerade has to be "masked" and appear in a modified, less aggressive form – in the gothic trope of mystery and in the context of anti-theatricality. In contrast to Eliza Hayhood, whose

outwardly transgressive portrayal of women's masquerades explores an ardent and rebellious side of femaleness, Burney has to perform her ladylike style of writing and depict a proper lady who strictly adheres to the rules about feminine behavior. If the masquerade is equivalent to feminine mystique and deception that denies the authenticity of the modest female character, Burney has to mask the feminine mask to display her innocence rather than her artfulness, contriving a damsel-in-distress who is pursued by patriarchal figures. The gothic tale about a distressed heroine, then, provides a rhetorical means for Burney's construction of femininity.

Burney's story thus begins with a masked scene, only to reveal "female difficulties" through a gothic narrative of female distress. The heroine of *The Wanderer* does not appear in a conventional masquerade assembly; instead, she emerges at a dusky night from the coast of France: while a group of English passengers is taking a clandestine voyage back to England to escape the French government's persecution, they are entreated by a "voice of keen distress" imploring "pity and admission" in the French language to take the speaker abroad. The passengers hesitate until they identify the gender of the voice as female when the voice "sharpen[s] into cries of agony" (12). When the owner of the voice appears, she wraps up her face in layers of veils: "a French night-cap, a large black patch, and a broad black ribbon" and remains reticent most of the time throughout the voyage (20). With a foreign accent and no gender-specific clothing to identify her, the heroine seems to be a figure who frequently appears in an eighteenth-century masquerade. Yet she differs greatly from those who seek pleasure and freedom with the aid of such mask. Her voice of distress identifies her as a poor female who is persecuted by her enemies and who is apparently powerless and helpless. Following a traditional Gothic paradigm, *The Wanderer* begins with a narrative of mystery, presenting a masked figure at the outset of the story. This gothic narrative of mystery is supplemented by Burney's use of

another gothic convention: the damsel in distress. By presenting a distressed heroine seeking protections and security in a hostile environment and focusing on her difficulties, the novel creates a narrative about the distressed heroine, a surface text that focuses on the virtuous heroine's struggles to escape financial quagmire and male domination. This narrative of distress successfully obscures the transgressive nature of the heroine's mask by underlining her powerlessness and passivity; her mask provides a protective shield that prevents her from being discovered by her enemies, rather than a transgressive means to rebel against social constraints. Burney's adoption of gothic conventions thus deftly undercuts the transgressive nature of the mask, masking the narrative as a conservative tale through rhetorical means. However, Burney's employment of gothic tropes, while presenting a surface text of proper femininity, simultaneously undercuts it through the theme of the masquerade.

While the initial depiction of the heroine represents her as a pitiable damsel-in-distress who masks herself in order to escape persecution, the ensuing narrative continues to weave the theme of masquerade into the narrative of distress. The mystery of the heroine's identities persists: even after the heroine removes her disguise once she is in England, she refuses to lift the veil of her identity and remains masked for the most part of the novel. She veils herself both physically and verbally so successfully that none of the passengers succeeds in eliciting any information about her identity. As the narrative progresses, the narrator endows her with a plethora of names, addressing her as the stranger, the wanderer, the Incognita, until she is finally forced to accept a name mistakenly attributed to her: Ellis. Before she reveals her real name, Juliet, which occurs much later in the novel, the reader acquires scanty information about her identity. The narrative of mystery coexists with the narrative of distress: the heroine seems to possess an amazing ability to disguise and transform. When the passengers arrive in England, the

stranger undergoes a transformation: her dusky skin fades into "dazzling fairness" and she later appears extremely feminine: beautiful and elegant, along with her lady-like demeanor, she incites every woman's envy and every man's desire. The transformation in her appearance incites various attempts to read her, but her identity remains a mystery. She remains reticent about her name and origin, refusing to divulge any information while insisting on the integrity of her cause for concealment. Subsequent narration veils her identity completely that even the reader is hardly given a chance to read her mind. The questions about her identity persist: "Who are you?" "What is your name?" Everyone is enamored by, or confused about the Incognita's identity.

While the novel repeatedly reinforces the theme of masquerade by presenting her as an unidentifiable woman, it simultaneously insists on her innocence and integrity as a distressed heroine. The masquerade is ubiquitous in the novel, only to enhance the theme of female suffering: in order to escape from male persecution, the heroine masquerades herself on various occasions, adopting an unknown identity and disguising herself in different personas in her struggles for independence. The novel thus deliberately severs itself from the masquerading tradition of earlier novels such as Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*, in which the transgressive female protagonist masquerades herself in her pursuit of sexual pleasure and freedom, by suggesting the heroine's reluctance to assume such disguise. Juliet is deeply anxious about her disguises: "Shocking to all her feelings was this attempt at disguise, so imitative of guilt, so full of semblance to conscious imposture. But there are sometimes circumstances, great and critical, that call for all the energy of our courage, and demand all the resources of our faculties, for warding off impending and substantial evil, at whatever risk of transitory misconstruction" (665). Siding with the heroine's perspective, the narrator justifies Juliet's masquerade as a necessary means of survival and highlights her anti-masquerade attitude and sense of propriety. As the

narrative insists, the masquerade is a passive layer Juliet has to wear for self-protection rather than a self-willed, transgressive one that violates social codes.

By acknowledging the dangerous nature of the mask and expressing her anti-masquerade attitude, Juliet presents herself as a proper lady who succumbs to the patriarchal law. Similarly, by insisting on the heroine's virtue of propriety, the novel conforms to the readerly expectations of a virtuous, distressed heroine. Like its heroine whose passivity exempts her from being a suspect for violating the patriarchal law, the novel's integration of the masquerade topos into the narrative of distress thus frees itself from being identified as one with transgressive intent and produces a discourse of ambiguity. Depicting the heroine's plight and underlining her virtues through the trope of the masquerade, *The Wanderer* flags itself as a conventional "heroine's text" that illustrates "female difficulties" rather than a transgressive tale. Using the masquerade trope strategically, Burney presents a convincing surface narrative of female distress without directly challenging patriarchal ideologies, although the configuration of the mask opens up an ambiguous discourse in the novel, as I will show in later sections.

As I have shown, Burney transforms the masquerade, a potentially disruptive rhetorical mode, into a reactionary tool to represent Juliet's innocence and integrity, through her masterful adoption of gothic conventions. The gothic narrative of distress is a mask Burney employs to open up an ambiguous discourse: by incorporating the masquerade topos yet presenting the masquerade as a dangerous form of female representation, the novel emphasizes the heroine's distress and virtue, performing the conventional "heroine's text." Burney thus "writes like a lady," performing the conventional role expected of a woman writer. But even so, as I show in the following sections, her engagement with the gothic genre allows her to problematize the gender ideology of her society through the narrative form.

II. Theorizing the Female Condition: Femininity as Masquerade

I have argued that, while Burney constructs a surface text of female distress, seemingly conforming to patriarchal demands by presenting a proper lady, the gothic narrative of distress is indeed a mask laden with complexity, revealing the depth behind the conventional text. In this section I argue that Burney uses the trope of the masquerade subversively to show femininity as a discursive construct, thus challenging patriarchal ideologies in a subtle way. The novel's configuration of femininity as masquerade further deconstructs the patriarchal ideologies seemingly upheld by the gothic narrative of distress. Perhaps what distinguishes *The Wanderer* from other novels is its implicit comments on femininity as masquerade through the narrative form. By constructing a proper lady whose real self eludes definition through the gothic tropes of mystery and ambiguity,[27] it not only exposes the masked nature of femininity but also proposes a performative identity that destabilizes the proper femininity it ostensibly endorses, thereby undermining the patriarchal discourse. As I will show, its construction of femininity as masquerade parallels the modern feminist theories, theorizing the condition of femininity through the narrative form.

Simone de Beauvoir famously claims, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (301). The novel's representation of Juliet as a masked figure serves to illustrate through the narrative form such constructed nature of femininity: the woman is a social construct rather than an essence. The novel posits Juliet's femininity by portraying her as extremely feminine and decorous, a figure whose demeanor suggests that she is a lady in disguise. Juliet appears to be the ideal woman whose sensibility and morals govern her proper behavior. Abiding by the social codes of feminine behavior, she constantly fears others' misinterpretations of her behavior, the

"blighting horrors of calumny" (571). The patriarchal figures in the novel such as the Admiral and Harleigh approve of Juliet' proper behavior and identify her as the most feminine woman. However, rather than confirming that Juliet's lady-like demeanor represents her true self, the novel deconstructs her femininity by presenting the proper lady as a mere representation rather than an essence.

The novel's anti-essentialist representation of femininity is evident in its portrayal of the community's reception of Juliet. Concealing her identity from the characters and even the reader, the narrator often elaborates on others' reception of Juliet as a masked feminine figure, showing how the representation of her is unstable and subject to interpretations. Early in the novel, Juliet is completely masked in ambiguity, which incites vast curiosities and various interpretations. The narrator provides an elaborate account of the readings of her identity by the community. To some, her appearance, combined with the fact that she appears on the coast of France, indicates that she could be a run-away soldier. To others like Mrs. Ireton, her shabby clothes and her veiled appearance imply that she is a dishonest lower-class woman. To the romantic Elinor, she is either a figure in distress in romance, a "dulcinea" rescued by the knight-errant, Harleigh, or a nun who escapes from her monastery. To Harleigh, she is a woman in need of sympathy and succor. As the narrative shows, when she later appears as a lady in the eyes of the community, showing lady-like manners "strikingly distinguished from the common class" (47) and feminine skills such as music, painting, and performance, she again evokes various interpretations. Her accomplishments, in the eyes of some characters, belong exclusively to a higher-class lady. Her acting of Lady Townly convinces some that she is a princess in disguise. Her reserved manner and timidity convince the Admiral that she is "a poor weak female", while her modesty convinces Harleigh that she is an elegant and well-bred young woman, a woman of fine

sensibility. Sir Jaspar reads her as a "sorceress" who entices with her elegance and dignity. In contrast, the high-class women perceive her as a corrupted woman who seduces men with her beauty; Elinor calls her a "chimera" who camouflages with a demure femininity.

Observing the disguise of the stranger and various interpretations she incites, Nora Nachumi remarks, "the narrative calls attention to the subjective nature of the passenger's interpretations...the passenger's different interpretations have as much to do with their own characters, concerns and beliefs as with the way Ellis looks and behaves" (159). Nachumi's remark not only highlights the position of Juliet as the victim of a patriarchal society that has stringent codes of proper femininity, but it also points to the function of the narrative in emphasizing Juliet's identity as a social construct. Juliet is the object onto which everyone else projects their beliefs, desires, and fantasies. All the readings of Juliet's character objectify her as a social nobody, dismantling her identity by valuing only her appearance, as the narrative shows. The narrator affirms her status as a victim of the society through Elinor's comment: "She affords us...the vivifying food of conjecture" (13). The indefinable woman is a commodity doomed to be consumed like food, suggests Elinor. Through the voice of Elinor, the narrative speaks of Juliet's victimized position and presents her as a social construct.

As we have seen, in presenting Juliet's femininity as an empty mask onto which others project their understandings of what a woman is, the narrative exposes the constructed nature of femininity and illustrates how social codes construct a woman's being. It also constantly posits contradictory views of her femininity together, calling attention to the constructed nature of femininity in the patriarchal society. When told by Juliet that she cannot reveal her name, Elinor construes this confession as an indication of the Incognita's treachery, while Harleigh interprets it as a sign of honesty:

[Elinor:] "And can you, really, Harleigh, be allured by so glaring an adventurer? a Wanderer, -- without even a name!"

[Harleigh:] "She is not, at least, without probity, since she prefers any risk, and any suspicion, to falsehood. How easily, otherwise, might she assume any appellation that she pleased!" (33)

Here, the narrative is divided into two different perspectives, each representing various social beliefs about femininity. Elinor's version represents a widely accepted belief that a wandering woman without a name, without a home, is likely to be a duplicitous impostor. Harleigh's version, in contrast, demonstrates a view that identifies female honesty as a woman's primary virtue; the heroine's reluctance to make up a name is therefore an indication of her honesty. Both versions reflect common yet biased beliefs about proper feminine behavior. By juxtaposing these two views, the novel calls attention to the tension between these social expectations of femininity. The differing views demonstrate how a woman is judged by her society and how her femininity is constructed according to social expectations of female conduct. Through the juxtaposition of the differing views, the narrative not only highlights the social norms that condition femininity but also suggests that how living to social expectations of proper femininity shapes a woman's life in a patriarchal society, and that she needs to negotiate between different representations of her self to ensure her survival. If the novel presents femininity as a mask that lacks essence, it also depicts femininity as a victimized concept through the trope of the mask. It is no wonder that the novel presents Juliet's plight as "female difficulties," for Juliet is not only a victimized female nobody, but she also represents every woman, every "nobody" in the patriarchal society.

As I have argued, while the novel's representation of Juliet's character as a masked feminine figure depicts her as a female nobody who lacks interiority, it also highlights her victim status by showing that the mask of femininity replaces her real being. The novel's construction of femininity as masquerade, then, parallels the modern theory of femininity as masquerade, which occurred a hundred years later. Joan Riviere, an eminent psychoanalyst, conceives of femininity as masquerade in her 1929 seminar essay, "Womanliness as Masquerade,":

> Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference...between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade' whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (213)

Riviere's analysis of femininity as masquerade pinpoints the endangered position of women in a patriarchal society and suggests their needs to survive in the society in which they are deemed as dispossessed beings who often arouse suspicions of those in power. Riviere points to the constructed nature of femininity, suggesting that femininity is merely a representation rather than an essential gender identity, and that in order to protect themselves, women have to conceal their masculinity, an attribute that does not exclusively belong to men. *The Wanderer*'s delineation of the heroine corresponds to Riviere's understanding of femininity: a dispossessed being just like a thief in the eyes of the rich, Ellis/Juliet has no actual essence, and her mask becomes the representation of her self. She is even forced to accept the name of Ellis, which is imposed on her by the ladies of the town. She embodies the lack of essence, becoming an empty mask onto which others project their understandings of femininity. By presenting Juliet as a social nobody

who cannot freely express her self and whose essence is replaced by the mask of femininity defined by society, the novel's configuration of femininity as masquerade thus articulates its own theories about gender, deconstructing patriarchal ideologies with narrative strategies and participating in the feminist discourse in its own time.

If the novel has shown that femininity is a mask imposed by society and passively constituted by social discourse, which renders the real self non-existent, it also demonstrates that the mask of womanliness becomes a condition of femininity even through women deliberately try to break out of the feminine role prescribed to them. Rejecting the psychoanalytic conception of masquerade as a reflection of woman's desire to be man, Luce Irigaray argues that

> the masquerade has to be understood as what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain "on the market" in spite of everything. But they are there as objects for sexual enjoyment, not those who enjoy...a woman has to...become a normal woman, that is, has to enter into the masquerade of femininity. (134)

Irigaray's notion of masquerade pinpoints the condition of femininity: a woman has to mask her own desire in order to become "normal," to participate in the patriarchal language system. Masquerading as a woman in order to gain access to the privileges otherwise excluded from her paradoxically requires her to renounce her own desire as a woman. The novel's pairing of the antithetical characters – Juliet and Elinor, embodies such struggles for freedom, representing the condition of femininity Irigaray theorizes.

As the antithesis of the modest Juliet, Elinor is an outspoken character who openly voices her protests of male oppression and defies the social expectations of proper femininity. While the

timid Juliet observes and conforms to the codes of female conduct, the fearless Elinor openly

defies the rules of female conduct by declaring to be a violator of "tyrannous customs" that

accustom women to feelings of delicacy. The novel casts Elinor's actions in the terms of

masking: Elinor presents herself as a masculine, rational woman, one who attempts to break out

of the social prescribed feminine role through theatrical performance and disguises. She designs

a dramatic scene in which she performs the role of a romantic lover who initiates courtship,

refusing to be a "sentimental pendant" like Juliet, who conceals her love for Harleigh, and

expressing her passions for Harleigh publicly. When rejected by Harleigh, Elinor deliberately

disguises herself as a man in enacting the drama of suicide. By assuming a traditionally

masculine role in expressing her love for Harleigh, she defies the rules of proper femininity and

chooses an aggressive strategy in her struggles for self-representation. As she declares, "[she is]

throwing off the trammels of unmeaning custom, and acting, as well as thinking, for myself"

(151). Elinor masquerades herself, but as a masculine woman rather than a feminine one. As

critics have pointed out, she is a Wollstonecraft character who embodies the revolutionary

femininity of the 1790s.[28] Unlike Juliet, who wears the mask of modest femininity, Elinor dons

the mask of masculine-femininity.

However, Elinor's play with her mask turns out to be a fiasco. Even though

Elinor seems to be "a disruptive feminine force" who challenges patriarchal system openly with

her defiant behavior (135), as Catherine Craft-Fairchild notes, "her defiance of the patriarchal

system fails almost before it begins" (136). The novel presents Elinor's masquerade as an

inadequate one by casting her aggressive demeanor in exaggerated theatrical terms, and the

novel's plot shows that, although Elinor adopts an aggressive, masculine stance, she nevertheless

entraps herself in a traditional romantic paradigm in which she plays the role of a romantic

heroine. Despite her attempt to "break the rules of courtship that demand passivity and reticence from the woman," she paradoxically performs the romantic role she rejects, becoming the woman who is willing to die for the love of a man and thus imprisoning herself in the femininity she rejects. And the ending of the novel shows that she has no role in the romantic relationship she desires; only Juliet, who conforms to social rules and perform her prescribed femininity, is rewarded the love she secretly desires. Straub convincingly argues, "Burney uses the character of Elinor [...] to make what is perhaps her most powerful statement of women's disempowered position in performing the customary gestures of romantic love" (187).

Even though the novel presents Juliet and Elinor as antithetical characters, it deconstructs the antithesis by positing their relationship in a gothic fashion through haunting terms. As Craft-Fairchild points out, the narrative "continuously holds the two women together and encourages comparison" (130). The contrast between Juliet and Elinor, the "Hegelian dialectic" between the good and bad woman,[29] enables a reading of the two women as representing opposing strategies in women's struggles for independence. Although Elinor appears to be the opposite of Juliet, she comes to represent Juliet's secret desires, haunting Juliet in every possible way. Commenting on the scene in which Juliet is forced to perform publicly, Julia Epstein notes the function of Elinor in preventing Juliet's performance: "Juliet becomes transfixed by a cloaked and masked figure who turns out to be her protofeminist alter ego, Elinor Joddrel...The event abruptly ends when Elinor stabs herself, thus rescuing Juliet from humiliation just as Bertha Mason would later rescue Jane Eyre" (208). Reading the same scene, Haggarty argues that Elinor's public suicide is a parody of Ellis' own social suicide were she to perform in public: Elinor's violation of her own body "mimics the way women are treated by men in a violent and abusive community" (261). I argue that the novel's pairing of the two characters in violent, gothic terms reveals the female

difficulties. Elinor not only represents Juliet's inner desires but also her potential difficulties

were she to follow her desire like Elinor does. Elinor haunts Juliet, disguising and even

shrouding herself in her pursuit of Juliet. Perhaps Margaret Doody's comments best summarize

the dialectical positions of the two characters in the novel: "The heroine in the broadest sense of

this novel is Elinor-Ellis, the double-faced entity of two fighting the battle of womankind, in

conjunction with, and sometimes in opposition to each other" (*Frances Burney* 367-8). Even

though Elinor has been presented as the antithesis of Juliet, the novel's representation of the two

characters through the trope of the masquerade deconstructs the binary oppositions, showing

their affinity and the problems of femininity in more violent, gothic terms.

The novel's configuration of the masquerade in relation to femininity thus demonstrates

and comments on female difficulties. When Elinor adopts an unconventional mask, her

masquerading fails as she refuses to participate in man's desire and to "enter the masquerade of

femininity" as Irigaray suggests. Quoting Mary Ann Doane, who views masquerade as "a

curious norm, which indicates through its very contradictions the difficulty of any concept of

femininity in a patriarchal society," Craft-Fairchild argues that Elinor is the embodiment of the

difficulties: "Unlike Haywood's *Fantomina*, Burney's text does not allow the gap between the

constructed image and the female self necessary for subjectivity...The guises Elinor adopts in

themselves indicate her lack of power since, far from collapsing hierarchical categories and

challenging the dominant ideology, they remain entirely within patriarchal norms" (149); Juliet

"masks so seriously and so completely that the masquerade becomes her reality" (138). While

agreeing with Craft-Fairchild's reading that Elinor's masquerading demonstrates her lack of

power, I stress the function of the novel in commenting on the condition of femininity under

patriarchy through the theme and trope of the masquerade. After all, it is "a novel about a woman

locked into her identity as though it were a prison and imprisoned by her attendant public namelessness" (Epstein 181). The novel theorizes the condition of femininity by showing that both women are entrapped in the masquerade of femininity. Even though Juliet enters the masquerade of femininity as Irigaray suggests by wearing the mask of modesty, she is, for the most time of the novel, "not as Juliet," for she demonstrates no desire of her own and is consumed by her fears of misconstruction of her behavior, losing herself in the mask of femininity. Spacks finely encapsulates Juliet's position: "... Juliet as a heroine must struggle not only with the obstacles supplied by a hostile physical and social environment but with those created by her own standard of femininity; no psychic or religious conversion can reduce her. Femininity wins; all else is only a dream" (187). Thus, by illustrating the difficulties of defining femininity through the masquerades of the two antithetical characters, the novel presents masquerade as a condition of femininity, a mask that imprisons women with patriarchal ideologies. In this sense, it performs its ideological task, articulating its own theory about gender through the narrative form.

The novel's performative capacity further manifests itself in the complexity of commentaries it generates through its play with the theme of the mask. While the novel presents femininity as socially constructed and that women are objectified by the male discourse through the masquerade of Juliet and Elinor, it also demonstrates through narrative ambiguities that women can turn the cultural stereotypes into their advantages by wearing the mask of weakness and submission to empower themselves. In other words, the novel's configuration of femininity also posits masquerade as a performative play of femininity. By exposing Juliet's performativity through ambiguity, it mirrors the feminist conception of femininity as an empowering masquerade.

As Mary Ann Doane points out in her discussion of Riviere's concept of masquerade, in which a woman is compared to a thief playing with the mask of innocence, femininity can be a form of "theft" to appropriate male authority if women play with the male-coded femininity. She observes, "The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade's resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely imagistic" (25). Her analysis suggests that a woman can play with the gap between the mask and her female self to gain autonomy: womanliness can be a play of mask in women's struggles for autonomy in the patriarchal society. Luce Irigaray likewise observes the empowering function of femininity as masquerade, suggesting that although women often lose themselves in the masquerade of femininity, the "role...image...value imposed upon women by male systems of representation," they can also subvert the patriarchal discourse through the means of mimicry. As Irigaray theorizes:

> One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it...To play with memesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself -- inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible," of "matter" -- to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means "to unveil" the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. (76)

Irigaray believes that women could mimic the prescribed femininity in a playful way by deliberately acting out of the socially prescribed feminine roles, that male-defined femininity is an external mask that a woman could deliberately choose to wear in order to undermine the patriarchal discourse and to develop a "female imaginary." While patriarchy disallows female self-representation and reduces women to an empty mask of femaleness, masquerade can be a feminine strategy that women can adopt to turn their vulnerability into power. As Judith Butler further points out, masquerade can be a "play of appearances;" a "performative production of sexual ontology, an appearing that makes itself convincing as a 'being'" (64,65). To summarize, these feminist theories all recognize masquerade as "a double strategy of acceptance and denial of femininity," one that subverts "all notions of a 'natural' femininity" (Robinson 120).

If the novel has demonstrated the imprisonment of femininity, it also presents its empowering function by suggesting Juliet's masquerade as a performative identity. In the novel, Juliet is often presented as one whose weakness and submission win male approval. Her timidity and sensibility win the hearts of many powerful male characters in the novel, such as the Admiral, Sir Jaspar, and Harleigh, who interpret her qualities as feminine virtues. As the narrative shows, although Juliet's lady-like demeanor impresses every character in the novel, it is the male characters who recognize and approve of her timidity and modesty that help her escape perilous situations. The Admiral, Harleigh, and Sir Jaspar all provide monetary support for her after identifying her as "a poor weak female", a woman of "fine sensibility" and "delicacy," a woman with a "patiently calm" air. Sir Jaspar is so enamored by Juliet's "air" of a proper lady that he becomes one of her main supporters and saves her from her husband's persecution. As we can see, while Elinor's aggressive, masculine masquerade relegates her to the position of powerlessness, Juliet's mask of modesty and passivity elevates her to a more powerful position.

If the novel shows the dismal condition of women by portraying both women's failure to "escape the mask of femininity" (E. Anderson 15), it simultaneously demonstrates that Juliet's mask of modesty subverts the dominant discourse, and that the mask of female modesty and propriety is essential to a woman's survival in a male-centered society. Juliet derives agency from her abnegation of power, presenting herself as a powerless woman while maintaining the depth of her character. Her mask increases her charm in the eyes of the male characters, as Sir Jaspar remark shows: "She is a rose planted in the snow, for aught I can tell! The more I see, the less I understand; the more I surmise, the further I seem from the mark" (444). The narrative here highlights the gap between the constructed image of modesty and her real self, drawing our attention to her performance of her feminine role. She seems to be the Irigarian heroine who plays with the masquerade of modest femininity and thereby empowers herself, at least the novel wants us to think so, for the novel also presents Juliet as a skillful performer, one who has a profound understanding of a woman's performative role in their society.

As we have seen, by associating femininity with masquerade, an ambiguous mode of representation and a "destabilization of the image,"[30] the novel, constructs a non-essential model of femininity and undermines its own ostensible endorsement of the patriarchal ideal of the proper lady. Through Juliet's masquerade, it calls femininity into question, presenting femininity as a mask and a social construct that has no material essence, linking it with the victimization of women. This depiction of the heroine's non-essence points to the dismal position of women in a gendered society in which masculinity is perceived as the only authority. Its portrayal of the novel's antithetical characters further illustrates that femininity is an impossible concept in a patriarchal society, and that women are entrapped in the masquerade of femininity. Not only so, the novel also presents the proper lady as a performative identity, thereby exploring the power of

a woman's mask of passivity. The novel thus articulates its theories on gender through its narrative representation of femininity as masquerade. Even though the novel posits the feminine ideal of passivity and seemingly endorses the feminine ideal, its narrative representations articulate a subtext of resistance. It manifests advanced feminist thinking, antedating the modern theory on femininity. Like Wollstonecraft's *Maria, The Wrongs of Woman*, it articulates its theories on gender through the narrative form, thereby participating in the feminist discourse of its time. As Stathis Gourgouris posits, literature has "an intrinsic capacity to theorize the conditions of the world from which it emerges" (xix); it has a "cognitive and theoretical nature" that allows it to "theorize without the aid of the analytical methods we have come to consider essential to theory" (2). *The Wanderer* demonstrates such capacity to theorize the condition of femininity in the patriarchal society. Acting as a literary text that "transform[s] itself into a theoretical vehicle beyond its apparent boundaries" (17), it participates in the feminist discourse of the time with its unique form and with the mask of a conventional tale of love. Even though it shows that the masquerade of femininity is the condition of women, its ambiguous construction of femininity in fact opens up a discourse of resistance.

III. Performing Femininity: The Heroine and the Novel

Not only does the novel theorize the condition of femininity as masquerade through the narrative form, thereby deconstructing patriarchal ideologies, but it also undercuts its superficial ideological position through the ambiguities inherent in the text. If we probe into the depth of the text, we will discover numerous instances of ambiguity that complicate the novel's ostensible endorsement of proper femininity. Proper femininity, then, becomes a mask that the novel unmasks through narrative ambiguities. In this section I argue that by filling the narrative with

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ambiguities, the novel acts as a mask, undermining its own superficial message in various ways. A careful reading of the novel's ambiguities will enable a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's performativity through narrativity.

To acquire an understanding of the novel's capacity to articulate conflicts and to construct a discourse of resistance, let's take a look at an oft-discussed scene. Upon receiving a letter from Harleigh, who tries to dissuade her from public performance, Juliet appreciates Harleigh's concern for her yet laments the inability of "the most liberal of men" to understand the female character:

> What is woman, – with the most upright designs, the most rigid circumspection, – what is woman unprotected? She is pronounced upon only from outward semblance: – and, indeed, what other criterion has the world? Can it read the heart?...Tears rolled rapidly down her cheeks, and she lifted the letter up to her lips; but ere they touched it, started, shuddered, and cast it precipitately into the fire. (344)

Despite Ellis' declared gratitude towards Harleigh, who "alone, escape[s] the contagion of superficial decision" and perceives her inner worth, her abrupt destruction of the letter becomes a mystery to the reader. As Margaret Doody astutely observes, "It is a bit shocking that Ellis should throw his letter into the fire – as the communication of such a phlegmatic unfiery character seems unsuited to an ardent fate" (*The Wanderer* xxv). In destroying the letter, Ellis negates her usual image of timidity and modesty, expressing an "ardent" side of her character through her physical reaction. Her "started, shuddered" somatic reactions suggest a sudden repulsion towards her own gesture of affection for Harleigh, serving to complicate her expressed gratitude towards Harleigh. The spontaneous, involuntary bodily reaction in the passage belies her usual image of modesty, betraying her desire for freedom. This textual moment, negating the

character's expressed compliancy through its ambiguous rendition of the female body, encourages the reader to reflect on Juliet's outward docility. Not unlike her fictional counterpart, Elinor, Juliet articulates her perception of female oppression here, only in milder terms. How might we perceive this silent heroine, who reserves her opinions but expresses her protest through her unconscious (if we can say so) bodily reaction? Is her modesty a deliberate masquerading strategy?

Critics who are avid proponents of Burney's feminism have interpreted Juliet's modesty as a deliberate mask. For example, Kristina Straub observes that Juliet has a remarkable ability to manipulate her appearance and hence acquires "a certain epistemological power" in the novel (205). Kathleen Anderson identifies her as a "compelling actress-heroine," arguing that she represents "a novel reconfiguration of the actress ...[she] recognizes, energetically exploits, and evinces a subtle pleasure in performance" (424). In contrast, Claudia Johnson reads the heroine as "Doing neither, Ellis/Juliet is an equivocal being" (186), as she notes the novel's conflicting representation of Ellis' performance and reads it as a drawback: "Arguing on one hand that Ellis/Juliet is marvelously talented and on the other that she is not acting, Burney takes back with one hand what she gives with the other" (169). Like Johnson, I perceive the ambiguity in the novel's representation of Juliet's performance of her femininity, yet I discover in the ambiguity a positive, performative site of resistance. I argue that it is through ambiguity that the novel succeeds in suggesting Juliet's performativity while denying it as a conscious choice. The novel's conflicting, ambiguous representations of Juliet's femininity are itself a performative strategy, a destabilizing mask that allows for the production of female subjectivity. Through textual ambiguities, the novel deconstructs her image as a proper lady by creating a distance between her actual self and her mask of modest femininity and suggests her performativity. It is

this performative strategy that prompts many critics to interpret Juliet as one who deliberately employs masquerading strategies. In fact, the critical tendency to turn the vulnerable heroine into a strong one actually demonstrates the novel's capacity in opening up space for the emergence of female subjectivity through its ambiguity.

