

PARODIC EMPOWERMENT
IN LADY ORACLE AND THE HANDMAID'S TALE

THE GENERIC ALTERNATIVE:
PARODIC EMPOWERMENT OF FEMININE GOTHIC HEROINES
IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S
LADY ORACLE AND THE HANDMAID'S TALE

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 Heroines in Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale

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ABSTRACT

Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale are both parodies of the Feminine Gothic. However, little existing Atwood criticism explores this phenomenon in great detail, nor does it explore these two novels together in their mutual context. Moreover, although there has been a wealth of critical attention paid to Atwood's heroines' narrative subversions of phallogentric and Gothic expectation, there has been very little paid to its generic structure as a means of achieving the same end. This thesis proposes that Atwood empowers her heroines not only through narrative disruptions of Gothic and phallogentric systems, but also through the analogous structure of parody. Through enabling parodic analogies, Atwood's heroines become, like her readers, interpreters who are capable of negotiating and escaping the Gothic space.

*What can I say
to you: with the fat moths
battering themselves on the light
and falling onto paper, which is
hot because the night is hot,
smeared with their grey
shining bodies, otherwise blank*

*It was the addiction
to stories, every
story about herself or anyone
led to the sabotage of each address
and all those kidnappings*

*Stories that could be told
on nights like these to account for the losses,
litanies of escapes, bad novels, thrillers
deficient in villains;
now there is nothing to write.*

*She would give almost anything
to have them back,
those destroyed houses, smashed plates, calendars,
dinted clothes with their vacant necks,
beds smeared with new bodies,
otherwise blank*

*those faces that vanished into the rivers
into the bushes at the side of the road
where the headlights hit, with no trace or ransom*

*anything except this empty piece
of dirty paper
on which she is free to make anything*

*Who knows what stories
would ever satisfy her
who knows what savageries have been inflicted on her
and others by herself and others
in the name of freedom,
in the name of paper*

*(Atwood, "Gothic Letter on a Hot Night,"
from "You Are Happy," 1974 (15))*

I. Introduction:

Parodic Authority and the Feminine Gothic

When the narrator of Margaret Atwood's "Gothic Letter on a Hot Night" asks "[w]hat can I say to you" she asks a fundamental question of this thesis: what is there for a woman to convey to her audience when Gothic ambiguity clouds her experiences? As Atwood's Lady Oracle (1976) and The Handmaid's Tale (1986) ponder, this question is inexorably linked to uncertainty, obscurity and terror, signatures of the Gothic genre that deny women 'authoritative' perceptions and expressions. Accordingly, the answer to "Gothic Letter on a Hot Night" lies in the poem itself, a story about the telling of stories. As the narrator communicates the compulsion to tell stories, specifically gendered female here, she implies that what there is for a woman to tell is not truths or histories, but rather tales, fantasies and terrors. However, as a letter in the Gothic tradition, this poem is not merely what it seems; feminist implications lurk beneath its surface. This poem is not only about women's stories, but also about the reasons women's stories are destined to remain stories as opposed to truths, and why the feminine experience is perpetually located outside of the legitimate. Similarly, Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale explore the incredibility of their heroines' Gothic experiences and the consequential situation of these women outside of the system of believable phenomenon that most other

figures in each novel share. As parodic texts, Atwood's novels do not merely mimic the Gothic, but also point to the genre's limitations and provide alternatives to it. Such alternatives lie not only in Atwood's narrative subversion of Gothic expectation, but also through the analogous parodic structures of her texts. This thesis argues that, as the heroine engages simultaneously with both the Gothic and with parody, she engages in a number of parodic analogies whereby not only do her narrative subversions of the Gothic legitimize her experiences, but so does the very form of the textual space in which she exists.

Seymour Lipset defines legitimacy in political terms, as "an accepted entitlement or sanction to rule"(427). To be part of the legitimate, then, one must confine oneself to its laws. In the context of this thesis, legitimacy refers to such sanctioned authority within the textual realm. The Gothic genre has its own general set of such sanctions not only with regard to its conventions, but also to its ideological construction of reality. Specifically, I am concerned with these rules of narrative reality, the distinctions between the believable and the unbelievable inside of the Gothic system. Although the authors of the Gothic, particularly of its Feminine stream, are often women, it tends to reflect a system predicated on masculine authority and patricentric tradition. The Gothic often portrays the exclusion of women from a multi-layered system of authority not only with regard to their subjection to male domination, but also to their dubious status as interpreting subjects. That is, the Gothic often portrays women's realities as straying

from the rules of implied narrative reality, the result of terrified notions and perceptions of menaces both ordinary and supernatural. Accordingly, the Gothic refuses women's participation in the legitimate by robbing them of experiential authority. This is not to suggest that the Gothic purports to be fully realistic. However, that which lies outside of the realistic and believable in this genre is predominantly the domain of women. As a result, the female Gothic experience is not necessarily merely one of oppression and abuse, but also one in which these injustices are undermined by women's illegitimacy.

Existing Atwood criticism often admits the parodic Gothic dimension to her work, although, with the exception of the rather obvious case of Lady Oracle, in surprisingly little detail, particularly with regard to parody's generic force. Accordingly, most criticism of Atwood's parodic Gothic concerns comic subversions of expectation but fails to account for the theoretical complexities of parody that this thesis will

address.¹ By contrast, this thesis argues that parody offers a means of subversion not only through narrative difference from its target genre, but also through the generic structure of parody itself, analogous to - yet not equal to - the heroine's various concrete and social structures.

Susan J. Rosowski considers Lady Oracle a Gothic novel that reveals contemporary Gothic themes, particularly the disparity between mythic ideals and reality. Although Rosowski argues that Lady Oracle is a novel about the tension between reality and fiction and the potential for the line between them to blur, she does not emphasize the importance of this struggle as it pertains specifically to female protagonists. By contrast, Michelle Massé provides a very useful interpretation of Lady Oracle as a specifically feminine forum for the subversion of masculine control. Massé points out narrative events that reveal parodic differences, most notably Joan's creation of her own

¹ This is not to ignore the large body of criticism including Margot Northey's The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction, Gerry Turcotte's "English-Canadian Gothic," and Atwood's own Survival that treats Canadian Gothic in general as a national allegory. Meyers, for example, refers to Atwood's use of the Gothic in Bodily Harm as a means of linking feminism and nationalist discourse, a particularly alluring association to make of any Canadian Gothic text given the arguable analogy of colony and Gothic heroine as spaces to be conquered by masculine imperialistic force. I have decided against this approach, however, even given The Handmaid Tale's obvious nationalist implications, because the theoretical application of a gendered dichotomy of colonizer and colonized to a text runs the risk of assuming the usefulness, even the naturalness, of this model instead of questioning or perhaps challenging it. Atwood herself reveals the limitations of this approach in Survival: A Thematic Guide to the Wilderness, wherein she hypothesizes that "for the sake of argument" Canada is, as a colony, a victim like an exploited minority (36). Although Atwood makes no explicit reference to gender here, her hypothesis's preface reveals her dissatisfaction with an analogy that depends on an uncontested metonymic thesis of domination and victimization. Moreover, because Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale are Gothic parodies that address the complex conditions of women, it would be sadly ironic to base an exploration of these novels on a model of male power versus female weakness. Instead, this thesis deconstructs such models of feminine victimhood and male villainy as part of what obscures the female experience.

parodic Gothic texts. She does not, unfortunately, account for the effects of parody as a generic subversion of the Gothic in any detail.

Criticism surrounding The Handmaid's Tale does far less to explore Gothic parody. Magoli Cornier Michael refers to The Handmaid's Tale as a feminist dystopia that critiques the cultural use of reproduction as a source of oppression (145), but fails to link it to the Gothic, thus neglecting the implications of its attachment to a genre obsessed with the victimization of women. Similarly, Lee Briscoe Thompson details The Handmaid's Tale's feminist implications, but also falls short of connecting it to its Gothic predecessors.

Nor does it seem that Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale have been studied together to reveal their mutual Gothic contexts. In this sense, Gothic criticism fails to address the significance of Atwood's publication of the less overtly yet equally parodic Gothic The Handmaid's Tale ten years after the appearance of the glaringly Gothic parody Lady Oracle. The fact that the futuristic former novel is a far less optimistic and humorous than the latter, and a far more cynically Gothic depiction of women's abilities to escape the Gothic realm, indicates that by 1985 Atwood's faith in the encoded criticism of the humorous text Lady Oracle had begun to dissipate. However, another way of interpreting these two texts in a mutual context is to focus on how, even in the darkly pessimistic The Handmaid's Tale Atwood provides alternatives to the Gothic system.

The heroines of Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale struggle with the indistinct lines between artifice, simulation, performance, and the reality that these façades purport to express, a condition suffered by many of Atwood's heroines.² Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale both exemplify Atwood's use of Gothic conventions to reveal the ways in which the illusory distinction between materiality and imagination render women's experiences illegitimate. Each text contains the ingredients that constitute a Gothic novel, including the influence of terror, ominously enclosed spaces, mysterious male hero/villains, innocent heroine/victims, an emphasis on the transgression of boundaries, and, most pertinent to my discussion, an underlying secret that the heroine must discover through this crossing over of social and physical boundaries in order to escape - a movement towards knowledge that might free her both physically and psychically. Traditionally, the secret regards family history and casts doubt on the identity of the heroine, often by revealing that the individuals and objects surrounding her are not who or what they seem. Typically, this confusion culminates in a moment of hamartia and contributes to the single most terrifying aspect of the Gothic narrative: the discrepancy between that which is legitimate and that which is imagined or constructed as it pertains to assumptions about the heroine's self and the materiality of her

² For example, in The Edible Woman Atwood implies the existence of hegemonic de-legitimization of women's material reality as Joe argues arrogantly regarding the education of women that "[h]er feminine role and her core are really in opposition, her feminine role demands passivity from her." Similarly, the heroines of many of Atwood's texts and the traditional Gothic novel alike are subject to the notion that their external acts must remain in opposition to their internal drives. See also "The Journals of Susanna Moodie," in which Atwood's Moodie struggles with the opposition between her appearance and behaviour and her survival drives.

circumstances. Often, however, the origins of the heroine are only temporarily in question. In The Rise of the Gothic Novel Maggie Kilgour locates the Gothic secret in Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho, wherein Emily's confusion concerning who her mother is, Laurentini or the Marchioness, undermines her presumption of her origins and therefore of her identity. Kilgour points out that Emily, "after 700 pages of suspicious and suspense turns out to be exactly who she thought she was in the beginning," which, in the Gothic tradition, further discredits her experiences and the justification of her fears (128). Moreover, as Kilgour notes, the reader's expectation of Emily's development is disappointed when "[the novel's conclusion] simply confirms her original identity and returns her to La Vallée and a state of childhood, in which Valancourt now substitutes for St. Aubert"(128). Clearly, then, although Emily crosses social and physical boundaries, her return and consequential reconciliation with patricentric rule indicates that there have been few if any fundamental changes in her status as incredible inferior.

