

The Emily Connection: Ann Radcliffe, L.M. Montgomery and “The Female Gothic”

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Résumé: *À la lumière des analyses de Julia Kristeva et, plus particulièrement, des notions de jouissance et d'intertextualité, Lorna Drew redéfinit l'atmosphère "gothique" du roman Emily of New Moon et montre l'influence déterminante des Mystères d'Udolphe d'Ann Radcliffe sur ce récit—et l'écriture—de Lucy Maud Montgomery.*

You can't get from Udolpho to New Moon as the crow flies, but you may map the distance discursively through the sub-genre known as “the female gothic.”¹ Emily St. Aubert, of Udolpho, connects with Emily of New Moon, her fictive counterpart, through the tropes utilized by Ann Radcliffe in the late-eighteenth century. These plot the first gothic heroine's journey through the oedipal maze that paradigms the female's passage into subjectivity.² What Montague Summers called “the gothic quest”³ includes in this female gothic an engagement with nature, a maimed male, discursive lapses into poetry, and alternative worlds manifested in dreams, fantasies and visions. All of these point towards the prooedipal mother whose presence links the heroine with the prelinguistic.⁴

All of these tropes work to retard the resolution of the plot. In the gothic novel written by women, a female heroine spends her textual life menaced by the very structures that are supposed to sustain her. Thus the domestic realm—hearth, home and often husband—becomes dangerous. The ostensible end of what I would call the gothic *faux* romance, marriage and congruent entry into the oedipal order through motherhood, is held in abeyance,⁵ while the heroine dallies and dawdles her way through patriarchal subjectivity's minefield.

In the classical realist novel, the lives of the characters take a familiar trajectory. Readers are presented with a disingenuous (and seamless) take on the life of the gendered subject at a particular historical and cultural moment in capitalist patriarchy.⁶ This ur-plot has its flip side in the gothic novel, the genre that exposes classical realism's fissured underbelly. The lives of women and men in the traditional novel are always and already predetermined. Women enter the social order with both gender and sexuality nailed down. Tensions in plot are resolutely resolved by marriage (read heterosexuality). Conventions click into place. Dissatisfactions experienced by heroines are found to be a result of individual waywardness, rather than gender opposition to the demands of a socially and culturally constructed and constricting feminine role.

Fiction (and indeed society) constructs ideology from family plots. The family in the traditional novel remains, at the end of the plot, securely in place, however shaky it might appear during the course of the story. The gothic text, on the other hand, represents a critique, if not a collapse, of family and its much-touted values.⁷ The place of women in the family is understood in this genre as a locus of confinement. I think it no accident that women in large numbers took to the genre and re-worked the form, making it their own. In the female gothic the family is seen as a site of dissatisfaction. Gothic heroines attempt to navigate its relationships using a series of delaying tactics that impede their entry into subjectivity. The clumsy, tacked-on dénouements, for which both Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Brontë⁸ were criticized, foreground the notion of a genre (and a sex) speaking its dis/ease.

I count myself among the several feminist scholars whose work with Freudian discourse results in a foregrounding of the negative oedipus complex.⁹ Freud found women's position vis-à-vis the oedipal complex an uneasy fit at best. The Electra complex was, of course, his explanation for the pattern followed by the majority of women as they turned from the mother towards the father in the matrimonial union recognized by Western culture as the first step in the reproduction of the family. Freud used this myth of matricide as a way of troping female heterosexual desire. Nevertheless he noted that women remained anxious and improperly oedipalized subjects. The negative oedipus complex represents an apparent dissatisfaction on the part of the female within the locus that is supposedly her proper sphere. Freud's theory amounts, in fact, to a confession that women do not fit the oedipal paradigm; that many, if not most, function as loose canons on the patriarchal deck.

The female gothic, then, may be understood as the genre that documents female uneasiness within the social order. It is, in a sense, popular culture's reading of Freud's negative oedipus complex. The discourse works to disqualify the male (to castrate him, in the metaphoric sense) and to (re)introduce the maternal/natural realm as a source of plenitude and pleasure. Whatever else the gothic heroine desires, it is not marriage and motherhood. Some other realm opens in the female gothic, through the gaps, fissures and cracks explored both by its texts and its heroines. Ann Radcliffe's Emily is the first to explore what amounts to this alternative female universe. L.M. Montgomery's Emily is decidedly not the last.