As the scene aforementioned shows, while the novel presents Juliet's modest femininity, its ambiguous rendition of Juliet's bodily language turns the docile female body into a site of resistance. In fact, the narrative often calls attention to the power of the passively masked body. For instance, when Juliet/Ellis appears on the public stage, she enthralls her audience with her appearance. As the narrator remarks, Ellis' peculiar attractions do not simply consist of her beauty; her physical appearance denotes her timidity and modesty, and her choice of attire also persuades the audience of her taste and modesty. Her attire, as the narrator puts, "was suited to her style of beauty...it seemed equally to assimilate with the character of her mind to those who, judging it from the fine expression of her countenance, conceived it to be pure and noble" (358). While pointing out that Juliet's power crucially relies on a positive reading of her appearance, the narration also turns the passive, docile mask into an active, performative spectacle, suggesting that, properly attired and thus masked, the passive female body could become an active agent if it plays to the audience's expectations.

The power of the masked body of passivity demonstrates itself most strongly when the body is associated with female fear and weakness, a gothic trope the novel employs to present the heroine's femininity in the novel. Terry Castle observes in *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!* that women are turned into "idiots" in the Gothic: "The Gothic inevitably fixates on female panic disorder – how best and most salaciously to reduce a docile-genteel heroine into a gibbering nervous wreck. Fear and stupidity in fact define Gothic femininity; to be female and a character

in a Gothic tale is to find oneself becoming mortally dumb and afraid" (xv). Juliet certainly

exhibits such panic disorder all the time. She is constantly seized by fear and turns herself into an

insensible body. Nonetheless, the novel's ambiguous portrayal of the nervous body displays

subversive potentials. Rather than turning women into idiots as Castle suggests, the ambiguous

depiction of the docile body as a modest mask provides an opportunity to transform the modest

and fearful woman into an active agent.

The transformative potential of the fearful body evinces itself in Harleigh's reaction to

Juliet's modest appearance. Although Juliet's appearance is often an empty vessel onto which

Harleigh projects his own desires and understandings, it paradoxically holds power over him

with its passivity. When Juliet's husband claims his right over her and Harleigh entreats her to

deny the legal claim with one word, the reader is told that "but the word was not spoken, – not a

syllable was uttered! A look, however, escaped her, expressive of a soul in torture, yet

supplicating his retreat" (729). Juliet's look, a mask indicating her passivity and weakness,

possesses a captivating power over Harleigh, who immediately takes the action her look wills.

Even when he ponders over Juliet's concealment of her married status and feels a sensation

"kindred to hatred" and perceives her as "altered" and "delusive," Juliet's look has an immense

effect on Harleigh despite his unpleasant sensation: the look is "rivetted to his very brain, so as to

take despotic and exclusive hold of all his faculties" (730). Interestingly, the narrator's

description of Juliet's look presents it to be an "out-of-control" bodily action rather than a

voluntary one, signaling the power of Juliet's passivity over Harleigh. At the same time, this

description presents Harleigh as an active observer and interpreter of Juliet's bodily language,

suggesting that the powerful effect of Juliet's bodily performance is partly created by Harleigh

himself. Harleigh's role in activating the performative effect is further confirmed in the

narrator's description of Harleigh's feelings when Juliet's husband is taking her away with a chaise: "It was surely to convey her away! – and with the man whom she loathed, – and from one who, so often! had awakened in her symptoms the most impressive of the most flattering sensibility!" (730). Focalized through Harleigh, this description presents Harleigh as a narcissistic hero who prides himself in evoking emotional responses in the heroine. Juliet's body is here again an empty vessel, onto which he projects the "symptoms" he is keen to perceive and identify. As we can see, while the narrator's ambiguous language suggests Juliet's passivity as a performative spectacle, it also implies that the passivity can activate active responses of others and achieve the desired effect. The narrator presents the passive body as another staging spectacle at the end of the novel when Juliet is forcefully taken away by her husband: Looking like "a picture of death," "She now again *looked* so sick and disordered, that all the woman called upon the foreigner to let her re-enter the house, and take a little rest, before her journey. Her eyes, turned up at heaven with thankfulness, even at the proposal, *encouraged* them to grow clamorous in their demand" (733 italics my emphasis). Signaling to its audience to take actions with its unspoken language, the heroine's masked body, thus, is a staging spectacle through which the heroine/narrator creates and directs meaning.

Perceiving the recurrence of Juliet's swoon and the heroine's "staged insensibility," Emily Anderson observes that the heroine's repression of her feelings, "if itself controlled, can be used to coordinate when and how the emotional breakdown occurs" (46). Anderson further comments that there are "unconscious creative endeavors that render her oblivious to herself and surroundings," and that "she seems adept at attaining this unconscious state" (48). Anderson's analysis of the heroine's swooning suggests the paradoxical production of agency through the heroine's gesture of passivity. If insensibility can be staged and be a "conscious deployment of

unconsciousness," what enables such agency? Although Anderson argues that it is chance, not her own agency, that produces her good fortune (68), her reading of the text actually demonstrates that the ambiguous rendition of the spectacle of the body allows for a positive reading of the heroine's agency despite her apparent passivity. Anderson's own statement is a testament to the novel's capacity for producing female agency through ambiguity: "the scenes and vocabulary of unconsciousness... and their acknowledged effectiveness throughout Burney's work, hint at a paradoxically conscious deployment of unconsciousness" (46). While the heroine performs passivity "consciously/unconsciously," the novel also performs through its ambiguous narration of the female body, turning the fearful body into an empowering spectacle.

The transformative power of narrative ambiguities best manifests itself in the novel's play with the mask of femininity through its recurrent sartorial metaphors, which creates a site for the emergence of Juliet's agency. As Juliet McMaster points out, the narrative reveals very little of Juliet's consciousness: "The reader is given very little privileged access to her mental processes, and must guess at her feelings for Harleigh from external signs such as blushes" (237). The narrative, however, often evokes sartorial metaphors to invalidate the authenticity of such external signs. For instance, when Miss Bydel enquires about the deposit that Harleigh leaves Juliet, we are told that "Juliet, who could not enter into any explanation, stammered, coloured, and from the horror of seeing that she was suspected, wore an air of seeming apprehensive of detection" (421). Rather than explicitly stating that Juliet is manipulating her appearance by "wearing an air" to show her apprehensions, the narrator uses ambiguous diction to suggest the performative nature of Juliet's bodily language. By using a sartorial metaphor here, the narrator suggests the discrepancy between Juliet's inner self and her appearance, while using the word "seeming" to further enhance the sense of ambiguity, suggesting that any image

or "air" could be a result of a performative strategy. Such narrative strategy creates layers of meaning, inviting the reader to perceive Juliet's agency.

By adding layers of meaning through sartorial metaphors to construct Juliet's femininity, the novel plays with the meaning of the mask, opening up a subversive discourse for the reading of Juliet's agency. Perhaps the most revealing sartorial metaphor occurs when Juliet is asked to marry Harleigh: "In Juliet, though happiness was not less exalted, pleasure wore the chastened garb of moderation, even in the midst of a frankness that laid open her heart" (861). The "chastened garb of moderation" indicates the layers of masks Juliet wears as if the image of modesty needs additional polish to make it "chastened" and therefore socially approved. While this description highlights Juliet's modesty, it carries an ironic undertone, suggesting that Juliet's appearance of modesty is only a performative effect; even her emotions are concealed by the mask of propriety. Juliet herself confesses that she has to wear an impenetrable mask to conceal her feelings: it is an "unremitting necessity of seeming always impenetrable – where most I was sensitive!" (861). Through the sartorial metaphor, the novel thus plays with the meaning of the mask and subtly endows Juliet with an agency through narrative ambiguities despite its constant flagging of her passivity.

IV. Sir Jaspar Masked: The Gothic Hero, Author, and Reader

As I have argued, the novel's ambiguous depiction of the masked female body opens up a discourse of female agency, undercutting its superficial narrative of proper femininity through its metaphor of the mask. It is no wonder that critics such as Spacks identify the subject of Burney's works as the "self-discovery of a woman in hiding" (176). *The Wanderer* epitomizes such strategy of masking and unmasking, as shown in the construction and deconstruction of

Juliet's modesty. In this section, I examine the ambiguous relationship between Juliet and Sir Jaspar to further demonstrate the novel's masking and unmasking strategies. I argue that the novel's ambiguous coupling of Juliet and Sir Jaspar through gothic terms enables the resistance of male ideologies. Juliet's sympathy with Sir Jaspar is the most important textual ambiguity that undercuts its surface narrative of female modesty; it not only shows how the masquerade of femininity reverses the power relationship between the hero and heroine in a gothic tale but also presents Sir Jaspar as a masked figure who ultimately serves to unmask the meaning of the text.

Despite Sir Jaspar's prominent role in the novel, he attracts little critical attention. Seeing him as a "childish man" and "ridiculous father-lover" (346, 365), critics such as Margaret Doody typically read Sir Jaspar as a minor male character who possesses the male fantasy for the ideal woman despite his own physical impotence. In her analysis of the scene in which Juliet is detained by Sir Jaspar, whose clutch entangles Juliet's skirt, Doody comments:

> If Elinor represents the problem of woman's body as woman sees it and is made to feel it, Sir Jaspar represents the problem of the male's body as woman sees it – a body given to age and weakness, disease and death, yet culturally assertive of mastery. Sir Jaspar's position gives him power; the visibly impotent body can still doggedly express sexual and social aggressiveness. (*Frances Burney* 347)

Doody's remark pinpoints the threat of Sir Jaspar to the gothic heroine: even though it is a crippled male body, Sir Jaspar's body carries the male power with it, asserting its mastery over the culturally and economically disadvantaged female. Despite Doody's brilliant assessment of Sir Jaspar's function, Doody overlooks a simple fact: in such a blatant relationship in which Ellis appears to be a passive object of desire, she still remains a surprisingly close, if not intimate, relationship with the old bachelor who openly expresses his desire for her. Despite Sir Jaspar's

constant and blatant expressions of her as his ideal lover, she remains tolerant of his fantasy. Her allowance, if not encouragement, of his indulgence in his romantic fantasy in which she exists as an object of desire contradicts her usual image of propriety. She acts very differently towards the old man who does not pose a real, substantial sexual threat to her, if we compare her attitudes toward other males in the novel.

Juliet's relationship with Jaspar exemplifies the gap between her image of modesty and her true self, which allows for a reading of Juliet's agency in her tolerance of Jaspar's fantasy. Juliet's gothic adventure with Sir Jaspar near the end of the novel demonstrates the power reversal in their seemingly conventional male-female relationship. By bringing Juliet to Stonehenge, the Gothic ruin, Sir Jaspar attempts to realize his fantasy that he is the master hero who rescues the distressed heroine in a gothic adventure. Like all other men, Sir Jaspar delights in the opportunity to become the master of the seemingly submissive Juliet. When Juliet learns of Sir Jaspar's design in taking her to the place, she follows him without resistance, asking to be "a humble dependent" in appearance, which satisfies Sir Jaspar's fantasy as he transforms from her "slave" into her "master" in the adventure (759). However, the narrator repeatedly claims, "Not as Juliet she followed" (759). This ambiguous claim suggests that Juliet is performing an identity that is not her true self when she is forced into a disadvantageous situation. Sir Jaspar later recognizes the power of her performed passivity: "it is you who are the wicked Will o' the Wisp, that lures all others, yet never can be lured yourself!" (629). Despite her passive role in her relationship with Sir Jaspar, the narration here highlights her agency in adopting a performative identity that ultimately engineers the male who rescues her. As Doody astutely observes, "Burney makes Stonehenge, which might seem like a masculine symbol, into a feminine space" (*The Wanderer* xxxvi). I argue that the conversion of the masculine symbol into a feminine space

is realized through the novel's ambiguous configuration of their relationship: the powerless Juliet becomes a performative agent in the Gothic setting, transforming her passivity into power. The ambiguous configuration suggests that, although Juliet remains reticent for the most part of the novel, she disrupts the male language system with her performance of passivity. Like its heroine, the novel disrupts the male language with its performative narrativity.

As Doody recognizes, Sir Jaspar "acts the part of love-story hero" in rescuing the heroine and replaces the inactive and therefore impotent Harleigh in this role. Sir Jaspar is the one who first acquires the knowledge of Juliet' birth in the novel, and he is also the first person to whom Juliet reveals her mystery. In my reading, Sir Jaspar is not only the main hero whom Juliet moves to rescue her from the persecution of her legal husband, but his fantasy, delivered through his supernatural discourse, also offers a space for the reversal of power. Each time when Sir Jaspar evokes the supernatural beings in his discourse to praise Juliet, she smiles instead of appearing timid and uneasy like she does in front of other men. These reactions reveal a side of her inconsistent with her usual self. The Juliet in front of Sir Jaspar is much more spirited, cheerful, and responsive, listening to Sir Jaspar's supernatural talks with interests. Although the narrative refrains from revealing Juliet's consciousness at these moments, the narrative gaps encourage the reader to perceive Juliet's interests in Sir Jaspar's supernatural discourse, as Sir Jaspar's supernatural talks elevate her to the position of power. Asking Juliet to display her opinions through her countenance, Sir Jaspar associates Juliet's countenance with power: "whether, with the playful philanthropy of courteous sylphs, to win me your gentile smiles; or whether, with the wanton malignity of little evils, to annihilate me with your frowns, is still locked up in the womb of your countenance" (757). In Sir Jaspar's flowery language, Juliet's countenance is aligned with supernatural power, determining the fates of others; he also

associates this power with female productivity: his metaphor of the womb acknowledges the productive power of Juliet's countenance, a mask she wears. It is no wonder that Juliet delights in Sir Jaspar's talks, as he is the one who recognizes and pays homage to the power of her mask. With his "sylphs" and "evils," he offers a supernatural tale that enables Juliet to escape the confines of patriarchy momentarily. Seen from this perspective, he is not only the gothic hero who rescues the helpless heroine but also the female gothicist who creates an empowering tale of female agency despite her crippled social position.[31] In making this claim, I'm aware of possible objections from critics who read Sir Jaspar as another domineering patriarchal figure who objectifies Juliet with his endorsement of the feminine ideal. However, I want to point out that it is precisely the narrative complexity that allows for a reading of him as an authorial surrogate who speaks for the mystique of the female masquerade, despite his phallocentric appearance, and I argue that he is a masked figure who transforms from the gothic hero into the gothic author, and finally, the gothic reader.

Sir Jaspar's role as one who unmasks the surface text of female modesty is made clear in an exchange between Sir Jaspar and Juliet in a particular scene. In the novel, although Sir Jaspar often moves and pleases Juliet with his supernatural discourses, there is an occasion in which Juliet is displeased by Sir Jaspar's actions. Juliet, after being shunned publicly by Sir Jaspar and unwittingly witnessing Sir Jaspar's rigidity towards his servants in private and discovers the defects of his character, cannot help feeling depressed. She articulates her disappointment in a monologue: "How superficially, thought Juliet, can we judge of dispositions, where nothing is seen but what is meant to be shewn! Where nothing is pronounced but what is prepared for being heard!" (538). However, her displeasure is quickly dispelled by Sir Jaspar's supernatural discourse. Sir Jaspar, a shrewd reader of countenance, sees her "reserved and grave" "air and

look" and quickly comprehends the reason for her displeasure. He declares, "You have but seen an old bachelor in his true colours! Not with the gay tints, not with the spruce smiles, not with the gallant bows, the courteous homage, the flowery flourishes, with which he makes him up for shew; but with the grim colouring of factious age, and suspicious egotism!" (539). While Juliet's countenance "show[s] her now to be shocked that she had given rise to these apologies," he proceeds to excuse himself by saying that it is "some imp of darkness and spite" that devises to expose his true self at the moment he is hoping to meet his "fascinating enchantress (Juliet)" (540). In hearing these explanatory words, Juliet relents, and Sir Jaspar's "penetrating eyes discerned so entire a change in his favor" when he "peer[s] now under her hat" (540).

This scene, carefully choreographed, displays the empathy between the two characters: their shared understanding of social performance and recognition of the discrepancy between one's mask and one's "true colors." Sir Jaspar regains Juliet's favor after he acknowledges the discrepancy and appeals to Juliet's understanding of it. Presenting the theme of the mask, the scene reveals the complex power relationship between Sir Jaspar and Juliet, the male spectator and the female performer, enabling the reader to perceive the power reversal through their exchange. By endowing Juliet with both the role of the spectator and the spectacle in this scene, the narrative turns the passive female into an active agent. Sir Jaspar serves as a dark mirror of Juliet in this scene, exposing his true self inadvertently in front of Juliet, subjecting himself to the judgment of Juliet. As a spectator in this scene, Juliet appropriates the power of the male gaze and turns Sir Jaspar into an object of vision, reversing the traditional power position of the male and female in this scene.[32] At the same time, as a spectacle, she performs her modesty by assuring Sir Jaspar the accuracy of his reading with her passive body language – when Sir Jaspar "peeps" under Juliet's hat with his "penetrating eyes," he discerns that he regains Juliet's favor.

By portraying the exaggerated action of peeping under Juliet's mask, the hat and her countenance in this instance, the narrative calls attention to the distance between Jaspar the reader and Juliet the text, suggesting the performativity of the text – the female body.

Perhaps still more noteworthy is the novel's self-reflective comment on the relationship between the reader and the performative text in the scene, as reflected through Sir Jaspar's reading of Juliet. Although Juliet remains silent when Sir Jaspar apologizes for his own misdemeanor, her countenance serves as a text for Jaspar's reading of her thoughts, and the text is masked with layers of meanings. Sir Jaspar, a shrewd reader who deeply understands the art of performance, has always been interested in the mystery behind Juliet's mask. As he admits, it is her depth that lures him: "what is it, thus mystic, yet thus attractive, that allures me whether I will or not into your chains? – Could I but tell who, or what you are" (627). He has a pair of "penetrating eyes" that seeks to dissect Juliet's bodily language, which in return satisfies his desires with its performativity. As he humorously puts, the little imps "whisked [him]...into every crevice of female subtlety. They exhibited all as a drama, and gave me a peep behind the curtain to see the gayest damsel the sulkiest..." (628). Sir Jaspar, then, is the novel's ideal reader who reads the performative feminine text and discovers a different story. Just as Juliet's silences and facial expression become an interesting text/mask to Sir Jaspar, the novel's gaps and silences likewise invite the reader to perceive the subtext of resistance under the performative narrative of proper femininity. The novel, thus, is offering a comment on its own performance through narrativity and invites the reader to become Sir Jaspar, peeping under the gaps and silences in the narrative of proper femininity to discover a more interesting and empowering drama of female experience.

Using the masquerade, an ambiguous mode of representation, and playing with the ambiguity of the mask to construct femininity through textual ambiguities, the novel provides a unique understanding of womanliness. As we have seen, the novel not only constructs a performative femininity that destabilizes the mask of modesty, but it also creates a discourse of resistance through its feminine "strategies of indirection, obliqueness, and doubling."[33] Like its heroine, who performs her identity through her mask of passivity, the novel performs a feminine style of writing through ambiguity. It performs its ideological task by masquerading itself as a conventional tale of proper femininity but undermines it through gaps and contradictions, through gothic tropes, and through the theme of the mask. Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues, "Narrative in the most general terms is a version of, or a special expression of, ideology: representations by which we construct and accept values and institutions" (x). I argue that, by masking the text with its ambiguous language, the novel not only expresses but also performs its own ideology about gender, undermining the patriarchal discourse through its unique textual nuances. Although as Juliet McMaster observes, Burney "won't make her heroines feminists, or overtly be one herself" (237), the novel becomes the means through which the female writer constructs a site of female agency. Coming from the hand of the female writer, the novel itself becomes a performative agent that opposes the male ideology, for it "think[s] like individuals about the difficulties of fulfilling oneself as an individual under specific cultural conditions[, w]hether this involves resistance, complicity, mimicry, or hybridity" (Armstrong, *How Novels think* 10). Although many critics have noticed the ambiguity in the construction of femininity in the novel, they have paid little attention to its importance and are eager to attribute an explicit feminist message to the novel's construction of femininity despite its ambiguity.[34] On the contrary, I have contended that the ambiguity itself is a performative site that produces female

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agency. By presenting a masked heroine through its masked language, the narrative offers "a rich imagining of the conventionally disguised self" (Spacks 169). Through the masquerading strategy, the text deconstructs its own surface text and creates a space for the emergence of female agency. As Spacks writes, "Miss Burney convinces the reader...that much lies beneath her compliance" (169). Likewise, the narrative reveals, through ambiguity, that much lies beneath its conventional representation of ideal femininity. Perhaps Juliet's playful remark – "Reverse, else, the medal,...and see whether the impression will be more to your taste!" when Harleigh asks whether he was most favored when he thought her "most inexorable," which I discuss in the introduction to this study, best illustrates the novel's call for a reading of the author/heroine/novel's performativity. While Juliet's playful reply suggests that she has catered to Harleigh's taste in creating the "impression" of her modesty and passivity, the novel, through its very ambiguity, invites the reader to "reverse the medal" and perceive a different "impression" – character[35] – of the author, the heroine, and the novel under the mask of modesty.

CHAPTER 2

Veiling and Re-veiling: Constructing Feminine Sensibility in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*

"The heroine who gravely ponders etiquette while running for her life is a peculiar feature of Radcliffe's Gothic" (454), Yael Shapira observes. She is not the only critic who has commented on Radcliffe's preoccupation with feminine propriety. After all, Radcliffe, "the great enchantress," has been recognized as "Mother Radcliffe," the initiator of the female gothic genre who popularized the genre with virtuous damsels-in-distress.[36] Radcliffe's characterization of the virtuous heroines in her novels has prompted early critics to identify her as a conservative writer who conforms to male ideologies. Observing that her works "demonstrate an obsession with the single subject of the coming of age of the individual" (Durant 520), critics such as David Durant argue that Radcliffe's heroines "preserve their innocence through the gothic adventures" and "devise no strategies by which to appreciate a chaotic world...Nor do they find new powers by which to change the terms of the world" (526). Deeming Radcliffe's heroines as submissive creatures whose survival depends on her evolving relationships with parental figures, Durant argues that Radcliffe's construction of femininity signals a return to conservative values (520).

Contrary to Durant, later critics such as Shapira have recognized that the ludicrousness of the heroine's desire to appear proper while fleeing for her life only serves to reveal the tension between decorum and the body, thereby exposing the ideological control of women in the patriarchal society. Thus, despite the earlier critical tendency to read Radcliffe as a conservative female gothicist, later critics acknowledge the feminist aspect of Radcliffe's novels, arguing that her works expose the female desire as a transgressive force under male oppression. As Robert

Miles points out, "one of the unappreciated subtleties of Radcliffe's art is her ability to equip her heroines with a psychological subtext. Her heroines are not fainting ciphers of conventional femininity, but have an inner life" (*Ann Radcliffe* 139). As Miles' use of the term "subtext" indicates, Radcliffe's novels should not be taken at face value; Radcliffe's endorsement of proper femininity is a narrative veil that needs to be lifted. Were we to discover the body beneath the narrative veil, would we find a decayed corpse as Emily St. Aubert does or a wax figure instead? Are there other possibilities?

This chapter aims to uncover the "subtleties" of Radcliffe's art by engaging with the ambiguity inherent in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Like Miles, I believe that a careful reading of the novel will produce a surprising proof for Radcliffe's art of "enchantment." Specifically, I examine the veil, symbol of ambiguity in the novel, and focus on sensibility/imagination as a site of ambiguity through which Radcliffe configures femininity. Mary Laughlin Fawcett's analysis of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* will help illuminate my purpose. Observing that Emily, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, is "especially prone to that 'love...of whatever is able to distend its faculties with wonder and astonishment'" (549), Fawcett comments on the phrase Radcliffe uses to describe the mind in response to the wonder of the supernatural: "Distend has an unpleasantly full sound here, reminding us of a kind of pregnancy of mind, following a desire to be filled, to take in sights, to have knowledge. The suggestion of multiplicity, of openness, againness, and repetition is muted but present in this passage, too" (492). Interestingly, Fawcett associates the meaning of "distend" with the feminine attribute – "pregnancy," suggesting that Radcliffe's use of the word "distend" implies more than it appears: the reproductive and regenerative function of an (over)active imagination is "muted but present" in this phrase. And she moves on to uncover "the veiled content" of the novel, arguing that feminine desire is latent in Radcliffe's works and

that the novel exposes "the paradox of the seeker who looks out only to find what is inside herself" (492). Despite the negative meaning associated with the "pregnancy of mind" in the novel,[37] Fawcett's analysis shows that Radcliffe's text is itself a veil that requires critical attention and engenders various meanings due to its ambiguity, and that "the veiled content" of Radcliffe's novels undermines its own criticism of the heroine's overactive imagination (492).

As we can see, Fawcett's analysis uncovers a masked discourse in the novel: Radcliffe's criticism of Emily's overactive imagination is a surface text, a normative task that Radcliffe performs in order to negotiate between the delicacy required of a woman writer and her desire to author a woman's text. As a woman writer in a patriarchal society, Radcliffe has to address the anxiety about the presumed feminine propensity to overactive imagination and construct a proper heroine who learns to discipline her sensibility/imagination. Only through the ambiguity of her text can she succeed in becoming "The Great Enchantress." This chapter aims to investigate the ambiguous discourse in Radcliffe's major novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, to better understand how ambiguity creates opportunities for feminist interpretations. The novel's critique of feminine sensibility seems to be a major means for the construction of proper femininity in *Udolpho*. But even so, as the critical readings we've discussed above indicate, the novel should not be read "monologically,"[38] for the ambiguity of the novel is a discursive site that articulates differing voices and perspectives. In fact, Mary Poovey has provided a convincing account of how sensibility functions as a "competing" ideology in the novel, displaying Radcliffe's own ambivalent attitudes towards the feminine virtues. Extending this line of argument, I turn to the veiled function of sensibility in the novel and read it as a metonymical figure of ambiguity. To fully understand the complexity of the Radcliffean art, we should pay attention to the figure of the veil in the novel and its relation to the construction of femininity. As Eve Kosofsky

Sedgwick argues, in the Gothic novel, "the veil is the locus of the substitution of one person for another, in the service of an indiscriminate metonymic contagion of its own attributes" (258). The veil is a figure of displacement and of ambiguity, a crucial figure in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, especially as its veiled content serves as a major enigma that demands unveiling throughout the novel.

In the following sections, I argue that Radcliffe's ambiguous representation of feminine sensibility, epitomized in the configuration of the veil, in fact creates a rich space for female expression, and that the veil, both as a symbol of ambiguity and femininity in the novels, carries a paradoxical quality that both represents female victimization and female empowerment. Radcliffe's configuration of femininity in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* takes advantages of the instability of such symbol, thereby presenting a masked, feminist message through the construction of feminine sensibility. I argue that underneath the critique of Emily's overactive imagination, Radcliffe creates opportunities for the expression of female agency through ambiguity, turning Emily's excessive imagination into a source for fictional agency. Such masked feminine strategy is later made apparent in *The Italian*, as a comparison of the two novels' constructions of sensibility shows. The "fluid signification" of the veil thus gives rise to transformative opportunities, as its liminal nature opens up interpretative possibilities in constructing female subjectivity.

I. Feminine Sensibility: Virtue or Flaw?

A common eighteenth-century belief was that women have a greater capacity for sensibility or feeling as the female body was thought to have more sensitive nerves than the male body and therefore more capable of refined feelings. As Terry Castle observes in *The Female*

Thermometer, women "were considered the primary embodiments of mercuriality" and often represented in literature as a subject ridiculed for their emotional instability and feminine sensitivity (25). This early inferior image of feminine sensitivity is transformed into a superior one in mid-eighteenth century literature in Richardson's *Clarissa*, which depicts an idealized version of feminine sensibility. The feminine ideal of sensibility established by the novels of Richardson is upheld by the writers of the period: Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, and Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* all extol heroines who excel in their feminine sensibility. Thus, sensibility becomes a primary marker of feminine virtues in the eighteen-century culture and literature.

However, as Ann Van Sant points out, "women were culturally constrained to exist in an idealized rather than a physicalized sensibility. Their physical structures could not be revealed in a sustained way" (114). The idealization of feminine sensibility demands that women neglect their physical sensations and desires, the conflict of which is often explored in the late eighteenth century. Because of the social anxiety about sensibility's "close proximity" to (sexual) passions,[39] many women writers caution against excessive sensibility despite the positive values attributed to feminine sensibility in the literature of this period.[40] Jane Austen satirizes the romantic sensibility of her heroine Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, who has "passion for dead leaves" (65). Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* epitomizes the writer's fear of excessive sensibility as its heroine is shown to be imprisoned by her sensibility. Mary Wollstonecraft herself resists excessive feminine sensibility in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, perceiving that indulgence in sensibility will vitiate women's reasoning faculty and subject them to further enslavement: "their senses are inflamed, and their understanding neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility" (82-

83). As she laments, many women cultivated excessive sensibility, seeking out occasions that provoke their tears and indulging themselves in sentimental scenes in the romance instead of trying to alleviate the misery of their own lives. Feminine sensibility thus becomes a theme of ambivalence in the literature of the period, charged with female writers' anxiety about the biological weakness of the female body.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe exhibits her own ambivalence about the values of sensibility. She critiques sensibility and explores its limitations – the danger of imagination and its affinity to sexual desire – while simultaneous extolling it as a moral attribute. Emily's sentimental values enable her to sympathize with her surroundings: she finds aesthetic pleasure in nature, easily connecting to the emotions of others due to the delicacy of her mind. While representing Emily's delicacy of mind as an admirable value, the narrator points out its weakness early in the novel: "She had discovered in her early years uncommon delicacy of mind, warm affections, and ready benevolence; but with these was observable a degree of susceptibility too exquisite to admit of lasting peace" (5). As the narrator implies, Emily's extreme sensibility renders her susceptible to external influences, which cause disquietude in her emotional state. Emily's refined feelings become an obstacle to her understanding of reality, a fact foreseen by her father, who cautions her against excessive sensibility: "Do not indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds" (79). When she is left alone to face the vicissitudes of life without the aid of her father's rationality, she experiences numerous errors in her understanding of reality, while being constantly haunted by phantoms due to the delicacy of her mind. After her father's demise, she indulges herself in her overwrought imagination and therefore observes twice her father's phantoms. She is greatly frightened and loses her consciousness when she encounters a wax figure in the castle of Udolpho, mistaking it for a

corpse and imagining a murder committed in the castle. Her sensibility also renders her the victim of her own imagination when she misconstrues her father's papers as a sign of his extra-marital affair, therefore questioning her own identity and parentage. Representing Emily as a character who is "sensible to the 'thick-coming fancies' of a mind greatly enervated" and yields to "momentary madness" (102), the narrator is relentless in criticizing Emily's susceptibility to the external influence due to the delicacy of her feelings and depicts her as the victim of her own imaginations.