Atwood's heroines avoid such a fate through Atwood's parody of three specific Gothic conventions: the uncanny space, the triangulated relationship, and the self-undermining narrative, or, as I will refer to them, the uncanny, the simulated, and the performative. Atwood's attention to the uncanny domestic space parallels the archetypal Gothic's concentration on the confounding enclosure that contains the Gothic heroine. Like the traditional Gothic heroine, the inability of Atwood's heroines to fully register

their living spaces reflects their own ambiguous knowledge of self. The relationships between Atwood's protagonists and those who enter such spaces bear a likeness to the often triangulated affairs of the Gothic Romance, affairs that facilitate the displacement and simulation of identity and desire between two individuals onto a third. Finally, the female-centred narratives of both Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale resemble those of the traditional Gothic heroine as Atwood reveals them as self-undermining in a patriarchal language economy that seeks to dismiss the feminine perspective. Each of these parodic targets concerns the confusion between reality and imagination, the material and the perceptual; each leaves open to interpretation the lines between what is real and what is not. If Joan and Offred consistently interact only with the uncanny, the simulated and the performative, how are they to express, or even understand reality? How are these women to participate in the realm of the legitimate? This is question is precisely what Atwood's parody points to, and precisely what it reacts against. How this reaction functions, of course, depends on our understanding of the generic trope in terms of each convention.

Each of the uncanny, the simulated and the performative connotes irreferentiality. Parody, on the other hand, relies on identifiable sources and social/political meaning, reacting against the irreferential. Herein lies the complexity that this thesis approaches: what is the consequence of parodying those lines of legitimacy that the Gothic perpetually blurs? As Atwood parodies the uncanny, the simulated and the performative

in her texts, she participates in the reformation of the Gothic. However, this is not to suggest that parody reduces the Gothicism of Atwood's texts. Rather, parody *is* Gothic; it transgresses boundaries of text and genre to arrive at the message or meaning behind the difference it pronounces between parodic and parodied. Similarly, the Gothic heroine transgresses boundaries to arrive at knowledge of self and surroundings. In this sense, the Gothic heroine is analogous to the reader of Gothic parody; both cross boundaries in order to arrive at meaning, the heroine of her self and surroundings, and the reader of the Gothic system in which the heroine exists. However, although they are analogous, the Gothic heroine and the Gothic reader each cross boundaries to meet disparate ends. True, both are, in a sense, participants in the Gothic system. And true, both perceive and interpret the Gothic system. The reader, however, participates in the system only on occasion, and because he or she also exists outside of the text, he or she need not adhere to the rules of the Gothic text's reality. Accordingly, he or she is not contained in the Gothic realm in the manner that the heroine is, nor is he or she subject to the portrayal of incredibility that seems to result from not abiding by its rules. In this sense, whereas by the end of all of the border crossing in the archetypal Gothic, and even arguably by the end of Atwood's parodic Gothic crossings, the heroine, like Emily, returns to her normative feminine, in-authoritative role, her reader, her parodic double, emerges from the system with credible, interpretive knowledge of it. In this sense, parody promotes an analogous alternative to the Gothic realm for the heroine through her analogous double.

In order to understand exactly why the Gothic heroine suffers from illegitimacy to begin with, one must have prior and specific understanding of the discursive formation that is Atwood's target: the Feminine Gothic and its relentless subversion of the discrepancy between the actual and the terrified. As this thesis implies, the Feminine Gothic is often associated with terror. In The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology, Kate Ferguson Ellis provides the following quotation from Ann Radcliffe, first printed in an 1826 edition of *New Monthly Magazine*: "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a higher degree of life, the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them"(xvii). Radcliffe further explains Burke's theory that terror is the "opening to the sublime"(xvii) that stimulates the activity of the mind, as opposed to the petrifying effects of horror; terror inspires imagination while horror arrests.³ In this sense, terror is capable of perpetuating fear; it is accountable for much of the Gothic heroine's perceptions of menaces that are often actually benign. Terror promotes the working of the mind, the inspiration and propulsion of a frightened imagination, whereas horror prevents this activity. The obscurity of surroundings, the ambiguity of relationships, and the questionable credibility of the feminine narrative, all pertain to female terror; each depends on the inspired and imaginative, perhaps paranoid, mind, and consequently suffers under the suspicion of illegitimacy. This thesis examines terror in Burke's sense

³ As Tamar Heller notes, Radcliffe's use of Burkian terror should not imply that her novels assume Burke's "images of rightful authority overturned."(15)

of the word, yet acknowledges that in Atwood's parodic Gothic, even terror becomes a target of parody, thus shifting its meaning away from the sublime, and towards a broader definition that pertains generally to fear's propensity to perpetuate itself.

According to Ellis, "Masculine Gothic" narratives are told from the perspective of an isolated, exiled, male figure, who for various reasons is forced out of the home. In the Masculine Gothic narrative, the result of the hero/victim's exile is the construction of the domestic space as a "special province of women"(xiii), which correlates to problematic idealizations of the home in nineteenth century discourse. Ellis provides Godwin's Caleb Williams (1794) as an example of a typical Masculine Gothic novel, characterizing Caleb as a hero who becomes excluded from the domestic enclosure. Prevalent notions of the home as a more sacred space than that which exists outside it call into question the virtue of subjects such as Caleb who are no longer able to exist within its boundaries. Consequently, the Masculine Gothic stream works to subvert the idealization of the domestic, feminine sphere, by, in Ellis's words, "implicating the ideology of separate 'spheres' on which this idealization depends" (xiii). In other words, according to Ellis, the Masculine Gothic constructs a gendered division of social spheres in order to subvert it so that there is no longer a sacred space exclusively reserved for women.

In contrast, Ellis defines the Feminine Gothic stream according to the female subject's ability to reclaim the domestic space as a refuge from a male villain who constructs it as her prison. Among numerous critics of the Gothic, Ellis identifies this

stream as a form of popular fiction (often written by women for women) that discloses gender inequality and reacts against the masculine stream.⁴ Ironically, the gender inequality that the Feminine Gothic unveils is that which enables the same idealization of the home that the Masculine Gothic rebels against (xvi). That is, the Feminine Gothic stream reveals gender inequality by revealing the domestic space as a menacing scape as opposed to a sacred asylum. Ellis cites Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho, (also published in 1794) as an archetypal Feminine Gothic novel, wherein the male villain resists the feminization of the domestic sphere by usurping enclosed spaces such as castles, or rooms within them.

As an early critic of the Feminine Gothic, Ellis provides the basis for a differentiation between streams of the Gothic based on gender. However, these gendered categories are not mutually exclusive. Even Ellis's categorization of Caleb Williams as an archetypal Masculine Gothic novel exemplifies the inadequacies of her oppositional division. There are notably few female characters in the novel; Caleb is cast out of a domestic space that is predominantly masculine. Thus, the notion that the text undercuts the feminine sacrosanct home is not entirely credible. Instead, the Feminine and Masculine Gothic streams often overlap. For example, Clara Reeve's A Champion of Virtue features Edmund Twyford's expulsion from the domestic sphere only to portray his containment within another haunted ancillary structure, thus revealing aspects of both

⁴ Maggie Kilgour, however, argues that Godwin's use of Gothic conventions was actually in reaction to Radcliffe's style (113).

streams. Subsequent theorists of the Gothic have realized that the Masculine and Feminine Gothic are not binary categories, and have accordingly dealt with the ways that the Gothic problematizes genre categorization in general to approaching the larger issue of feminine authority.

According to Ellis the Feminine Gothic is subversive yet must position women as victims in order to facilitate subversion. Accordingly, her book begins to explore the debate over the nature of female victimization that emerges in much criticism of the Feminine Gothic. Michelle Massé argues that the very simulation of submission that facilitates women's subversion in the female Gothic also undermines it. Thus, like Ellis, Massé argues that in order to react against the Gothic, women must position themselves within its unjust masculinist script. According to Massé, however, submission does more than merely add ambivalence to the extent to which women are rebelling against men in the female Gothic; she suggests that the simulation of weakness could result in a feminine simulacrum whereby the submissive no longer refers to subversion, but that her "miming may become reality, its point forgotten over too many years of acquiescence"(250). Massé also notes the association between subversion as simulated submission and female masochism. She is careful to add, however, that such modes of behavior are taught, that "when a woman is hurt, as she is throughout the Gothic, the damage is not originally self-imposed. We must acknowledge that someone else strikes the first blow"(3). According to Massé, then, although subversion requires submission

on some level, it is never the woman who originally constructs her role as victim.

Nonetheless, female subversion becomes subversive of itself, simulating submission only to erase its original subversive referent.