A structural look at *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and the Emily trilogy, yields specific similarities, beginning with the shared first name of the protagonists.¹⁰ Moreover, both Emilys begin their textual life (as indeed do most gothic heroines) as orphans. The biological family is moribund and requires replacing. Emily St. Aubert, in *Udolpho*, plots a cyclic journey, returning to La Vallée, her birthplace, to take her place as wife and mother. Emily of New Moon, of course, never leaves PEI. Nevertheless both heroines begin and end their textual lives in a valley. (The first sentence of *Emily of New Moon* begins with the phrase "the

house in the hollow").¹¹ That both texts close with the heroine in her place of origin speaks a female reluctance to move beyond maternal space.

In these twinned gothic quests, textual gaps are opened that reveal a longing on the part of both heroines to remain in place; a desire *not* to invest in the social order. One of these textual leverages is opened by the discursive practise of both Emilys, their penchant/desire for writing poetry.¹² This work does nothing to further the oedipal plot/progress of the characters towards patriarchal requirements for femininity; rather it constitutes a diagenetic stumbling block, for although the work is done in order to win paternal approval (the Emilys write for their respective dead fathers) their creative output situates them closer to that maternal space of difference. In this way, writing practice for both Emilys is a rebellious act, a refusal to be contained within the patriarchal structure that speaks them.

I do not mean to suggest that the two characters have an overtly feminist consciousness, nor are their poetic texts informed by anything approaching modern feminism. Both Emilys adore their fathers (it being relatively easy to idolize a ghost dad). Both saw their fathers as mentors, teachers who criticized and shaped their work. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this work in the text, and the fact that it was ideologically unsound for women to write at all, makes their writing practice revolutionary.

Contextually, the subject matter of the poetry and prose authored by the Emilys refers mostly to the sublimity of the natural world. I use this word advisedly. In the eighteenth century, the sublime was used almost in a religious sense to signify inexpressible emotion. As such, it parallels the French *jouissance*, a word utilized by Julia Kristeva to signify desire beyond language, particularly the maternal desire seen in mother/child iconography.¹³ Emily St. Aubert writes lengthy lyrics extolling the glories of the romantic landscapes through which she travels. The linguistic life of Emily Byrd Starr is constructed from the rhetoric of romantic poetry: her mentors are Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, Shelley *et al.* Both heroines express their mutual love of nature in a way that works to situate eroticism in the maternal, not the paternal order.¹⁴ (Nature, after all, has been historically, and rhetorically, figured as "Mother Nature"). Emily Byrd Starr is, of course, inspired by her "wind woman," a kind of nature goddess.¹⁵ Indeed the poetry, like the prose descriptions of nature, may be understood as ways of de/siring the paternal text and substituting maternal longing, the *invagination* slyly referred to by Jacques Derrida in his *Of Grammatology*. Claire Kahane further elaborates the link between nature and the maternal in her assertion that,

Because the mother-woman is experienced as part of nature itself before we learn her boundaries, she traditionally embodies the mysterious not-me world, with its unknown forces. Hers is the body awesome and powerful, which is both our habitat and our prison, and while an infant gradually becomes conscious of a linked Other, the mother imaginatively remains linked to the realm of Nature, figuring the forces of life and death. (336-37)

Both Radcliffe's and Montgomery's heroines are spoken to and by nature; the maternal/natural voice is heard in the Romantic vistas that call the heroine back towards a place where the sound of silence signifies maternal safety and plenitude.

Moreover, prose descriptions of landscape by the implied narrators threaten to take over the text, displacing the romantic plot entirely. Whatever romantic configurations the plot possesses are shelved, displaced by lengthy portions of the texts in which the heroines ecstatically contemplate the beauties of the rural landscape. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, opened at random, yields, for example, the following passage.

And now the moon was high over the woods, touching their summits with yellow light, and darting between the foliage long level beams; while on the rapid Garonne below the trembling radiance was faintly obscured by the lightest vapour. Emily long watched the playing lustre, listened to the soothing murmur of the current, and the yet lighter sounds of the air, as it stirred, at intervals, the lofty palm-trees. 'How delightful is the sweet breath of these groves,' said she. 'This lovely scene!—how often shall I remember and regret it, when I am far away.' (*Udolpho* 114)

The language here is far more erotically charged than the romantic passages (such as they are in a text this early). It is as though sexual desire is coded in these landscape descriptions. This is, no doubt, a result of historical suppression of female sexuality, in accordance with the dictates of eighteenth-century morality. The passage then may be read as sublimation, a Freudian return of the repressed.