In demonstrating Emily's excessive sensibility, the novel also ties feminine sensibility with unrestrained passions, showing the danger of indulging in one's sensibility. As the narrative illustrates through the doubling of characters in the novel,[41] although Emily does not become a sexual woman, her mind's tendency to shape the external world according to her own imagination suggests the danger of such tendency. Embedded in St Aubert's warning about excessive sensibility is his anxiety about Emily's indulgence in passions, particular sexual passions a young girl is prone to experience. What St. Aubert fears is that not only Emily's excessive imagination can produce erroneous perceptions of her life, but also it will lead to the pursuit of sexual passions. The novel's fallen woman, Agne, warns against the danger of sensibility: "Sister! Beware of the first indulgence of the passions…possessing us like a fiend, it leads us on to the acts of a fiend, making us insensible to pity and to conscience" (646). As critics point out, in calling Emily "sister," Agne claims herself as the diabolical double of Emily. Thus, the novel persists in abundant illustrations of the negative impact of feminine sensibility: it weakens one's rational faculty and destroys the life of women who fall prey to their own feelings. Like Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe explores the problematics of feminine sensibility in *The*

Mysteries of Udolopho, presenting undisciplined feminine sensibility as an instance of feminine weakness.

Unsurprisingly, the narrative fully explores the feminine weakness through the mystery of the black veil: it centers around Emily's epistemological quest in finding her true identity, which turns out to be a misdirected quest caused by her own overactive imagination and erroneous conjectures. The black veil she discovers in the castle of Udolpho becomes a byword for her epistemological barriers, representing the drawback of the excessive feminine sensibility that the novel overtly critiques. The novel is replete with St. Aubert's incessant warnings against the excess of feelings, presenting and seemingly endorsing the male ideology about feminine propriety. Emily herself also attempts to reject and control her own feelings, perceiving her own proclivity for sentiments as a severe drawback. Internalizing St. Aubert's notion of sensibility, Emily thus answers Madame Cheron when the latter accuses her of boasting her sensibility: "I am sure I would not boast of sensibility – a quality, perhaps, more to be feared, than desired" (281). The novel repeatedly delineates Emily's efforts to repress her sensitive tendency. She is quick to perceive her own errors and to curl her "distempered" imagination, endeavoring to be a dutiful daughter who faithfully follows her father's instructions. While she perceives in Valancourt the same refined sentiments shared by herself and feels sympathetic connections with him, she cannot wholeheartedly embrace the refined feelings but perceive them as a potential threat to their welfare. In her last meeting with Valancourt before her departure for Udolpho, she is subjected to sadness and melancholy. Nevertheless, upon seeing Valancourt, she quickly represses her feelings. As the narrator remarks, "his countenance was the mirror, in which she saw her own emotions reflected, and it aroused her to self-command" (127). Valancourt, as the male double of Emily, possesses similar feelings under the circumstance. He acts here only as a

reminder of her own weakness, becoming a sentimental model that she rejects. In depicting

Emily's strenuous efforts to avoid improper sentiments, the novel presents a conformist

discourse in its endorsement of the patriarchal ideology.

However, the critique of feminine weakness is only a superficial discourse that presents

proper femininity. The narrative frequently undercuts the critique of feminine sensibility with

ambiguous narratorial comments. Despite the novel's explicit warning against excessive

imagination as a negative attribute of sensibility, it also associates Emily's sensibility with the

strength of her mind. In describing Emily's delicacy, the narrator observes: "lovely as was her

person, it was the varied expression of her countenance, as conversation awakened the nicer

emotions of her mind, that threw such a captivating grace around her" (5). Seemingly extoling

Emily's physical appearance, the narrator presents that the real charm of Emily's person is "the

nicer emotions of her mind." The narrator indeed underlines the value of sensibility in her

character, linking sensibility with the capacity of the mind rather than the body. Thus, when

Emily converses with Valancourt, her countenance captivates him "with so much animation the

taste and energy of her mind" that it evokes his most tender sentiments. As we can see, even

though the narrator endeavors to delineate Emily's physical charm, the text itself unveils its

narrative purpose: Emily's mind, rather than her body, is the source of her sensibility. Emily's

sensibility not only demonstrates her high intellect but also generates benevolent feelings. Later

in the novel, it is Emily's ability to sympathize that redeems Valancourt. By associating Emily's

countenance with the power of the mind, the novel undermines St. Aubert's warning against

Emily's weakness and highlights the value of feminine sensibility.

In fact, the narrative's implicit endorsement of Emily's sensibility weakens St. Aubert's

image as the spiritual lead in the novel and reestablishes Emily's strength as a heroine. A passage

depicting the charm of Emily's sensibility helps illustrate this point. When Emily's sensibility "render[s] her a very interesting object to persons of a congenial disposition, St. Aubert, however, "had too much good sense to prefer a charm to a virtue, and had penetration enough to see, that this charm was too dangerous to its possessor to be allowed the character of a blessing" (5). The sarcastic undertone of the narrator here is apparent: the words "too much" and "enough" both represent St. Aubert as one whose excessive confidence in his own rationality tempers his judgment: Emily turns out to be "the character of a blessing," the heroine who is redeemed by, and who redeems others with, her sensibility. When Madame Montoni finally recognizes Emily's virtue, she bequeaths her property to Emily and enables her to become a wealthy heiress. When Valancourt degenerates into a path of dissipation, Emily's sympathy reforms him. Even her imaginary fears become a predictive force that enables her to face her enemies in Udolpho. Thus, the narrator's remark here serves to diminish St. Aubert's image as a figure of authority; it implicitly recasts him as a domineering patriarch whose dogmatic beliefs and "penetrating" discourse hinder the growth of his daughter.

In fact, the gendering of St. Aubert's sensibility and that of Emily allows the novel to reconstruct its seeming critique of feminine sensibility in a subtle way. While the novel depicts St. Aubert as a man of feeling who simultaneously exhibits rationality and prudence in his reasoning, his sensibility is frequently tied to decadence and decline and ultimately leads to his own death. Ever since the father makes his first appearance in the novel, he resembles Harley, the man of feeling in Henry Mackenzie's novel. His "pensive melancholy", and love of "chaste simplicity" prompt him to "resign himself to the influence of those sweet affections," although we are told that he possesses the mind of the naturalist and science is his favorite pursuit. As we can see, his proneness to sweet sensations often prompts him to linger in darkness where the

stars are "reflected on the dark mirror of the waters" and in the places where he laments the loss of former happiness (2). The evocation of dark imageries here suggests the link between St. Aubert's masculine sensibility and the darkness that resides in the heart of the novel, offering a negative preview of St. Aubert's masculine sentimental energy.[42] At the same time, his language is charged with emotional excess: like Mckenzie's the man of feeling, he projects his emotions onto inanimate objects, calling them "noble chestnut" and "venerable tree" (13). The hyperbolic language reduces him to a state of naivety and simplicity, representing him as a character whose ideals make him incompatible with the mundane world, and he suffers a dark fate similar to that of the man of feeling: he expires after a long period of melancholic indulgence in his own feelings. As we can see, even though St. Aubert seemingly possesses a strong mind, he degenerates from his indulgence of feelings. The novel's depiction of the benevolent patriarch indeed reveals "the trouble status of paternal authority," constituting a critique of patriarchy.[43]

In contrast, Emily's sensibility is associated with regeneration, even though she seemingly has a weaker, feminine intellect that prompts her to overactive imagination. When Madame Montoni is threatened and tortured by Montoni, Emily builds a connection with her as she perceives the pain of her aunt and expresses her sympathy for the sufferer. Madame Montoni, who mistrusts Emily previously and often ridicules Emily's feelings, is moved by Emily's sympathy and bequeaths her own property to her. Not only does Emily's sentimentality dissolve Madame Montoni's hostility towards her, but it also enables her to resist male domination. It is Emily's sensibility, her ability to sympathize with Valancourt, that allows her to reestablish her relationship with him, thereby redeeming him with her grace. As Mary Poovey points out, "the feminine values of sensibilities could socialize masculine energy" (325). The contrast between St. Aubert's sensibility and that of Emily thus overturns the novel's superficial

rendition of feminine weakness generated by sensibility, implicitly articulating the novel's own ideology and its criticism of the dominant gender ideology.

The novel also exposes its criticism of the male ideology indirectly by presenting Emily's sensibility as an excessive response to the constraints of proper femininity. In portraying Emily's excessive sensibility as a weakness in her character, the narrator simultaneously undercuts the criticism by delineating its cause. When Madame Cheron expresses her dislike of Valancourt and accuses Emily of impropriety, we are told that Emily is so fearful of her own impropriety that she almost renounces Valancourt. As the narrator remarks sarcastically, "Her mind, weakened by her terrors, would no longer suffer her to view him as she had formerly done; she feared the error of her own judgment...and feared also...she had not conducted herself with sufficient reserve" (125). When Emily "endeavored to review with exactness all the particulars of her conversation with Valancourt...had the satisfaction to observe nothing, that could alarm her delicate pride,...Her mind then became tranquil, and she saw Valancourt amiable and intelligent, as he had formerly appeared (126). Emily's sensibility ludicrously prompts her to view Valancourt differently, but the cause of her uncertainty is clear: it is the fear of being accused of impropriety that causes her perceptions of Valancourt to fluctuate. If the narrator exposes the weakness of Emily's mind in this instance, she also highlights Emily's inquietude as a habitual yet unnatural response to the hegemonic patriarchal regulation of female conduct. Emily's vacillation between different opinions about Valancourt's character serves to illustrate the impact of St. Aubert's ideological control over his daughter.

As I have shown, the ambiguity embedded in the novel's critique of feminine sensibility is itself a discursive site that enables a discourse of resistance that counters the male ideology about feminine propriety. The effect of ambiguity is evident in the critical evaluation of

Radcliffe's ideological stance: the ambiguity of the Radcliffean novel has driven critics such as

Robert J. Mayhew and E. J. Clery to identify Radcliffe and her heroines as liminal, gothic

figures. Mayhew writes, "Radcliffe emerges from this criticism, as she did from generic

criticism, as a liminal figure. Her novels point toward radicalism, whilst she herself pulls back

from endorsing such a position" (274). E.J. Clery similarly comments on the Gothic effect of

Radcliffe's conformity on the image of the Gothic heroine in gothic terms: the heroine becomes

"paler and more pensive…by her strict adherence to it, the ideology of femininity had drained

her of lifeblood, vampire-like" (74). These critical observations bespeak the rhetorical effect of

Radcliffean ambiguity in presenting its ideological stance on gender construction. In the readings

that emphasize the Gothicism of Radcliffean femininity, Radcliffe and her heroine have appeared

passive and insubstantial, and their liminality is a testament to their victimized status in the

patriarchal society.

Other critics unequivocally remark on the masked feature of Radcliffean novels. As Scott

Mackenzie points out, there are "hidden and missing elements which both drive the narrative,

and determine its overall shape" in Radcliffe's narrative (415); Radcliffe's "deliberately fissured

narrative style suggests its capacity to accommodate nominally separate discursive spheres

within its figural range" (416). Robert Miles further states that the subtlety of Radcliffean art

"works by keeping antithetical meanings in solution, creating internal difference where the

meanings are" ("The Surprising" 300). As these critics credit Radcliffe's subtle art, they also

recognize its contribution to the construction of female agency in her work despite its adherence

to normativity. As Kate Ferguson Ellis and Allen Grove both recognize, "Radcliffe creates a

fictional space where a woman can be 'fiercely rational without really moving outside a

definition of femininity that denied this resource to women'"; within the fictional world of

Radcliffe, the heroine's powers of her mind are the main source of her safety and virtue (Grove 431). These critics' vocabulary – "liminality," "antithesis," "contested" – pinpoints the ambiguous feature of the Radcliffean novel and calls for a careful investigation of their veiled meanings.

The critical comments illuminate the agency of the novel in producing divergent readings through ambiguity. While Miles accentuates the subterranean, transgressive nature of Radcliffe's novels, Cannon Schmitt insists on the dialectical nature of Radcliffean novels. Arguing that Radcliffe's novel "seeks to belong...to a specifically English literary tradition" (854), Schmitt notes that the "unresolvable conflictedness" in Radcliffe's art has become "a definitive characteristic of Radcliffean Gothic": "Her novels resist being read monologically: they promote aristocratic as well as bourgeois values, demonstrate both progressive and conservative political beliefs, and are at once feminist and anti-feminist" (855). Coral Ann Howells similarly points out, "what is distinctive about Radcliffean art: it is not concerned with destruction but with evasion of conventional limits, with expressing dissent within the framework of existing social and fictional structures" (154). Quoting Roland Barthes, she argues that the strategy of evasion creates "moments of instability which mark the 'deficiency of any superior value'" (44). These various readings of the Radcliffean novel point to the multiple perspectives inherent in the novel, presenting the complexity of the novel in constituting a discourse of ambiguity despite its surface text of conformity. The novel, then, performs its resistance to the male ideology through its ambiguity, as its narrative ambiguity undercuts the critique of Emily's excessive imagination.

II.   Ambiguous Agency: The Power of Sensibility/Imagination in *Udolpho*

Eighteenth-century philosophers and critics often linked sensibility with imagination. For them, the sensitivity to feelings requires the aid of imagination. Adam Smith once declared that without imagination, a person cannot sympathize with the feelings of others: "it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations….By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation" (2). Sensibility, then, is equated to "the sympathetic power of imagination… the faculty whereby the imagination, through the attendant emotional sensitivity, succeeds in identifying itself with the object of its attention" (Wasserman 264). Although the notion of sensibility as a moral attribute was debated in the eighteenth century, its link to imagination remained a major belief in the eighteenth-century aesthetic theories. As Walter Jackson Bate points out, Shaftesbury and his followers maintained the connection between imagination and sensibility, insisting that their interplay is "necessary for the complete self-absorption of the poet" (150), and Alexander Gerard further identified the imagination through "sympathetic sensibility" as the "creative imagination" that prompts poetic passion and creation (154). Given the link between sensibility and imagination, I demonstrate in this section how Radcliffe takes advantage of the instability of the concepts and their link to each other to produce a discourse of agency.

In her analysis of *Udolpho*, Mary Poovey notes that Radcliffe "dramatizes the internal instability of sentimentalism" (317), but she neglects the positive effect of such gesture. For her, such gesture does nothing more than exploring "in detail a woman's psychological responses the enemy sensibility has bred" (137); the novel remains a "complex" and "contradictory" response of Radcliffe to the ideologies of sensibility. Although she recognizes that Radcliffe's first critique of sensibility centers on the imagination, she fails to perceive the construction of Emily's

agency under the mask of such critique, concluding that "Radcliffe insists that imagination may also be the principle agent in victimizing its vessel" (320). Unlike Poovey who mainly perceives passivity in Radcliffe's configuration of feminine sensibility and imagination, I argue instead that it is through the instability of sensibility and imagination and their interplay that Radcliffe creates instances of agency by endowing Emily's imagination with creative, fictional power at the moments when she seemingly criticizes Emily's overactive imagination. If Emily's overactive imagination, a side effect of her sensibility, has been understood as a dangerous attribute linked to sexual passions, it is also presented as a potential source for female agency, as the imagination becomes an invaluable asset for Emily's Gothic fiction making.

If the novel presents Emily's overactive imagination as a weakness to be rectified, it also links her imagination with fiction-making, endowing it with female creativity and thereby subverting its own superficial message of feminine weakness. Emily is not only a character whose sensibility touches and moves others, but she also possesses a fictional agency enabled by her sensibility. While the insensible Madame Cheron is apathetic to her surroundings, Emily's sensibility, manifested in her aptness to perceive others' character, allows her to fictionalize her world and acquire a fictional power. When Emily discovers the wild summits of the Pyrenees, we are told that "her fancy immediately painted the green pastures of Gasconuy at their feet" (120). By using a constructive word "painted" to describe her imagination, the narrator suggests her role as an artist who composes a sublime picture with her sensibility. Moreover, her imagination is endowed with a phallic power as it "pierces" and brings things alive: "Her imagination, piercing the veil of distance, brought that home to her eyes in all its interesting and romantic beauty" (120). In this sense, the narrative is alluding to the power of creation

dominated by the male author in the literary tradition and appropriates it through the masked language of the text.

Thus, although Emily's overactive imagination predisposes her to many errors of perception in the novel and inflicts imaginary fears on herself, the novel also presents her imagination as a creative response to the gothic reality she is facing. When Emily is compelled to leave Valancourt and depart for Udolpho, she goes to lament their separation on the terrace where they met, we are told that Emily "was sensible of the features of this scene only as they served to bring Valancourt immediately to her fancy" (152). As Terry Castle contends, in the novel, "To think of the other is to see him"; "to be 'haunted'[is] to find oneself obsessed by spectral images of those one loves" (124,125). Calling these phenomena as "the spectralization of the other," Castle extols them as "products of refined sentiment, the characteristic projections of a feeling heart" and argues that "To be haunted...is to display one's powers of sympathetic imagination" (123). Despite her brilliant argument, Castle little acknowledges the interplay between sensibility and imagination here, thereby missing the transformative function of Emily's sensibility and its link to fiction-making. Emily's sensibility, manifested as sympathetic imagination here, works as a driving force to help realize her own desire: it not only brings Valancourt to the fictional world constructed by her mind but also to the world of reality. We learn that she finds herself in someone's arms next moment and is seized with terror before she distinguishes the person to be Valancourt. Although the novel depicts Emily's imagination as the source of unnecessary terror, it also presents it as a productive force that helps realize her fantasy. In this sense, Emily's sensibility/imagination directs the plot of the novel, becoming an active agent in shaping the events of the novel. She is indeed the female plotter in disguise.

And Emily obviously becomes the plotter of her own fiction, plotting the gothic adventures in Udolpho with her imagination. Emily's overactive imagination possesses a kind of narrative agency as it predicts the events of her life in Udolpho. The novel shows that her imagination often comes true in the gothic world in which she lives. Her anxiety about male attacks is soon realized in the novel as Count Monaro indeed attempts to kidnap her. The narrator implicitly presents her role as a female writer who composes gothic fictions with her imagination: "Her present life appeared like the dream of a distempered imagination, or like one of those frightful fictions, in which the wild genius of the poets sometimes delighted" (296). Although Emily's imagination has been critiqued for its excess, the narrator confirms here that her "disordered" imagination actually represents the gothic reality in which she resides. Moreover, by associating her imagination with poetic creativity and fiction-writing, the narrator hints at her narrative power. The novel "generates an opportunity for narrative intervention and exegesis, particularly in the form of prophetic dreams and nightmares" (Wight 98), endowing Emily with a narrative agency that deconstructs her passivity.

No wonder, then, when Emily lifts the black veil in an attempt to discover the secret of the castle, the narrator remarks on her imagination and terror thus incited, "but a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object, from which we appear to shrink" (248). The vocabulary here is of a positive, regenerative kind, showing terror to be a quality that fascinates and stimulates, "expand[ing]" and "elevating" the mind. As Radcliffe herself explains, "terror 'expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life', while horror 'contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them'" (qtd. in Cavallaro 3)." Critics have characterized the Radcliffean terror as a primary feature of the female gothic, identifying it as

transcendent and regenerative. As Kristin M. Girten points out, "Radcliffe presents and encourages a markedly democratic aesthetic of terror designed to empower even disenfranchised individuals" (713). Thus, Emily's susceptibility to imagination and terror indeed becomes a means of self-empowerment through fiction-making in the Radcliffean gothic.

Not only does Emily's sensibility enable transcendence and empowerment, the novel also links it with fiction-making through Emily's reading of characters. Observing Emily's role as a silent spectator in the novel, Helen Oesterheld remarks, "Although Radcliffe's gothic heroines are figured as victims of the mysterious sights and sounds around them, Emily's peculiar characterization as an ever-vigilant observer protects her from any kind of physical violation – she is always only subjected to visual terror and her paralyzing fright assails her only when she is alone" (115). As a privileged spectator who is immune to physical harms, Emily is also endowed with the privilege of characterization, as she is the main focalizer of the novel and many of the novel's characters are presented to the reader through her point of view. Not only does Emily have "spectatorial privilege" thus described by Oesterheld, but she also fictionalizes the characters around her, and her fiction making is another ambiguous discourse in the novel that constructs her agency as a female heroine since it transforms her from a passive heroine into an active character-writer.

As Syndy M. Conger notes, Radcliffe presents the "notion of sensibility as heightened consciousness, as the capacity to penetrate beyond physical surfaces" (114). With her sensibility, Emily is a shrewd reader of countenance who captures the essence of character through her reading of countenance. In the world of *Udolpho*, countenance is often a truthful mirror of one's character. While Emily's countenance expresses genuine and pure emotions, characters without virtues such as Madame Cheron's countenance is often "stained" with her expressions. The

countenance of the character, thus, is often an indicator of one's virtues or vices, but this explicit representation of character in the novel is complicated by Emily's spectatorship. We are told that Emily often observes other characters' countenances with high interest. When she discovers a lady's miniature in her late father's chamber, the narrator gives an account of Emily's interest in the miniature:

> Emily still gazed on the countenance, examining its features, but she knew not where to detect the charm that captivated her attention, and inspired sentiments of such love and pity. Dark brown hair played carelessly along the open forehead; the nose was rather inclined to aquiline; the lips spoke in a smile, but it was a melancholy one; the eyes were blue, and were directed upwards with an expression of peculiar meekness, while the soft cloud of the brow spoke of the fine sensibility of the temper. (103)

The narrator first states explicitly that Emily is fascinated by the miniature but unaware of the source of its charm. The following sentence gives a depiction of the lady's countenance from Emily's perspective, which reveals a subconscious thought process Emily goes through at the moment of gazing. The lady's miniature is a picture of mingled sensibility and sensuality that dominate her physical features. While the lady's expressions demonstrate the meekness and fine sensibility we often witness in Emily, the adjectives and verbs describing her countenance – "careless," "open," "inclined", and "play" – suggest sensuality, unrestraint, and defiance. And the conjunctions in the passage – "but" and "while" – reveal the tension between sensuality and sensibility, the two prominent elements highlighted in the description. Given its likeness to Emily, the lady's countenance can be seen as a mirror of Emily's feelings and desires. If we recall that right before this scene, Emily goes through a process of restraint, repressing her curiosity and desire to transgress her father's injunction, Emily's reading of countenance here

becomes a means through which she constructs a character who reflects her own unconscious desire. Although she is observing a character of sensibility, she endows the character with elements of sensuality and unrestraint, thereby creating a romantic story with her character-reading. Thus, reading character in the lady's countenance allows Emily to create an imaginative story of her father's past, which becomes the main mystery of the novel. In this sense, Emily acquires a narrative agency through her character-reading.

A similar scene of ambiguity in which Emily demonstrates her fiction-making power occurs when she meets Montoni for the first time. The description of Montoni's appearance and manly spirit is clearly focalized through Emily: "This Signor Montoni had an air of conscious superiority, animated by spirit, and strengthened by talents, to which every person seemed involuntarily to yield" (122). The passage ends with a description reminding us of the effect of Emily's spectatorship: "Emily felt admiration, but not the admiration that leads to esteem; for it was mixed with a degree of fear she knew not exactly wherefore" (122). As Joellen DeLucia argues, Emily's admiration for Montoni suggests "their shared stoicism, their ability to restrain emotions under extreme circumstances" (107). The novel's ambiguous rendition of sensibility certainly supports DeLucia's reading, as the contrast between Emily's sensibility and her father's does demonstrate an affinity between Montoni and Emily, who are "more alike" in their control of emotions. In contrast, Kenneth W. Graham contends, Emily's "irrational" attraction to Montoni reveals her "ambivalent love-hate attitude to her demon-lover" as hers is "an imagination prepared to acknowledge the diabolical" (168, 164). Graham's reading is equally valid, as the novel's description of Emily's reaction towards the possibility of Montoni's death contains some "odd moments."[44] Emily's concern for Montoni manifests itself in the episode in which she hears of the fighting between Montoni and his enemies. She articulates her concern in

a tremulous voice: "Is any person much hurt?...the belief of his death gave her spirits a sudden shock, and she grew faint as she saw him in imagination, expiring at her feet" (316). While I agree with both critics' readings, I want to point out that the differing readings of the two critics signify the ambiguous discourse of sensibility in the novel, suggesting that the novel's construction of sensibility as an unstable concept generates possibilities for Emily's agency. Moreover, I extend Graham's reading by drawing attention to Emily's imagination in the above scene. If Emily's imagination suggests her affinity with "the diabolical," it also endows her with a fictional agency as she imagines Montoni's death. In the fictional world constructed by her imagination, she is either a heroine who witnesses her lover's death or a heroine wishing to defeat her enemy. No matter how Emily feels towards Montoni, Montoni does "expire at her feet" figuratively at the end of the novel. Emily's imagination here again has the supernatural power Castel perceives, foretelling the events of the novel.

Emily's fictional agency manifests itself again and again in Emily's attraction to the men of heroic qualities. More than once in the novel, Emily observes Montoni and his followers with "admiration, tinctured with awe" while imagining herself to be the victim of male attacks (173). The silent heroine observes, discerns, and constructs characters and stories through her spectatorship and her imagination. As Michelle Massé notes, a woman's gaze carries a transformative agency, allowing her to reconstruct power relationship. Quoting Naomi Scheman, who argues that "The lack of authority in women's gazing is not, however, reason to conclude that we do not see, nor even that patriarchy does not allow or require that we see….The looking that we do is a good place to seek out cracks in [masculine] power" (qtd. in Massé 59), Massé accentuates the importance of female spectatorship: "the gaze of the subordinated is a potential means to identify and reconstruct patterns of domination (59). The novel's ambiguous rendition

of Emily's spectatorship suggests the reconstructive potential of Emily's imagination in her gaze. She frequently "looks" with "her eyes fixed," "observes" and "further observes," "gazes" and "fancies" while continuing to gaze (302). In her observation, sometimes she discovers "a shade of thought on [Cavigni's] countenance" and discerns in him "the majesty of a hero" whose "graceful and commanding figure...[has] never appeared to more advantage" (302). While these moments of gazing obviously indicate Emily's repressed sexual desires, they also serve to suggest her capacity to create her own fiction of romance by characterizing the males around her as heroic figures in a mysterious castle and herself the victimized heroine. If the novel critiques Emily's sensibility and links it with sexual passions through her attraction to the male figures, it simultaneously creates a discourse of agency under the surface narrative of critique.

Emily's sensitivity to the countenance of the men, therefore, not only demonstrates her involuntary attraction to the manly figures, but it also becomes a creative response associated with her fiction-making as it allows her to characterize the male characters around her. When Emily observes the tumult in the castle and fears male attacks, she observes the men near her with close attention. The narrator again gives an account of Montoni's visage through the focalization of Emily and then turns to describe Emily's reaction: Emily "observed these written characters of his thoughts with deep interests, and not without some degree of awe, when she considered that she was entirely in his power" (192). Perceiving Montoni's dark energies, Emily ruminates on the workings of his mind. Interestingly, Montoni's countenance here becomes a piece of paper on which Emily observes and draws his thoughts down with "written characters." Emily is a silent writer here who creates her "frightful fiction" though her reading and writing of Montoni's countenance. And her "frightful fiction" later comes true again when Montoni becomes the captain of his bangs.

If Emily's characterization enables her to fictionalize the world around her and acquires a narrative agency, it also helps her to fight against male oppression. When Emily seeks to speak with Montoni on her aunt's behalf, she finds him conversing with a group of men. The following description is curious: Emily observes "involuntarily" a man's appearance: "this man was apparently of low condition; yet his looks appeared not to acknowledge the superiority of Montoni, as did those of his companions; and sometimes they even assumed an air of authority, which the decisive manner of the Signor could not repress" (307). This is a curious moment in which Emily's observation serves as an instance of resistance against male authority. Before she confronts Montoni herself in the next instant, what she "observes," or rather, "fancies," is a scene of power struggle in which the man challenges Montoni's authority. Given Emily's propensities to "fancy" with her observance, we can read this scene as a vicarious power struggle in which Emily envisions herself to engage. The man defies Montoni with his "looks" and announces his superiority with "an air of authority" despite his "apparent low condition." In a way, he vicariously represents the reticent heroine who observes and resists silently. Here, Emily fictively "reconstructs patterns of domination" through her gaze and imagination.

The vicarious scene of power struggle later enacts itself in Emily's confrontation with Montoni, who demands that she forfeit the property she inherits from her aunt. When Emily expresses her volition to resist oppression, Montoni scoffs, "You speak like a heroine...we shall see whether you can suffer like one" (381). Remaining silent, Emily "smiles complacently" when she recollects that she resists "for Valancourt's sake" (381), as the property will provide Valancourt, who is destitute as the younger son of his family, with economic security. Observing that Emily's resistance is of an excessive, romantic nature and "is registered in her naming as 'heroine'", E. J. Clery maintains that Emily is "an instrument for the passage of property,

whether by cession to the superior claim of a male relation or as the merchandise of a profiteering marriage agreed between men" (73). Her reading, however, neglects the fact that it is Montoni who names her as a heroine, and that Emily's silence indeed signifies her resistance to such naming. Instead of being one whose romantic fantasies simply subject her to negative consequences, Emily resists male authority through her imagination, which enables her to do so in reality. Perceiving and performing herself as a subject in power who will aid her lover financially, Emily reverses the role of exchange object that Montoni designs for her, presenting herself as an unconventional heroine who resists the powerful male with her imagination and sensibility. After the confrontation, "For the first time, she felt the full extent of her own superiority, and despised the authority, which, till now, she had only feared" (382). This description echoes the scene in which the man challenges Montoni's superiority with his air of authority. The narrative, then, implies that Emily's imagination has turned her fantasy into reality, enabling her to fight against Montoni's tyranny.

As we have seen, Emily's sensibility/overactive imagination equips her with a narrative agency that allows her to characterize the others around her, thereby coping with the danger in her life. Although Emily is recurrently frightened by her own overactive imagination in the supernatural episodes, as Robert Miles maintains, "we should not think of Emily as a passive subject upon whom the supernatural is visited; nor should we think of her as an undesiring blank;" "the supernatural is a consequence of Emily's 'active, desiring' encounter with the world" (*Ann Radcliffe* 147-8). Miles' comments pinpoint Emily's narrative agency – it is a testimony to her fiction-making power manifested in her imagination of the supernatural. In fact, it is the novel's ambiguous rendition of Emily's imagination and sensibility that lends her the

fictional agency, transforming the passive heroine into an active writer who constructs her romantic and supernatural fiction with her sensibility/imagination.