The question of who constructs the female Gothic experience of victimization emerges in Kilgour's point that at the end of The Mysteries of Udolpho Radcliffe reveals herself as the "Guardian Spirit" behind its plot (140), the woman who literally constructs the Gothic victimization of Emily only to diminish it by revealing aspects of her experience as the effects of feminine terror. Not only does Radcliffe reveal herself as the female author of the text, "the weak hand that has recorded this tale," but she does so informing her audience that "the end of the text shifts [...] authority from St. Aubert to [...] herself," that typically patriarchal power is now in the hands of a woman (140). Although Radcliffe's assumption of power suggests subversion of patriarchal rule, it also suggests that she takes responsibility for placing her women in the submissive position that this subversion demands. Although this might seem to indicate feminine culpability in the victimization of women, according to Massé's argument it is merely the symptom of a larger cultural illness in which women adhere to a masculine script. In this sense, who actually constructs the female Gothic is unclear. If women are not acting but writing submission, can one really continue to blame masculinity, or is the feminine Gothic the result of the an embedded history of masculine usurpation? Are women perhaps also in part the architects of the very system that oppresses them? Such a

question further undermines the authority of women's expressions of injustice, further obscuring their abuse under the banner of illegitimacy.

As Helen Meyers points out, "feminist literary critics have, within the past two decades, reengendered the Gothic as female"(26), and have begun to use the Gothic to "protest and accommodate themselves to women's lot," to uncover the system that confuses abuse with masochism (26). Such is the nature of Atwood's parody, which uses the Gothic not only to reveal either female victimization or subversion, but to question, as Meyers does, "the extent to which women's fears are warranted and derive from normalized cultural arrangements"(26), to question the justifiability of female fear. In this sense, Meyers's book and Atwood's novels both explore the ways that female fear is culturally interpreted and portrayed as terror.

Tamar Heller's Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic approaches the role of terror in the de-legitimization of feminine authority. Heller argues that "the female Gothic is animated to a large extent by an antiauthoritarian spirit," and points out that the Feminine Gothic gives women subjectivity and activity to secure rights and protest injustice (15). However, Heller admits that the extent to which heroines rebel against their male villainous counterparts is somewhat uncertain given that "terror as a theme and narrative device suggests the influence of conservative ideologies of gender and domesticity on the female Gothic" (16). This is to suggest that the female Gothic portrays the subversiveness of its plot in its foreground, yet that the terror that haunts it

reflects the very mores of conservatism and male domination that it initially seems to subvert. For example, at the end of The Mysteries of Udolpho, until Emily returns to her normative, feminine, domestic role, terror haunts her, implying that whatever subversion she may have enacted throughout the plot is always undermined by symbolic terror that represents masculine authority.

As a Gothic writer Atwood reveals and protests the victimization of women, just as she reveals feminine subversion of this injustice and the ambiguity of villainy and victimhood in general. However, as a parodic Gothic writer Atwood does far more; she denies that ambiguity must connote feminine inauthenticity through the meaningful difference between the traditional Gothic and her similar but parodic texts. Here one can begin to answer the questions that this thesis poses concerning the function of parodying those conventions that imply the erasure of feminine referentiality. Atwood's parody creates a generic and temporal boundary to be crossed, a counterinfluential space that mutually affects both the genre that it targets as well as its parodic texts. In this sense, Atwood's readers become like the Gothic heroine through their attachment to parody; as they enter the realm of parody they begin to move across boundaries of genre and period to arrive at parody's motive, just as the heroine transgresses social and gender boundaries in order to escape Gothic injustice and arrive at the truth of her identity. Parody always has motive; it is not simply the copying of cultural forms. Just so, Linda Hutcheon suggests that "[n]o integration into a new context can avoid altered meaning" to either

that which is recontextualized, or that which constitutes the new context (7). As such, parody creates an abstract space that constitutes a counterinfluential boundary between what David Cowart defines as the “host” or primary target of parody, and the “guest” or parodic text (5).⁵ Just as the Gothic genre portrays spaces that are under the influence of the mind as much as they influence the mind, so parody creates a tertiary space wherein the primary host and secondary guest engage in reciprocal influence, thus blurring the border between them. Similarly, the Feminine Gothic blurs the lines between reality and women’s terror. Atwood’s parody reflects the interrelatedness of these blurred lines; it implies a parallel among these crossings that provides for her readers what the Gothic heroine is consistently robbed of: the ability to enact border control that will facilitate her escape from Gothic illegitimacy. Through parody, Atwood’s readers cross over the boundaries of text, genre, and period without the punishment and even at times without the terror that plagues the Gothic heroine, and are rewarded with knowledge of the Gothic script, the system of female de-legitimization, and cultural awareness that metonymically parallels the heroine’s quest for knowledge of space and self. In this way, the heroine, as the reader’s analogous parodic double, has the potential to escape the Gothic system.

⁵ Cowart suggests that parody is a form of literary symbiosis that creates a dichotomy of reciprocal dependency between the “host” or targeted text, and the “guest” or parodic text such that the meaning of each may be destabilized according to the meaning of the other (4).

The first chapter of this thesis, "The Uncanny Space as Gothic Scape," explores the domestic enclosure with specific reference to its contents as reflections of the heroine's psyche and/or social reality, conscious of the discrepancy being negotiated between the two. Specifically, I employ a Freudian interpretation of the uncanny to explore the tension between the mind and the ordinary space, exploring the possibility that not only the home but also its ancillary structures are uncanny enclosures at risk of masculine penetration both physically and psychically. I will argue that such male-dominated spaces are analogous to language, using Mary Daly's theory of androcentric discourse as a means of illuminating Atwood's analogously imprisoning labyrinths as symbolic Gothic scripts. Moreover, I will explore the function of parody as a form of boundary crossing that is analogous to those of the Gothic heroine, noting that while she fails to escape the uncanny space, the labyrinth of language, and the Gothic realm, the reader of parody achieves the crossing over of textual and intersubjective boundaries to arrive at knowledge of the Gothic script of female irreferentiality so that they might transcend the system as the heroine's parodic doppelgangers.

The second chapter of this thesis, "Parodic Simulation: Triangulated Relationships and Multiplicitous Veils," concerns Atwood's parody of the Feminine Gothic's archetypal convention of triangulation, with specific attention to the obfuscation of the desires, motives and figures who drive these relationships. I argue that Atwood's parody of this convention is in fact a reaction against the notion that simulation can

consume feminine referentiality. As Atwood's heroines enact simulation they come to embody the Gothic veil, and therefore also the mediating space between the real and the simulated. This position is analogous to the space between the host and guest of parody, that which, as I argue in Chapter One, is mediated by the reader of the parodic text. Accordingly, the heroine is not obscured but empowered by her status as Gothic veil.

Finally, in "Parodic Performativity: In-Credible Women and the Terrified Herstory," I examine the function of the Female Gothic narrative within each text as self-undermining, with reference both to the eighteenth-century medical discourse that surrounded the Gothic genre, and to the contemporary complaint that femicidal plots create rather than simply reveal female victims. Specifically, I discuss Thomas Trotter's "nervous hysteria" as the male justification of the Feminine Gothic narrative, a structure that is undermining by virtue of the 'inherent' hypochondria of the female body. Moreover, this chapter examines Atwood's use of the first-person female narrative, that which is performative and therefore self-undermining, and which speaks of an already inauthentic, uncanny and simulated experience, to further obscure the meaning behind the feminine voice. As Atwood parodies this convention, she returns authority to the feminine voice; just as the heroine's embodiment of the veil empowers her, so her persistence in speaking in the face of a phallogentric system that undermines the feminine voice implies her status as the space between the sayable and the unsayable, again

analogous to the parodic boundary, thus affirming her capacity to negotiate, interpret and mediate meaning as opposed to remaining illegitimate and metaphorically “silent.”

This thesis examines Margaret Atwood’s parodic empowerment of the Feminine Gothic heroine. Although Lady Oracle is a comic subversion of the values associated with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century woman, and The Handmaid’s Tale by contrast is a somber dystopia that reminds the reader of a Puritan America, each can be interpreted similarly as a parody of the Feminine Gothic novel in that each concerns the subversion of the possibility of the differentiation between the real and the terrified. Because these novels are in fact parodies of a discursive formation that denies feminine authenticity, and because parody is a trope that appropriates in order to portray meaningful difference from its target, Lady Oracle and The Handmaid’s Tale reveal not only the subversion of the distinction between female reality and terror, but also that this subversion might itself be challenged through the successful transgression of boundaries that allows for the escape from the Gothic realm. Atwood does not merely point to the experience of illegitimacy as meaninglessness or irreferentiality, but instead through parody reacts against it, crossing freely from past into present, and offering an alternative fate to her Gothic heroines, her male and female readers who cross generic boundaries with her to rebel against the Gothic’s de-legitimization of the feminine.

II. The Uncanny Space as Gothic Scape

“Fear, too, has a special power to change experience
and compromise any possibility of freedom.”

(Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse*)

As I have begun to argue, what a woman can express in the Gothic novel is largely dependent on what there is for her to say. Because the Feminine Gothic so often confines its heroines to homes that are paradoxically both havens and prisons, the domestic space is a large part of the experiences that constitute this account. Such duplicitous spaces often reflect the psyche of the heroine; her internal fears project onto the external world thus conflating vision and its object. Therefore, when the heroine speaks of her obscure surroundings she is also speaking of her self, just one of the many ways that the internal and external correlate in the Gothic genre. The other and more obvious example of this correlation is the influence of the duplicitous space on the heroine; before her fears alter her perceptions of her surroundings, her surroundings inspire terror in her mind. In this sense, the psychic crossing over of boundaries that the heroine partakes in serves a far different end than the social and physical crossings that might facilitate her escape from the duplicitous enclosure typical of the female Gothic experience; they affirm her status in the domestic space as terrified and incredible. As I have suggested, however, this thesis does not concern itself solely with the heroine's expression, but rather takes a step back to explore how the Feminine Gothic reveals that because the heroine exists in obscure surroundings that she cannot fully register, a system

of meaning shrouded in uncertainty mandates the basis of her expression. Because the heroine's Gothic home reflects her psyche, not only does it undermine her perceptions of her surroundings; it also undermines her knowledge of self. Consequently, the Feminine Gothic renders its heroine's grounds for subversion against whatever injustices she may experience inside of the domestic space illegitimate, and boundary crossing does not free her of the Gothic experience, but confines her to it. Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale react against this system of feminine de-legitimization, not only through the plot's occasional subversion of Gothic expectation, but more consistently through the generic structure of parody.