However, it is astonishing to find the same erotically textured charge in the Emily trilogy. It seems to be an ongoing function of the female gothic to code female desire in ways that do not manifestly relate to the love story. Emily of New Moon describes

... a red sunset behind the white, distant hills, shining through the dark trees like a great fire; there was a delicate tracery of bare branch shadows all over the crusted garden; there was a pale, ethereal alpenglow all over the southeastern sky; and presently there was a little, lovely new moon in the silvery arch all over Lofty John's bush. (*ENM* 175)

Readers of the Emily trilogy are familiar with the frequency with which these passages appear; indeed, even (perhaps especially) when I read them for the first time as an adolescent, I was aware of their erotic power. The romance with Teddy Kent seemed all smoke and mirrors in comparison.

Furthermore, the *irruptions*¹⁶ of poesy (I include the nature descriptions as well as the rhymed and metered verse in the text) give credence to Julia Kristeva's formulations of the mother position in language. Kristeva maintains that patriarchal language, in spite of its syntactical, grammatical and even contextual control, does not entirely have its own linguistic way. Working through and impacting against the symbolic (*le symbolique*) that structures language is the semiotic (*le sémiotique*).¹⁷ This represents the place of the abjected mother in language, and imbues the text with rhythms tracing the primal loss of the maternal body. Poetry, with its emphasis on rhythmic, emotive power, its dependence on the *connotative* sense of words, works against plot. To find

it in the novel as a major rhetorical device is to plot the traces of the missing (m)other in the language.

Moreover, it is not only poetic language that works to impede plot. Montgomery's Emily trilogy incorporates much of Emily's creative prose as well, including the entire text of *The Woman Who Spanked the King*.¹⁸ Much of the prose operates as a kind of deconstructor of the romantic discourse Emily has been encouraged to write by her own intertextually informed reading practice. Beside romantic descriptions of place, there are wonderfully comic character sketches, and events that work as send-ups of the more formal writing. It is to Mr. Carpenter's credit that he recognizes these as literature; indeed they are far more interesting than the conventional work she publishes. Emily's letters to her father, spelling errors and all, represent the real opus of *Emily of New Moon*. This is work in process, and it is interesting that the letters eventually recognize maternal influence, however celestial.

The work authored by both Emilys is, interestingly enough, trivialized by male characters who tend to damn it with faint praise. M. St. Aubert's attitude to his daughter's writing is undeniably patronizing. The text informs us that "whatever St. Aubert might think of . . . [Emily's] stanzas, he would not deny her the pleasure of *believing* [*italics mine*] that he approved them" (*Udolpho* 17). Emily Starr has a writing role model and supporter in her journalist father in heaven. It is at the textual level that her writing is most patriarchally circumscribed by the social, historical and gender constraints that mark this and indeed almost all texts. She may write only on the island, performing the important ideological task of marketing both family values and place. Moreover, her dark (and critical) side is kept in abeyance, relegated to the private, feminine and largely unmarketable realm of the journal and the Jimmy book.

Thematically, however, the creative writings of the Emilys (which operate rather like *mise en abyme*) are deconstructive of patriarchal ideology (which may be why they are textually belittled). Emily St. Aubert, in one poetic utterance, documents female oppression (about which she is, by this time in her beleaguered textual travels, something of an expert) by inventing the myth of a mermaid chained to a rock by Neptune to prevent her intruding in his realm. Emily Starr's ostensibly humorous short story *The Woman Who Spanked the King* nevertheless enacts a narrative of female revenge.

An ubiquitous unveiling¹⁹ of the male in the female gothic speaks yet another of its genre practices. Castration (in the Lacanian metaphoric sense) of the male characters in the female gothic occurs with enough regularity to establish it as a mark of critical difference. In the discourse, an emasculation occurs which deconstructs the phallic power of the male, rendering him more manageable, less threatening. Ann Ronald deals with this aspect of the female gothic in detail, finding it a sign that "the psychology behind these books is more seriously disturbed than most critics have hitherto dreamed" (Fleenor 184).²⁰ Rosalind Coward, on the other hand, finds in the mutilation of the male a positive "push

for power in female fantasy” (Coward 195). What is important here is that the castration of the male reveals/unveils his culturally recessed femininity in a way that, for Kaja Silverman, deserves far more critical notice than it has hitherto received because of what it has to say about the subjectivity of both sexes. Silverman maintains that:

... since no one assumes identity except by being separated from the mother, having access to the real, and entering into a field of preexisting meaning, and since no identity can be sustained in the absence of the gaze of the Other—what passes for ‘femininity’ is actually an inevitable part of all subjectivity ... what is needed here is not so much a ‘masculinization’ of the female subject as a ‘feminization’ of the male subject—a much more generalized acknowledgment, in other words, of the necessary terms of cultural identity. (*The Acoustic Mirror* 149)

I myself see nothing alarming in a textual poetics/politics that articulates phallic power within the realm of apprehension (in all senses of the word) by the female characters. When the power of the phallic function is understood as deriving from culture rather than biology, then the heroine’s rejection of phallic privilege does not involve rejection of the biological male. As well, the feminization of the male moves him textually closer to the mother position and therefore more readily accessible, and acceptable, by and to the female.²¹

Both Emily St. Aubert’s father, M. St. Aubert, and her lover Valancourt, share feminine characteristics that result in a curious conflation of differences; the father’s passing leaves a gap in the convenient shape of the son-in-law to be. Both men are connected with poetry, music and a mysticism and romanticism more often associated with the feminine. Moreover, although M. St. Aubert acts as arbiter of Emily’s emotions, advising her regarding the balancing of reason and sentiment, he himself is frequently overcome by his own feelings, and in several highly-wrought passages he breaks down entirely.²² Valancourt too indulges in the feminine act of weeping; he is reduced to unmanly tears almost as often as his intended. Furthermore, M. St. Aubert approves in Valancourt the emotional outbursts he tries to check in Emily, seeing in the former “a frank and generous nature full of ardour, highly susceptible of whatever is grand and beautiful, but impetuous, wild, and somewhat romantic” (41). “This young man,” remarks St. Aubert approvingly, “has never been at Paris” (41). The association of Valancourt with rural space marks the lover as partaking in/of the maternal place, closer to nature than to culture. The same observation may be made of St. Aubert, who retires to La Vallée “to scenes of simple nature, to the pure delights of literature, and to the exercise of domestic virtues” (1), the century’s equivalent of family values.

Indeed, considering Valancourt’s position on the feminine side of the subjectivity curve, it is astonishing how many times he requires wounding by persons acting on Emily’s behalf. At their first meeting her father stages a mini-castration scene by inadvertently shooting him in the arm (the modern connotation of “a shot in the arm” is not without significance here). The wound engages Emily’s sympathy, necessitating rather more physical closeness be-

tween the two than would otherwise be permissible. Later in the text, as the narrative moves towards romantic closure, her *gardener* shoots him in the arm, as though to reinforce the original wound as a mark of difference. Nor is Valancourt the only male in the text who sustains physical injury on Emily's behalf. Montoni and Morano, both her suitors, fight a duel, resulting in the wounding of Morano.

Many males in the Emily Starr trilogy are also coded feminine. Those who are not are brutes, as attested to by the character of Dr. Burnley (before the exoneration of his wife) and the awful Murray patriarchs whose portraits terrify the heroine. Emily Starr's father burns out as a result of consumption, the illness most often textually associated with the female, particularly in the nineteenth-century novel.²³ In fact, the biological mothers of both the Emilys die before their husbands; so that longing for the mother runs like a lost umbilical cord connecting the texts. Both mothers died of a lingering illness, unspecified in *Udolpho*, consumption in the case of Juliet Starr. The feminine may be read almost as a disease, infecting both the fathers through the maternal carriers. Also, it is from Douglas Starr that Emily inherits her love of the bucolic and the pastoral, a desire that again situates her (and him) on the nature side of the nature versus culture binary opposition.

Teddy Kent too is hardly a lover in possession of the "masculine" virtues. Indeed, Emily's acquaintanceship with him derives from the visits made to the Tansy Patch during his sickly adolescence. It is this feminine delicacy and his also feminine-coded alignment with the fine arts, which makes him preferable to the more robust Perry as the object of Emily's desire. Elizabeth Epperly's reference to Teddy Kent as "associated with Emily's deepest emotions—with what she feels and thinks, not with what he tries to impose on her" and her insight that "the coolness readers feel about Teddy shows how difficult Montgomery's problem with romance is" (*Sweet-Grass* 178) validate this notion of the femininity of the lover.