III. Veil as A Site of Ambiguity

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the veil is primarily configured as an epistemological barrier caused by Emily's sensibility, which she has to overcome in her journey to autonomy. By depicting her heroine as a paragon of feminine sensitivity whose overactive imagination veils her reasoning faculty and leads to her cognitive errors, Radcliffe constructs a passive feminine model whose feminine sensibility needs to be supplemented by masculine rationality by epitomizing feminine sensibility and masculine rationality respectively in Emily and her father. But as I have shown, while this configuration of femininity and masculinity seemingly extols the father as the spiritual lead, such construction of gender identity is complicated by the masquerading of female desire and agency in the novel through the fantasies of Emily. The textual ambiguities in the novel, enacted through the instability of sensibility and imagination, undercut the novel's gesture of conformity. The black veil is a central symbol of such ambiguities, as it becomes a transformative site through which female agency emerges. It is important, then to examine the figure of the veil as a prominent symbol of ambiguity in the novel, as it is not only a symbol closely aligned with femininity but also a site of gendered construction.

While some critics have discussed the imagery of the veil in the works of Radcliffe, few have paid enough attention to the significance of the veil in constructing femininity and female agency. In her article "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface," Eve Sedgwick, observing the critical interest in interiority in the Gothic novel, calls for a return of attention to surfaces, arguing that an investment in surfaces will "change the traditional view of the Gothic

contribution to characterization and figuration in fiction" (255). Refusing to see "'the veil as primarily a boundary and a disguise for something else'", Sedgwick sees the veil "both as a metonymy of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified" (256). Sedgwick aptly perceives the veil as a narrative tool for interpreting gothic texts. For Sedgwick, the veil that conceals sexuality comes to represent sexuality; it becomes the very thing that it conceals. This replacement is significant since it reflects the critic's own interpretive interest, despite its function as a site of cultural, literary, and critical inscriptions. Sedgwick's conceptualization of the veil suggests that the veil, besides being a site of cultural inscriptions, is also a carrier of projected willfulness, from which signs of subjectivity spring. The veil is thus also a narrative construct the meanings of which transform incessantly and escape any fixated definition, which exemplifies the very ambiguity of the veil and its interpretative possibilities. In fact, Sedgwick's conception of the veil as metonymy and metaphor highlights the role of the veil as a prominent symbol of textual ambiguity, epitomizing the ambiguous discourse of the novel we have discussed.

Before we examine the ambiguity of the veil closely, an overview of the veil in early gothic novels will help illuminate our understanding of its role and its "feminist significance" in the novel.[45] As a prominent trope that constructs femininity, the veil proliferates in the early gothic novels. A transparent headdress often worn by women to conceal and protect their faces, the veil has its symbolic significance: the heroine of the gothic novel often wears a veil to conceal her face from the public view in order to protect her chastity and demonstrate feminine propriety. The heroine of Mathew Lewis' *The Monk*, Antonia, wears "a veil of thick black gauze" to prevent her beauty from being known. Being a protective layer for women, the veil is thus not only associated with female vulnerability but also acts as a primary symbol of female

modesty, a feminine quality that attracts unmarried young men and designates the heroine as one worthy of marital interest. In addition, as the veil is also first and foremost a religious symbol in the early modern period, early Gothic novels are replete with the imagery of the veil to represent the plight of gothic heroines, who either voluntarily choose to "take the veil," that is, to enter the religious order to seek refuge from male persecution, or are forced into it by an overbearing patriarchal figure. In addition to its religious use, which expresses female victimization, the veil has another melancholy connotation: it is often associated with the private act such as individual mourning and religious ritual, denoting sadness, melancholia and sacredness and becoming a symbol of female suffering. Emily, saddened by her father's death, wears a thin black veil frequently. With its melancholy connotations, the veil is an emblem of gothic femininity, epitomizing the dismal female condition in a patriarchal society and representing female sufferings and victimization through its very image.

On the other hand, the veil transforms incessantly. It is a powerful metaphor that permeates the Female Gothic genre; it is not only a prevalent imagery associated with the female body but also an emblem of femininity. Like the masquerade, it embodies ambiguity and transformation, denoting artifice, femininity, ambiguity, liminality, and spectrality like the masquerade does, only in a more passive and melancholy sense. It itself is a liminal figure that invites double readings: the transparency of the veil implies both concealment and disclosure, and this very double nature demonstrates its ambiguity and its transformative possibilities. The ambiguity of the veil simultaneously provides access to and block viewers and endows its female wearer with agency. Compared to the playful masquerade, the veil is more aligned with feminine passivity, thus more subversive when it is associated with female agency.

While Radcliffe's early use of the veil clearly adheres to the conventions of early gothic novels by representing it as a feminine, religious, and emotional symbol, she transforms the veil into a fluid, transformative entity that allows for the emergence of female subjectivity in her later novels. Her configuration of the veil in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* suggests that much has been veiled under the mask of proper femininity, as the criticism of the novel shows. The transgressive impulse of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* has long caught the critical attention, and the critical vocabulary unanimously engages with the terms "mask" or "veil" to describe the transgression of the novel. Observing the sexual undertone in Emily's curiosity over the mysteries of the novel, Mary Fawcett presents her curiosity as a concealed desire for sexual gratification: "The veiled content of this primal scene, the passionate woman and the exhausted man" (489). Likewise, when Howells discusses the transgressive moments in *Udolpho*, she often uses the metaphor of the veil, as if veil and transgression are interchangeable terms: "what is ultimately seductive in a Radcliffean novel are those moments of aberration, those eccentric moments which evade the constraints of conventional narrative and social order, lifting the veil to reveal other possibilities not contained within the conventional story at all..." (151). Miles also perceives the prevalence of veiling in the novel's themes and imageries: "In *Udolpho*, the Radcliffean sublime is closely linked to veils and veiling" ("Surprising" 307). The critical interest in the veiling strategy of the novel exemplifies the importance of the veil, as the veil is being associated with transgression here rather than passivity. As Shapira finely encapsulates, critics have noticed the role of the veil in constructing femininity and recognized that "as a barrier between a concealed sexuality and a 'modest' exterior, the veil is an ambivalent symbol of both erotic appeal and its chaste public denial" (468). Her comment highlights the double

nature of the veil and its function as a mask that replaces its pretended passivity. The critical commentary thus illustrates the performative role of the veil in constructing femininity.

The Mysteries of Udolpho seems to employ the trope of the veil in a straightforward way – to illustrate Emily's integration into the rational community by rectifying her own excessive sensibility. E. J. Clery reads this gesture of conformity negatively, arguing that the ending of the novel leaves Emily "paler and more pensive," a "supernatural nonbeing" (74, 79). But she undervalues the significance of the ambiguous veil and its transformative potential. If the black veil represents the limitations of the heroine, it is also simultaneously a site of transgression. The mystery of the black veil instigates Emily into a process of discovery as to her father's secrets and her own identity, initiating the emergence of her subjectivity. In this sense, the veil, as an ambiguous ritual symbol and object, enables her to subvert standard social roles in her process of reintegration into her community. Thus, the black veil is indeed a transformative agent that enables Emily's subjectivity to emerge. Instead of being "drained [of] lifeblood and vampire-like" like Clery argues, from the seeming dissolution of Emily's identity emerges a new subjectivity at the site of the ambiguous veil.

Perhaps the novel's ambiguous presentation of Emily's sensibility as a self-destructive veil prompts Castle to contend that, although Emily's sensibility is "a central and compelling focus" in the novel, she does not remain the novel's "presiding consciousness." Castle observes that the novel moves to "nobody's point of view" in the black veil scene, arguing that "the episode epitomizes [Emily's] lack of epistemological authority" and that she does not develop as a character and "remains a cipher" in the novel for her lack of knowledge (xiv). I argue instead that it is precisely through the association of the veil with sensibility and their shared ambiguity

that the novel enables a reading of Emily's development as a character. Emily is to be cyphered, or unveiled, along with the veil.

In fact, the novel associates Emily's sensibility with the image of the veil early in the novel and implies the transformative potential of the veil from the very beginning. The narrator often extols Emily's enhanced look under the veil and endows Emily's charm with a sense of transgression. When Emily appears at the party hosted by Montoni and her aunt in Venice, she is in a "thin black veil" (184), which echoes the famous black veil that she later lifts in the novel. The narrator then gives an account of her countenance, which "was partly shaded by a think black veil," with the touch of sensibility: "Hers was the *contour* of a Madona, with the sensibility of a Magdalen; and the pensive uplifted eye, with the tear that glittered on her cheek, confirmed the expression of the character" (184). The description here is curiously implicative. Emily possesses the contour of Madona but the sensibility of Magdalen, while it is uncertain which character is exactly "expressed" here. We can almost read the contour here as a mask that she wears, an ostensible outline of the virtuous Madona, and read the comparison to Magdalen as indicative of her transgressiveness through her own sensibility. [46] The linguistic ambiguity suggests subversive possibilities, indicating the complexity of the sentimental heroine. The fact that she is under the shade of the black veil further amplifies the sense of ambiguity, re-presenting her modest sensibility as a performative mask. Not surprisingly, she mingles with "the parties of masqueraders" a moment later, the "gaiety and novelty" of which, as we are told, dissipates Emily's uneasiness (187). As Shapira contends, "narrative context has a powerful role in determining the precise formulation of [the veil's] ambivalence and the relative weight of eroticism and modesty" (468). By mingling the veiled Emily with the masqueraders, the narrative establishes a textual correlation between the veil and the masquerade and presents the

veiled Emily as a masquerader. As the veil and the masquerade both denote the masking of identity, this textual correlation allows us to read Emily's veiling as well her sensibility as a masking strategy. And the transition from the melancholy veil into the playful masquerade in the scene signals the burgeoning of her agency.[47]

The novel itself calls attention to the significance of veiling and its ambiguity in a scene depicting Emily's sensibility. Disturbed by the possibilities of evil, Emily tries to restrain her fears and sorrow, "efforts which diffused over the settled melancholy of her countenance an expression of tempered resignation, as a thin veil, thrown over the features of beauty, renders them more interesting by a partial concealment" (161). With the word "tempered" to describe Emily's efforts to resign to her fate, the narrator indicates that Emily's submission is a forced response. Calling Emily's efforts "interesting," a subjective word that denotes various meanings, the narrator renders this description more ambiguous, since it associates Emily's expression with the ideas of masking. The layered ambiguity in this sentence, which reveals the function of the veil, produces interpretive possibilities as to Emily's "tempered resignation." This ambiguous account of Emily's interesting features is followed by the narrator's criticism of Madame Montoni, who "observes nothing in this countenance except its unusual paleness, which attracted her censure" (161). Frequently represented as a character whose lack of sensibility renders her oblivious to others' character and their sufferings, Madame Montoni lacks the perceptions that the narrator asks of the reader. In other words, in this criticism of the insensible, the narrator invites the sensible reader to participate in her word play. Thus, in associating Emily with veils and veiling, the narrative unveils an ambiguous subtext for female agency.

It is significant, then, to examine the unveiling act in the novel – Emily's lifting of the veil to probe into the secret of the castle is an ambiguous act: it is not only a transgression

against patriarchy but also a reflection of narrative unveiling. Emily lifts the veil literally and figuratively a few times to discover her father's and Montoni's secret. As Miles points out, Emily's transgressive act of "lifting the veil" on "paternal secrets" reveals her unconscious desire (*Ann Radcliffe* 141); "when Emily lifts the veil, she sees herself" ("Surprising" 314). Reading Emily's superstitious fantasies and her misinterpretation of the wax figure after she lifts the veil as the impact of patriarchal surveillance over feminine propriety on her mind, Miles argues that, although the narrator assures us that Emily welcomes the censorship, what is veiled behind the heroine's fainting spells is a dynamic text that discloses the conflict between patriarchal censorship and female desire.

While I value Miles' deconstructive reading, it is also important to recognize the veiling and unveiling in the novel as a performative strategy. When Emily, who is often in the black veil, lifts the black veil, the secret behind the veil is also veiled from the vigilant reader who is as eager as Emily to discover the secret. Nevertheless, the recurrence of the veil image implies the affinity between Emily herself and the people and things that she attempts to unveil. This affinity is later again reinforced in a scene in which Emily tries to uncover her father's relationship with the Marchioness. She discovers "a long black veil" when she explores the lady's room. The ensuing description is interesting: declaring that the veil is her lady's, Dorothee the servant "threw it suddenly over Emily, who shuddered to find it wrapped around her" and declares that she resembles her lady in that veil (534). As we know, Emily resembles the lady not only in looks but also in sensibility. The recurrence of the black veil here suggests their affinity and their similar fate: they are both imprisoned in the patriarchal castle represented by the black veil in this instance. When the narrative returns to the black veil near the end of the novel and unmasks the secret behind it, the reader discovers "a human figure of ghastly paleness, stretched at its

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length, and dressed in the habiliments of the grave. What added to the horror of the spectacle, was that the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms, which were visible on the features and hands" (662). This veiled wax figure is indeed an emblem of the female plight: [48] the decayed and disfigured figure is a concealed image of the feminine *The Mysteries of Udolpho* tries to uncover through its ambiguous subtext. The pale and ghostlike figure reflects the dismal female condition in which women are succumbed to patriarchal violence, which is symbolized in the attack of the worms. As we can see, Clery's observation of Emily being "paler and more pensive…by her strict adherence to...the ideology of femininity [that] had drained her of lifeblood, vampire-like" actually parallels the novel's description of the wax figure, only that the novel presents the female condition in an indirect way. While the novel performs the normative text of female education and presents Emily as one who learns about her own mistakes at the end, the ambiguous discourse in the novel, exemplified in the veiling and unveiling drama, serves instead to illuminate the women in veil as the victims of patriarchy. Moreover, it uncovers the agency of Emily whose sensibility works as a performative mask that allows her to resist patriarchal domination. She is the female writer who composes the Gothic fiction with her "overactive" imagination and thereby counters patriarchal power.

IV. Reconstructing Feminine Sensibility through the Veil in *The Italian*

As we have seen, the veil in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* epitomizes the instability of sensibility and imagination, presenting itself as a site of ambiguity from which female agency emerges. The lifting of the black veil is a performative act through which the heroine reconstructs her subjectivity under the surface text of female bildungsroman. As a symbol of "fluid signification," the veil transforms in *Udolpho* from the melancholy, mournful veil into a

playful narrative mask that conceals and reveals. Conceived first as a means of restricting female agency, it is a liminal figure that reconstructs female agency through its ambiguity. Although *The Mysteries of Udolpho* offers us an instance of the feminist significance of the veil, the constructive power of the veil extends itself into Radcliffe's later novel, *The Italian*, where its fluidity is fully explored to configure female agency. As Vijay Mishra argues, "all of Radcliffe's works explore the same theme, and each later text is a revision of the one before" (qtd. in Warren 538). *The Italian* is precisely a revision of feminine sensibility and an extension of Radcliffe's full play with the veil image. This section demonstrates how Radcliffe reconstructs feminine sensibility in *The Italian*, revising her critique of the presumed feminine weakness through the ambiguity of the veil.

Although critics such as Elizabeth P. Broadwell and Susan C. Greenfield have discussed the development of the veil image in *The Italian*,[49] none has considered its significance in relation to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The veil image permeates *The Italian*, becoming a symbol of fluidity. As Andrew Warren points out in his analysis of *The Italian*,

> The discourse of penetration pervades the entirety of Radcliffe's novel, most often in relation to an "impenetrable veil" or a "penetrating glance." This "piercing" or "penetration" refers...not only to penetrating the "veil of nature" and looking upon the work of God...but also to reading the thoughts of an individual, or penetrating the veil which Ellena draws over herself, the "veil of retirement." (532)

In observing the novel's usage of the veil, Warren remarks that the sexual overtones carried by the convention of the veil "gain a more epistemological scope in *The Italian*" (531). Warren's comment points to the fluidity of the veil in *The Italian*: sometimes a protective layer of the female body and a symbol of female sexuality, sometimes an epistemological barrier, other times

a means of escape, the veil's "fluid signification" epitomizes the novel's feminist strategy in presenting a masked discourse. By endowing the transparent veil with impenetrability and linking it to the power of feminine sensibility, Radcliffe resists its connotation of female vulnerability and passivity that she herself explores in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Thus, if *Udolpho* presents an ostensibly submissive paradigm but undermines it through textual ambiguities epitomized in the veil, *The Italian* reaffirms the masked message through the usage of the veil. The beginning of the novel presents this masked message through its subversion of the veil as the symbol of female chastity in the gothic tradition. As a response to Mathew Lewis' *The Monk*,[50] the novel reconfigures the veil in a way to challenge the male writer's portrayal of female submission. While Lewis' *The Monk* opens with a scene of unveiling in which the hero forcefully removes the heroine's veil to obtain a view of her face, the opening of *The Italian* revises this scene of male sexual aggression by evoking the imagery of the veil to demonstrate the power of feminine sensibility instead. When Vivaldi first meets Ellena, the narrator draws our attention to the source of attraction:

> The sweetness and fine expression of her voice attracted his attention to her figure, which had a distinguished air of delicacy and grace: but her face was concealed in her veil. So much indeed was he fascinated by the voice that a most painful curiosity was excited as to her countenance, which he fancied must express all the sensibility of character that the modulation of her tones indicated. (6)

Instead of depicting a female body that expresses sensibility, the narration here accentuates its disembodied effect: a female voice whose "modulation of tones" indicates feminine sensibility. Unlike *The Monk*, in which the hero forcefully unveils the heroine, the hero here is "embarrassed by a respectful timidity, that mingled with his admiration" (5). Not only does the depiction here

reveal the emotional impact the heroine's sensibility produces on the male character, it also

places the male character under the control of the female character. Instead of unveiling the

heroine forcefully, the hero has to await the arrival of chance: Ellena "held her veil close" – until

"the breeze from the water caught the veil" and reveals Ellena's countenance. Note that it is

nature, rather than the male, that unveils Ellena in this scene, suggesting that the male no longer

has the power over the female in this story. In fact, the subsequent portrayal of Vivaldi and

Ellena reaffirms the more egalitarian relationship between the hero and the heroine. By

subverting the male version of female submissiveness, Radcliffe's revision of the veil is not only

a continuation of Udolpho's veiling strategy but also an affirmation of the power of feminine

sensibility.[51]

Not only does the opening of the novel directly challenge the convention of the veil, but

its structure also responds to *Udolpho*'s construction of gender and presents a more explicit

message about the power of feminine sensibility. As critics have pointed out, *The Italian*'s plot

structure is a revision of its earlier novels: Vivaldi the hero becomes the puzzled protagonist who

is misled by his superstitions, while Ellena seldom succumbs to the negative influence of

feminine sensibility like Emily does. According to Robert Miles, "the hero occupies the

'feminine' role of fantasist" (*Ann Radcliffe* 151). By presenting Vivaldi as a feminized hero who

has to overcome his superstitious beliefs, the novel not only reverses gender roles but also

presents the heroine as a superior character whose strength of mind displays a stronger control of

her action than the male character. Vivaldi is often lost in the veil of his own vision, unable to

overcome his own epistemological barriers, while the veil is often a protective layer for Ellena,

aiding her to escape from her enemies. In *The Italian*, the veil is no longer the mental prison that

hinders the heroine's development in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*; instead, it represents the

strength of the female mind and becomes a feminist tool even though it is a "mobile prison" inflicted upon the heroine.[52] The re-veiling and the re-gendering of masculine and feminine sensibility thus overturns the conformist configuration of sensibility as a potential feminine weakness in *Udolpho*.

By transferring Emily's overactive imagination to Vivaldi, the novel divests the gothic heroine of her presumed weakness and endows her with the power to control her own destiny through a refined version of feminine sensibility. As the plot of the novel makes it clear, if the hero's sensibility hinders his growth, the heroine's sensibility leads her to a path of liberation. Instead of being pestered by her own fancies, Ellena possesses a sensibility whose moral power protects her from physical harm. Syndy M. Conger notes that in *The Italian* Ellena's suspicion of Spalatro proves that "sensibility [is] an instinctive survival skill" (216). I argue that sensibility not only sustains survival but is also the leading spiritual and moral power in the novel. When Schedoni attempts to murder her, the tears on her face during her sleep prevent him from committing the atrocious deed and prompt him to "argue with himself" as "a shuddering horror restrain[s] him" (234). Ellena's sensibility not only makes the villains guilty of their acts, it also changes her fate from being a target of murder into a treasure to be protected. Schedoni mistakes her for his own lost daughter and becomes her bodyguard in her journey back to her home. As we can see, *The Italian*'s reconfiguration of feminine sensibility accentuates the power of sensibility, reaffirming the regenerative values of feminine sensibility previously implicit in *Udolpho*. What is veiled previously in Udolpho is re-veiled/revealed in *The Italian*.[53]

If the novel subverts the convention of the veil and presents a stronger version of feminine sensibility, it also portrays veiling as "a feminine line of defence" (Shapira 469). In a celebration of festivals in the convent where the nuns are mingled with strangers, Ellena,

wrapped in Olivia's veil, conceals her identity and successfully escapes the convent that

imprisons her. While veiling serves as a disguise that enables her escape, I find the description of

the scene full of implications, for it presents a scene that reveals not only the physical but also

the symbolic significance of veiling:

> Near the holy father were placed the strangers of distinction, dressed in the splendid
>
> Neapolitan habit, whose gay colouring and airy elegance opposed well with the dark
>
> drapery of the ecclesiastics; their plumed hats loftily overtopping the half-cowled heads
>
> and grey locks of the monks. Nor was the contrast of countenances less striking; the
>
> grave, the austere, the solemn, and the gloomy, intermingling with the light, the
>
> blooming, and the debonaire, expressed all the various tempers, that render life a
>
> blessing ora burden, and as with the spell of magic, transform this world into a
>
> transient paradise or purgatory. (130)

While this scene alludes to the masquerade culture of the eighteenth century, it highlights the

carnivalesque manner through which Ellena escapes from the convent.[54] Despite the contrast

between the ecclesiastical order and the gay society, the depiction here underlines the

intermingling of the two cultures, which provides a malleable space in which things could turn in

opposite directions. The gay spirit in the gathering strangely evinces a sense of liberation,

defying the hegemonic control of the Abbess, whose "severe majesty" renders her "the Empress

of the scene" (130). In this scene of the carnivalesque, the veil first serves as a symbol of

femininity. While the nuns are dressed in "the interesting habit of their order" – the veil, they

nonetheless exhibit feminine gentleness that sets them apart from the rigidity of the Abbess:

"The delicacy of their air, and their beauty, softened by the lawn that thinly veiled it, were

contrasted by the severe majesty of the lady Abbess" (130). Ellena's escape under this veil of

femininity has a symbolic significance: it is not only a physical act of rebellion accomplished through the disguise offered by the veil but also a symbolic act of rebellion performed through the veil of femininity. This scene thus encapsulates the significance of the veil as a carnivalesque object whose ambiguity nurtures the possibilities for female agency.

As I have shown, by fully engaging with the fluidity of the veil, *The Italian* reconstructs *Udolpho*'s configuration of feminine sensibility and presents a powerful model of femininity through textual ambiguities. The mournful black veil in *Udolpho* transforms into a playful mask in *The Italian*. The novel's various configurations of the veil and various instances of veiling and masking allow for a new understanding of this symbol closely associated with femininity and offer a new way of understanding the novel's performative strategy. Being a primary and yet masked emblem of femininity in Radcliffe's novels, the veil carries the paradox of the genre — both confining and liberating — and embodies the genre's gothicism. It is a masked figure that not only reflects the gothic nightmares of women but also offers transformative opportunities for female agency. By engaging with the masked figure, the novels of Radcliffean thus succeed in producing female agency through the veiled, carnivalized writing.

CHAPTER 3

Spectral Femininity: Narrating the Figure of the Ghost in *Jane Eyre*

Despite *Jane Eyre*'s reputation for being a "cult text of feminism," some critics have

decried its submission to the orthodox of storytelling by female writers, seeing it as ultimately a

tale of containment in which the older Jane recounts the story of her passionate past in a

moderate, submissive tone and presents herself as a mature heroine whose spiritual growth has

allowed her to see the impropriety of her passions and thereby overcome her own passionate

nature. In these critics' eyes, Jane Eyre falls into a conventional paradigm, in which female

writers conform to the patriarchal codes of writing by presenting their tales as tales of

containment. As Bette London contends, "the novel offers the pleasures of submission –

submission to the text. And instead of the self-conception of 'the militant female subject,' we

encounter the production of 'woman'- a social and cultural construct" (199). Reading Jane's

cautionary tale as a reconstruction of "the docile body," she underlines its self-effacing gesture

and identifies the novel as a "deportment book" and the narrative as "the agent of self-

surveillance," warning against such "danger of the text" and feminist criticism's participation in

propelling such danger by lauding the novel's subversiveness (209).

While I agree with London's assessment of such danger, noting that *Jane Eyre*'s

autobiographical, Bildungsroman mode does contribute to the novel's narrative structure as a

conventional tale of containment, I also perceive in Jane's own narration a form of female agency

that is under the guise of self-effacement. In fact, Bette's own deployment of the term to depict

the novel's conformist gesture backfires: by asserting that Jane writes autobiography to

"reconstruct her story in the guise of a cautionary tale" (201), she unwittingly presents Jane's

autobiography as a guise, a masked story that could be uncovered for a different reading. Overemphasizing the novel's disciplinary gesture like London does would extenuate the significance of the novel as an acclaimed feminist text; however, ignoring Bette's warning will be similarly misleading. I argue that we should see the novel instead as a text that performs its feminist agenda through conformist strategies, for lurking behind Jane's narrative of reformation is a subversive tale of female agency. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, Jane may have appeared a disciplined character and "represse[d] her rage behind a subdued facade, but her soul's impulse to dance...has not been exorcised" (87). It is important to perceive the novel's performativity through its rhetoric, especially the rhetoric of Gothic. I argue that it is through the employment of the gothic genre that the novel deconstructs its surface tale of containment and produces a storyteller who empowers herself through her ghosted experiences.

The critical attention to the gothic element in the novel has been long-lasting. Critics such as Robert Heilman have praised Bronte for creating a "new dimension of Gothic" by discovering, releasing, and intensifying "new patterns of feelings" that "increases the sense of reality in the novel" (121, 132). Other critics notice how *Jane Eyre* relies heavily on supernatural machinery, a Gothic convention, to propel its narrative action, and they tend to characterize the novel's interventions in Jane's story a number of ways, but each reverts to the language of the supernatural to explain it.[55] Even though the critical tradition recognizes that the construction of Jane's subjectivity relies on supernatural interventions, few has paid sufficient attention to the function of the supernatural in creating a textual site of gender construction and of female agency. I argue that the novel's configuration of the ghost, a figure of ambiguity, is a site of construction for the emergence of female subjectivity. Lurking beneath Jane's conformist narrative is a more powerful representation of the female self, whose agency emerges from the

liminal figure of the ghost. In its representation of Jane's ability to take control of her supernatural powers in her ghost stories, the novel demonstrates its performative power in its construction of femininity through the figure of the ghost, producing a tale of female agency despite the surface tale of containment.

To fully understand the dynamics of power in the novel, it is important to investigate the figure of the ghost and to examine its relevance to the manifestations of powerless and powerful in Jane's narrative. It is in overlooking the figure of the ghost in their examination of the supernatural that most critics underestimate Jane's agency, which is manifest in her autobiographic narration of the ghost figure. In this chapter, I investigate Jane's path to autonomy by examining the metaphor of the ghost in the novel, and its relation to the three main supernatural events that determine the movement of the novel: the red-room drama, the Bertha episode, and the mysterious summons, since they epitomize the most perilous moments of Jane's life. I argue that while the disembodied figure of the ghost metaphorizes Jane's periled and passive position as a middle-class female subject in patriarchal society, it also acts as a transformative agent in Jane's journey to self-determination. More importantly, the ambiguity of the spectral figure in Jane's autobiographical account suggests that it is in identifying with the ghost and projecting her spectral self onto the figure of the ghost that Jane liberates herself from social oppression. It is, then, Jane's own desire that propels the narrative movement and enables the transformation of her fate. Thus, while the figure of the ghost enables Jane's escape from oppression and transforms her fate, it is ultimately the ghost narrative that lends her real agency. The ambiguity created by the figure of the ghost allows for a masked narrative of liberation. Although the novel's use of the spectral trope presents a conflicted version of femininity,

forestalling a sanguine picture of the female condition in patriarchal society, Jane's ghost storytelling proves to be a more viable form of self-empowerment.[56]

In order to fully understand the significance of ghost story-telling in the novel, it is necessary to investigate the meaning of the ghost in general and its special association with Victorian women.[57] The ghost is a figure of betweenness: one that is between the real and unreal, the living and non-living, being and non-being.[58] While it is characterized by its invisibility, ineffectivity, and insubstantiality, its very nature of betweenness also marks it as a powerful figure, a figure of "possibility" – it will always "come back," and its ultimate power lies in its ability to "see without being seen" (Derrida 10-12). Critics have long compared the invisibility of the ghost with the invisibility of Victorian women, and by extension their potential threat. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, while the Victorian woman could be idealized as the angel in the house, underneath that image lurks the forms of the demonic: the ghost or fiend. Nina Auerbach further comments on the alliance between women and ghosts, perceiving the cultural association of women with monstrosity as empowering, for the demon is "that disruptive spiritual energy which also engorges the divine. This demon is first of all the woman's familiar, the source of her ambiguous holiness, but it is also the popular - and demonic - imagination that endowed her with this holiness..." (1). Vanessa Dickerson likewise summarizes the affinity between the woman and the ghost, comparing the Victorian women's marginal position in society to the ghost's insubstantiality and liminality. All of these criticisms point to the angel-demon dialectic and the powers of horror embedded in the dialectic.[59]

This angel-demon dialectic reflects itself in the novel's representation of femininity. While Helen Burns, the novel's angel in the house, represents the ideal femininity, Bertha the demonic woman symbolizes the deviant femininity that Jane has to learn to abject in her quest

for autonomy. Ostensibly, Jane's spiritual path is one of self-surveillance, a struggle for a middle path that requires Jane to grow into a self-disciplinary subject by effectively controlling her own passions while following her heart's desire. However, if we probe into the language of Jane's autobiographical narration, especially the configuration of the ghost, we will find a masked story of self-empowerment in which Jane embraces her ghosthood to construct her subjectivity. I argue that the novel plays upon the duality of the ghost figure as a figure of narration, using it to delineate Jane's insubstantiality and invisibility as a female subject in a class-based and male-dominated society and demonstrating the subversive potential of the ghost figure as it is realized in Jane's stories about supernatural events. In Jane's narrative, the ghost appears in various forms, ranging from a metaphor for lack of identity to an atomized, self-operating body, a human embodiment of ghostliness – Bertha Mason, and the disembodied voice of Rochester. By revealing the dynamics of power behind these various forms of the ghost figure in her narration, Jane is able to construct a successful ghost story in which her projection of her spectral self transforms her from a passive female ghost to a powerful one. Thus, while the metaphor of the ghost forestalls a sanguine picture of female condition since the ghost is ultimately a figure closely related to death and annihilation, Jane's ghost story-telling proves to be more promising as a form of self-empowerment as she subverts the negative meaning associated with the ghost figure through disembodiment,[60] through her narration of her ghosted experiences.