As Ellis argues, the Feminine Gothic novel "creates a resistance to an ideology that imprisons women even as it posits a sphere of safety for them"(x); it reveals and reacts against an ideology of the home as both stifling to and protective of women. Such spaces tend to emerge in the Feminine Gothic as those that were once havens to the heroine but have become terrifyingly custodial and are consequently subject to the projections of her frightened imagination. Typically, a villainous man imprisons the heroine and uses her for his own gain, economic or otherwise, under the guise of protection. As a result, the home that was formerly a sanctuary to the heroine becomes a space of masculine domination and menace from which she must escape in order to survive.

Unfortunately, living in an androcentric society limits the heroine's options for

escape from this space to other similarly protective/imprisoning, and consequently terrifying spaces. Ellis argues that the Feminine Gothic novel is organized such that the home is the primary menacing space to the heroine, connected to a number of similarly terrifying enclosures that also appear on the surface as potentially safe havens – monasteries, abbeys, cottages, and, I will argue in some detail, the body, gardens and language – yet which can likewise serve as terrifying prisons to the heroine (48). As Heller argues, the persistence of terror and its capacity to distort reality in the Feminine Gothic undercuts the heroine's legitimacy and subversion of masculine control because it symbolizes conservatism and male domination (16). That is, the heroine's terror reflects the androcentrism that she seeks to escape. Accordingly, as the likelihood of her success grows, so does her terror, ensuring her failure. Therefore, although the heroine's transgressions appear to have the potential to free her, they merely inspire the crossing over of her mind onto the external space, creating a terrifying distortion of narrative reality that perpetually undermines the legitimacy of her experience and her capability of escaping it.

The heroine's body is her primary living space, her first enclosure. However, the Feminine Gothic often portrays women's bodies as either subject to male domination or under the threat of male penetration. Accordingly, as Andrea Dworkin argues, heterosexual intercourse becomes a Gothic transgression that opposes the sorts of social and physical transgressions that might facilitate escape from the female Gothic

experience, whereby women become spaces to be inhabited by men. According to Dworkin, “[t]he normal fuck by a normal man is taken to be an act of invasion and ownership undertaken in a mode of predation: colonizing, forceful (manly) or nearly violent; the sexual act that by its nature makes her his” (63). The threat of intercourse that haunts the heroine, often represented as the threat of a man entering her analogous room, implies a potential crossing over of boundaries that generates her terror. However, according to Dworkin, consensual heterosexual intercourse implies women’s collaboration in their own victimization. Dworkin argues that “[w]omen have needed what can be gotten through intercourse: the economic and psychological survival; access to male power through access to the male who has it; having some hold – psychological, sexual, or economic – on the ones who act, who decide, who matter”(128). Dworkin’s theory of women’s “submission” to intercourse implies a female fear of inequality, that women engage in intercourse in order to attain proximity to masculine power.

Consequently, Dworkin, in an argument reminiscent of Heller’s, notes that “fear, too, has a special power to change experience and compromise any possibility of freedom” (129). The fear of inequality that incites women’s engagement in intercourse ultimately denies them their freedom by affirming predominant hierarchies of gender and power; fear perpetuates peril. Rape, of course, cannot ever imply collaboration; it is analogous to the Gothic villain breaking down the heroine’s locked door. In the Feminine Gothic, however, too often doors cannot be locked. Accordingly, in the Feminine Gothic it is so

often difficult to discern whether the heroine is under the threat of forced entry, her own paranoia or her collaboration in her own abuse, that even her body connotes the uncertainty of her situation.

Like the female body, the ancillary Gothic structure that this chapter focuses most intently on is one that reveals the inauthenticity of the heroine's experience not only in terms of materiality, but also in terms of agency. Both the traditional Gothic and Atwoodian parodic Gothic alike portray the garden, an apparently benign domain of women, as a potentially imprisoning space. The garden contains the flower, the symbolic vagina, the metonymy of female fertility and generative power. As such, the Feminine Gothic often portrays the garden in or as a metonym for its most deceptive and confusing form – the labyrinth. As a deceptive space for women to be lost in, the labyrinth is a likely representation of the Gothic script, a discursive formation that posits the experiences of women as inauthentic, incredible and terrified. Accordingly, Mary Daly theorizes the labyrinth as representative of phallogentric language that men construct to oppress women. To include images of gardens and labyrinths in the Gothic text is thus to insert a symbol of the Gothic system into its own narrative. Of course, because women are often the authors of Feminine Gothic novels, the presence of phallogentrism in the form of a garden or maze, unless portrayed as a space from which the heroine is freed, confuses its status as subversive. The garden/maze motif then becomes as ambiguous as the duplicitous home and body in that it reflects a female fear of the Gothic experience

even as it posits as a linguistic sphere of safety – the novel - in which women can willingly be ‘lost.’ As Simon Pugh argues, “any garden is the sum of interpretive readings, and these readings are inscribed in language. A garden is always in a state of flux and change: it can never be pinned down, fixed, it can never be a ‘definitive text’”(ix). That is, the garden, like the Gothic genre it may represent, is subject to a sort of ambiguous origin and function, and as such serves as a complex tool with which to explore the heroine’s escape from the Gothic system; it becomes increasingly difficult to discern who constructs, tends, and lives within its boundaries.

As I have been arguing, transgression is a major source of terror in the Feminine Gothic; the heroine fears not only the transgression of the male other into her home and body, but also her own ‘transgression’ beyond their boundaries. As a result, a great deal of ambivalence surrounds boundary crossing in the Gothic novel, be it out of the home, body, or discursive space; the heroine fears the act even as it has the potential to facilitate her transcendence of the Gothic experience (115). If the garden or labyrinth represents the language that facilitates and constructs this experience, it follows that in order to transcend the Gothic the heroine must, in spite of her terror, cross over its seemingly (and I stress *seemingly*) male-designed borders instead of inhabit or cultivate them. However, in the Feminine Gothic it is not only the transgression of boundaries that inspires terror in the heroine, but the possibility that she will *never* transgress boundaries, and thus never escape the Gothic realm of female illegitimacy. As such, the failure of the heroine to

transgress social and physical boundaries functions to the same end as the perpetuation of her psychic transgressions. If the heroine does not transgress physical and social boundaries she cannot solve the Gothic mystery. Similarly, if she remains perpetually stymied by the ambiguous relations between her mind and surroundings, she will remain forever captive in the obscurity of the female Gothic experience. This ambivalent portrayal of transgression is reminiscent of the Radcliffian Gothic in which, as Kilgour argues, conclusions return their heroines to their domestic realms and roles that are, like the garden, masculine designs yet the domains of women who might never escape. As Rosowski notes, the source of Gothic fear is often “the disjunction between the Gothic world and the ordinary world”(199); the heroine experiences terror when the home becomes suddenly terrifying to her because she realizes that it imprisons her, an attribute that differentiates it from its former status as safe by virtue of familiarity. Consequently, the enclosed space, although recognizable to the heroine, becomes simultaneously unfamiliar because it is an element that she understands as a male design to oppress her, one that she must strive to escape to transcend her victimization. This relationship between terror and the un/familiar space, between the mind and the surroundings of the heroine, is much of what de-legitimizes the female Gothic experience.

In the Feminine Gothic novel, the enclosure and the objects within it have the capacity to instill terror in the mind of the heroine, just as her mind has the capacity to project fear onto the enclosure and its contents, rendering it difficult to decipher which

comes first, the fear of the menace, or the menace itself. In the Gothic discrepancy between reality and the machinations of the human mind, the heroine's fear becomes both the source and result of her terror within the enclosed space. Thus, it would seem that as Dworkin argues, women's fear facilitates men's possession of them, and that perhaps women in the Feminine Gothic are in part responsible for their own containment. Of course, the counter argument to this is that the heroine's space is frightening to begin with because a man renders it so. In any event, because the imprisoning space remains so ambiguous, it is always difficult to discern which originates first, the frightening element, or the woman's terror.

The un/familiar enclosure that results from the tension between internal and external is clearly a version of the phenomenon that Freud refers to as the uncanny. According to Freud, the uncanny, or *unheimlich*, is that which is frightening by virtue of its un/familiarity; the uncanny is, like the Gothic heroine's identity and the enclosure in which she lives, simultaneously unknown or concealed, yet also somehow recognizable. In his explanation of the term, Freud notes that Jentsch

ascribes the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness to intellectual uncertainty, so that the uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one's way about in. The better orientated in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events within it. (221)

The uncanny refers to both intellectual and physical spaces wherein something(s) is (are) unfamiliar. However, as Freud goes on to explain, etymologically, the word 'heimlich' paradoxically refers not only to that which is unfamiliar, but also to "what is familiar and agreeable"(224). Correspondingly, the term *unheimlich* (or uncanny) refers both to that which is known and unknown (unfamiliar and un-unfamiliar), a term that refers to the seen and unseen in a given space, a term that names the terrifying effects of the Gothic enclosure and the heroine's inability to discern that which it contains - including her self. Most significant to my association of the unheimlich to the Gothic enclosure, however, is the fact that 'heim' means 'home.' Freud cites Grimm's dictionary (1878, 4, Part 2, 875), which gives the following definition of the uncanny:

From the idea of 'homelike', 'belonging to the house', the further idea is developed to something withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret; (225).

Demonstrably, in the Feminine Gothic the home of the heroine functions as an uncanny space, first because this space conceals the way in which it menaces the heroine, and second because much of what shares the Gothic enclosure with the heroine remains likewise ambiguous.

Freud connects the uncanny to what I have identified as a major theme of the Gothic genre, the problem of discerning what is real and what is the product of a terrified imagination:

If psychoanalytical theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs* (241).

Here Freud argues that the uncanny is related to repression and repetition. Accordingly, the Gothic heroine represses her fears such that they continuously manifest themselves on the surface of her world, rendering it increasingly difficult to discern whether terror originates in the mind or its surroundings. This ambivalent connection between the psyche and the external world incites a debate that Freud insists “must be a matter of indifference”: “whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening, or whether it carried some *other affect*”(241). I am, of course, compelled to challenge Freud on this “matter of indifference”; the very fact of the difficulty - perhaps impossibility – of determining whether an element is frightening in itself, or if the terrified psyche of its beholder determines its fearfulness, implies a systematic mode of oppression that denies the authority of those who perceive it.