The lovers of the two Emilys are also psychically related. Emily St. Aubert's ubiquitous communings with nature frequently call up the image of, and indeed the voice and the music associated with, her absent beloved. Though the voice she conjures is internal, unlike the external voice projected by Emily Starr to Teddy, it is nevertheless an example of the psychic presence-in-absence that characterizes their relationship. Teddy Kent is also frequently invoked by Emily Starr *in absentia*. The episode where she saves his life, long distance, is, of course, the most powerful example of their psychic connection. Again, as Epperly points out, "psychic experience, dream vision, and artistic inspiration link Emily with Teddy" (*Sweet-Grass* 179). Indeed, the most intense episodes connecting both Emilys to their lovers take place in the realm of the psychical, not the physical. The heroines seem particularly potent in this supralinguistic realm.

In the Emily books, both cousin Jimmy Murray's poetic affiliation, and his

mental impairment, speak his marginality. However, the character most powerful (and dangerous) to Emily is, of course, Dean (Jarback) Priest, whose surname bears the connotative weight of castration. Priest wants to fix Emily as his anima, the eternal feminine whose power is spiritual rather than cognitive. He situates her in a fairy realm that does not threaten his already physically eroded masculinity. Dean loves Emily, but rejects her text in the world. If she wants him, she must give up her writing, and with it the power to make her mark on patriarchal culture.

Two other male characters in the Emily trilogy deserve mention because of their impact on Emily. Mr. Carpenter, her teacher and mentor, suffers from alcoholism, and so is disqualified from the possession of his patriarchal share of phallic potency, though he is useful to Emily. The other male character of interest is mad Mr. Morrison, whose mental aberration keeps him from signifying in any significant manner. Nevertheless his ongoing search for his dead wife Annie, and the plot manipulation that would have him displace her with Emily, serves as yet another warning that the marital/maternal position in the patriarchal symbolic is not a place of safety. Mr. Morrison, with his blood-red hand which I read as pointing ominously to the position of the wife, is straight out of the traditional gothic. The episode where he attempts to finger Emily in the dark church (locus, not coincidentally, of the marriage ceremony) is truly terrifying.

Female characters too serve as unhappy signifiers of women's place, warning the heroines away from the feminization that is their supposedly serendipitous lot. Emily St. Aubert's impossibly good (and dead) mother is displaced by an impossibly bad aunt, Madame Cheron. Emily's doppelgänger (the gothic text is full of these doublings) is the Lady Laurentini, a manifestly mad character whose evil machinations facilitate the murder of the aunt who Emily so resembles. The linkage between the two women is ratified when Laurentini, meeting Emily for the first time, announces, "we are sisters indeed" (*Udolpho* 574).²⁴ When Sister Frances states of Laurentini that "love was the occasion of her crime and of her madness" (377), she indicts heterosexual love, the ostensible motivating force behind Emily St. Aubert's quest, as dangerous.

Montgomery's Emily trilogy is full of women whose sheer bloody-mindedness speaks their unhappiness. Vindictive Aunt Ruth Dutton linguistically removes Emily's "I," dubbing her "Em'ly." Aunt Elizabeth's puritannical sternness, Miss Brownell's spitefulness, Ellen Greene's stupidity and insensitivity, all testify to female dissatisfaction. Aunt Tom, of Stovepipe Town, who tries to buy Emily for her nephew, actually functions as a kind of witch. So too do Great Aunt Nancy and her familiar, Caroline (although the youthful Great Aunt Nancy, with her beauty, money and independence, comes off rather well as an example of what might be done on the distaff side of the social order given the right stuff).

Ilse Burnley's mother, with whom Emily has a psychic connection, is, of course, an example of the fate in store for women who are rather *too* feminine; her excessive jealousy places her beyond the patriarchal pale. In reviving her

tarnished reputation, Emily makes a statement for the presence of a less repressed version of femininity than that manifested in the women who surround her. Mrs. Burnley's wild child Ilse herself, with her rages and her independent ways, is her mother writ large, again manifesting the return of the repressed, and Emily's alter-ego, particularly in her transgressive flouting of the marriage ceremony when she leaves the hapless Teddy waiting at the church. Ilse plays sun-queen to Emily's more restrained and chaste new moon. However, the most threatening example of womanhood gone wrong is found in the character of Mrs. Kent. Like the Lady Laurentini in *Udolpho* (and like Mrs. Burnley), she represents the danger of over-investment in the feminine realm. Her hold on men is too tenacious. As punishment she is branded by a livid scar that disfigures her face. Scarring is historically, of course, the societal method of coding the outsider. The source of Mrs. Kent's unhappiness is a misplaced letter which, like all purloined letters, points to the slippery ways of signification in language. Read from a feminist perspective, the letter represents the character's misreading of her gender role. Like Mrs. Burnley, Mrs. Kent is improperly schooled in the ways of feminine subjectivity.