I. Spectral Femininity: the powerless and powerful specter

While critics have long recognized the power of storytelling and read Jane's history as "the story of an empowered narrator" (Bodenheimer 98), none has discussed her role as a ghost story writer. I want to point out that Jane's value as "a feminist heroine" is embedded in her

ability to tell the ghost story, for she demonstrates herself to be a competent story writer who resorts to the figure of the ghost to construct her own subjectivity. When the demon/ghost dominates the Victorian imagination of femininity, as Auerbach asserts, Jane's ability to access the power within herself enables her to resist male domination through the ambiguous configuration of the ghost in her story.

The narrator Jane first uses the spectral motif to convey her own periled existence in her society by presenting herself as an insubstantial figure whose being is in danger of extinction. In Jane's self-representation, her existence resembles that of a ghost, a liminal figure whose presence and absence are often contingent upon people's ability to see them. The people in her world have deliberately ignored the presence of her material being and rendered her "unseen." They treat her as a nonentity and regard her as a reincarnation of an evil being. She is perceived as an "unnatural" child, "a compound of virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity" (30). Identified as a "child or fiend" (39), the younger Jane inhabits the realm of ambiguity, lingering between the natural world and the supernatural one. Vanessa Dickerson effectively summarizes Jane's plight: "In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë ultimately wrote about her heroine's ghosthood" as "the truth of her being remains as unseen and yet as present as a ghost" (50), thus highlighting the liminality of Jane's condition: Jane's social invisibility makes her "unseen" as a tangible, "present" ghost.

Dickerson, however, overlooks the link between Jane's ghosthood and the novel's construction of her femininity. Correspondent to Jane's ghostly state is her fragmented, self-operating body, not only as an orphan child, but also as a woman. Jane's narrative is shot through with the image of a fragmented, spectral body. In describing her return from a walk to a cold and hostile interior of Gateshead, Jane presents her body as a disintegrated one, denied of its

existence by its culture. Jane's narration depicts her body in fragmented forms rather than a harmonious whole as she is forced to conform to the collective will of walking: "nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened and humbled" (20). This spectral, disintegrated image of the body later frequently occurs in a feminine form as Jane describes her bodily sensations when confronting powerful male figures who dominate her life. Her representation of her own female body is frequently characterized by the images of atomization and self-operation: "My eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face: I could not keep their lids under control…and the irids would fix on him" (177); "my vitals…my marrow…my limbs" (396). Frequently using the passive voice to describe her fragmented body parts, Jane presents an image of a ghosted female body when threatened with male oppression. In presenting a spectacle of her objectified, endangered position in a society that denies her existence through her description of her ghosted, self-operating body, she associates her ghostliness with her femininity, showing her femininity as a construct shaped by cultural conditions. As Laurence Talairach - Vielmas observes, "Bronte's novel uses the spectral to examine and rewrite contemporary constructions of ideal femininity: the Gothic helps to shape Brontë's reflection on contemporary culture and aesthetics" (50). Jane's association of spectrality with femininity thus suggests the insubstantiality of the female position in a patriarchal society and women's spectral role in a male-centered material world.

In using the Gothic motif of specter, the narrator Jane presents the debilitating effect of cultural exclusion of women as the Other through Jane's ghosted experience. Objectified as an insubstantial figure whose being is in danger of extinction, the child Jane internalizes her own spectrality and becomes a haunting spectacle at Gateshead. Rendered invisible and fiendish by her relatives, she is often ordered to stay away from the Reeds, who regard her as a fiend, a mean spirit. She frequently inhabits the space of intersection such as the window seat and occupies the

shadowy place – the "solitary and silent nursery," while often making sure that "nothing worse than myself haunted the shadowy room" (40). Internalizing others' perception of her as a ghostly being, Jane comes to identify herself with the ghost. Observing Jane's reaction to other's objectification of her, Dickerson comments, "Even Jane herself voluntarily turns herself over to spectralness" (56). The young Jane becomes a passive, vulnerable ghost subject to others' objectification of her in the mature Jane's narrative. The narrator Jane uses the word "worse" to indicate her negative state as she accepts others' definition of her as a fiend and considers herself a "bad thing." The child Jane's reaction to the ghost figure is repulsive at first. When she encounters "the fiend" in Bewick's "History of British Birds," she "passed over quickly: it was an object of horror" (21).

However, Jane's narration shows that the figure of specter is also a figure capable of resistance. As Vielmas suggests, "The specter, of course, remains an ambiguous figure, capable of defying boundaries: it functions as a significant symbol of femininity, simultaneously signaling Jane's adherence to feminine conventions and subverting it" (53). But Vielmas pays little attention to the textual construction of Jane's spectrality. It is through Jane's representation of herself as a ghosted, self-operating body that Jane succeeds in subverting feminine conventions by endowing her own passive body with transformative power. In her fight with John Reed, Jane describes her resistance as unconscious: "I don't very well know what I did with my hands, but he called me 'Rat! rat!' and bellowed out aloud" (24). Resisting John's version of herself as a malicious animal – "rat," Jane invests her body with the quality of ghostliness instead. She delineates her body as one associated with an alien force that renders her "out of [herself]." Indignant at Mrs. Reed's prejudice against her, she articulates her "scarcely voluntary" objection: "as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their

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utterance: something spoke out of me over which I had no control" (39). Critics have been split on the representation of the link between Jane's physical and psychological control in this scene. In observing Jane as a passive object of forces, Heather Glen writes, Jane's feelings are "represented less as impulses emanating from herself than as entities with lives of their own" (169). In contrast, James Buzard identifies the force that drives Jane as "an impersonal force that disdains to be thought the servant of this or that self, and that uses the self as its agent and vehicle" (203). But as we have seen, both critics fail to observe the subtlety of agency implied by Jane's spectralized body and the dynamics behind the narration of Jane's bodily language. Operated by an alien force, Jane's body demonstrates transformative potential in the body's out-of-control actions. Jane's use of negatives – "don't," "without" – in her description demonstrates that agency derives from negation, from her denunciation of her conscious control, while the conditional modifier – "as if" – presents the possibility of her control. Jane's narration thus implies that her agency lies in her conscious disembodiment, a strategic negation of her material body.

In fact, Jane's narrative is full of implications of the transformative potential of the ghost. Even in the incipient stage of Jane's ghosthood, the transformative possibilities embodied in the specter are informed in an oft-discussed passage in which Jane not merely describes but also stages herself as a spectral figure. Dismissed by Ms. Reed, who accuses her of being "unchildlike," Jane retreats into a shadowy area: "I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined in double retirement" (20). As Vielmas writes, "as Jane makes herself invisible she simultaneously constructs herself as a picture, as the term "mount" could intimate. The red curtain and the window before and behind her enhance even more the effect of dramatization by

suggesting a stage" (51). If, like Vilemas suggests, Jane is staging her invisibility here, her performance of her spectrality has a double symbolic meaning. Jane's self-enshrinement indicates her coming to accept her ghostliness as a form of life. The redness of the curtain also implies the birth of womanhood through the performative gesture of self-ghosting. In drawing on the symbol of womanhood to delineate her ghostly position, the narrator Jane foreshadows her rebirth as an active, powerful female ghost in this passage. The fact that Jane describes her occupation of the liminal space as an act of ascendance by using the word "mount" is also self-revealing. In presenting the liminal position as an elevated one, Jane hints at the power of the position. Thus, while Jane's narration presents herself as a cultural other, a female ghost, her narration suggests that, embedded in the liminality of her position is the possibility of turning her own passivity into agency.

Jane's determination to subvert the negative meaning of her spectral femininity is further implied in her claim that "The fact is, I was a trifle beside myself; or rather out of myself" when explaining her rebellion against the Reeds (24). She derives agency from her strategy of disembodiment, the strategy of extracting "out of herself" the mysterious power of the specter. The ensuing result of Jane's rebellion is the further objectification/spectralization of Jane and Jane's volition to rebel: Mrs. Reed "gazed at me as if she really did not know whether I were child or fiend. I was now in for it" (39). Deliberately identifying herself with a "fiend," Jane begins her resistance with the power invested in her ghostly body. By declaring that she is "in for it," Jane not only expresses her determination in participating in the power game but also presents the dynamics of the game to us: by being "out of" herself and "in[to]" the body of the ghost, she is able to participate "in" the power game from which she has been excluded by her society. Thus, to be "out" and "in" the power game measures Jane's ability to be "out of" her

culturally condemned body and into the body of a ghost, a power she has yet to obtain through

strategy and deliberation in her supernatural encounters, or rather, in her making of the

supernatural. By choosing to identify herself with the ghost and refiguring herself as a ghost in

her story, she proceeds to tell a subversive tale of disembodiment in which she progresses from a

negative state of spectrality to a positive one.

As we have seen, the narrator Jane produces a story of her ghosthood in Gateshead

through the spectral motif. As Alison A. Case remarks, the narrator Jane often "stresses her

childhood artlessness, continually calling attention to the unpremediated, even involuntary,

quality of her acts of self-assertion" (92), while such "Emphasis on the involuntary quality of

Jane's acts of self-assertion props up her credibility at the expanse of her self-control" (93).

While Case pays little attention to the spectrality in Jane's story and therefore misses Jane's

rhetoric in narrating a gothic narrative, her comment indeed testifies Jane's credibility as a

narrator who has achieved rational control over her emotions and is narrating her past from "the

distance of -- I will not say how many years" (27). Creating "the distance between the

experiencing and narrating selves," Jane's "dissonant narration" allows her to present herself as a

mature narrator/character who has learned to repress her unnatural self, [61] while maintaining the

"doubleness of perspective" and undermining that repression with her use of spectrality as a

"privileged rhetoric" (Warhol 861, 863). The unnatural, ghostly child Jane, cast away in the

distanced past, is adept at self-assertion without directly offending the fastidious Victorian

audience;[62] the narrator Jane, moreover, empowers her past self through her rhetoric of

ghostliness, thereby subverting the oppressive ideologies of the Victorian society.

II. The Making of the Supernatural

As publicly recognized, Jane's narrative is a gothic story in which she encounters male oppressors as well as the female ghost who represents the dark side of Jane and has to learn to cope with both of these external and internal dark forces in order to achieve autonomy. As Margaret Homans rightly asserts, Bronte "uses the Gothic with ambivalence and uses her ambivalence to protest the objectification of the feminine that the Gothic enacts" (116). In noticing the association of femininity with ghostliness, Vanessa Dickerson similarly perceives Bronte's use of the supernatural to delineate women's ambivalent position. However, these critics have read the gothic/supernatural as an emblem of Jane's imperiled position and considered its function as representational; none of them has recognized its performative and productive function – a "motor force" devised by the narrator herself to construct her own subjectivity.[63]

Compared to those critics, my reading emphasizes the productive function of the supernatural, engendered by Jane's own ambiguous narration. In my reading, it is through her ghost narrative that Jane constructs her own subjectivity by identifying with the female ghost and thereby gains agency. While supernatural encounters in the story enable her to escape social oppression, it is important to recognize Jane's own role in making the supernatural. Peter Brooks' theory on plotting is useful here for our understanding of Jane's narrative power. According to Brooks, plot is "the dynamic shaping force of the narrative discourse" (13); "the organizing line of plot is more often than not some scheme or machination, a concerted plan for the accomplishment of some purpose which goes against the ostensible and dominant legalities of the fictional world, the realization of a blocked and resisted desire" (12). If Jane has faithfully presented a story of her spiritual growth, she conceals her role as a plotter in her story while secretly realizing her desire through her configuration of the ghost. By employing the spectral

trope, she endows the character Jane with an agency that enables her to escape the gothic enclosures in her life.

An examination of the redroom drama will serve to illustrate my point. Jane's spectrality first, and most famously, evinces its transformative power in the red-room drama, which enables Jane's escape from the stifling enclosure of Gateshead. In my reading, Jane is not so much a terrified child driven to the extremity of madness, which critics have often observed to be the case, as a child fascinated with her ghostliness in her exposure to the supernatural. Her first reaction after she is thrown into the chamber of her dead uncle is to check whether the door is locked. In describing this gesture of checking, the narrator Jane reminds the reader of her earlier gesture – to make sure no one else but she herself "haunts the room." Presenting this act as a gesture of territorialization, Jane's narration suggests that her feelings at the time are more complex than mere terror. In fact, as the diction in the following passage shows us, Jane's feelings at the moment of imprisonment are a combination of terror and fascination. Instead of simply delineating her as a terror-stricken child, the narrator Jane curiously addresses her fascination under the circumstances:

I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp. (26)

Although fear is present in Jane's emotions, it is certainly not the only emotion Jane experiences at the time. Jane's fascination with her ghostliness, exemplified by her "fascinated glance," allows her to see through the surface of the mirror, which reveals a "strange little figure," and

probe into its "depth." What she discovers in the looking glass, as Dickerson puts, is "the reality of her own ghostliness" (59); "Jane sees directly, in 'a flash of sacred terror,'[…]'the realization of her powers,' the wonder of her self" (60). Jane has indeed found a figure not so much a stranger to her; the "tiny phantom, half fairy, half imp" is one whom she has been acquainted with in Bessie's evening stories. And her reaction to the ghost figure has certainly changed: rather than "pass[ing] over it" upon seeing the "object of terror," an evasive attitude she undertook last time, she is now "fascinated" by the image and decides to explore its "depth." As we can see, the narrator Jane presents an image of an enlightened child here. Jane's diction allows us to perceive a hidden narrative in her depiction of the child Jane's discovery as a fortuitous event. As the word "involuntarily" suggests, the child Jane has discovered the wonder of her spectral self by accident, by involuntary exploration of the depth of the realm of the supernatural presented to her by the mirror. In contrast to the previous description of her involuntary, passive reactions to others' mistreatments of her, here Jane uses "involuntary" to imply her own awakening at the fortuitous moment. The accidental exploration is significant as it marks a starting point in Jane's spiritual pilgrimage. "Cross[ing]" the mirror that reveals to her the reality of her ghostliness, Jane is going to cross the cruel human world and enter the "hollow" realm of the supernatural. Jane uses the word "cross" to signify her crossing from one world to another, to one that liberates her from social oppression. The visionary "hollow," another word suggesting "depth," also signifies the depth of the ghostly world Jane is going to explore, suggesting her agency in turning the surface into a "hollow" realm of the ghost. In using the diction tinged with spiritual connotations, Jane narrates her fascination with the gothic chamber, implying that her spectrality prompts her to explore the power of the demonic side imposed on her by others.

If the spectral figure in the mirror reflects Jane's own ghostliness, Jane's ambiguous narration reveals that it is precisely the ghostly figure that inspires her to evoke her uncle's spirit, an external specter, thereby enabling her to escape from the social enclosure of Gateshead. As Dickerson observes, in perceiving the reality of her ghostliness, Jane "turns to the mirror and to the thoughts of her dead uncle" (62), retreating into another world. Yet it is no coincidence that Jane's thoughts about her uncle's ghost occur right after her reflection on her ghostliness: "a strange child…an uncongenial alien" (28). Her following description suggests that the evocation of her uncle's spirit is inspired by her own ghostly image: "as I sat looking at the white bed and overshadowed walls – occasionally also turning a fascinated eye towards the dimly gleaming mirror – I began to recall what I had heard of dead men…and I thought Mr. Reed's spirit" (29). Jane depicts an image of a child who is fascinated with her ghostliness and endeavors to empower herself through the figure of the ghost. Her "fascinated eye" searches for the opportunity embedded in her ghostliness, which is symbolically suggested by the depth of the mirror. Presenting the possibility as "occasioned" by her fascination with the mirror, this passage underscores Jane's agency in seizing the occasion to invoke her uncle's spirit. Referring to the tales of dead men and ghosts as the memory of her past, Jane, in declaring "I began to recall," is announcing her affinity with the specter and demonstrating her progress toward a supernatural pilgrimage in the temporality of the sentence. Thus, although Jane claims that a preternatural voice is "consolatory in theory" and "terrible if realized," she nevertheless welcomes her uncle's ghost with her uncontrolled body: "prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation" (29). Here, her uncle's ghost becomes a vehicle for liberation, allowing her to exhibit her own ghostliness: Jane succumbs to her passion upon "seeing" the ghost, which ultimately leads to her departure from Gateshead.

In fact, Jane's ambiguous narration of the event hints at the possibility that the ghost is a result of her narrative invention. Jane remains composed and collected after seeing her own ghostly reflection: "Superstition was with me at that moment; but it was not yet her hour for complete victory…I had to stem a rapid rush of retrospective thought before I quailed to the dismal present" (27). Little affected by the figure of the ghost, she is not ready to "quail" as she is claimed by her own rebellious body, "the mood of the revolted slave" (27). Superstition has to yield to the decision of the "I" who is in the position of control and delays the effect of superstition. Jane is in the position of "stemming," the position of restraining and deciding what effects should come first. Jane's checking upon herself, implied by the word "stem" here, indicates that "quailing" to the terror is a conscious choice as Jane goes through a process of meditation: "I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there;…a heterogeneous thing,…a useless thing,…a noxious thing" (28). That Jane's thought process ends with the notion of her "noxiousness," a quality constantly associated by her elders with a fiend, is quite telling: while ruminating on her heterogeneity and her own social vulnerability, Jane turns to her fiendishness and deliberately claims it as her nature. As we can see, Jane's ambiguous narration suggests that the child Jane defies her superiors' definition of "fiendishness" as a condemned quality and endows it with a positive meaning.

Jane thus proceeds to tell an empowering ghost story with her ambiguous statement that "a singular notion dawned upon me" while she discovers her ghostly reflection. Like a person who perceives a light in the dark, Jane presents herself as one "dawned," in other words, illuminated by the "singular notion." Declaring that she resolves to "instigate some strange expedient to achieve escape from unsupportable oppression – as running away, or, if that could not be affected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die" (27), Jane indicates that

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the "strange expedient" she eventually resorts to is the "strange" body of the ghost, the externalization of the "strange figure" she sees in the mirror, as she specifically refers to the possibility of dying, a concept closely connected with the figure of the ghost. Thus, with a mind attuned to gothic stories, Jane finds a way of escaping from the gothic enclosure by inventing a ghost story in her mind that the narrator Jane explains as a product of imagination, or rather, deliberate imagination, as we have seen. She perceives a light on the wall and readily identifies it as her uncle's ghost. In this story that highlights the role of Jane's spectrality, the ghost of her uncle could be seen as the effect of her spectral projection. The narrator Jane confirms this possibility while she concludes this episode with an ambiguous remark without offering further explanation: "I suppose I had a species of fit: unconsciousness closed the scene" (30). Distancing herself from the experiencing self at the moment, the narrator Jane nevertheless presents an ambiguous ghost story in which the character Jane plots her own storyline through her ghosthood.

Thus, Jane's identification with the ghost shapes Jane's future: by projecting her own spectral self into the external ghost body of her uncle in her narration, Jane saves herself from the fate of extinction; she is sent to Lowood school after this incident and thereby escapes from the enclosure of Gateshead. Her attempts to describe her supernatural encounter to Mr. Lloyd, although proved futile, lead to the escape. As Mary Poovey puts, "Jane's ability to tell (if not direct) her own story" earns Jane "the precarious independence" (*Uneven Developments* 140). The apothecary, while discrediting her ghost story, decides that Jane's ghost story shows her "nerves not in a good state" and she "ought to have change of air and scene" and therefore suggests her removal from Gateshead to her aunt (37). In the chamber of the uncle whose will is violated by his widow, Jane's evocation of the ghost subverts the passivity associated with the

figure of the ghost, empowering herself with her own spectrality. Although the novel's superficial plotline shows that the child Jane will be learning to curb her passions, the narrator Jane subverts the surface tale with the spectral motif, showing that Jane's embracement of her ghosthood conditions and effects her escape. Jane's fascination with her ghosthood becomes the "motor forces that drive the text forward" (Brooks xiii), proving to be the desire that plots and marks the meaning of the narrative. More importantly, the narrator Jane's ghost narrative makes use of the supernatural power associated with the Victorian women,[64] turning the vulnerable child-woman into a powerful specter who plots her own story.

III. The Liberating Specter: Bertha the Human Ghost and Jane the Ghostly Priest

As a female protagonist who struggles for autonomy and egalitarian relationship, Jane has to undergo several ordeals to achieve self-determination. Centered around this line of development, Jane's story resorts to conventional gothic tropes to present her own growth as a character. If the red-room incident is, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, one of the episodes of "enclosure and escape" in the novel (68), the second crisis of Jane's life occurs in her Thornfield sojourn, in which she is not only a ghostly woman herself but she also encounters a human ghost, Bertha Mason, "Jane's truest, darkest double" (Gilbert and Gubar 85). As Gilbert and Gubar write, Jane's encounter with Bertha is "an encounter...not with her own sexuality but with her own imprisoned 'hunger, rebellion, and rage,' a secret dialogue of self and soul on whose outcome...the novel's plot, Rochester's fate, and Jane's coming-of-age all depend" (66). Jane's success of her own story thus crucially relies on her rendition of their relationship, for she is to become a character who learns to repress her own darkest desires, therefore Bertha, in her narrative in order to produce a "socialized" narrative style.[65] I argue that although she condemns

her ghostly double as a demonic woman in her superficial tale, her dynamic figuration of the ghostly woman offers an alternative reading, showing her own affinity with Bertha and her own role in plotting the emergence of Bertha.

During her sojourn in Thornfield, Jane again faces the danger of extinction as she is rendered invisible by Rochester and his aristocratic friends. Jane's analogy of herself as the liminal figure of the ghost is persistent; Jane constantly occupies the liminal spaces, taking a window seat or hiding behind the curtains, excluded from the game of her social superiors. However, her retreat into the shadowy area of Thornfield is accompanied with her consciousness of the vantage of her liminal position: "screened by the curtain, I could see without being seen" (169). In her stroll around the orchard, Jane observes, "No nook in the grounds more shelter and more Eden-like…Here one could wander unseen…I felt as if I could haunt such shade for ever" (247). The images of haunting are prevalent in this period of Jane's life, and the narrator Jane highlights Jane's awareness of her own spectrality and its protective function – she has found "shelter" and "Eden" in her ghostly territory. As we can see, Jane's narrative plays on the duality of the spectral figure. While others' spectralization of her signals her vulnerability as a spectral figure, Jane's self-spectralization, in contrast, serves as a sign of agency as she recognizes its subversive potential.

Jane's figuration of the duality of the ghost figure is also evident in Rochester's mystification of Jane: his metaphorization of Jane as a ghostly figure simultaneously reveals Jane's vulnerable state under male domination and her capacity to resist it. As Susan Weisser points out, Rochester does not fix and imprison Jane in a social context (61); instead, he elevates Jane above the human world by assigning her to the supernatural realm. Contrary to the Reeds who demonize Jane and compare her to a fiendish child, Rochester mystifies Jane and likens her

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to the more benevolent supernatural creature – "good genii," "malicious elf," "sprite,"
"changeling," "angel, "fairy" (271), admitting his inability to understand and define her. He
laments over his incapacity to grasp her: "as if [she] were a dream or a shade…She comes from
the other world – from the abode of people who are dead…If I dared, I'd touch you, to see if you
are substance or shadow – but I'd as soon offer to take hold of a blue ignis fatuus light in a
marsh" (244). Compared to her childhood experience, Jane's spectrality takes on a more positive
meaning here, representing the transcendent, mysterious power that enamors Rochester, who is
unable to "take hold of" her "substance or shadow."

Ironically, as Helena Michie points out, Rochester's mystification of Jane results in the
further objectification of Jane. Rochester's mystification "disguises a sinister implication that she
has no flesh of her own," Michie comments, "Rochester insists to Jane that she is an elf, a goblin,
a fairy, ethereal….In his eyes, Jane does not need physical sustenance; her 'otherworldliness' is
his expression of her lack of physical presence…Rochester's assumption that Jane has no body,
no physical needs…is demeaning and potentially fatal to Jane" (25, 50). Rochester's
spectralization of Jane "effaces Jane and her needs" and further objectifies Jane. Jane herself
senses the danger of Rochester's sinister mystification and attempts to resist it, as her narration
shows. Although she is driven by her desire to submerge herself for Rochester, she declares,
"I'm not an angel…you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me;" "I had rather be
a thing than an angel" (258-60). Refusing to be idealized as a "celestial" being, the angel that is
the opposite of the ghost, Jane insists on her non-celestial nature, deliberately identifying herself
with the ghost, the demonic "thing" her aunt often names her. Thus, by constructing her
subjectivity through the figure of the ghost, Jane contrives a ghost narrative through which she
resists Rochester's domination, although she has to publicly deny the ghostly woman.

Not only does Jane configure her own subjectivity through the spectral trope, she also conjures up a human ghost in her story, a specter that is "Jane's surrogate" and the "avatar of Jane" – Bertha.[66] Jane, who declares that she is now "used to the sight of the demon" (279), hints at her affinity with the ghost and her embracement of her own spectral power. Jane's affinity with Bertha is, as many critics have observed, implied by their similar position in Thornfield. While both are rendered invisible, Bertha's existence serves as a mirror to Jane's peril. Bertha's physical presence disillusions her, making her realize that her seemingly egalitarian relationship with Rochester is only an imaginary veneer, and that she, like Bertha, has been subordinated and rendered ghostly and invisible by Rochester. It is no wonder, then, after seeing Bertha's ghostly image in the mirror, that Jane discovers another strange image of "Mrs. Rochester" when she sees her own reflection: "a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger" (284). Here, the narrator Jane reenacts the red-room drama, reminding us of her terrifying yet transformative experience with a similar image of a "stranger." Unlike the child Jane who only begins to explore her spectral power, the adult Jane here recognizes clearly her own spectrality and refuses to claim the stranger "robed and veiled" by Rochester as her "usual self." Jane, in addressing herself as "Mrs. Rochester" before the wedding ceremony, secretly acknowledges her affinity with Bertha and identifies herself with the female ghost in Thornfield. Thus, in narrating Bertha the strange female ghost and turning herself into a "stranger" in her narration, Jane subtly and covertly collapses the boundaries between Bertha and herself. Jane's claim that it is "the second time" in her life that she "became insensible from terror" upon seeing the specter is highly suggestive: like the ghost of her uncle, Bertha's existence offers her a second opportunity to fight against male domination (281).

If Jane herself has insinuated her affinity with Bertha, Jane's narrative soon reveals that Bertha is the medium through which Jane liberates herself from male domination. By turning Bertha from an invisible ghost into a visible being, Jane not only exercises her power of making the other but also of making her self. As Gibert and Gubar point out, Bertha's existence is an impediment paradoxically raised by Jane (85). In fact, Jane's own account suggests that Bertha's emergence is Jane's own making. Although Jane has not had a direct encounter with Bertha, Bertha's "demonic laugh" increases her anxiety about her relationship with Rochester. With the anxiety heightened by Rochester's attempt to objectify her by dressing her, she writes a letter to her uncle in the hope to procure financial security and thereby secure her own position. This letter, as it turns out, leads to the emergence of Bertha whose physical presence becomes the legal predicament to her marriage and gives Jane an ample excuse to escape from Rochester's domination. As Jane's retelling of her story shows, if Jane has not actively staged Bertha's emergence, she certainly participates in the process of making Bertha emerge out of the imprisoning attic. Thus, Jane's own action shapes the plot of her story; she is the inadvertent plotter of her own story,[67] if not a conscious one.

Jane's self-representation in describing her strong desire to see "the invisible thing" prior to the marriage ceremony particularly points to her making of the ghost: "my heart was with my eyes, and both seemed migrated into Mr. Rochester's frame. I wanted to see the invisible thing" (285). Full of implications, this description first suggests that the invisible thing, the invisible body of Bertha that has been effaced by Rochester, is going to be made present by Jane's desire. Jane's representation of herself in this scene also signifies the growth of Jane's spectral power. Jane's body symbolically invades the secret territory of Rochester, making Bertha emerge out of

the patriarchal frame, the attic that has confined her. Jane describes her unusual composure in

learning of Bertha's existence, suggesting her anticipation of the event:

> My nerves vibrated to those low-spoken words as they had never vibrated to thunder –
>
> My blood felt their subtle violence as it had never felt frost or fire: but I was collected,
>
> and in no danger of swooning. I looked at Mr. Rochester: I made him look at
>
> me….Without speaking; without smiling; without seeming to recognize in me a human
>
> being, he only twined my waist with his arm, and riveted me to his side. (287)

Jane's description of her composure suggests that she has certainly anticipated and made this

outcome, the outcome of Bertha's emergence. By making Rochester look at her, she demands

Rochester's confrontation with her. Interestingly, the narrator Jane hints at her own ghostly

nature by describing Rochester's non-recognition. Jane is no longer "a human being" but an

evanescent creature whom Rochester "twines" and "rivets" in vain. In Jane's story, by making

the invisible Bertha visible, Jane defeats Rochester who tries to efface Bertha's body as well as

her own. She thus realized her own supernatural power, which is symbolically suggested by her

ghostly body here. In fact, Jane's attempts to disembody herself are evident in her command of

her own body when she tries to resist Rochester's power: "No; you shall tear yourself away,

none shall help you: you shall, yourself, pluck out your right eye: yourself cut off your right

hand: your heart shall be the victim; and you, the priest, to transfix it" (294). This command, as

we are told, is issued by "a judge haunted" (294), namely, the voice of the ghost in her. Thus,

realizing that only by dismembering herself can she elude male grasping, Jane resorts to the

transformative power of the specter, symbolically turning her body into the disembodied figure

of the ghost in this scene and asserting victory over Rochester. In explicitly demanding that she

act as a priest to dismember and transfix her own heart, Jane identifies herself as a priest who

carries out the act of disembodiment. Jane's representation of herself as a ghostly priest thus demonstrates her spiritual growth: she has progressed in her supernatural pilgrimage, if we recall her earlier neophyte state in the red-room drama.

Thus, if Jane directs the action of her narrative by conjuring up the human ghost, Jane's own narration of the event suggests her real agency. By turning herself into the body of a ghost in her narrative, Jane realizes her power as Rochester has predicted: "seized against your will you will elude the grasp like an essence – you will vanish ere I inhale your fragrance" (313). Despite Rochester's attempts to "twine" and "rivet" Jane, Jane eludes his grasping and escapes from Thornfield. She has literally realized her power as a ghost, the power she claims to possess earlier in her rejection of Rochester's objectification: "I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: - it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are!" (252). The power of the ghost as a figure Jane invents in her self-description is evident here as Jane insists that it is her "spirit," not "mortal flesh," that "pass[es] through the grave" – the ghostly spirit, not "mortal flesh," that is conversing with Rochester and demanding to be his equal. By playing the verbal game of "in" and "out" through her figuration of the ghost, the narrator Jane presents Jane's transformation from an insubstantial ghost into a triumphant self.