This chapter examines Atwood’s parody of the Feminine Gothic’s emphasis on the crossing over of the internal (mind) to the external (surroundings), as a reaction to the obscurity of the feminine experience. The obscure and frightening space that contains the Gothic heroine, be it her home, her body or language, reflects her internal fears, a phenomenon that implies the distortion of the feminine self. Through parody, however,

Atwood's readers, like the Gothic heroine, cross boundaries – not of internal/external, but of text, genre and period - to create another version of an already distorted version of the Gothic heroine's implied reality and correlating perceptions of self. Of course, as I have argued, parody is not merely copying, but copying with difference, and as such might seem to perpetuate the distortion of the Gothic heroine's already distorted world, further removing her from the implied reality of the text. However, as I have also suggested, parodic difference connotes motive. Thus, while the reciprocal transgressions of the Gothic heroine's mind, body and space imply the obscurity of her reality, Atwood offers an alternative means of boundary crossing that the heroine may enact through the reader in order to escape her Gothic experience. As such, Atwood creates a generic resistance to a literary universe in which the uncanny space perpetually de-legitimizes feminine reality. While typically, after the supposed transgression of social and physical boundaries that provides the answer to the Gothic mystery - knowledge of self and place - the Feminine Gothic heroine returns to the realm of male domination and the duplicitous home, Atwood's parody offers her readers an alternative experience in which boundary crossing is successful and educational, in which systemic knowledge of the Gothic script, the maze of language, frees the reader from the Gothic heroine's fate of containment within it.

If repressed fear is the source of the uncanny in the Feminine Gothic, Joan's surroundings are terrific parodies thereof. Joan frequently finds herself in the types of domestic spaces that haunt the pages of her Costume Gothic novels, seemingly protective yet ultimately harmful. It is only natural, then, that Joan obsesses over her various enclosures – her homes, her body and her novels – and compulsively manipulates these spaces in intuitive self-defense. Like the traditional Gothic heroine, Joan must not only enact physical and social transgressions, but she must also somehow control the effects of uncanny enclosures; she must control the reciprocal crossing over of mind and space that the duplicitous space inspires. At times Joan achieves such border control through subversion of Gothic expectation. However, by the end of Lady Oracle her success becomes ambiguous. Fortunately, the parodic structure of Atwood's novel provides an alternative mode of interaction with borders that renders the obscure and uncanny that results from psychic border crossings a form of analogous movement out of the Gothic realm.

Joan's living space is, like that of the Gothic heroine, almost always under the control of patriarchal influence that veils itself as benevolence, be it from her landlord, her lover, or her father. When Mr. Vitroni, Joan's landlord in *Terremoto* visits Joan, Joan fears that he will discover and disapprove of the fact that she lives alone. When Joan recalls her move to Canada House, she notes that "I wasn't supposed to cook in my

room – the landlord felt his tenants were conspiring to set his house on fire”(172). When her lover Paul sees her tiny room, he insists “this is appalling... You can’t live here. *Nobody* lives here” (175), and he later insists that she will instead live with him. Ironically, the only male figure in control of Joan’s living space who does not do so under the guise of paternal benevolence is her father, evincing a potentially harmful lack of paternal benevolence. For example, after her mother’s death, Joan must take a room that she cannot afford, because her father plans to sell the family home and move into a one-bedroom apartment. Although Joan’s various living spaces are not typical Gothic castles, each bears an affinity to the traditional Gothic enclosure, most obviously in that they are each duplicitously both protective and menacing. Also, in spite of their clear association with ‘normative’ femininity - beauty rituals, domestic duties, female rivalry, and problematic body images - they are dominated financially and morally, to varying degrees, by men. Accordingly, Joan’s spaces are often reminiscent of those spaces in the Costume Gothic novels Joan writes, with “their covers featuring gloomy, foreboding castles and apprehensive maidens”(36). For example, Joan describes the house where she rooms on Isabella street as

a red-brick Victorian one – they’ve torn it down since and built a highrise – with dark, creaky wooden-floored hallways, a staircase which has been useful to me on several occasions (“she glided up the staircase, one hand on the banister...”), and a smell of furniture polish. Undercutting the furniture polish was another smell,

probably vomit. (165)

Like the authors of the traditional feminine Gothic, Atwood does not limit her menacing interiors to the home, but includes a host of ancillary locations. In the case of the Atwoodian Gothic, not all of these ancillary locations are concrete structures. For example, although Joan claims not to suffer the typical fears of the Gothic heroine, a phenomenon she attributes to being fat and therefore unlike the genre's typically beautiful female victim, she simultaneously reveals her containment within an abstract Gothic enclosure:

I'd never developed the usual female fears: fear of intruders, fear of the dark, fear of gasping noises over the phone, fear of bus stops and slowing cars, fear of anyone or anything outside whatever magic circle defines safety (166).

Joan's "magic circle" suggests the "sphere of safety" for women that Ellis argues is the paradoxically stifling haven of the Feminine Gothic, here a magic and therefore ambiguous and tenuous form of "protection" against traditionally Gothic threats to women. Thus, although Joan maintains herself throughout her youth as fat Gothic anti-heroine, Atwood implies that she is nonetheless subject to the Feminine Gothic enclosure's duplicity. Moreover, the correlation that Joan draws between her weight and her protection in "the magic circle" implies that her overweight body is a similarly Gothic enclosure that is both protective yet stifling; it seems to prevent her from being subject to Gothic threats, yet in actuality does not. In fact, health issues of obesity not

withstanding, Joan does not leave her childhood home in Braeside, a home that she finds incredibly stifling, until she loses weight and gains access to Aunt Lou's inheritance, suggesting that her overweight body and her Braeside home are equally duplicitously Gothic enclosures that promise both protection and menace.

Lady Oracle's most conspicuous examples of the Gothic enclosure as analogous to the female body emerge with Joan's visits to the Jordan Chapel in Braeside. The chapel is actually a house where Leda Sprott, alias E.P. Revele, mediates messages from the dead, or from the astral bodies of the living. Upon Joan's first visit to the Jordan Chapel, Leda mediates a message from an uncanny double of Joan's mother:

[t]here's a woman standing behind your chair. She's about thirty, with dark hair, wearing a navy-blue suit with a white collar and a pair of white gloves. She's telling you...what? She's very unhappy about something...I get the name *Joan*. I'm sorry, I can't hear... (130)

The 'ghost' of Joan's mother, seen by Leda but not by Joan, is another obvious example of the uncanny within the domestic enclosure: she is visible and invisible, heard and not heard, a copy of a woman Joan does not ever really know. Later, Joan sees this same vision of her mother, who is now dead, while alone in the apartment she shares with her husband Arthur. Immediately, Joan rearranges the furniture in the apartment, just as Leda Sprott does before the service at the Jordan Chapel. However, Joan's control over the uncanny is proportionate to and circumscribed by her degree of power over her

surroundings. Joan cannot control this space because it is not hers in the sense that her own homes are, and, to a greater extent, as her body and her writing are. When Joan returns to the Jordan Chapel with Arthur to get married, and she cannot control the uncanny space, she transfers her compulsion to do so onto an analogous Gothic enclosure - her body. Her response to the uncanny space is to "decide whether or not to faint"(241). Joan's *decision* to faint is quite unlike the general feminine reaction to the uncanny spaces that women cannot control in The Mysteries of Udolpho. When Emily first suspects that her aunt has been murdered, an idea implanted in her mind by her terrified misinterpretation of the objects, individuals and events around her, she "[grows] very faint; she [can] support herself no longer, and [has] scarcely the presence of mind to set down the lamp, and place herself on a step"(305). While Joan decides to faint, Emily has no choice, a difference between these two women that I attribute to the disparate uncanniness of their Gothic bodies.

Emily's body is seemingly out of her control, prone to fainting and under the threats of men who control and enter her space. In this sense, it is as I have argued, like the Gothic home, un/familiar. Joan's body, on the other hand, is always under her own control; she apparently has the power to decide to faint, she controls her weight loss and gain and as an adult is in control of her sexuality. Moreover, Joan frequently displays bodily agency through disguise. That is, Joan frequently obscures her history, creates double lives, and multiple versions of her self through embedding her own life into her

writing. Joan's body, then, unlike Emily's, is uncanny at least in part because she constructs it so. This compulsion to distort her self implicates Joan in the construction of an uncanny space that undermines the authenticity of her experience. Thus, Atwood suggests through her parodic Gothic heroine that it is possible that women are in part responsible for their existence in a Gothic system of incredibility, that they are potential tenders of the Gothic garden.

Ironically, Joan attempts to control the uncanny, not always to remove it, but also often to sustain it. Joan constantly fears that someone will recognize her, that she will cease to be uncanny, and thus she must perpetuate a complex series of alternative histories in order to obscure the reality of her past. As Joan and Arthur approach Braeside Park, Joan notes that

My terror was growing. Surely the minister would be someone I knew, someone whose daughter I'd gone to school with, someone who would recognize me despite my change of shape. He wouldn't be able to contain himself, he would exclaim at my transformation and tell humorous stories about my former size and weight, and Arthur would know – on our very wedding day! – how deeply I'd deceived him (241).

Joan's withholding of knowledge from Arthur (albeit merely her former weight and relationship with Paul), inverts the archetypal Gothic convention whereby the male hero/villain withholds knowledge from the heroine, to suggest that although she is

frightened of being discovered, Joan's "deception" is at least in part empowering. However, Joan's terror that Arthur will discover her incites her desire to remain obscure, to remain uncanny, seen but unseen, a repression of her self whereby her history is always subject to distortion. Joan's desire to remain an ambiguous figure is the inverse of the Radcliffian heroine's desire to uncover the truth of her origins; instead of seeking out her history, Joan veils it with lies to Arthur and others and is therefore not empowered through deception but obscured. As a result, Joan is not only uncanny, but also the source of the uncanny, complicating the simplistic villain/heroine dichotomy apparent in much criticism of the Gothic that privileges women as innocent.