In effect, the only good mothers in both Radcliffe's and Montgomery's texts are dead mothers. The subjectivity of both heroines is shaped by the fathers, over the dead bodies of their hapless wives. These too point the heroines towards the feminine sphere, but they do so advisedly, and from the dead and deadly realm of the prelinguistic and phallic mother. What these ghostly mothers signify is femininity as a masquerade, a place lacking in phallic power and consequent worldly signification; a role that requires dress-coding to hide its otherwise obvious lack. In *Udolpho*, it is Emily's deceased maternal aunt who passes on the female role in the oedipal paradigm to her niece by means of the veil offered by the servant Dorothée. As the text informs us,

Dorothée wept again, and then, taking up the veil, threw it suddenly over Emily, who shuddered to find it wrapped round her, descending even to her feet, and, as she endeavoured to throw it off, Dorothée entreated that she would keep it on for one moment. 'I thought,' added she, 'how like you would look to my dear mistress in that veil;—may your life, mam' selle, be a happier one than hers.' (*Udolpho* 534)

The signifying effect of the passage is to represent Emily as a creature caught in a net. The veil, moreover, is black; it represents a linguistic shroud. The veil, of course, is Lacan's trope for "lack," the figure that marks the phallus as an empty signifier, and the mother as powerless behind it.²⁵

Emily Starr, as well, initially finds the apparel of the dead mother uncomfortable, if not terrifying. For her first day of school as a ward of the Murrays, she is forced into wearing her dead mother's clothes.

Aunt Elizabeth had produced a terrible gingham apron and an equally terrible gingham sunbonnet from the New Moon garret, and made Emily put them on. The apron was a long, sack-like garment, high in the neck, with sleeves. These sleeves were the crowning indignity. Emily had never seen any little girl wearing an apron with sleeves. She rebelled to the point of tears over wearing it, but Aunt

Elizabeth was not going to have any nonsense. (ENM 79)

In both cases, a garment covers the heroine from head to foot, as though to sequester her from the world of the fathers. Although Emily Starr later comes to like wearing the clothes that were once worn by her mother, and though she occupies her mother's room, it is interesting that the apron, a garment with subservient (and today domestic) connotations causes her distress.

The focus on death, which affords the gothic so many of its delicious *frissons*, informs narrativity in both Radcliffe's and Montgomery's texts. I have mentioned the dead mothers, whose influence extends beyond the grave. Emily St. Aubert's text, which represents the more traditional gothic, is full of other *memento mori*. The corridors of *Udolpho* are littered with rotting corpses. There are poisonings and attempted poisonings. Sanguineous tracks chart Emily's progress through the text, as though to map the dangers of the female quest and its implications for femininity.

Emily Starr, whose texts are less traditionally gothic, is nevertheless shadowed in her quest by the dying and the dead. The trilogy offers up a variety of children who have lost one or both parents. Ilse is motherless (and to all intents and purposes fatherless initially). Teddy Kent's father is dead. Perry is an orphan. Furthermore, there are hosts of dead kinfolk whose portraits decorate the New Moon walls. Dean Priest meets Emily when, suspended over a cliff, she is threatened with death. One of Dean Priest's gifts to Emily is a portrait of the Lady Giovanna, who (not coincidentally) died young. Teddy's engagement ring to Ilse is "an historic jewel for which a murder was once committed" (200). Signifiers of the conditions for female subjectivity are everywhere, and they are terrifying. Cousin Jimmy's guided tour through the New Moon graveyard, Emily in tow, offers Little Stephen Murray as a reminder that death comes even to the good and gifted child. "'So you see, Emily, he must have been an extraordinary child—but it ended in that—', Cousin Jimmy waved his hand towards the grassy grave and the white, prim headstone" (ENM 76) blithely ignoring the fact that Emily, an extraordinary child herself, is the same age as was little Stephen when he met his untimely end. The episode where Lofty John tricks Emily into believing she is poisoned works as an interesting echo of the frequent poisonings in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Indeed, the intertextual reference to *Udolpho* in the Emily trilogy marks Emily Starr as a (perhaps unwilling) descendant of Emily St. Aubert. On her visit to Great Aunt Nancy, Emily "felt like one of the heroines in Gothic romance, wandering at midnight through a subterranean dungeon, with some unholy guide. She had read 'The Mysteries of Udolpho' and 'The Romance of the Forest' [both by Ann Radcliffe] before the taboo had fallen on Dr. Burnley's bookcase" (ENM 247).