Alison Case has identified Jane as an "artful manipulator" who "project[s] the image of sinister plotting woman onto Bertha (99). The artful strategy testifies Jane's power as a Gothic narrator who retroactively writes her own ghost story. As we recall, the character Jane has attempted to tell a Gothic story to Rochester by recounting her dreams in which Bertha tears her wedding veil. However, Rochester dismisses it as a product of her fantasy. Bodenheimer points out that Jane's role as a Gothic narrator is a dangerous one, as "it allows Rochester to maintain

his hold over Jane's imagination" (109, 110). While I agree that Jane hasn't been a mature Gothic tale-teller at this point in the story, unlike Bodenheimer who sees Jane "in the position of losing control her own story" when she assumes the role of a Gothic storyteller (110), I argue that it is precisely through the gothic storytelling that Jane empowers herself as she plots Bertha's emergence both in her life and in her narrative.

IV. Mysterious Summons: The Ghost Voice in Jane

Jane's ghost narrative reaches its climax at Moor House, a place where Jane faces the hardest ordeal in her life and undergoes the final process of turning herself from a vulnerable ghost into an active agent, through its "making" of a final ghost, the voice of Rochester. Although Moor House appears less confining and stifling, Jane is faced with a mortal enemy who exerts the highest power in patriarchal society. Although St. John rescues Jane when she is dying, as Eugenia DeLamotte suggests, "the rescue men seem to offer women is often one with the Gothic perils those women hope to escape" (226). St. John, God's representative, proves to be Jane's most powerful enemy against whom she has to fight to ensure her autonomy. Jane's spectrality, as Dickerson observes, is more prominent in this period of Jane's life as a result of St. John's objectification of her. When Jane arrives at Moor House, she appears to be "a mere spectre" to the Rivers (331). Interestingly, the narrator Jane presents her own spectral figure in a more positive light in this stage of her life. Jane is no longer an involuntary ghost who is passively spectralized by others and rendered invisible. On the contrary, Jane's narration presents her as self-empowering ghost. Jane's nature as "air" is figuratively realized in this part of the story. She refuses to give an account of her identity, thereby exerting her power by concealing

her identity to reject male definition. In this sense, she becomes more and more unidentifiable as she exercises the power of abstraction and disembodiment.

However, the debilitating effect of spectralization is also stronger this time as she is confronted with the strongest male representative. Jane offers an account of St. John's debilitating influence on her own being through her descriptions of their relationship. Unlike Rochester who is enamored by Jane's mysterious power and yet unable to define her, St. John finds Jane unattractive as a woman; it is also he who discovers Jane's identity and redefines her as Jane Eyre. Under the domination of a man who represents God's power, Jane's ghostly power diminishes. She "felt under a freezing spell… could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by" (389). She is mesmerized under St. John's "ever-watchful blue eye" and "felt for the moment superstitious – as if I were sitting in the room with something uncanny" (388). Here, the female ghost is confronted with God's representative; his "preternatural gaze" surpasses Jane's own ghostly power, demanding Jane's surrender: "I was tempted to cease struggling with him – to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own…I could resist St. John's wrath: I grew pliant as a reed under his kindness" (408). Jane's narration presents the power struggle she experiences as a female ghost. If Jane is empowered by her spectrality, St. John's preternatural gaze seems to devitalize her power and threaten to eliminate Jane's being. The power relation between St. John and Jane again demonstrates the duality of the spectral figure, as the narrative shows.

However, what finally liberates Jane from St. John's domination is again a ghost figure, described by Jane in an auditory form this time as the voice of Rochester. At the fatal moment of submission when Jane is driven by her impulse to submit to St. John, she is rescued by the supernatural call of Rochester, the "mysterious summons" that drives her back to Rochester.

While critics often read this supernatural event as evidence of Jane's lack of agency, Jane's own account of the clairvoyant communion suggests otherwise: the true agent in the transformative scene is the ghostly body of Jane herself. Calling for the supernatural interventionat the fatal moment: "Show me, show me the path! I entreated of Heaven" (409), Jane, however, turns inwardly to her inner being, resorting to the power of her body:

> My heart beat fast and thick: I heard its throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were now summoned, and forced to wake. They rose expectant: eye and ear waited, which the flesh quivered on my bones. (409)

As Robin Sherlock points out, in this scene, Jane's body emanates transgressive desire; it is "Jane's body that senses desire first; Rochester's voice merely reverberates its force" (100). Pointing to the importance of the body in the scene, Sherlock identifies the desire of Jane's body as the precursor of Rochester's voice. Yet he overlooks the body's supernatural function in producing Rochester's voice. As described by Jane, her body not only senses desire as Sherlock contends, but it also responds to her desire actively, expecting and waiting for the miracle to happen. Notice that Jane's bodily sensations here are not presented as merely physical reactions; Jane's body has become a ghostly one, absorbing her physical body and emanating supernatural signs with "quivered flesh." By making clear that it is her heart, her feeling that acts on her senses and awakens her body, Jane is suggesting in her narrative that it is her will that produces Rochester's voice and that her own spectralized body provides a conduit toward her inner self

and finds her power within. Again, Jane's desire propels her own narrative, shaping the action of her own ghost story.

Jane's narration further responds to Jane's desire through the figure of the ghost. As Jane later ruminates on the source of the voice, she declares that the voice:

> seemed in me – not in the external world….it had opened the doors of the soul's cell, and loosed its bands – it had awakened it out of its sleep, whence it sprang trembling, listening, aghast; then vibrated thrice a cry on my startled ear, and in my quaking heart, and through my spirit; which neither feared nor shook, but exulted as if in joy over the success of one effort it had been privileged to make, independent of the cumbrous body.
>
> (411)

As this description suggests, the voice in Jane emancipates Jane from her own body. If the body has been tempted to turn itself into an object, Jane's internal voice, the voice of the specter in her, produces "the success of one effort" and relieves her from the burden of her "cumbrous body." Jane's narration of this event abounds in symbolic connotations. The voice of Jane, which at the time was interpreted as Rochester's, symbolizes her strategic disembodiment at the fatal moment. Jane introduces another form of the ghost here, utilizing the nature of the voice as an (auditory) presence and material absence, a feature with which the ghost figure shares, and proceeding to narrate another ghost story in which the voice serves as a symbolic manifestation of the ghostly body. Thus, it is again the ghost that liberates Jane from a direful situation, although it appears in the form of the voice in her story this time. Jane further confirms this by describing her vision of the ghost at the fatal moment: she perceives a "spectre rose up black by the black yew at the gate" when she hears the voice of Rochester. Her narration thus suggests that the voice is the specter in this scene that acts as a transformative agent; it is the projection of

her inner, spectral self onto the external world, onto the voice of Rochester and her own, that delivers her from male subjection. Juxtaposing the rise of the specter with the rise of her senses in the previous passage, Jane implies that the specter comes from within, "rising up" at the fatal moment and acting as the liberating agent. Upon "hearing" Rochester's voice, which Jane justifies as a supernatural instruction that directs her to the right path, Jane is able to resist St. John's proposal and thereby escape the fate St. John designs for her.

Jane, therefore, succeeds in telling a subversive tale of self-empowerment through her story of disembodiment, through her description of the ghost figure in her supernatural narrative. As Jane declares triumphantly, "I broke from St. John; who had followed, and would have detained me. It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play, and in force" (410). She becomes the voice and the "air" in this scene, transforming into a spectral, transcendent self. Jane, in her narration of the moment, again hints at her elevated position as a ghost, whom St. John "follow[s]" and "detain[s]" in vain, with the word "ascendancy." Her curious use of the word "play" in declaring her triumph highlights the fact that she has been playing a game, the game of the ghost in the dynamics of "in" and "out," in her fight for autonomy. She has, as she herself claims, "assume[d] ascendency," ascending into the realm of the supernatural, realizing her nature as air, the nature implied by the pun in her name. When she appears to Rochester when she finds him, she is invisible to Rochester, literally becoming the air that Rochester has grasped in vain. She has become the powerful ghost in front of her powerless lover. Her strategy of disembodiment thus liberates her, enabling her transcendence above the confines of patriarchal discourse.

Interestingly, when Rochester communicates the "mysterious summons" to Jane, Jane listens to Mr. Rochester's narrative, "but made no disclosure in return" (436). As critics have

suggested, Jane's withholding of the information indicates that Rochester is not the ideal interlocutor.[68] Jane's curious address of the reader as the judge of the clairvoyant communication – "whether what followed was the effect of excitement, the reader shall judge" – suggests that the reader is chosen as her ideal interlocutor, to whom she reveals that the supernatural intervention is only a fictional disguise for her strategy of disembodiment. By choosing the reader as her interlocutor and excluding Rochester from her discourse, Jane reserves the right to interpret and claims her control over her narrative and chooses "the fit audience" for her "women's narration" of her gothic experience (Kaplan 25). As Carla Kaplan suggests, Jane's withholding her own story from Rochester is "performative" as it resists Rochester's power without appearing to do so (25). The autobiographic form of narration further allows her to obscure the nature of the "mysterious summons" without giving a plausible explanation. Thus, as the novel approaches its end, Jane transforms from the insubstantial, weak specter into a powerful ghost who exercises the power of abstraction over the male characters. In her journey towards selfhood, Jane has matured into an active ghostly agent – she no longer relies on an external medium such as the mirror, or Bertha, to realize her power; she seeks the ghost in herself and finds the transformative agent within herself with the aid of the "divine" intervention.

Although critics such as Helen Moglen have argued that the ending of Jane Eyre signals the creation of feminist myth as the novel's aggressive, even sadistic 'masculinity' is contained within the humbled and broken hero whom Jane ultimately nourishes and sustains (60), I've proposed to read the novel's feminism and the character's agency through the lens of the Gothic genre, for I perceive a more cogent narrative of female self-empowerment through ghost storytelling, although under the mask of self-effacement. By having Jane narrate the Gothic story of her past, the novel presents a version of female self-empowerment through Jane's ghostly

transformation in her narrative. As Jane's narrative shows, Jane's ability to take control of her spectral power in her ghost stories enables her transformation from a passive female ghost to a powerful one. Moreover, if Jane plots her own future through her spectralization, Jane's true agency lies in her ability to narrate her stories of disembodiment, the ghost stories that previously enabled her physical escape from patriarchal enclosures and now remain an everlasting testament to her power, the power of ghost fiction-making. Bodenheimer writes, "the power she takes to 'rehumanize' and 'rekindle' is defined precisely as the power of storytelling" (103); "Jane Eyre's history may be read as the story of an empowered narrator, which describes her gradual, though partial release form conventional bondages, both social and fictional" (98). I specifically argue that it is through the making of the ghost narrative, a "distinctively female form" in the nineteenth century,[69] Jane becomes the empowered character/narrator.

As we have seen, Jane constructs a ghost narrative in which she turns herself from a vulnerable female ghost into a powerful specter, a subtext she produces under the mask of her autobiography, which demonstrates her spiritual growth as she learns to repress her demonic desires and matures into an angel in the house. As I have shown at the beginning of this chapter, some critics have emphasized the disciplinary nature of Jane's story, seeing her autobiography as "the agent of a self-surveillance that exposes and corrects the woman's irregular traits" (London 200). I argue that we should instead look beneath the mask of Jane's self-effacing Bildungsroman and uncover ambiguity in her narrative. Despite her self-defacement in her autobiographical account, Jane reconstructs her subjectivity through her ambiguous ghost narrative. As Paul de Man has argued, as a "discourse of self-restoration," autobiography is also a process of "de-facement," a masked process that disfigures and refigures the experience of the subject. Jane's autobiographical account thus can be seen as a performative gesture through which she

reconstructs a self-empowering tale. Although Jane presents herself as a reserved character who

learns to discipline her own passions and is eventually domesticated as the wife of Rochester in

her surface tale, she "hold[s] on to some important secrets by means of self-concealment (Cho

101). As Sonjeong Cho observes, in Brontë's novels, "the truth of subjectivity is perpetually

veiled and postponed" (103). Only by investigating the novel's modes of narration and its

configuration of the specter can one fully understand the agency of the character/narrator Jane.

As Harold Brooms observes, "Few novels match this one in the author's will-to-power over her

reader. 'Reader!' Jane keeps crying out, and then she exuberantly cudgels that reader into the

way things are, as far as she is concerned" (4).

It is interesting to note that Jane's self-empowering narrative ends with a seemingly less

sanguine picture. Jane's final destination turns out to be a place of isolation and degeneracy.

Critics have been split on their readings of Ferndean. Some argue that the desolation of the place

signals Brontë's pessimistic vision of female condition, while others like Gilbert and Gubar

perceive a more optimistic message and argue that, despite Ferndean's desolation, the place

evinces the healing power of nature and thereby demonstrates Brontë's faith in the possibility of

female progression. While I agree with both readings, I wish to point out that it is precisely

through the ambivalent portrayal of Jane's final destination that the novel succeeds in offering

simultaneously a pessimistic view of female condition and yet a more optimistic version of

female power. On the one hand, as critics point out, in a culture in which women are

instrumentalized, Jane cannot achieve ultimate liberation. In presenting the complexity of

women's existence through the spectral figure of Jane, the novel uses disembodiment as a

strategy to empower its heroine while simultaneously displaying her imprisonment as a female

subject in a male-dominated society. The fact that Jane's egalitarian relationship with Rochester

has to be realized in a secluded place conveys a pessimistic message. The novel's use of the metaphor of the ghost in fact forestalls a sanguine picture of female condition since the ghost is ultimately a figure closely related to death and annihilation. Although an iconoclast in her rebellion against patriarchal society, Jane has to efface her material body voluntarily in order to achieve autonomy and elude male subjection. The erasure of the female body ultimately signifies the limited agency of a female subject in a hegemonic patriarchal society. As we can see, while Ferndean simultaneously displays decadence and regeneration, it is only fitting that Ferndean becomes the final destination of Jane, whose spectral figure is also characterized by such ambivalence, for Ferndean likewise signifies the paradoxical position of the woman/ghost.

It is also important to recognize that by presenting Jane's path as a ghostly informed one, the novel invites us to meditate upon the limits of the spectral discourse that has offered Jane a way out. Either choosing to become a passive and devitalized angel in the house, an image emblematized by Helen Burns in the novel, or a ghost in Ferndean, Brontë's Victorian heroine is left with meager options. The pun in her name – "air" – denotes the direful condition in which she is permanently trapped: insubstantial and evanescent as air, she can never achieve complete autonomy. Jane thus remains a phantom in our imagining of the Victorian past, haunting us with her "brave" yet "troubled" spirit.[70]

On the other hand, while the figure of the ghost itself remains ambivalent, Jane's ghost storytelling proves to be the ultimate solution to the plight of the Victorian women. In the ending of the novel, becoming Rochester's "vision" and "right hand" (439), Jane continues her fiction making: "He saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of…landscape before us" (439). Here the female ghost turns into a fiction writer who possesses a powerful vision, narrating the stories of their lives with her own

"words" for the male dependent. Composing fiction in a ghostly realm, Jane finally becomes a transcendent female ghost who figures her ghostly presence in her autobiography. Thus, while the novel serves to convey a conflicted message about female agency, Jane's own ghost fiction-making proves to be more promising as a form of self-empowerment. In providing us with a narrative of self-ghosting through which the vulnerable female ghost gains agency, Brontë, with her own making of *Jane Eyre*, a gothic fiction that lives perpetually in the reader's memories, presents a living testimony to the female power of fiction-making.

CHAPTER 4

Northanger Abbey: Irony as A figure of Mask

When Henry Tilney makes his first appearance in the fashionable world of Bath in *Northanger Abbey*, the narrator offers a wry remark about Catherine's attraction to this intelligent, meant-to-be hero: "He talked with fluency and spirit – and there was an archness and pleasantry in his manner which interested, though it was hardly understood by her" (14). This remark offers a tangible, narratorial judgment on the relationship of the characters: it encourages the reader to perceive the hero as the intellectual lead whose task in the novel is to enlighten and improve the ignorant female heroine, who "hardly" understands the male character's "archness and pleasantry" yet is intrigued by these traits of intelligence.[71] The reader who is familiar with Jane Austen's characteristic irony has no difficulty in identifying this novel as a female Bildungsroman and recognizing the apparent irony directed towards its heroine, for Catherine, the naive heroine who is often subject to the ironic portrayal of the narrator, is to tread a path of blunders before she reaches her full maturity (or not?). In fact, the novel does offer sufficient instances of Catherine's misunderstanding of social situations, which expose her to the laughter of others and render her the object of humiliation. However, the ensuing narrative sheds a different light on her character.

Despite the narrator's claim that Catherine "hardly understood" Henry's pleasantry, the ensuing scene, in which the narrator describes an amiable Henry entertaining Catherine with a playful speech, demonstrates the contrary:

After chatting some time on such matters as naturally arose from the objects around them, he suddenly addressed her with — "I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the

proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent — but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars? If you are I will begin directly.”

“You need not give yourself that trouble, sir.”

“No trouble, I assure you, madam.” Then forming his features into a set smile, and affectedly softening his voice, he added, with a simpering air, “Have you been long in Bath, madam?”

“About a week, sir,” replied Catherine, trying not to laugh.

“Really!” with affected astonishment.

“Why should you be surprised, sir?”

“Why, indeed!” said he, in his natural tone. “But some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply, and surprise is more easily assumed, and not less reasonable than any other. Now let us go on. Were you never here before,

madam?”“Never, sir.”

“Indeed! Have you yet honoured the Upper Rooms?”

“Yes, sir, I was there last Monday.”

“Have you been to the theatre?”

“Yes, sir, I was at the play on Tuesday.”

“To the concert?”

“Yes, sir, on Wednesday.”

“And are you altogether pleased with Bath?”

"Yes — I like it very well."

"Now I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again." Catherine turned away her head, not knowing whether she might venture to laugh. (14)

Despite Catherine's alleged social ineptitude, she evinces a surprisingly sufficient understanding of Henry's parody of social mannerism here through her tacit assent to participate in Henry's parodic act. The exchanges between Catherine and Henry are a performative act that requires a full understanding of social context, i.e. the polite society of Bath that expects social mannerism from its members. Although Catherine only passively reacts to Henry's banter with her natural manner of speaking, she is certainly participating in this staged conversation that expects her to adopt the proper feminine style of speaking. Following Henry's suggestion of "propriety," both of them participate in a theatrical performance of socially approved conversation, with Henry acting the pretentious, aggressive male and Catherine carrying out a passive, feminine manner of speaking. Although Henry leads the conversation and plays the major role here, Catherine's cooperation and attempts to repress her natural feelings suggest her full understanding of Henry's parody and willing participation in such a parodic act. Especially, Henry's declaration to be "rational again" when they end their parodic act implies his criticism of the irrationality of the social norms and values endorsed by their society, a harsh criticism disguised by Henry's superficial pleasantry, which we hardly expect the understanding of the alleged naive heroine. Catherine, then, seems to be more than a naive heroine who is destined to receive heroine training in order to become the worthy heroine of the novel.

Given such a rich scene laden with meanings, which almost directly contradicts the narrator's previous statement, we cannot but wonder how we might interpret this scene and Catherine's supposed simplicity and ignorance. This scene suggests the tension between the

superficial narrative of female education and the actual language of the text. To what degree does the narrator mean what she says explicitly, that Henry's archness and pleasantry is "hardly understood" by Catherine? The representations of the two characters in this scene prompt us to reevaluate the narrator's claim and ponder the qualifications of "hardly," a word that seems more encompassing than it first appears, a qualifier whose ambiguity drives us to consider the following questions: to what extent does the narrator want us to take her words seriously? How serious is the female Bildungsroman narrative? Who is the Catherine here that engages in a language game, if not the simplistic character whose image of naivety and ignorance the narrator has been projecting for the most time of the novel? To what degree does Henry represent the narrator, whose manners of speaking share the traits of "archness and pleasantry"? To what extent does Austen represent propriety, especially female propriety, as a necessary social decorum, if she makes such fun of social mannerism relentlessly? What else is concealed in the textual universe of this "anti-gothic" novel, revised by Jane Austen in 1816-1817, the year before her death, and how does it add to our understanding of Austen as an eminent woman novelist of her time and of the literary history? The textual ambiguities created by the narrator's use of irony and the discrepancy between the narrator's statement and the scene thus raise many questions.

While some Austen critics have chosen to read such instance of ambiguity as an incongruity resulted from the insufficient revision of the novel,[72] I argue that, given the fact that Austen had matured into a sophisticated, skillful master of irony in the years she revised the novel and that Austen revised and attempted to publish the novel again before her death,[73] we should read the novel's ambiguity as a deliberate strategy with which Austen performs her role as a woman ironist. Embedded in the humor of the scene, I argue, is a deeper irony directed at

the reader of the novel: to what extent can we recognize Austen's art in producing meanings and masked messages through her superficial narrative? I argue that the ironic aspect is carefully structured; the evidence I've heretofore discussed suggests that lurking beneath the narrator's explicit statements and parodic mode of story-telling is a rich textual space that awaits critical decoding. This chapter pays attention to Austen's ambiguous mode of storytelling: irony, and argues that it is a performative site that allows for the production of female agency. I explore the performative and constructive nature of Austen's irony and argue that Austen breaks through the convention of decorum in the poetic rhetorical tradition through her mask of irony, thereby producing a feminist discourse underneath the narrative of Bildungsroman. While J. L. Austin postulates the performative nature of language – that words can do things instead of merely representing reality in 1962, Jane Austen implements the performative function of language more than a century and a half ago, creating a feminist universe through her rhetorical use of irony.

Feminist critics such as Gilbert and Gubar have argued against the reading of the novel as simply a female Bildungsroman, contending that beneath the surface of the text lurks the writer's anger, fear, and loathing. Despite such critical attention to the hidden aspect of Jane Austen's novels, few critics have discussed the textual ambiguities in *Northanger Abbey*. Even feminist critics who value the narratological aspects of Jane Austen's novels fail to discover *Northanger Abbey*'s textual complexity. For example, Susan Lanser, an influential figure who works in the field of feminist narratology, has identified *Northanger Abbey* as an apparent failure of Jane Austen in asserting her narrative authority, in comparison to her later novels. Likewise, John Wiltshire discovers a "Hidden Jane Austen," "the facets of [whose] writing... might elude the attention of the first-time reader," in his 2014 book, in which he notices the "re-readability" of

Jane Austen's texts and explores what is hidden in them. Despite his convincing claim, he concludes that *Northanger Abbey* "is a frankly open text. Its plot sets out to reveal that there is nothing to be excited about in the secret places its heroine explores, nor is there anything mysterious about its two dominant characters...The novel's narrative content is reflected in a style which, like its heroine, is explicit, frank, and open" (10). Like other critics, he fails to discover the rich space embedded in the ambiguities of the novel created by the novel's irony. The critical tendency to overlook the rhetorical complexity of *Northanger Abbey* leads to a devalued appraisal of Austen's role as an ironist in her early literary career. Even critics who have genuinely valued Austen's irony such as Marvin Mudrick identify her as an immature ironist who has yet to develop her style of writing through a more skilled implementation of Free Indirect Style.[74] Contrary to the critics who underestimate Austen's rhetorical capacities and her feminist proclivity, I argue that *Northanger Abbey* manifests Austen's capacity as an ironist who promotes feminist agenda through her writing style. The scene I discussed at the opening offers an instance of how the ambiguity in the narrator's ironic statement enables us to read the novel differently, and to read Catherine as an ambiguous agent in her role as a reader of the female gothic novels. It also allows us to read Austen as a feminist writer who negotiates the rhetorical tradition of decorum through her manipulation of language. It is critical, then, to investigate the figure of irony in the novel to understand Austen's narrative artistry and her prominent status as an eminent eighteen-century female novelist who arguably contributes to the discourse of feminism in her time.

In short, by looking at irony as a performative form of language, I hope to further uncover Austen's talent as an ironist and her contribution to feminism.[75] While the theorists of irony often emphasize the disruptive nature of irony, I want to focus on its performative aspect

and read it as an ambiguous mode that produces agency. As Judith Butler argues in *Bodies that Matter*, performance is "a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo" (95); "The 'performative' dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms" (94). Understanding irony as a performative form of language allows me to demonstrate how Austen manipulates the use of irony in her negotiation of decorum and produces a feminist message through language. In the following sections, I argue that Austen's ironic mode of storytelling creates a site of ambiguity that opens up space for the reading of female agency, and that irony is a mask that not only conceals more pungent criticisms of the patriarchal structure but also creates opportunities that undermine its ideological stances. Through the mask of irony, the novel criticizes patriarchal ideologies and the male literary traditions by keeping its conservative image intact, performing its ideology through language. By conflating laughter with criticism, the narrator keeps the object of her irony uncertain, constantly redirecting the target of her satire and reversing the ideological stance she seemingly endorses. In doing so, she not only grants agency to the female character but she herself also acquires an authority as she moves freely between the zone of laughter and the zone of darkness and manipulates the reader's point of view. More importantly, in ostensibly suppressing the voices of women, the novel succeeds in resurfacing them through its use of irony. Thus, Jane Austen's ironic, masked style of writing could be seen as a "strategy of camouflage" that conceals "an exquisitely masked feminine desire" (35).[76] It is a performative act that disrupts the patriarchal discourse and produces female agency.

I. Irony Redirected: Discourse of Negation

To understand irony as a performative language in *Northanger Abbey*, we should first look at Barthes' notion of irony. "According to Barthes, irony introduces a kind of double-layered speech, a distinction between the surface of a literal, straightforward meaning and the hidden, dissimulated depth of what one is actually saying" (Martens 95). Barthes' notion of irony as a double-voiced speech, pointing to the ambiguous nature of irony, raises the question of what is the "truth" hidden under Jane Austen's mask of satire. *Northanger Abbey* opens with a series of negations, rendered in an ironic undertone, setting up a narrative of female education. Catherine, the destined heroine of the novel, is characterized in opposition to a traditional heroine, a sentimental, ideal figure of femininity often seen in the novels of the time.[77] "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be a heroine" (5). As the narrator introduces her character as an unconventional heroine, she delivers a number of familial traits that disqualify Catherine from being the traditional heroine in the gothic and sentimental tradition: she has an ordinary father who "had never been handsome" and is "not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters" and a fecund mother who, "instead of dying in" childbirth, brings up all of her children healthily. And Catherine herself is devoid of any heroic qualities: "a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour...and not less unpropitious for heroism seemed her mind...She had no taste for garden...She never could learn or understand any thing before she was taught" (6). Using a plethora of negatives to describe Catherine, the narrator associates Catherine with lack and deficiency, presenting her as a figure of nothingness, a figure out of the realm of femaleness, in contrast to the feminine figure in the popular sentimental and gothic fictions of Austen's time. Introducing a "strange, unaccountable character" (6), the narrator begins a narrative of female education naturally: Catherine, with her

deficiency, is to be formed into a figure of femaleness: "from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine" (7). At least that sounds like a plausible plot.

However, even if the plot of female education has been introduced smoothly, the reader cannot help wondering at the ironic tone of the narrator when she gives such a negative account of her heroine. With Barthes' notion of irony as a double-voiced discourse in mind, we cannot help asking: what is Austen actually saying with her ironic portrayal of her heroine? As literary critics have long assumed, the narrator's irony is primarily directed at the sentimental novelistic tradition, or gothic conventions, one that presents the weak, passive, sentimental heroine as the cultural ideal.[78] In fact, the readers of the gothic/sentimental fictions will have no difficulty in discerning the narrator's description of Catherine's deficiency the archetypal gothic father and mother: the tyrannical male and the delicate, often frail female. Nevertheless, the narrator's use of negatives also forces a rereading of the novel's opening sentence: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be a heroine" (5). By associating Catherine with the novelistic tradition, the "No one" sentence forces the reader to reread the description of the heroine to figure out the narrator's irony. Who and what is she making fun of? The charmless heroine? The characters in relation to the heroine? Or the reader of this novel? The negatives echo each other frequently in this passage, flagging its non-status and producing a distinctive ironic discourse. Terry Castle notes the significance of the discourse of negation: "In telling a story of "no's" and "not's," Austen was making a statement about her own art – about what it would not be, what it would not describe, what it would not endorse" (*Boss Ladies* 27). While she sees the "no's" as a critique of the Gothic and of certain social, literary conceptions, I focus instead on the performative, self-referential nature of such negatives. With "echoic mention" of the no's,[79] the narrative performs its ironies and calls attention to the

rhetorical role of such negatives, inviting the reader to reconsider the target of Austen's irony. Austen's irony is thus not just "a pattern of words that turn away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning;" (qtd. in de Man 164). Austen's ironic discourse of negation indeed calls attention to its "turning away" movement, signaling to its reader its performative function and revealing that there is a subtext beneath the mask of irony.

As we have seen, while the novel's ironic discourse of negation performs the conformist narrative by representing the heroine as a deficient figure of femininity, it is also highly self-referential and invites the reader to recognize its performativity. The novel's irony, as critics have noticed, produces a reversed effect on its representation of femininity by creating laughter. Gabriela Castellanos contends that "laughter undermines the pathos of victimized virtue of the protagonists of sentimental and gothic novels and thus their established form of heroism" (4). If Austen's deficient, fallible heroine lacks the attractive traits defined by the patriarchal ideal, the irony here undermines the ideal, resisting the "victimized virtues" upheld by the ideal, and the young Catherine, lacking the traits of a traditional heroine, is described as a carefree spirit who enjoys the freedom of a tomboy. By casting Catherine in an ironic light, the narrative endows her with freedom and agency without incurring criticism through its light-hearted representation of Catherine's deficiency. Catherine, in contrast to the traditional heroine, is much more wholesome, active, and natural. She remains perfectly calm upon seeing the beautiful and fashionable young woman leaning on Henry's arm, "instead of turning of death-like paleness, and falling in a fit" like a traditional heroine (35). She possesses "feelings rather natural than heroic," as the narrator declares, when being neglected by the hero. Noting that "Catherine is an active, affirmative protagonist in sharp contrast to the passive, dependent, hysterical young women at the center of many sentimental novels," Castellanos convincingly argues that

Northanger Abbey both "exaggerated and satirized" the ideology of the feminine ideal (76);

however, I want to stress the performative function of irony in critiquing such ideology.

While the narrator's use of negatives in her mockery generates skepticism of the ideal of

femininity endorsed by the popular fictions at the time, it is important to note how the narrator's

irony acts as a mask in producing such critique. Catherine, with "symptoms of profligacy," as the

narrator mockingly assures, has "neither a bad heart nor a bad temper; [is] seldom stubborn,

scarcely ever quarrelsome, and very kind to the little ones, with few interruptions of tyranny" (6).

Using abundant negatives again here to emphasize the need to assure that her heroine is not an

evil woman despite her "symptoms of profligacy," the description debunks the feminine ideals.

It also exposes the fallacy of the patriarchal polarization of femininity: women as either good or

evil, which condemns women without so-called feminine traits as profligate and unworthy. The

"discourse of negation" in the narrator's irony thus not only creates laughter, but also targets a

more ominous system and points to the role of literature in enforcing such system.