Joan's position as both the affect and effect of the uncanny is fitting given that she is an author of the Gothic herself. When Joan begins to embed her own life into the pages of her texts not only do her characters cross psychic and physical boundaries, but she herself begins to cross textual boundaries to create parody. Thus, it is evident that Joan is not only a parodied reader, but also a sort of parodied author, constructing the Gothic as does Atwood herself, to cross textual and generic boundaries. Unlike Atwood (presumably), however, Joan is not only writing the Gothic, she is also interpretively participating in it as a figure within a Gothic novel. Accordingly, Joan is both parodied author and reader. Joan's relationship to the uncanny as both its author/creator and its reader/interpreter emerges most clearly through Atwood's (and Joan's) use of labyrinthine imagery. Joan's final Costume Gothic novel, Love, My Ransom, concerns

both her protagonist Charlotte's and her female rival Felicia's relationship to a labyrinth that is said to contain the previous wives of the novel's hero/villain, Sir Redmond. Charlotte's and Felicia's journey into the maze functions as the inner/outer quest for identity that marks the Feminine Gothic novel, while simultaneously acting as an uncanny double of the events of Joan's life. Just so, as I have already implied, the labyrinth is an uncanny space, one that is familiar yet strange, one that might confuse and deceive, one that encloses women like the Gothic home. Because Joan embeds her own life into the novel's pages, she traverses the maze with Charlotte and Felicia. Joan writes, "*It was noon when she entered the maze*" (413), leaving her identity ambiguous; it could be the good, sweet Charlotte, the villainous Felicia, or Joan herself. Because, as I have argued, the labyrinth is often a symbol of the Gothic system, when Joan writes, "*[s]uddenly she found herself at the centre of the plot*"(413), she indicates not only Charlotte's or Felicia's entry to the maze, but also her entry into the text/maze as both author and reader. In this sense, Joan is contained not only within Daly's phallographic, deceptive language, but also a linguistic maze that she creates herself.

Contrarily, as Tristram argues, the garden itself, particularly the eighteenth-century Classical and the nineteenth-century Picturesque or Gothic, testifies to human control over nature, nature's submission to a master who, like the master of the Gothic home, is usually male (242). As Alvilde Lees-Milne points out, "historically, it is more often than not men who have done the initial planning and layout of Gardens"(ix). Just

so, Sir Redmond is the master of Love, My Ransom's maze. As Joan's fictional construct, Redmond's control thus indicates a hegemonic system of masculine control. Therefore, although the garden is often associated with femininity, like the Gothic enclosure, it is also associated with masculine mastery over it. In fact, Tristram cites Ruskin's notion of the garden as an extension of the house, that which ideally contains women within its (masculine) order (242).

If Joan is in the plot's maze, then, she is in Daly's maze of language that affirms patriarchal myths both outside and inside of women's minds (1), what I equate to the discursive formation of the Gothic. Because Joan is the parodied author of this system, her escape from it is necessarily complex. To break free from this maze, Daly argues, is the journey of feminists, a journey that involves locating meaning and knowledge that a system of language hides from and robs of women (8). Similarly, as I have pointed out, the Gothic heroine must journey to acquire meaning and knowledge through solving the Gothic mystery of origins, to learn about her self and her surroundings so that they cease to be uncanny. Just as the Gothic heroine must embark on a terrifying journey inside the enclosure of the mind and beyond the enclosure of her external space, Daly describes the journey out of the linguistic maze as that which requires the confrontation of "demons in ghastly/ghostly forms, not noticeable by ordinary sense perception"(3). Daly's "ghosts" are, like many of the sources of Gothic terror, the repercussions of a patriarchally dominated culture in which women are subject to "...deceptive perceptions [that]

are/were implanted through language – the all-pervasive language of myth” (3); Daly's ghosts are thus analogous to Heller's interpretation of the terrors that prevent the Gothic heroine from crossing over the boundaries of her enclosure – male domination and conservative ideology.¹ However, in Lady Oracle, the only ghostly form that Joan sees is that of her mother. In this sense, Daly's “ghastly ghosts” undergo gender inversion, and become maternal menaces as opposed to the results of masculinist myths. Accordingly, Atwood's novel suggests that the deceptive perceptions are not necessarily male constructs for the de-legitimization of women, but the designs of women's own psyches. Just so, Joan attempts automatic writing, exaggeratedly Gothic poetry, or as I will argue in Chapter Three, a form of Kristevian poetic writing occasioned by the maternal Real. In this sense, the feminine maternal becomes the source of Gothic terror as opposed to the masculine paternal, and Joan is thus implicated in her own containment within the Gothic system.

Daly goes on to suggest that the journey out of the maze of patriarchal language is a process that “unmasks the unreality of ‘self’ and ‘world’ as these are portrayed,

¹ Daly suggests here that the labyrinth that controls nature is analogous to the ways masculine language and rhetoric control women. The demons to which she refers, then, are the ghosts of the male myth-makers. At the center of Love, My Ransom's maze, Joan finds a demonic man whose identity shifts from Sir Redmond's to Arthur's. In The Edible Women (1972), a younger character named Arthur is described by his mother as “a real nature child, he just loves to shit in the garden”(34), a perhaps unlikely yet humorous foreshadowing of Lady Oracle's Arthur, whose attempts to control women are through his attempts to prevent them from leaving Daly's Male Maze. The Arthur in Love, My Ransom tells Joan/Charlotte/Felicia to “let me take you away”(415). In this sense, Arthur as a demon of the Male Maze metaphorically ‘shits’ in the garden, preventing female escape, while enabling a dependence on masculinity.

betrayed, in the language of the father's foreground"(6). That is, to escape the male maze one must realize the deceptiveness of a patriarchal portrayal of reality. According to Daly, this process involves encountering what is unknown (knowledge or understanding that is hidden from or repressed by women and portrayed alternately through the patriarchal language system - the uncanny, if you will) and converting it to that which is known and familiar (8). Just as the Gothic heroine must uncover knowledge of self to escape her duplicitous home, Daly claims women must escape the maze of patriarchal language to arrive at the true meaning of language, reality and self. For the traditional Gothic heroine, it seems that escape from the maze is impossible; she ultimately returns to her former role in spite of her attempts at the transgression of boundaries and the traversing of various symbolic mazes and mysteries. For Joan, however, the heroic escape from the maze, the uncanny and the Gothic script, is left rather ambiguous, particularly because of her role as both author and reader of it.

The last words written in Love, My Ransom, "*[t]he flesh fell away from his face, revealing the skull behind it; he stepped towards her, reaching for her throat*"(415), suggest that Joan and her heroine/rival are still under the threat of masculinity inside of it. Moreover, at the conclusion to Lady Oracle Joan remains terrified; as I have pointed out, she hits a stranger over the head because of her paranoia that he is on his way to harm her by revealing her true identity. I correlate Joan's apparent failure to exit the maze to her uncanniness, as Daly might argue, her failure to uncover what the Gothic

system veils, in this case, her own uncanny self. While Daly argues that the journey out of the maze involves converting that which is unknown to that which is known (or, the uncanny to the familiar), Joan *herself* remains uncanny. At the end of Love, My Ransom, it is still unclear who, exactly, remains in the maze - Charlotte, Felicia, or Joan. At the end of Lady Oracle, although Joan plans to tell her story and cease to be uncanny, she notes that "[r]ight now, though, it's easier just to stay in Rome" (Italy being the frequent setting of the Gothic novel). Joan bases this decision largely on the feeling that the reporter she has hit with the Cinzano bottle is "the only person who knows anything about [her]" (419). Of course, this man knows nothing of Joan except her role as controversial author, a construction by her male publicists. Although this moment seems to be Joan's point of departure from the Gothic, she continues to protect herself as an uncanny construction.

As I have noted, Daly remarks that the journey out of the maze involves "spinning through and beyond the father's foreground"(2). She argues that spinning requires locating the source of the terrors that have been implanted into the female mind (3). Later, Daly returns to the term spinning in her discussion how women might "dispell the language of phallocracy"(4). As Daly argues, "spinsters" are women who enact the "whirling movement of creation"(3), women who have the capacity to return to reality "by destroying the false perceptions of it inflicted upon us by the language and myths of Babel"(4). Daly's spinsters are reminiscent of Lady Oracle's intertextual

references to Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*. The Lady of Shalott is a spinster in the traditional sense, one who "weaves by night and day/ A magic web with colors gay." The Lady of Shalott weaves depictions of Camelot, not as she actually witnesses it, but rather as she perceives it through a mirror. Similarly, Joan enacts Daly's "whirling movement of creation" through the writing of her Gothic novels that replicate not an authentic world but versions of one that she has read of; she writes according to a script. In this sense, both the Lady of Shalott's and Joan's creations are simulacrum that negate the original referent driving them. Thus, the spinning that Lady Oracle portrays is quite unlike Daly's hope of feminist escape from phallocracy. Instead, Joan's and the Lady of Shalott's weaving alike promote irreferentiality and the Gothic realm of feminine obscurity.

However, as I began to suggest earlier in this chapter, Atwood offers an alternative possibility for her readers through her own "spinning," the creation of the parodic text. Unlike Joan, who merely "spins" tales up with her reality to confuse and contain, Atwood "spins" and weaves parody's disparate genres, periods and discourses to arrive at an interpretive knowledge of the Gothic that will prevent containment within it. Moreover, Joan's parodied readers succeed in fulfilling her heroic quest as they cross the boundaries of genre and text, negotiating meaning to arrive at such interpretive knowledge of the Gothic system. In this sense, parody offers a generic alternative to Gothic expectation, intersubjectively empowering its heroine through its effects on her

analogous reader.