With the "real" world of women so perilously coded, no wonder both the Emilys prefer to occupy the world of nature, where dreams and visions substitute for lived experience. Both Emilys take pleasure in the world of memory, itself

redolent of the lost maternal. Dead parents are imaged in a supernatural realm accessible to their children through meditation and contemplation. Emily St. Aubert, whose desire for melancholy contemplation flavours her emotional world, hears the voices and music that cathect her with the dead. Indeed, it seems like wishful thinking, so frequently does she imagine her absent lover Valancourt as moribund. Emily Starr has access to an invisible world through "the flash." These realms keep the heroines located in the imaginary, that Lacanian mirror site of reflection and contemplation rather than action and projection. Moreover, these extraterrestrial loci are so enticingly presented as to seem infinitely more attractive than the physical world of the text, with its congruent perils. Nor do these worlds bear any resemblance to the Christian heaven. Rather they resemble the visions of the mystics in their ability to invoke ecstasy, and indeed eroticism, with their glimpses of unspecified bliss.

It's interesting, but I find this nostalgia (which amounts to a death longing) more intense in Montgomery's texts than I do in that of the more manifestly death-coded novel of Radcliffe's. Emily St. Aubert's quest is full of obviously contrived terrors. When they end, and she is released from them, her marriage is experienced as a relief, even by the modern feminist reader who, like myself, prefers a less traditional ending. My readerly desire to play down the importance of marriage for the heroine is, however, mitigated by the fact that Emily's nuptials are conducted against the background of a tapestry "representing the exploits of Charlemagne and his twelve peers" (670-71) where scenes of extreme violence and cruelty represent iconography at odds with the notion of marital bliss. Moreover, Emily St. Aubert's quest, however unwillingly undertaken, represents adventure, not stagnation and stasis. On the other hand, Emily Starr (the future Mrs. Frederick Kent) spends several friendless and loveless years waiting for those three whistled notes that signal the arrival of the beloved. Moreover, Emily's castration as female subject is, in my opinion, overdetermined. Her lengthy convalescence after the measles, and her months-long recovery from blood-poisoning occasioned by a (castrating) encounter with the domestic (Aunt Laura's sewing scissors) more than parallels Emily St. Aubert's fainting fits and lapses into melancholy. It is, however, in and because of these lacunae that the maternal function operates unimpeded.

I suppose I wanted the one hundred and fifty years separating the Emilys to amount to more than a longing on the part of the later heroine for the traditional female ending to the quest. Emily Starr's quest should, I thought in my post-modern feminist way, end in our heroine's happiness at having constructed herself as a woman writer. The Emily books are, after all, one of the few examples of the female *künstlerroman*.

The female gothic, however, does not operate simply on the level of manifest plot fulfilment. It hints and teases, as slippery as signification, as convoluted as would be a floor plan to the castle of Udolpho. Although the Emilys are sacrificed to patriarchal plotting, they do not go gently into the world of the

fathers. Their texts leave behind a residue of lost desire beyond closure, and traces of an as yet uncharted place/space where maternal signification works at unseating patriarchal narrative control.