In portraying an unconventional heroine with irony, Austen is not only critiquing the

feminine ideal, but she is also calling attention to and mocking the novelistic convention that

designates the feminine ideal and thereby shapes the destiny of the female character. As the

narrator jests, "[Catherine's] greatest deficiency was in the pencil – she had no notion of drawing

– not enough even to attempt a sketch of her lover's profile, that she might be detected in the

design" (8). This ironic portrayal of Catherine redirects its target at the sentimental/gothic

tradition in which the traditional heroine often attracts male attention with her refined feminine

skills. Here, the narrator mocks the marketing function of drawing, a feminine skill a woman

needs to acquire before she engages in a romantic relationship. She is to sell herself as a

commercial object in the marriage market; drawing is a "design" that presents her as a valuable

object that ought to be "detected" by men. In ironizing Catherine as a deficient heroine, the narrator indeed satirizes the novelistic tradition that presents drawing as a necessary feminine artistry, thus redirecting its target of irony and inviting the reader to reflect on the role of feminization in literature. The language style here constitutes an undercurrent that critiques the literary convention of femininity. Austen's irony is thus double-edged: in mockingly representing her heroine as an unconventional one and thus engaging in a seemingly dominant discourse, it succeeds in presenting a criticism of the social structure that objectifies women and diminishes them to the state of non-being.

Although the novel does not openly protest against the patriarchal ideologies about femininity, its irony certainly produces a covertly discursive criticism of the dominant ideologies. By satirizing Catherine as a figure of deficiency, the novel takes a conformist stance yet secretly undermines its own ideological stance with its ironical portrayal of the unconventional heroine. In doing so, it celebrates the naturalness of its own heroine. Thus, under the mask of the narrative of female education, Jane Austen's irony constructs a performative "discourse of negation" satirizing the feminine ideal popularized in sentimental/gothic fictions,[80] displaying its subversive edge.[81]

Although theorists have seen irony mainly as a disruptive mode, Austen's performative use of irony proves to have a constructive power. Wayne Booth posits in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, "irony is usually seen as something that undermines clarities, opens up vistas of chaos, and either liberates by destroying all dogma or destroys by revealing the inescapable canker of negation at the heart of every affirmation" (ix). Although critics find it difficult to define irony, irony's disruptive function has been long recognized. Paul de Man, in "The Concept of Irony," further defines it as a disruptive force that "interrupts, disrupts" narrative coherence and systematicity

(179). Jane Austen's ironic discourse certainly disrupts the male ideology about the feminine ideals; however, in undermining its own ostensibly conservative narrative stance, Austen's irony serves a performative role, not in the sense that "it permanently suspends meaning in a prolonged hovering undecidability" as seen by de Man (J. Miller 86), but in the sense that it produces new meaning through its performative mask. This performative, constructive force of Austen's irony exemplifies the feminist theory that irony's interruption entails "productive possibilities," that it is "a potential force for subversion and gives irony its 'edge' since "in failing to engage with the 'ruling' structure on this structure's terms, irony promises to shift the prevailing dialectic of power and open the terms of debate to more and different conceptions of 'otherness' and 'identity'" (Reinford 8).

As I have shown, in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's strategic employment of irony successfully disrupts and subverts the power structure of the male-centered society. The narrator's refusal to define her heroine in straightforward, positive terms enables her to open up an ironic discourse of criticism through the mockery of gothic conventions, which paradoxically leads to the opportunities to configure Catherine as a free agent. The parody comprised of negatives produces a performative, double-voiced narrative: a superficial, humorous female Bildungsroman is accompanied by a serious, subversive discourse that undermines, disrupts and produces. Thus, in presenting a narrative of female education with the use of irony, the novel negotiates its own ideological position through its performative rhetoric, subverting its ostensible ideological stance and challenging dominant ideologies.

II. Case Study: Intertextuality and the Power of Irony

As the novel's ironic discourse successfully targets the root of the social construction of femininity and challenges dominant ideologies through its depiction of anti-gothic heroine, its subversive force manifests itself in the novel's engagement with intertextuality. By engaging with the literary texts of its time, the novel succeeds in constructing its own model of femininity and its own ideologies through the use of irony. To fully perceive the power of Austen's irony, it will be useful to look closely at the scene of Catherine's "heroine training," in which the narrator mockingly represents Catherine's sincerity in bettering herself in order to become the conventional heroine: "But from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives" (7). The narrator then gives a list of the works Catherine reads and learns from:

> From Pope, she learnt to censure those who
> > "bear about the mockery of woe."
> From Gray, that
> > "Many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> "And waste its fragrance on the desert air."
> From Thomson, that
> > — "It is a delightful task
> >
> > "To teach the young idea how to shoot."
> And from Shakespeare she gained a great store of information--amongst the rest, that
> > — "Trifles light as air,
> > Are, to the jealous, confirmation strong,
> > As proofs of Holy Writ."
> That
> > "The poor beetle, which we tread upon,
> > "In corporal sufferance feels a pang as great
> > "As when a giant dies."
> And that a young woman in love always looks
> > — "like Patience on a monument
> > "Smiling at Grief." (7)

Note that this is a list of texts authored by eminent male writers, whose lines embrace the feminine virtues of endurance, passivity, and self-sacrifice, and demonstrate the ideological trend popular among male writers. Pope warns against romantic indulgence of "a woman who would

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rather kill herself than endure hopeless love"; Gray reminds young girls that being neglected is a common fate; Thomson extols the value of instructing the young (woman); Shakespeare depicts the patient, selfless women who is willing to sacrifice themselves.[82] Examining these quotations closely, Emily Auerbach notices the link between the themes of female education in these texts and those of the novel and the irony embedded in the link: Catherine hardly learns any lessons from these quotations as she is often active and unreserved.[83] As she convincingly argues, hinting at the difference between the healthy and active Catherine and the passive, suffering women in the texts, Jane Austen is perhaps attacking the superficiality of women's education and inviting her readers to play "a game of hide-and-seek" (80). Auerbach, however, fails to notice the gothic content of the texts. In fact, if we look into the content of the texts, we discover a far more ominous story: almost all of these texts endorse female victimization, designating the death of the heroine if they do not accept their fate submissively. Pope's poem censures the female character who refuses to endure the pain of unrequited love; Gray's lines are taken from his "Elegy Written in a Country Graveyard," a proto-Gothic poem in which he cautions against worldly ambitions, the pursuit of which leads to death; Shakespeare's lines are taken from *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Twelfth Night*, all of which depict female characters who are murdered, or threatened to be killed, or willing to commit suicide if their chastity is in danger. Romanticizing female victimization, these texts teach women to sacrifice themselves patiently in their relationships with men. If the narrator's irony renders the feminine ideal absurd, in referencing these books, Austen indeed presents a gothic destiny for the heroine under training. The heroines who receive the training are the ones "shut up in prose" by these male writers.[84] The irony, covertly rejecting sentimental values upheld by the patriarchal culture, renders the novel's surface text, the text of female education, superficial and performative. In laughingly

presenting her character as a strange character who is in her path to become a heroine, Austen couples this path with a dark undertone, criticizing the male literary tradition and the patriarchal hegemony perpetuated by the literary works in shaping the female destiny.

By situating its irony in the matrix of male-centered texts, the novel not only rejects the authority of the male-authored texts but also succeeds in producing a rich feminist subtext through intertextuality. If we "look behind the bush to see what is hiding there" as Auerbach suggests, we note that there is one exception in Austen's selection of the texts that does not contain the theme of death. Instead, it eulogizes the pleasure of instruction, which is evidently linked to the novel's theme of learning. As Auerbach points out, the lines are taken from Thomson's poem, "Spring," in which "an ideal couple rejects both a mercenary marriage" and searches for "an emotional and intellectual partnership" (78). For Auerbach, Henry Tilney's recognition of Catherine's innocence and simplicity is a foundation for an ideal marriage as "innocence...will triumph" (78). While I agree that Catherine's innocence predisposes the couple to a harmonious marriage, I argue that a richer meaning is hidden in these lines that foreshadow the ending of the novel and the construction of Catherine as a heroine. Does Austen truly believe that instruction is the solution to Catherine's unconventionality, given the novel's critique of conventionality? If we reexamine the quotations, we find that following the celebration of instruction is a text involving deceptions, i.e. Iago's deception of Othello. As Auerbach points out, the quotations foreshadow the plot of *Northanger Abbey*, as the reference to Iago's deception mirrors the plotline of the novel, since Catherine's education starts with her recognition of others' deceptions. But even so, we should not ignore the subversive content of the quotations, neither should we overlook the role of irony in producing a subversive and transformative narrative. Austen's irony, I will argue, says more than "what is contrary to what is

meant" (qtd. in Colebrook 1) and skillfully utilizes "a complex set of assumptions about context" (Booth 8). Besides indicating at the female victimization, Austen's rhetorical deployment of irony produces a complex subtext through intertextuality.

As Auerbach notes, it is no coincidence that the name of the speaker advocating female self-sacrifice in Shakespeare's *Othello* is Isabella, a name shared by the novel's female antagonist. If we pay attention to the intertextual relationship enacted in the quotation, we find it hard to ignore the fact that Shakespeare's Isabella, who wants to preserve her honor, in persuading her brother to submit to his fate, speaks of the following lines: "The poor beetle, which we tread upon, / In corporal sufferance feels a pang as great/ As when a giant dies" (7). Although the novel ironizes and condemns its own Isabella for being aggressive in pursuing her material interests and challenging the norms of proper femininity, the intertextuality here serves to cast a different light on her character. The passivity advocated by Shakespeare's Isabella is counterbalanced by Austen's Isabella; the intertextuality here asks for a third, interpretative response from the reader through its ironization. Knowing the context thus involved, the reader could read the lines as expressing sympathy towards the female antagonist, who is condemned for her worldliness in the novel. Like the "poor beetle," she is "tread" by the patriarchal laws and her pursuit of personal gains is a forced and adaptive response to the hegemonic control of patriarchy.

Moreover, we cannot ignore the fact that the last quotation is spoken by Shakespeare's Viola, who disguises herself as a man when giving the passionate speech about her womanly patience as a lover. The common assumption is that the novel's anti-heroine will be eventually like Viola, who "like Patience on a monument smiling at Grief" (7). The novel's ending reflects this image of patient suffering: when Catherine is driven out of Northanger Abbey, she

transforms into a silent, submissive heroine who patiently accepts her fate and waits for the arrival of Henry, who asks for her hand in marriage. However, the intertextuality complicates such reading and suggests a message of self-empowerment. The novel's reference to feminine passivity is compromised by its irony, while the intertext, Shakespeare's play, offers an instance of female empowerment, as Viola's male disguise runs counter against her presumed feminine passivity. This intertextual reference suggests an ironic reversal of the relationship between the lovers: the appearance of female submission and passivity under the domination of the male lover is only a facade the text presents. The novel, like Shakespeare's play, portrays a submissive heroine educated by the male lover. Is Austen implying that her naive heroine is wearing a disguise like Viola while submitting to her fate? In situating her heroine in such an intertextual matrix, the novel's ironic play with the quotations creates various interpretive opportunities, once the reader realizes that there is another layer of truth hidden under the narrator's irony. In fact, by situating itself in a rich literary context, the novel demands that the reader pay attention to its interaction with other literary texts and discover its subtext under the mask of irony. According to Michael Riffaterre, who describes intertextuality as a vital form of text production in literature, "Each episode is an enigma, since each scene can be read only in relation to the neighboring scenes, and after backwards and forwards comparison, must be transposed into an analogical discourse" (111). For Riffaterre, literary texts are characterized by "ungrammaticalities," while intertextual interference directs the reader's attention to another level of textual meaning (Moyal 457). *Northanger Abbey*'s employment of intertextuality exemplifies such masterful production of another layer of meaning through irony, demonstrating the performative and transformative function of irony in the novel. The heroine-training list thus

serves as a feminist case study in which irony becomes a feminist strategy, although the reader "must still go through the ritual of lifting the veil" (Riffaterre 111).

The novel's ironic discourse thus opens up space for feminist readings through intertextuality. It testifies Austen's narrative artistry as an ironist and suggests her feminism at this point. As Tarez Samra Graban suggests, "Feminist ironic discourse...(re)defines the ways in which women ironists participated in various traditions, the possibilities for their participation, and what it means for them to participate at all" (4-5). The novel's irony, as a useful form of "ideological disruption," demonstrates "its potential for redefining agency, language, and history" (5). Austen thus participates in the eighteenth-century satirical literary tradition with her irony, and by incorporating and referencing the male texts in her ironic representation of her heroine, she undermines male ideologies through her adroit craftsmanship.

Austen's feminism is more evident in a famous defense of the novel voiced by the narrator, in which the narrator critiques the discrimination against female writing. This protest is voiced under another guise in the novel when the narrator ironically depicts the female characters' friendship and their preference for the novel.

> Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel–writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding — joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us leave it to the reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and

over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now

groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions

have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary

corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From

pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. (22)

As Susan Fraiman argues, this speech manifests Austen's feminism as her advocacy of women

writers "is pitched against the conventional bias in favor of male writers, male genres, and male-

centered periodicals" (NA 23). Even in this open protest against discrimination, Austen's

narrator manages to deliver her critique of the social structure indirectly. She parodies the female

intimacy instead: Catherine and Isabella strengthen their friendship with their shared interests in

the reading of the gothic novel. The parody disguises the narrator's feminist intent and allows it

to launch more forcefully under the guise of a general critique of the (female) public reading

preference. Moreover, in this famous defense of the novel, the narrator associates "heroineism"

with the feminization of the novel genre. The novel, like the victimized heroine, was a gendered

genre that was considered low in comparison to other genres such as poetry and drama, which

were often composed by male writers. A genre favored by women writers, the novel was a

popular genre among female readers and was often associated with the feminine. By associating

gender with genre here, the narrator calls attention to the victimized position they share and calls

for female bonding as a defense against such victimization. At the same time, she reveals the

significance of her novelization of Catherine: "If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by

the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard?" Offering "protection

and regard" for the heroine of the novel she is reading, the reading heroine acts as an active agent

rather than a passive woman. Her novelization of Catherine is therefore a feminist strategy

subverting the social structure that she seemingly affirms in her narrative of female Bildungsroman. More interestingly, the parody of the female bonding, the bonding of the two female characters, turns into a call for bonding here. By suggesting the importance of female bonding – "we are an injured body," the narrator presents Isabella, the mercenary coquette, in a different light. Her friendship with Catherine, although false, is a necessary defense against the oppressive patriarchal structure.

In associating gender with genre amidst laughter, Austen creates a masked feminist text. With references to the novelistic tradition and other literary texts, the narrator moves freely between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic world, signaling to the reader that the objects of her satire are more than one. By constantly reminding the reader of his/her role, she invites the reader to do the same: to move in and out of the fictional world and adjust their interpretations accordingly. Like the reading heroine, the reader is asked to protect the weak and maintain equality. Thus, in presenting a narrative of female education, the novel simultaneously undermines its own conservative stance through its ironic style, thereby challenging the dominant patriarchal discourses. In doing so, it performs a lady-like writing style – being proper, demure, and conservative, although the voice of protest emerges from its ironic discourse. The mask of femininity may well explain Elaine Showalter's observation that "Austen's name had become a byword for female literary restraint" (A Literature of Their Own 102), for Austen's feminism remains hidden under the novel's irony and its performativity, which gives the illusion of Austen as a conformist who sides with the conservative writers of her time in stressing decorum. As we have seen, a careful dissection of Austen's style of writing could unveil a "hidden (feminist) Jane Austen," as the ambiguity embedded in the novel's ironic discourse certainly gives rise to such opportunities.

III. Irony, Reading and Agency:

As critics have noticed, *Northanger Abbey* follows the Female Quixote tradition in representing Catherine as a naive reader and is itself "a tribute to and updating of *The Female Quixote*."[85] Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* depicts Arabella, a character whose avid reading of Romance leads her to make erroneous associations in reality, rendering herself the object of ridicule. Arabella closely resembles the ladies in Romances, an ideal feminine figure whose beauty often attracts the male attention. Yet despite her lady-like appearances, she possesses a mind so "enlightened...and...ridiculous" that she reads every instance in her life as a potentially romantic scene, imagining herself to be the object of romantic pursuits (409). Satirizing Arabella's obsession with Romance, Lennox presents her as a laughable character whose subjectivity is shaped by her reading experience. Jane Austen, in depicting Catherine as an avid reader of Radcliffe's gothic novels, responds to the "reading heroine" tradition and represents her heroine in the same satirical light. Catherine constantly references *Udolpho* in her conversation with others, endows her surroundings with gothic elements, and reads Northanger Abbey as a mysterious place concealing unspoken secrets. Not unlike Lennox's Arabella, Catherine appears to be a ludicrous figure with her romantic illusions. Unsurprisingly, critics have often seen Catherine "as a deluded female Quixote" and interpreted Catherine's misreading of the social world as a character flaw she needs to outgrow in order to become the novel's worthy heroine.

Seeing the critical tendency to read Catherine as a naive reader who frequently misreads her social world, Carole Gerster, however, points out the irony directed at the reader's expectations: "Readers are invited to see Catherine as deluded and then to have to correct their

own expectations," as Catherine's reading of Northanger Abbey's secret darkness is somehow justified by General Tilney's cruelty (123). As Amanda Gilroy also posits, Catherine's misreading is somehow validated by General Tilney's tyranny, which "exposes the gothic qualities within the home" (xlii). Hoeveler similarly observes that "the domestic is gothic," arguing that the gothic functions "as a continually disruptive and undercutting presence" in the novel (129). She emphasizes Catherine's victim status: "Catherine is Austen's Everywoman heroine - plain, ordinary, insufficiently educated, nothing special – but she still manages to become a heroine by following her instincts, waiting passively, and suffering injustices from the hands of a misguidedpatriarch" (123). These readings demonstrate that although the novel satirizes Catherine's reading experience, it also validates Catherine's reading: the gothic plot of male persecution and female victimization lies in the heart of the novel. Catherine is not simply a laughable character; she is sometimes an astute reader, as I demonstrated in the beginning of this essay, although she exhibits ignorance and perspicacity simultaneously. How do we resolve this apparent incongruityin Catherine's character, then? Margaret Kirkham laments that this incongruity poses a difficult case for feminists: the novel adopts the schema of the reading girl as a victim of her romantic illusions but also modifies and corrects this schema "at the risk of confusing readers" (90). I argue that it is through the ambiguous nature of irony that Austen resolves this incongruity and succeeds in generating female agency by turning Catherine into an interpretive agent and by inviting the reader to become an interpretative agent as well. We cannot read Catherine's misreading without considering Austen's style of irony, for Austen distinguishes herself from herliterary predecessors by endowing her parody of the reading girl with an ambiguous rhetorical style. Although Catherine frequently misreads, the ironic portrayal of her reading experience, especially as a reader of the female gothic, presents her as a more powerful agent than commonly

perceived. In this sense, Austen's irony becomes a mask for power, offering interpretive possibilities for female agency.

As the scene I discussed at the beginning of this chapter shows, Catherine is not always a clumsy reader. The narrator's portrayal of her naivety is qualified by the discourse of negation. The narrator's ironic use of words such as "hardly" allows her to create a space for Catherine's agency at the special moment: Catherine seems to possess a power unperceived by most readers when she engages in the lively performative act with Henry in their conversation. She reads Henry's performance with perfect understanding and is able to perform her role to cooperate with Henry. The novel's ironic portrayal of Catherine thus presents Catherine as a more powerful agent, one that contradicts her usual image of naivety and cluelessness. Austen's text is characterized by such ironic markers, which distinguishes itself from the texts that similarly adopt the reading girl trope by creating an ambiguous site for the production of female agency.

Ironic markers are ubiquitous in the novel's depiction of Catherine, reconstructing Catherine as a performative agent in spite of her naivety. As we know, for the most time in the novel, Catherine appears to be a socially inexperienced heroine and therefore presents herself as a zealous learner of social decorum. She is eager to observe social norms if properly instructed, and she is anxious to prove herself a teachable heroine who is ready to recognize, acknowledge, and rectify her own flaws. When Mr. Allen speaks of the impropriety of young men and women "driving about the country in open carriages," Catherine sincerely regrets over her own decision: "I am sure if I had known it to be improper, I would not have gone..." (71). In these moments, the narrator delivers Catherine's speeches without ironic commentaries, siding with Catherine's view in observing feminine propriety. As J. Oldmark argues, Jane Austen's "characters with a sense of the social whole allow their moral discourse to alter, expose itself to definition and

articulate questions of how one ought to speak" (qtd. in Colebrook 161). The learning Catherine seems to be a faithful observer of proper female conduct, and the narrator certainly seems to approve of Catherine's sense of propriety.

However, the novel gives an ironic turn to Catherine's desire to abide by social rules one page later through the use of free indirect style. When Catherine returns to her room after her conversation with the Allens, Catherine:

> …felt greatly relieved by Mr. Allen's approbation of her own conduct, and truly rejoiced to be preserved by his advice from the danger of falling into such an error herself. *Her escape from being one of the party to Clifton was now an escape indeed*; *for what would the Tilneys have thought of her* (my emphasis), if she had broken her promise to them in order to do what was wrong in itself? if she had been guilty of one breach of propriety, only to enable her to be guilty of another? (72)

This passage, replete with markers of irony, unveils Catherine's psychology and presents her as a performative agent who self-consciously strives to construct a proper feminine self-image. The free indirect style here renders Catherine's willingness to observe decorum ironic, revealing that Catherine's eagerness to learn about propriety is somehow conditioned by her desire to appeal to the Tilneys with her sense of propriety. Her real escape, an escape from others' perceptions of her "breach of propriety," is "now an escape indeed." The narrator's ironic tone, amplified by the ironic markers such as "indeed," "greatly," and "truly", exposes the psychology of the misreading heroine, disrupting her usual image of naivety and sincerity. If the narrator has been ironizing Catherine's romantic illusions, she also suggests here that Catherine is performing a feminine style in order to realize her romantic dream. Catherine, then, becomes an active, performative agent even though she is the object of irony. Given the novel's previous

presentation of her sincerity in learning about feminine propriety, one might question the sincerity of the narrator's delineation of Catherine's sincerity: what could have escaped the reader's attention when the representations of the novel's viewpoints are complicated by its ironic style of storytelling?

As Lydia Reinford points out, irony, "as a form of agency for feminist discourse," has the "potential for redefining agency, language, and history" (1, 5). Borrowing Paul de Man's theory of irony "as an ever-present danger of disruption and deviation in signifying systems," she restates de Man's argument in eloquent terms: "If narrative takes place through the 'tropological' movements of language – the 'turning' between literal and figurative meanings – then irony epitomizes the dark undercurrent of this movement: the propensity for words to 'turn' at any moment, and mean something other than what their apparent context would indicate, or their narrator would intend" (6). Austen's irony epitomizes such transformative force: its "turning movement" disrupts the usual image of Catherine as an unknowing and unsophisticated reader, turning her into a more powerful agent who exercises her will under the mask of naivety.

If Austen's irony constitutes a subversive discourse in the novel, undercutting its surface meaning frequently, the novel's presentation of Catherine as a ludicrous reader further creates laughter, endowing Catherine with agency through the ironic representation of her role as the reader of the gothic novel. A fervent reader of Radcliffe's novels, Catherine often associates everyday life with gothic elements, which allows her to defy the laws of feminine propriety that she frequently expresses her will to obey. Catherine begins her gothic and romantic reading with her reading and figuring of Henry: the potential hero of romance. Ironizing Catherine's "disappointed love" when Henry fails to appear as Catherine expects, the narrator presents Catherine's feelings as a reading sentiment: "This sort of mysteriousness, which is always so

becoming in a hero, threw a fresh grace in Catherine's imagination around his person and manners, and increased her anxiety to know more of him" (21). Represented as a ludicrous, over-imaginative reader, Catherine's romantic interest in Henry is said to originate from Henry's "mysteriousness." In associating Henry with such a gothic attribute, Catherine justifies her attraction to the hero without breaching the norms of female propriety, turning the solemn, restrictive reality into a free, fictional realm in which she allows herself to roam freely with her gothic imagination. As the novel shows, she associates everyday reality with gothic and sees beauty and romance in it, seeking wonder and excitement in her own romantic plot. By representing Catherine as a reader of the gothic fiction, the narrator thus endows Catherine with the freedom of imagination, despite the parodic manner with which the narrator delineates the heroine. Her association of reality with gothic romance gives her the freedom otherwise blocked to the traditional heroine. Thus, although the narrator makes fun of Catherine's obsession with the gothic, the irony also opens up an ambiguous space for the emergence of female agency – when Catherine associates reality with gothic elements, it becomes ambiguous whether gothic is a vehicle for free expression or a flaw in her perception, for her gothic associations, although exposing her erroneous judgments, also allow her to create an imaginative space to transcend the confines of the patriarchal discourse.

The novel's ambiguous production of female agency is more evident when Catherine's gothic inclination turns her visit to Northanger Abbey into an exploration of wonders. Once sojourned in Northanger Abbey, Catherine's prevailing sentiments are excitement and enthusiasm. Upon her discovery of a black cabinet, "Catherine's heart beat quick...with a cheek flushed by hope, and an eye straining with curiosity, her fingers grasped the handle of a drawer and drew it forth" (116). Although Catherine's hope and curiosity present her as a laughable

character whose gothic imagination misleads her, Catherine's voluntary spirit is also evident here. When she discovers a large high chest, her consciousness reveals her adventurous spirit: "Pushed back to, as if meant to be out of sight! – I will look into it – Cost me what it may, I will look into it" (112). Determined to discover the secrets of Northanger Abbey, Catherine acts like a detective, looking for the dark secrets of the home. Comparing the reading Catherine to "a figure of detection and exposure," Susan Zlotnick remarks that Catherine acts exactly as "a voluntary spy" that Henry describes in his speech; her reading "spurs her to action" and "prompts her to act in ways that suggest an enhanced sense of autonomy" (288). While I find Zlotnick's reading convincing, I argue that it is through the ironic depiction of Catherine as a reading heroine that Catherine's agency emerges. While laughing at Catherine's romantic illusions, the novel also validates her reading by presenting her, through the ambiguity of irony, as an astute reader of the gothic who can read beneath the surface sign and detect the symbolic significance of the home.

Catherine's astuteness as a gothic reader is further implied in the following description in which Catherine examines the gallery with curiosity:

> Catherine, who, having seen, in a momentary glance beyond them, a narrower passage, more numerous openings, and symptoms of a winding stair-case, believed herself at last within the reach of something worth her notice; and felt, as she unwillingly paced back the gallery, that she would rather be allowed to examine that end of the house, than see all the finery of all the rest. – The General's evident desire of preventing such an examination was an additional stimulant. (127)

Stimulated by the General's reluctance to let her visit the building, Catherine evinces a transgressive spirit in defying the male authority. Moreover, the narrator's portrayal of Catherine

is ironic yet empowering. Using the word "symptoms" to create an exaggerated sense of Catherine's ludicrousness in applying gothic "symptoms" to the building and seeing it symptomatic of the gothic structure she reads in Radcliffe's novels, the narrator makes fun of Catherine's romantic imagination. At the same time, by associating Catherine's reading with the acts of examination and detection and presenting her as one who attempts to discover and diagnose the "symptoms" of the "diseased" gothic building, the narrator elevates her to the position of authority and endows her with a power traditionally ascribed to males. In other words, the irony here subtly yet successfully appropriates the traditional male power and transfers it to the reading girl. In parodying Catherine's gothic imagination, the narrator, with a sleight of hand, transforms her into an active agent in her gothic-reading adventures. Catherine, not unlike the reader of *Northanger Abbey*, is constantly looking for signs and symptoms that validate her own reading.

The narrator's irony is even more pungent when she describes the reading Catherine who perceives in the General the character of Montoni, the villain in Udolpho: "with a grandeur of air, a dignified step, which caught the eye, but could not shake the doubts of the well-read Catherine...It was the air and attitude of a Montoni!" (128). The narrator here deliberately links Catherine's reading with her characterization of the General as Montoni, highlighting her role as a reader of the female gothic. Catherine's suspicion of the General's character is further confirmed, as thought by Catherine, by Miss Tilney: "I was going to take you into what was my mother's room – the room in which she died – " were all her words; but few as they were, they conveyed pages of intelligence" to Catherine (128). Again, despite the satirical tone of the narrator, Catherine's role as a shrewd reader is underscored here: she becomes a word detective, trying to read the words of Miss Tilney as hints for the General's crime. The narrator's ironic

figuring of Catherine as a word detective endows Catherine with an efficacious reading agency. As critics widely agree, Catherine's reading of the General is validated by the novel's actual characterization of him; although he does not murder his wife, his tyranny and cruelty justify the link between him and Montoni. Thus, although the narrator parodies Catherine's misreading, the irony turns the other way when the narrator depicts her as a word detective who tries to make meaning of her life through her own reading. Given her reading of the Abbey as a gothic space that imprisons the female characters, instead of a domestic haven, she is not unlike our feminist critics who read *Northanger Abbey* as a gothic text that shuts up the female characters.

Perhaps the most ambiguous agency lies in the novel's ironic configuration of Catherine's reading of Northanger Abbey as a gothic text along with Henry's gothic tale. Upon Catherine's arrival at Northanger Abbey, Henry composes a gothic tale predicting the adventures of Catherine at the abbey. The narrator later depicts Catherine's discovery of gothic signs as such: the black cabinet, "which, though in a situation conspicuous enough, had never caught her notice before. Henry's words, his description of the ebony cabinet which was to escape her observation at first, immediately rushed across her; and though there could be nothing really in it, there was something whimsical, it was certainly a very remarkable coincidence!" (115). Austen's use of free indirect discourse here makes the narrator's ironic stance evident: the narrator mocks Catherine's consciousness with an air of detachment. Nonetheless, the use of free indirect style, because of the merging of the voice of the narrator with that of Catherine, also makes the narrator's intention ambiguous, suggesting "a narrative complicity between the authorial voice and that of character" (Lanser 74).[86] Although the narrator parodies Catherine's response, her consciousness also merges with Catherine's and serves to authorize Catherine's view, which is later verified by the novel's own portrayal of General Tilney's cruelty.

The structure of the passage also illustrates the merging of the consciousnesses, as the narrator provides supplementary comments in her depiction of Catherine. Stating that the cabinet catches Catherine's attention only after Catherine has been searching in vain, the narrator remarks that Henry's words only take effect at the moment when Catherine discovers the cabinet. When Catherine finds nothing that matches her fanciful anticipation, the narrator imitates Catherine's thought with an ironic tone: "but it was so very odd, after what Henry had said. In short, she could not sleep until she examined it" (115). Disregarding the structure of the ironic passage, Maria Jerinic centers the import of the passage on the negative influence of Henry's words on Catherine's imagination: "Gothic novels do not construct Catherine, Henry's conversations do" (146), and argues that "The object of Austen's parody and the real threat to women...is not the gothic novel but it is men, particularly men who wish to dictate to women what they should and should not read" (138). However, she has missed the productive force of the irony. I argue that although the narrator underlines several times the comic effect of Henry's tale, depicting Catherine's gothic reading as a laughable response to Henry's tale, the irony in the free indirect discourse and the structure of the passage also invite us to read Henry's words as Catherine's justification for her exploration of the gothic space. Although Henry's tale may provide a framework for her imagination, as the ironic passage suggests here, Catherine also uses Henry's tale to make a tale of her own. By merging the consciousness of Catherine with her own through supplementary commentary, the narrator transforms Catherine into an active agent in constructing her own gothic story.