As for Joan, on the side of optimism, I must note that she decides to stop writing Costume Gothics because she decides that they were bad for her. Instead she considers writing science fiction, which Massé suggests implies her desire to move away from the Gothic universe into one in which knowledge will provide authority (264). However, whereas Massé praises science fiction, Daly notes that “even the most imaginative science-fiction writers (allegedly the most foretelling futurists) cannot/will not create a space and time in which women get far beyond the role of space stewardess” (1). Clearly there is an irony to Joan’s decision; it plots an attempt at escape from one script/maze by contemplating adhering to another. The true irony of Joan’s choice, however, only became evident ten years following Atwood’s publication of Lady Oracle with the publication of The Handmaid’s Tale, a social science-fiction novel in which women are not merely reduced to space stewardesses, but to the sum of their uncanny reproductive parts.

Tending the Macrocosmic Maze in The Handmaid's Tale

The most jarring difference between Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale lies in the latter novel's relative lack of hope for women's escape from the Gothic, evinced by its setting in the bleak future as well as by its portrayal of the duplicitously protective yet harmful space as the domains of all women instead of individual women. While Offred's individual terror blurs the lines between the benign and the menacing in her own surroundings, the terror of all of the female citizens of Gilead undermines the collective authenticity of the female experience in The Handmaid's Tale. In this sense, not only is Offred a Gothic heroine/victim, but so are all women, under the threat of a 'protective' all-male government regime that forces them into gender specific roles. As such, I can only conjecture that, ironically, The Handmaid's Tale's comparative commercial success lies in its metonymic and parodic prediction of inauthentic or terrified female reality as a result of paradoxical protection and punishment – the duplicitous Gothic home as republic. The irony of this success is that so often literary critics dismiss the Gothic as escapist writing for women. However, this collectivity of terror is not to suggest that women in The Handmaid's Tale are any less responsible for the construction/authorship of the Gothic system than Joan is. Although it seems counterproductive for a female readership to escape into their own systematic oppression, Atwood portrays the women of Gilead as ensnared in the creation and maintenance of the Gothic's uncanny space, be

it in the form of the duplicitous home or deceptive maze. Although Offred, unlike Joan, is not a perfect parodic author of the Gothic, but merely a parleyer of its effects, Atwood implicates feminine collaboration in the Gothic system of feminine obscurity. In this sense, Offred is at least a metonymic parody of the Gothic author. However, like Joan, Offred is also a parodied reader of the Gothic, who through the intersubjective effects of parody crosses over boundaries analogous to the psychic crossings over that generate the uncanny and affirm her status as terrified and incredible, to successfully arrive at an interpretation of the Gothic that facilitates her parodic doppelgangers's freedom. The Handmaid's Tale is successful not because it is escapist, but because it is a parody that reveals and reacts against a Gothic system that denies feminine authority.

Just as in Lady Oracle, the domestic space and its ancillary structures in The Handmaid's Tale play a large role in determining the inauthenticity of feminine reality. Offred exists in a society in which the 'freedom to vs. freedom from' debate is over, and women are forcibly under the 'protection' of a patricentric government that robs them of individuality (they are forced into coloured uniforms), initiative (they live in constant fear of Ellis's "public expiation of shame" in the form of public hangings, Salvagings, or being sent to the dreaded colonies), and financial power (their bank accounts are frozen, transferred to their husbands if they have them). Offred, as a Handmaid, must likewise live in a man's house, just as Emily must move to Udolpho with Montoni. Once there, Offred must act as a reproductive servant under the threat of Gilead's patricentric

and militant regime. As though to prove to her hypothetical audience that her enclosure is in fact a Gothic space, Offred notes that the Commander's house is Late Victorian, and "a family house"(9). Offred is in an uncanny space; it reminds her of what she knows is a home, yet it has become menacing to her because it traps her. It should or once could have been familiar and benign, but now is not. Atwood makes it clear that, just as is the case of the traditional Gothic novel, while the home is the primary uncanny enclosure in the novel, "[a]part from the details, this could be a college guest room, for the less distinguished visitors; or a room in a rooming house, of former times, for ladies in reduced circumstances"(8); it could be a containment for any social inferior, anywhere. In fact, on the first page of the novel Offred remembers that she and several other women "slept in what had been the gymnasium"(3). Although a gymnasium is not a traditionally domestic space, it is, like the ancillary structures of Lady Oracle, part of a network of spaces that contain women. These redefined spaces serve a different function, or incite a different emotion than in the "time before" to which Offred often refers and as such are uncanny. Offred notes, "[t]here was old sex in the room and loneliness, and expectation, of something without shape or name"(3). This shapeless, nameless force of expectation is reminiscent of the uncanny, that which is *almost* there. This expectation's connection to sex foreshadows the novel's emphasis on sexuality, in particular, pregnancy and the womb. In this sense, the gymnasium in which women are reborn as Handmaids is the first clue in the text that the female body is an uncanny Gothic interior.

Like Joan, Offred's sense of self is inexorably linked to her repressed or oppressed (as is perhaps more accurate in Offred's case) past. Like Joan, Offred becomes an uncanny, obscure figure who is both seen yet unseen, known yet unknown, reminiscent of her former way of life, yet unable to admit or enact it. Unlike Joan, however, Offred does not wish uncanniness upon herself. Rather, a government that seeks to erase the personal histories of its women in favour of a future in which they are reduced to categorical female roles forces her to remain anonymous and heterogeneous. In this sense, Offred's body is more reminiscent of Emily's than Joan's in that Offred has little control over it. Offred's body is also, as Dworkin might imply, the site of heterosexual intercourse whereby the Commander imperialistically enters her as a villain would enter the room of the archetypal Feminine Gothic heroine. The Commander, Serena Joy and Offred engage in ceremonies whereby the Commander attempts to impregnate Offred with a child that will never belong to her.² Although the ceremony is a form of rape, the general hegemonic dismissal of the act as such implies the submission that Dworkin identifies as collaboration in the ceremonious invasion of women's bodies. Accordingly, the ambiguity of their own role in their victimization clouds women's grounds for subversion.

² These ceremonies are parodies of the Biblical story in which by divine right, to please her husband, Rachel has her maid Bilhah conceive a child by and for him: "And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and her said *Am* I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" (Genesis 30:2-3).

The room that contains Offred in the Commander's house is in several ways analogous to her body; both are under the threat of what appears as male control over and at times female collusion in the Gileadian regime. Offred insists that this room is in fact *not hers*, and notes that the door to it cannot be locked. The lack of a locked door, a door that fails to shut properly, connotes the room of the Gothic heroine/victim, who cannot control who enters it. The fact that Offred refuses the notion that the room in which she sleeps is her own thus suggests that she likewise denies her status as the heroine/victim. However, in denying her room, Offred also denies her analogous body, rendering it an uncanny space that is both familiar and strange. Accordingly, Offred does not effectively deny her status as Gothic heroine, even as she denies her room. Just so, Offred ultimately admits that the enclosure in which she lives does, in fact, belong to her. When Offred encounters the Commander in the hallway she notes, "[n]obody else has seen him. I hope. Was he invading? Was he in my room?" And then, "I called it *mine*"(61).

The lack of a locked door connotes not only the room of the Gothic heroine and the threat that her body is perpetually under, but also the parodic text, a space that is entered freely by both its target and reappropriations. Offred's denial of her room is thus not only her denial of her status as Gothic heroine/victim, but also her denial of the generic empowerment inherent in parody's boundary crossings. In this sense, Offred is caught in a catch twenty-two through which her denial of the Gothic system hinders her generic escape from it.

The ambiguity surrounding Offred's capacity to escape the Gothic reminds one of Joan/Charlotte/Felicia's difficulty in escaping Lady Oracle's labyrinth. Just as the labyrinthine imagery in Lady Oracle is a (mis)leading maze, one that is uncanny, one that enslaves and entraps women, so the paths in The Handmaid's Tale serve as uncanny containments. For example, as Offred and Ofglen shop and do errands together, Offred notes that, "[n]ow and again we vary the route; there's nothing against it, as long as we stay within the barriers. A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze"(206). If we are to think of Offred's maze, the Republic of Gilead, the Commander's home, her own room, as Daly's linguistic male maze, the rhetorical patriarchal construction of feminine stereotypes embedded into language and culture, Offred is only free to move if she does so within the confines of this seemingly male-designed script.

Offred, unlike Joan, is always very aware of her presence in the maze; she knows that it traps her, and that the paths she traverses are quite literally the constructs of men. Here The Handmaid's Tale differs from Lady Oracle; in the former it is very clear that the maze is male, whereas in the latter this is an inadequate analysis, given that first, Joan constructs the maze in which her characters are lost, and that second, Atwood constructs the maze in which Joan is lost. In spite of existing within a literary universe created by a woman, Offred walks paths that Atwood portrays as male designs. As such, it appears that Offred's maze is the type that Daly describes, the type that is created by men to

imprison women in stereotypical roles, a realm that is uncanny and therefore incapable of reflecting any accurate or even adequate version of reality or self. If Offred's admission that the room that contains her is her own posits female culpability in the affirmation of the Gothic script, further obscuring the materiality of female victimization, her enclosure becomes a double obscurity.

Atwood's use of garden imagery throughout The Handmaid's Tale does reveal that even in a violently androcentric society women may in fact play a role in the construction of the uncanny enclosure, that, like Offred, the women of Gilead might somehow, even if under force, collaborate in the construction of the Gothic realm. Accordingly, Atwood's text implies a feminine illegitimacy when it comes to their victimization. Images of flowers abound throughout the novel, suggestive of female sexuality. As Offred describes her quarters, she notes that "[f]lowers are still allowed"(7), suggesting that, Gilead tolerates the feminine sexuality that they so often symbolize. Of course, such toleration exists likely because Gilead is dependant on women like the Handmaids for reproduction. However, although flowers often represent female fertility, Offred describes the garden as "the domain of the Commander's Wife"(14), a woman who cannot reproduce. This garden, in no way a masculine construct, is something for the wives of Commanders "to order and maintain and care for"(14). In fact, Serena Joy has a male Guardian working for the Commander to do the heavy digging for her, whom she "directs, pointing with her stick"(14). Here Serena Joy is given a phallic symbol to direct

a man through a garden that represents the female body. Offred remembers nostalgically, "I once had a garden. I can remember the smell of the turned earth, the plump shapes of bulbs held in the hands, fullness, the dry rustle of seeds through the fingers"(14).