NOTES

- 1 See Juliann Fleenor's discussion of "the female gothic" in her introduction to *The Female Gothic* (3-28).
- 2 Subjectivity, or the speaking subject's entry into the social order, explains the ways in which language and the culture which it speaks intersects and informs consciousness. This complex process is explained brilliantly in Kaja Silverman's chapter on "The Subject" (130-131).
- 3 Montague Summers' *The Gothic Quest* was the first critical study to take the gothic novel seriously. In it he refers to Ann Radcliffe as the mother of the gothic, a significant insight considering the genre's involvement with the maternal.
- 4 The mother at the centre of the gothic novel is a concept remarked by several feminist critics of the genre. See especially Claire Kahane's persuasive essay "The Gothic Mirror" in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytical Interpretation* (334-351). This is the mother whose presence the child experiences as all-powerful, before language and the entry of the father signal the oedipal struggle.
- 5 What Roland Barthes calls in *S/Z: An Essay*, the proaretic, the code signifying action, is absent in large sections of the text.
- 6 See both Lawrence Stone and Edward Said for an account of the novel's imbrication in the construction of ideology.
- 7 The horror genre (including the horror film) may be understood as a reading of the gothic, framed around its most disturbing elements (Stephen King's novels and the films made from them are cases in point). In these texts the nuclear family is all over the map.
- 8 I refer to Radcliffe's easy explanations for her more horrific plot elements, and Brontë's "reader I married him," the phrase that ends *Jane Eyre*.
- 9 According to Freud, women never work through the oedipus complex. Even if they choose heterosexuality, their desire retains its link with the mother. Because oedipalization is achieved through language and the father, this desire is connected with silence. For a thorough explanation of this complex process, see Kaja Silverman, Michelle Massé, Claire Kahane, *et al.* Silverman especially gives a comprehensive account of the negative oedipus complex in *The Acoustic Mirror* (210-225).
- 10 I am always astonished by the overdetermined names of gothic protagonists. It signifies a kind of intertextuality, as though each text was pointing towards its avatars.
- 11 For all Emily's determination to climb "the alpine path," there are few (phallic) peaks in this text.
- 12 Indeed, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and the Emily trilogy, may be looked at as examples of the female *künstlerroman*, the former recessed, the latter blatant.
- 13 Leon Roudiez explains this term in his helpful introductory gloss to Julia Kristeva's *Desire in Language*. See especially the chapter "Motherhood According to Bellini" (237-270) for an explanation of the word's imbrication on and with the maternal.
- 14 See, for example, Sherry Ortner's influential essay, "Is Female to Male as Nature I to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture, and Society* (86-97).
- 15 A recent novel by Canadian writer Claudia Gallinger contains a reference to the wind goddess Oya (163).
- 16 Julia Kristeva uses this word, rather than the more familiar "eruption," to signify intrusion at the level of the unconscious.
- 17 Again, see Leon Roudiez' gloss in the introduction to *Desire in Language*.
- 18 *The Mysteries of Udolpho* too contains, in "The Provençal Tale" (552-557), a narrative manifestly unrelated to the plot.
- 19 Jane Gallop describes the work of veiling/unveiling as

a displacement of the phallic centre. Lacan writes that the phallus 'can play its role only when veiled' (écrits, p. 692; Sheridan, p. 288). The 'prick' at the centre of phallogocentrism unveils the phallus and spoils its game. It is the ec-centricity of desire, the avoidance of the centre, of the 'prick,' which keeps the phallus its privilege as signifier (29).

- 20 See her essay "Terror Gothic: Nightmare and Dream in Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Brontë" (Fleenor 176-206).
- 21 For an interesting insight regarding the feminized lover, see Mary Ann Doane, who understands the feminization of the male as contributing to "the thematics of narcissism, the type of relation—or more accurately, nonrelation—to the other which Freud labelled specifically feminine" (116).
- 22 It is interesting that in the earlier text, M. St. Aubert attempts (unsuccessfully) to discourage emotional thinking in his daughter. Douglas Starr, on the other hand, encourages Emily's imaginative development, as does her surrogate father, Dean Priest. Perhaps in the later text, with patriarchy a cultural surety, the female imagination is no longer dangerous.
- 23 See Elaine Showalter's fascinating *The Female Malady*, and my unpublished dissertation, particularly the chapter on "The Methodology of Madness," (70-113) for a discussion of gender-coded illnesses, and their semiotic significance.
- 24 Claire Kahane in "The Gothic Mirror" tellingly equates the two women with the statement "as a victimizer, victimized by her own desire, Laurentin is presented as Emily's precursor, a mad mother-sister-double who mirrors Emily's own potential for transgression and madness" (229).
- 25 For a concise analysis of Lacan's use of the term, see Mitchell and Rose (42-43).
- 26 As Elisabeth Bronfen's entire text testifies, "Freud has termed 'death' and 'femininity' as the two most consistent enigmas and tropes in western culture" (11).

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