As the narrative shows, Henry's words never put a limit on Catherine's imagination. When she finds a manuscript in her room, although it is a "striking exemplification of what Henry had foretold, [she] resolved instantly to peruse every line before she attempted to rest"

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(116). Catherine does not simply accept the plot Henry designs for her, she reads "the manuscript so wonderfully found, so wonderfully accomplishing the morning's prediction" (117), delighting in the wonder and her "lot" in discovering it, and she plots her own adventures with her reading. In parodying Catherine's "wonder" at finding the manuscript, the narrator also invites us to perceive the wonderful effect of Catherine's reading. Catherine provides Henry's unfinished tale with a plot of "such horror" that shocks Henry, completely revising Henry's tale with her own reading. Allowing Catherine to read with an extravagant plot in mind, the narrator's irony authorizes Catherine's gothic text with the plot of the novel.

The plot of the novel mirrors Catherine's gothic text and verifies her gothic imagination, which is perhaps the novel's biggest irony, a structural irony without the recognition of which the reader cannot perceive Austen's narrative art. Although Austen references Radcliffe frequently in this novel and mocks the Radcliffean heroine, she embeds the Radcliffean gothic plot in her own narrative. Catherine, who enters Northanger Abbey like the gothic heroine who is entrapped in the castle, becomes a female victim who suffers from the cruel treatment of the tyrannical father. General Tilney courteously invites her to the abbey, but he does so only because she is considered a valuable asset for his son; when General Tilney discovers Catherine's true status and deems her unworthy of his family, he relentlessly drives her out of the abbey, as she exists only as an "exchange object" in the marriage market. Although the novel satirizes Catherine's fears in imagining her gothic adventures, the gothic plot of male persecution and female victimization lies in the heart of the novel, functioning "as a continually disruptive and undercutting presence" in the novel (Hoeveler 129). Presenting Catherine as a "everywoman heroine" and a victim of General Tilney's tyranny, the novel, under the guise of laughter, presents the plight of women under the patriarchal regime. By replacing fear with laughter, the

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novel effectively masks its feminist intention while presenting it through the dark undertone embedded in the novel's plot. More importantly, it eventually verifies Catherine's reading of General Tilney as a tyrant and of Northanger Abbey as an imprisoning space instead of a domestic haven, thereby affirming Catherine's agency as a novel reader.

In presenting Catherine as a naive reader of the gothic novel, the novel's irony produces an active female agent through its ambiguity. It is no wonder that Catherine declares, when she is disappointed in her search for Henry, "but while I have Udolpho to read, I feel as if nobody could make me miserable" (26). Her reading of the gothic alone transforms her into an empowered heroine who searches for fulfillment in her reading experience rather than in a romantic relationship with men. Consequently, critics such as Joanne Cordon read Catherine as a feminist and *Northanger Abbey* a "feminist version of the female bildungsroman", arguing that Catherine educates Henry in many ways, teaching Henry to break cultural constraints and express his true feelings (41). Agreeing with this view of Catherine's natural capacity, I argue that it is the novel's use of irony that allows for such feminist reading, and that it is precisely the irony used to present the instructor-student relationship between Henry and Catherine that enables the reversal of their relationship. In one of the learning scenes in the novel in which Catherine misreads the social situation and is supposed to be corrected by Henry, Catherine's would-be instructor, the narrator gives an interesting twist to their conversation. When Henry teases Catherine, who tries to discover his true meanings in his roundabout expressions, with the declaration that he understands her "perfectly well," Catherine shrewdly responds, "Me - yes; I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible" (91). Henry's praise of this expression as "an excellent satire on modern language" ironically calls attention to Catherine's natural capacity for satire/language, even though she has appeared to have no clues about linguistic decorum/rules

that Henry strictly follows. Often acting as the authorial surrogate in the novel, Henry is subjected to irony at this moment, as his vague expressions reveal little information to Catherine, and Catherine's comment ironizes the inadequacy of his fastidious use of language. Capable of rhetorical complexity, Catherine criticizes Henry indirectly, reversing her role as a learner in the conversation.

As we have seen, Austen's irony reverses the power relationship between Henry and Catherine, presenting Catherine's agency through these ambiguous moments. Perhaps this indirect feminist strategy contributes to the novel's "inconsistency," which critics such as A. Walton Litz identifies as the novel's "real problem": "some passages point forward to the dramatic ironies of the mature works, while others revert to the cruder methods of the Juvenilia" (274). Reading occasional authorial intrusions as being inconsistent with the fact that Henry is often her spokesperson in the novel, Litz attributes the "inconsistency" to Austen's literary inexperience. Contrary to Litz, I argue that this inconsistency, rather than a structural flaw, is a deliberate feminist strategy, enabled by the novel's use of irony, that Austen employs in constructing female agency. Although the novel seemingly presents Henry as an authorial surrogate, it refuses to authorize a single voice through ironic ambiguities. Austen's novel thus allows the reader to perceive the ironized subject differently and detect her/his agency with the "inconsistency" in mind.

Seeing irony as "a subversive way of understanding meaning," Glenn Stanfield Holland contends, "irony always involves the upset of normal protocols of understanding and subverts the apparent meaning of a remark or text or event in favor of a privately derived, secret, but 'true' meaning" (33). Even so, Austen's irony not only subverts the novel's superficial meaning but also acts as a rhetorical strategy that destabilizes patriarchal discourses through its very

ambiguity. If, as Colebrook recognizes, "Irony was not just signaling the opposite of what was said; it was the expression of both sides or viewpoints at once in the form of contradiction or paradox" (54), Austen's irony plays with such paradox and thereby generates a discourse of female agency, realizing its potential to disrupt patriarchal discourses. Presenting both Catherine's self-delusion and self-empowerment, Austen utilizes irony as a figure of instability and allows the reader to perceive both the fatuity and potency in Catherine's reading with the ambiguity inherent in its ironic language, while validating Catherine's reading at the end with its structural design. By operating rhetorically on the level of language and on intertextuality and, finally, on its structure through the use of irony, the novel anticipates the reader's knowledge of the literary and cultural context in which the novel is situated and invites the reader to participate in uncovering the feminist message hidden in the text.[87] In using such a "discursive strategy," Austen disarms the potentially hostile reader by "a dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning-makers... [and] of different meanings" (Hutcheon 58).

As I have argued, performing a tale of female Bildungsroman, the novel simultaneously undermines it with its use of irony. Litz's comments finely encapsulate the effect of Austen's irony and the role of the reader in the construction of the ironic tale, even though he overlooks the effect of ambiguity embedded in irony:

> Jane Austen's irony is not directed at Catherine's sympathetic imagination, but at her
> misuse of it; and the novel's deepest criticism is reserved for the average reader's
> complacent reaction to the exposure of Catherine's 'folly.' Those who read *Northanger
> Abbey* as a straightforward drama in which Sense conquers Sensibility, and the
> disordered Imagination is put to flight by Reason, are neglecting the novel's ultimate
> irony. (271)

Heavily dependent on the reader's contextual knowledge, the novel often invites the reader to participate in the interpretation of its irony by addressing the reader's role explicitly. After the narrator introduces its unconventional heroine, she immediately calls for the reader's participation: "In addition to what has been already said of Catherine Morland...it may be stated, for the reader's more certain information, lest the following pages should otherwise fail of giving any idea of what her character is meant to be; that her heart was affectionate, her disposition cheerful and open...— and her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is" (9). Keenly aware of the effect of her previous ironic narrative projection of Catherine's image, the narrator modifies her ironic portrayal with a summary of statements, which further engages the reader in the interpretative process, for the narrator here depicts a wide range of character traits and encourages the reader to come up with his/her "idea of what [Catherine's] character is meant to be." Such "relational strategy" appears again at the end of the novel when the narrator,[88] after providing a happy ending, leaves it to the reader to decide on the meaning of the novel: "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience" (174). Austen's strategy is evasive – by posing a question to the reader, it engages the reader in the interpretative process through the novel's irony, which covertly challenges the dominant male discourses of her day, while at the same time effectively disburdening itself from the criticism of the male society by adopting such an evasive strategy.

While J. L. Austin postulates the performative nature of language, Jane Austen's rhetorical use of irony exemplifies language's performative aspect: it creates a world of empowered female characters. Moreover, Austen's style is performative in that she follows/performs the rhetorical tradition promoted by Pope that emphasizes the importance of

observing linguistic decorum, while undermining such male discourse through her irony. Her precision with the use of language and her observance of rules of decorum won her the recognition of the conservatives of her time – Dr. Fordyce, one of the most famous preachers in Austen's time who published a selection of sermons to instruct women how to behave, lauded her as "An 'Accomplished Woman'...one who possesses the qualities of 'purity and meekness, intelligence and modesty'" (qtd. in Cordon 43). However, he overlooks the complexity of Austen's language; precision and decorum are only one side of the coin. Observing Austen's fastidiousness with the choice of language, D.A. Miller remarks, "The impulse to put both the world and the word under correction is a powerful one in Austen...It's not just that Austen Style tries hard to be correct...but that it obeys an overwhelming urge to give correctness a theatrical form. To manifest grammatical correctness as spectacle" (84). Miller's remark pinpoints the performativity of Austen's style: in choosing a correct, decorous style of language, Austen performs what is expected of a female writer: performing the feminine, yet she destabilizes patriarchal discourses through her rhetorical strategy. Like her heroine Catherine Morland, who always exhibits the desire and capacity to learn and who emerges as a performative agent at the moments of misreading and learning, Austen displays in her novel a willingness to conform to the rules of literary discourses and yet constructs a subversive tale through the mask of irony. Even though she may not have fully achieved the maturity of style accredited to her later novels when she composed *Northanger Abbey*,[89] *Northanger Abbey* as a revised text testifies her literary talent with her masterful use of irony as a masked figure, even though there is a debate on the extent of her revision. Austen the ironic woman, although suppressing her own voice and her own heroine's voice, produces an empowering tale of female subjectivity with the complexity of her style. Perhaps Roland Barthes' remark in *The Pleasure of the Text* best illustrates the

Austenian strategy: "The most consistent nihilism is perhaps masked: in some way interior to institutions, to conformist discourse, to apparent finalities" (44). Masking her criticism of patriarchal regimes, Austen is most successful in resisting the dominant power structure by creating a masked, ironic style that constitutes an ambiguous, performative site, from which a tale of female subjectivity emerges.

Conclusion

The women writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, from the more reputedly "conservative" Burney and Radcliffe to the relatively "revolutionary" Brontë or the "neutral" Austen, all follow the conventional paradigm of the heroine's text in their novel writing, presenting a superficial discourse of normative femininity and seemingly participating in the dissemination of the feminine ideal endorsed by their society. But even so, Burney asks us to "reverse the medal" while reading her representation of female difficulties; Radcliffe invites us to lift the veil in our reading of her mysteries; Brontë encourages us to be the interlocutor of Jane Eyre to understand the "mysterious summons" in her ghost story; Austen bids us to perceive the gothic in the heart of her satire amidst the laughter. As we have learned, these novels are indeed masked narratives, and the women writers are the female masqueraders who don the masquerade of femininity in their fiction writing. As Spacks recognizes, "Women labeled frivolous or passive have corresponding resources open to them: resources of indirection, deviousness, evasiveness" (*Female Imagination* 27). Women writers of the time period, as I have shown, exploit these recourses to their advantages and (re)construct their fictions of modesty through their engagement with the gothic genre. Their deployment of the gothic mode in fact opens up an ambiguous discourse in their representations of female experience, which allows for the emergence of female agency despite its conformist gesture. By exploring the way in which the women writers construct, deconstruct, and re-construct femininity through their narrative masks, I have demonstrated how these women writers perform the "fictions of modesty" to conform to the cultural demand for feminine propriety yet simultaneously exploit the resources available to them to deconstruct their own superficial narratives. In deploying the gothic tropes in their writing, they re-construct femininity in ambiguous terms, thereby inventing a site of ambiguity

that challenges the normative definition of femininity. These ambiguous narratives, then, perform their ideological task by contesting the dominant ideologies they seemingly endorse.

The studies of the Female Gothic and of women's writing in general have often neglected the complexity of narratives in constructing female subjectivities. Although some critics have recognized the performative nature of women writer's works in the time period, they pay little attention to the intersection between narratives and historical context. My study, in contrast, calls attention to the performativity of narratives in constituting gendered subjectivities as a response to historical and cultural conditions. My study emphasizes not only the performance of these women writers but also the performative effect of their novels in subverting the dominant power structure, accentuating the performance of the narratives that utilize ambiguity as a vital means for the production of female agency. Like Armstrong, I believe that the novel can "think like individuals" and has the capacity to act like individuals in its mimicry of reality. The novels we have discussed are indeed performative agents who perform the conventional feminine style of text under specific cultural conditions yet succeed in resisting male ideologies through the feminine language of ambiguity.[90]

By paying attention to the interaction between historical context and textual ambiguities, my study avoids the essentializing critical tendency that categorizes the women writers and their works in fixated terms – feminists or anti-feminists; powerful or powerless. My study has shown that we need not label the women writers and their works as such. Instead, we should embrace the ambiguity in their novels and recognize the agency constituted by the ambiguity. The women writers in the particular time period that I have discussed, in their participation in the dissemination of the feminine ideal, have indeed destabilized stable gender categories through their engagement with the gothic genre, undermining the male ideologies their novels seemingly

uphold. Their works "undo" the dominant gender ideologies through the ambiguity embedded in their gothic writings. When Butler uses the phrase "the constitutive ambiguity of sex" to illustrate the instability of gender categories, as Penelope Deutscher points out, she is not only suggesting that gender categories are ambiguous but also claiming that "ambiguity can perform;" "Ambiguity can be constitutive," Deutscher reaffirms (15). But perhaps it is more important to recognize the performative function of narrative ambiguities in conjunction with historical context – the performative function of ambiguous texts in challenging existing gender categories and generating female agency when situated in a specific historical context.

With the insight we have gained, perhaps we can reevaluate the function of the novel in making the modern woman. Armstrong has famously claimed, "The modern individual was first and foremost a woman" (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 8), by which she emphasizes the role of domestic fiction in promoting the feminine ideal and enabling the production of the female subject. Perhaps we ought to reconsider the validity of her claim by approaching it in modified terms. As Sally Robinson points out, "narrative is one arena in which gender and subjectivity are produced in powerful ways…It is through narrative that women most often become Woman; but that process can be fractured through women's self-representation" (10). If women become "the modern individual," or Woman, through the representation of the self in the novel as Armstrong asserts, women writers are also forced to mask their narratives with a conventional paradigm and therefore engage in a "fractured" process as Robinson claims. What we need, then, is the unmasking of the process to recognize their agency in the acts of masking. Women writers and their characters are not the all-powerful, unambiguous agents as Armstrong perceives them to be; they are indeed ambiguous agents who struggle to find their voices in the narratives of conventionality. In structuring and masking their narratives, the women writers embrace a fluid

entity – ambiguities inherent in the cultural conceptions of femininity and in the feminine language they choose to write, thereby transcending above the confines of patriarchy through their performance of gendered identities and narratives. Even though their narratives either adhere to or return to conventionality eventually, what we witness is the burgeoning of female agency, albeit ambiguously, out of the masquerade of the proper lady.

NOTES

1. Ellen Moers argues that such heroines are the central figure of the genre: "a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine" (91).

2. I borrow this term from Rachel Blau DuPlessis, who sees narrative as an expression of ideology and narrative strategies as a means of women writers to reconstruct their ideological positions. Her book, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, explores the narrative strategies of twentieth century women writers in revising the conventional romantic paradigm of ending with marriage.

3. Diana Wallace evaluates the feminism of the female gothic in *Female Gothic Histories*. Quoting Margaret Doody, who identifies the Gothic novel as 'the novel of feminine radical protest,' she argues that "the major peaks within the Female Gothic tradition" correspond to the waves of feminism (19).

4. Jane Spencer points out that the historical and social changes in the mid-eighteenth century result in a different approach to the representation of femininity by women writers, who promoted the ideology of modest femininity in order to gain respectability. Mary Poovey examines the influence of the cultural ideal of proper femininity on the literary production of women writers. Nancy Miller discusses the heroine's text, the text that (re)produces conventional plots of female virtue and passivity, as a product of a culture that "codes femininity in paradigms of sexual vulnerability" (xi).

5. Patricia Spacks extols "the female imagination" of women writers under cultural constraints and argues that they exploit the stereotypes of passivity to empower themselves: "Women labeled frivolous or passive have corresponding resources open to them: resources of indirection, deviousness, evasiveness" (27).

6. For a feminist discussion of the Bakhtinian theory of "narrative as inherently multivocal, as a form of cultural resistance" (4), see Dale M. Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry's *Feminist, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*.

7. Susan Lanser argues in *Fictions of Authority* that women novelists adopt a feminine style, a coded "'powerless,' non-authoritative form called 'women's language,'" to seek access to a discursive authority" through their textual voices.

8. See Ruth Bernard Yeazell's *Fictions of Modesty*.

9. Yeazell notes that "'an in-bred sense of modesty' was bred even into the heroines of Gothic…bred so insistently that when a young woman in *The Monk* is unclothed, unconscious, and in danger of rape, the novelist pauses to remark" on her modesty in her 'very nakedness'" (ix).

10. I'm borrowing the phrase from Mary Anne Schofield's book: *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind*.

11. The OED defines the masquerade as a non-gender specific, outward show that is "false" in nature.

12. Terry Castle points out that the masquerade becomes marginalized in the literature of the late eighteenth century due to its transgressive nature, when the cultural climate of England appears to be anti-theatrical and anti-masquerade at this time.

13. As Castle herself contends in the epilogue of *Masquerade and Civilization*, the masquerade gradually disappears from eighteenth-century culture and literature; while the transgressive impulse of the masquerade becomes increasingly internalized and privatized, configured psychologically in fiction of late Eighteen and early nineteenth century, one of the

realms into which the masquerade "migrates" is the fantastical tale, a literary genre typified by its transgression of natural laws (341).

14. See feminist narratological account of "ambiguous discourse" in Kathy Mezei's collection. While their use of the term is inspiring for me, I'm employing the term "ambiguous discourse" to examine ambiguity as a discursive site for the construction of femininity.

15. See Catherine Gallagher's *Nobody's Story* for her analysis of the dispossessed position of eighteenth-century women.

16. As Emily Anderson contends, "the novel, like the playhouse or the masquerade, could offer its authors yet another theatrical frame; the fictional text, which announces a discrepancy between its author and the sentiments it conveys, could function as an act of disguise; and authorship could become an act of performance" (2).

17. See James Loxley's discussion of Austin's theory, in which he relates the function of words to making the world.

18. I emphasize the performativity of narrative in making ideology here, as opposed to DuPlessis' perception of narrative as an "expression" of ideology.

19. See Stathis Gourgouris's analysis of literature's "cognitive nature" and "constitutive performativity."

20. See Nancy Armstrong's discussion of the novel's capacity to think like individuals and to reproduce the individual.

21. See Gallagher 211.

22. Palomo points out that the Oxford English Dictionary cites Burney's *Cecilia* as its first source for the definition of "propriety": "Conformity with good manners or polite usage, correctness of behavior or morals; becomingness, decency" (444).

23. While Burney's Evelina is similarly characterized, *The Wanderer* differs from *Evelina* in its use of Gothic tropes.

24. See Juliet McMaster's discussion of the debate on Burney's feminism.

25. Maximillian Novak calls the eighteenth century "the age of disguise," arguing that disguise becomes "the very texture of literary style" in the eighteenth century (8).

26. Arguing that identities are "an effect of character" and that the superficiality of character presented by the eighteenth-century stage "raises the frightening possibility that either that there was no true 'inside' or that if there were, we have no real 'access' to it" (27), Lisa Freeman's fruitful study of how dramatic genres manipulate and produce identities of gender, class, and nation in *Character's Theatre* draws attention to the eighteenth-century's obsession with surfaces and to the dramatic genre's capacity in problematizing the essence of character.

27. While identities other than gendered ones are also often configured as non-essential in Burney's work, which indicates a conception of identity that goes beyond gender, my reading of the novel's configuration of femininity as non-essential emphasizes Burney's concern with definitions of gender.

28. See Mary Poovey's discussion of the two authors in *The Proper lady and the Woman Writer* (112); Tara Ghoshall Wallace also discusses the similarity between Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, The Wrongs of Woman* and Burney's *The Wanderer* in "Rewriting Radicalism: Wollstonecraft in Burney's *The Wanderer*," arguing that although *The Wanderer* parodies Wollstonecraft's radicalism through the character of Elinor, it also advances Wollstonecraft's feminist agenda in "subterranean ways."

29. Craft-Fairchild provides a detailed account of such reading in *Masquerade and Gender* (129).

30. See Doane's "Masquerade Reconsidered."

31. Questioning whether propriety is "a woman's world, or a woman's prison?", Beatriz Villacanas Palomo contends that "the matter of propriety" in Burney's fictions becomes "a claustrophobic world" crippling the author and her heroines (443).

32. See Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" for the discussion of the objectification of women by the male gaze.

33. Mary Poovey argues in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* that women employ "strategies of indirection, obliqueness, and doubling" in their act of writing; although these strategies are not unique to women, they are characteristically feminine (42).

34. For example, observing the text's conflation of virtue with decorum, Kathleen Anderson notes that "the result is a text whose profound ambiguity teases the reader with the suspicion that Juliet's real self is indistinguishable from her performances" (424). Yet she overlooks the function of ambiguity in presenting Juliet's performance and therefore over-reads Juliet as a compelling actress who actively and deliberately exploits the mask of female modesty.

35. In *Character's Theatre*, Lisa Freeman argues that identities are "an effect of character" and that the superficiality of character presented by the eighteenth-century stage "raises the frightening possibility that either that there was no true 'inside' or that if there were, we have no real 'access' to it" (27). While extoling the dramatic genre's capacity in problematizing the essence of identity, she dismisses the novel's role in questioning the essence of character, positing that "narrative realism functions to produce the illusion of continuity of self" (15). My analysis, on the contrary, demonstrates the novel's capacity to participate in the anti-essentialist presentation of character through the narrative form.

36. See Robert Miles' historical account of Radcliffe's reputation in *The Great Enchantress*. Also see Ellen Moers' definition of Female Gothic in *Literary Women*.

37. Emily's overactive imagination is perceived as a feminine tendency in a negative sense.

38. See Bakhtin for an explanation of "monologic" and "dialogic."

39. See Mary Poovey's discussion of such anxiety in *The Proper Lady*.

40. See Syndy Conger's "Sensibility Restored: Radcliffe's Answer to Lewis's *The Monk*" for a detailed discussion of the shift in the conception of sensibility.

41. Coral Ann Howells argues that the fact that Agnes sees an affinity between herself and Emily, although the novel rejects them as impossibilities, suggests "a 'subtle subversion of conformist discourse'" in the novel (151).

42. Critics such as Poovey have contrasted masculine energy with feminine sensibility in the novel, arguing that Emily's sensibility redeems the negative quality of masculine energy.

43. Helen Oesterheld argues that the marginalization of the heroine is itself a critique of patriarchy (114, 116)

44. Coral Ann Howells discuss some "odd moments" in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, arguing that these erratic moments expose "the false limits which the sentimental narrative imposes" (152).

45. See Humberto Garcia's "'To Strike out a New Path': Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Astell, and the Politics of the Imperial Harem" for her discussion of the feminist significance of the veil.

46. A repentant prostitute or promiscuous woman in the Christian stories of the Middle Ages.

47. See Terry Castle's *Masquerade and Civilization* for her analysis of the subversive function of the masquerade.

48. Miles infers that the figure is male and argues that Emily's misinterpretation of it as Laurentini's body is a projection of Emily's unconscious mind. However, the text states that "a waxen figure, made to resemble a human body in the state, to which it is reduced after death...serving as a memento of the condition at which he must arrive" (NA 662). The lack of the specification of gender here could be seen as a deliberate ambiguity as the body has been frequently identified by Emily and the reader as female.

49. For a detailed discussion of the veil image, see Broadwell and Greenfield.

50. See Lauren Fitzgerald's "Gothic Properties: Radcliffe, Lewis and the Critics" and Syndy Conger's "Sensibility Restored" for their comparisons of the two novels.

51. Yael Shapira points out that "the novel minimizes its references to the virtuous heroine's body by replacing it with a sartorial metonymy...the veil"; observing that "the veil is a symbol of the body's scrupulous effacement by women themselves" (468), Shapira perceives the use of the veil as a strategy of survival.

52. Ellena is forced into the religious order by her enemies. See Jessica A. Volz's discussion of the religious veil as "a mobile prison."

53. See Elizabeth Broadwell's discussion of "the double meaning of 'reveal'" (78).

54. See Bakhtin and Terry Castle for the use of the term "carnivalesque."

55. Observing the role of spiritualism in informing Jane's path to autonomy, Barbara Hardy states that "it is not the artifice of fantasy but the fantasy of belief, which determines the movement and the motivation" (24). James Buzard notices the novel's "repeated recourse to the heavy machinery of supernaturalism" to check the authority of culture, the culture that limits the

individual growth (198).

56. By ghost-storytelling I mean Jane's narrative rendition of her ghosted experiences.

57. Rebecca Munford notes the spectrality of women in general, arguing that "Owing to its cultural associations with the territories of irrationality, otherness and corporeal excess, femininity has been particularly and peculiarly susceptible to 'spectralisation'" (120), while I emphasize the affinity between the Victorian woman and the ghost.

58. See Jacques Derrida's discussion of the ghost in *Specters of Marx*.

59. See Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* for her discussion of abjection. Hilary Grimes notes that Kristeva's theory of abjection is cast in the terms of the ghost: 'it is...not lack of cleanliness or health that cause abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order[...]The in-between, the ambiguous, composite' (102)." Such theorization of ghosts as abject beings allows us to understand "the powers of horror for the ghostliness within the female self," she argues.

60. Marcus discusses abstraction as a technique for displacing Jane's embodied self into writing in her essay "The Professor of the Author: Abstraction, Advertising, and Jane Eyre." She argues that Jane gains subjectivity by alienating her embodied existence into abstractions. My essay extends this argument by discussing Jane's narration as a disembodiment that refigures herself as a ghost.

61. See Dorrit Claire Cohn's definition of dissonant and consonant self-narration in *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*.

62. Mary Poovey discusses the Victorian audience's response to the novel such as Lady Eastlake's objection to Jane Eyre, as the lady notes "the gap between Jane's professed innocence

and the sexual knowledge the author insinuates in the language and action of the novel" (*Uneven Developments* 135).

63. See Peter Brooks' theorization of the plot as a motor force in *Reading for the Plot*.

64. Hilary Grimes notes that "altered states of perception like hypnosis, dreams, hysteria, and ghost-seeing become catalysts for creative expression and for political awakening in women's writing" (87). Jane's ghost story similarly utilizes such supposed feminine force and turns it to her own advantage.

65. For a discussion of the novel's "socialized" narrative style, see Rosemarie Bodenheimer (101).

66. Poovey *Uneven Developments* 139; Gilbert and Gubar 85.

67. Alison Case has argued in *Plotting Women* that Jane disavows her plotting role to counter the image of artful plotter generated by Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela*. My reading differs from hers in that I read Jane's plotting in connection with the Gothic trope.

68. See Sonjeong Cho's discussion of "the ideal interlocutor."

69. As Hilary Grimes points out, the ghost story refined by women was a "distinctively female form" in the nineteenth century, especially the late century, whereby the ghost becomes the emblem for female identity (91).

70. Jeffrey Franklin notices the different implications of "spirit" in *Jane Eyre*.

71. Critics have often identified the novel as a female bildungsroman and Henry as the male instructor of the novel.

72. See Cecil S. Emden 280, Waldo S. Glock 34, and Narelle Shaw 339-340 for their discussion of Austen's revision. The degree of Austen's revision of the novel is debated: some argue that the novel received a substantial revision; others disagree, but most have concluded

that although the novel shares some similar traits with Austen's other earlier works, it also demonstrates the sophistication of the Austen style evinced in her later, more mature novels. I argue that, given the fact that Austen had fully matured into a sophisticated writer in the years she revised the novel, we should read such incongruity as a deliberate narrative strategy, or at least, an "incongruity" that increases the complexity of the novel that is consistent with the Austen style she later developed.

73. See Gilson 65 for his discussion of the novel's editions.

74. Narelle Shaw defends Austen's use of Free Indirect Speech in *Northanger Abbey*.

75. For a comprehensive discussion of scholarship on Austen's feminism, see *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, edited by Devoney Looser. Looser argues that Austen "cannot be easily deemed a 'protofeminst,' a 'feminist,' or an 'antifeminst" as her scholarship is characterized by 'the conflict of interpretations'" (3).

76. D.A. Miller argues that Austen's impersonality/neuter is indeed a "strategy of camouflage."

77. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* are often considered as the prototypes of sentimental heroines.

78. Gabriela Castellanos offers a comprehensive analysis of how *Northanger Abbey* satirizes the traditional sentimental/gothic heroine in her *Laughter, War and Feminism* (72-74), emphasizing its carnivalesque effect.

79. Linda Hutcheon identifies "echoic mention" as one marker of irony (153).

80. Several critics use the term "discourse of negation," including the aforesaid Terry Castle and Susan Lanser, although none of them considers its performative nature.

81. Linda Hutcheon's *Irony's Edge* discusses the function of irony, arguing that it has a subversive edge despite its "riskiness."

82. See Emily Auerbach's detailed examination of these texts.

83. Barbara M. Benedict argues in her "Reading by the Book in *Northanger Abbey*" that Jane Austen "underscores that 'books' serve as labels of romantic vulnerability, rather than sources of information."

84. Gilbert and Gubar uses this phrase to describe the condition of female writers and characters in their reading of *Northanger Abbey*.

85. See Amanda Gilroy's discussion in her introduction to *The Female Quixote* (xlii).

86. Although Susan Lanser sees such complicity only in the character's "indirect comment[s] presented (or accepted) as authoritative" (74), I argue that since Catherine has been presented as the moral agent in the novel, the complicity is self-evident, even in such parodic moments.

87. Tara Wallace comments, "*Northanger Abbey* refuses to yield a stable vision, either moral or aesthetic. What it does yield, what it insists upon, is an awareness of the reader's participation in narrative strategies" (29).

88. Linda Hutcheon calls irony a "relational strategy" as it operates both between said and unsaid meanings and between people such as ironists, interpreters, and targets (58).

89. D. A. Miller argues that Austen has developed her style of impersonality in *Northanger Abbey* even though it "has not yet attained the full purity of its impersonality," and he called this style "the Austen Neuter." Later, he claims that the Austen Neuter "may not be the Neuter at all, but only an exquisitely masked feminine desire for it" (35).

90. Craig Vasey argues that ambiguity is the "defining nature of feminine language" (156).

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