Clearly, the Gileadian garden is a status symbol, one that indicates a power that the Wives possess and the Handmaids do not. Thus it appears that, because the Wives control the garden, and because it suggests they have some power in society, they are somehow in collusion with the powers of Gilead, those masculine powers that maintain the social construct in which Gothic enclosures enslave some women. In this sense, if the garden is also doubly uncanny. First, it representation of the linguistic labyrinth that Daly refers to. Second, although in this light it seems to be an entirely male constructed system of female oppression, it is also controlled and kept by women to subsume and deceive others.

However, although it appears that the Wives control their gardens, and are therefore not subject to the Gothic enclosure, they are, like the Handmaids, forced to exist within a particular role in a society under the control of men. In this sense, the Wives do not actually control the garden (or linguistic labyrinth), but only appear to, which renders both the space and the women uncanny; neither are what they appear to be. Thus, it is fitting that the domain of the Wife is the garden, that uncanny part of nature that men control to maintain female stereotypes. These women are merely enacting a role of power that men construct for them; the phallic stick that Serena Joy wields attests

to the fact that her power over the Guardian and the Handmaid is merely an extension of her husband's male power. Likewise, the Aunts in the Red Centre "had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts"(4) like cowboys, controlling cows - not bulls. The Aunts, like the Wives, are women who control other women with and within the Gothic enclosure, as an extension of male power; their role is as constructed as that of the Handmaid.

As I have suggested, Offred's admission/submission that the uncanny room in which she lives is her own implies a collaboration in the Gothic script, Daly's male maze, just as the Wives and the Aunts do. And, as I have argued, whether the linguistic and hegemonic maze is always constructed and maintained by masculinity is extremely ambiguous, likewise imposing uncanniness on the space. As the novel progresses it becomes increasingly difficult to discern who constructs the maze and who is within it, be it veiled as a garden or house. When Serena Joy confronts Offred about her affair with her husband, Offred returns to her room and remarks, "there's nobody in the garden. I wonder if it will rain" (363). Here Atwood reveals just how irreferential the Gothic woman becomes; her status as either victim or villain becomes increasingly ambiguous as Offred notes that there is, in fact, nobody tending or inside of the Gothic garden, and therefore nobody responsible for or the casualty of Daly's linguistic maze. As such, the female victim is erased from the Gothic, and Offred's escape from the Gothic realm becomes impossible as she disappears into the uncanny space of garden/text.

Of course, it seems unjustifiable for a female writer to duplicate the erasure of the feminine. Atwood does, however, seem to perpetuate the irreferentiality of the Gothic woman throughout both Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale. In each text, the woman herself becomes as uncanny as her inauthentic surroundings as her fear is made manifest on the surfaces of her reality. Moreover, although the transgression of physical and social boundaries traditionally enables the Gothic woman to transcend what I have argued is the female Gothic condition of illegitimacy, both Joan's and Offred's engagement with the uncanny implies a crossing over of the boundary between the psychic and the material that affirms their status as irreferential beings. As such, like the traditional Gothic heroine, neither Joan nor Offred makes a clear escape from the Gothic system, Daly's maze, be it male or female or both. Why might Atwood copy yet again this oppressive and convoluted history of the feminine? She does not; she parodies it. As parodic texts, Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale do not merely reveal the Gothic system, but rather they work against it not only by virtue of parodic subversion of Gothic narrative expectation, but also by virtue of the trope's structure itself. Parody, as I have argued, is predicated on the crossing over of boundaries. In this sense, rather than suggest Offred collaboration in her own de-legitimization, Offred's unlocked door takes on a positive function; parody implies that the movement between open textual doors provides a way to examine the Gothic without being contained within it. For Atwood and her readers, the crossing over that is enacted through parody parallel to that of the

uncanny provides for them an alternative experience within the Gothic whereby boundary crossing does not contain the heroine as it does through the uncanny, but rather opens channels for her escape.

III. Parodic Simulation:

Triangulated Relationships and Multiplicitous Veils

Uncanniness plagues the female Gothic space, undermining the reliability of women's experiences and abandoning them outside of implied narrative reality. This obscurity of space, I have been arguing, does more than contribute to ambivalence concerning the status of the heroine as either victim or subversive; it more injuriously distorts her reality and blends it into terror so that she has no grounds for claiming victimization and therefore no possibility of subversion. Unfortunately for the Gothic heroine, the uncanny space, be it her home, her body, or language, is not the only façade that brings the authenticity of her reality into question. Those individuals who enter her duplicitous space(s) are equally ensnared in the obscurity of female reality. Phillipa Tristram argues that because the novel and the house are both domestic spaces, the Feminine Gothic novel in particular is often expressive of the relationships that take place within each (232). That is, the Feminine Gothic portrays domestic relationships as apparently protective yet harmful or malevolent, much like the spaces where they evolve. Particularly, the Feminine Gothic conventionally portrays triangulated relationships within the family or its analogous structure as a large part of what negotiates the heroine's reality. Typically, the heroine's engagement in such triangles, usually under male influence or force, positions her as the mediating figure not only between the two

other individuals in the triangle, but also between what is real and what is not, leaving her in a yet another sense subject to an obscure reality. In fact, the heroine's status in the triangle is not unlike that of the archetypal Gothic veil, positioned so as to disguise one motive while facilitating another; willingly or not she becomes the space of simulation. Accordingly, Atwood's heroines in particular occupy a space analogous to that between the host and guest of parody. That is, just as the reader negotiates and mediates the reciprocal exchanges between these two elements of parody in order for it to function, so Atwood's heroines negotiate and mediate the reciprocal exchanges of implied narrative reality and simulation's 'illegitimacy.' In this sense, Atwood's positions her heroines as unique thirds who posit an alternative to a binary opposition between the simulated and the actual.

To begin, I would like to justify my use of the term simulation and contextualize it to the Gothic. Simulation is, according to Jean Baudrillard, copying, creating an image that equals its original in every sense except for its relationship to meaning. That is, simulation lacks the referent it purports to express (6). For example, while the Gothic villain might enact benevolence, his malevolent motive assures that his enactment has no connection to a benevolent referent. This chapter will not remain entirely faithful to Baudrillard's sense of simulation, but will instead use his theory to deconstruct numerous types of recreation, copying and emulation that occur in the context of the Gothic family.

Specifically, this chapter focuses on the Gothic veil and its multiple analogous manifestations. As Elizabeth Broadwell notes, “[the veil] appears in the form of words such as ‘reveal,’ ‘obscure,’ ‘shroud,’ and ‘conceal.’ One form of the veil image is that of a ‘social veil’ – that is, the adoption of manners of a ‘social self.’” (qtd. in Sedgwick, 143). In The Coherence of Gothic Conventions Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that Gothic criticism largely ignores the dynamics of surface in favour of the tension between interior and exterior such as I address in Chapter One (141). True, the Gothic surface, which emerges most conspicuously through the imagery of veils and shrouds, often lurks in the critical shadow of the ironically high profile underneath, inside, subtext/conscious. In resistance to this critical trend, Sedgwick remarks that although most Gothic criticism attributes the veil to “a cloak for something deeper and more primal,” it is in fact simultaneously representative (143). Of course, the veil can both distract from what it hides as well as point out what it hides. As Sedgwick argues “the veil that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it, both as metonym of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced, specified”(143). However, Sedgwick also notes that the veil can refer to “an order of things that is both distinct from and intentionally descriptive of some other order”(149). In this sense, the Gothic veil not only disguises the interior, it also purports something else. In this sense, veils seem to be, like Daly’s maze, an imprint of deception onto the Gothic heroine’s world, a hindrance to the heroine as they generate confusion

and inauthentic reality. However, as this chapter examines, when veils are taken into the parodic context, this is not always the case.

My first chapter refers to the feminine Gothic experience in Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale as the result of the interaction of two elements - exterior and interior. However, the familial relationships that negotiate the realities of Atwood's heroines, like those of their archetypal parodic targets, emerge not only in pairs, but more often in threes. Much critical theory exists concerning the notion of triangulation and the function of thirds. This chapter adopts two models to illustrate the correlation between triangulation and simulation in both the traditional Feminine Gothic as well as Atwood's parodic formations: Sigmund Freud's Oedipal triangle, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's more recent queer readings.

According to Freud, as a child grows he or she will disassociate from his or her opposite sex parent in favor of the other to avoid the incest taboo. Freud's theory of melancholia mandates that the result of giving up one parent in favour of the other is the incorporation of that parent into the child's psyche, so that child will emulate (simulate) his or her behaviour to cope with the loss. Of course, if a daughter is to emulate, for example, her father, she becomes the acceptable heterosexual opposite to the mother, thus suggesting that the motive behind their emulation is not to compensate for the loss of the desired father, but to satisfy a desire for the mother. Thus, like the Gothic veil Freud's model of triangulation is duplicitous; it accounts not only for simulation of

desire's target, but also for simulation of desire itself.¹ In this sense, the heroine becomes a marked point of division between the actual and the simulated. Accordingly, she becomes an analogous veil between two elements that disguise one motive while purporting another.

Sedgwick's Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire explores triangulation in terms of sexuality to reveal how simulation veils taboo desire. Sedgwick's book focuses largely on triangulated relationships whereby the presence of a woman veils and facilitates the homosocial desire between two men. Sedgwick suggests that the Gothic inserts an apparent but perhaps not real homophobic break in the homosocial continuum so that compulsory heterosexuality governs the exchanges of men (90). One consequence of the appearance of this break is the presence of a woman among male kinship structures to negate the possibility of homoeroticism – the triangulation of male homosocial desire mediated through a woman. As Sedgwick writes, “[t]he paranoid Gothic was the novelistic tradition in which the routing through women of male homosocial desire had the most perfunctory presence” (118). Sedgwick argues that male homosocial desire in these triangles, often conspicuous as rivalry, is as strong as their mutual desire for the mediating woman (21). One very obvious

¹ Although Freud associates this phenomenon with child development, in the context of the female-centred Feminine Gothic, wherein the heroine is often already on the verge of adulthood, the result of such emulation is naturally an obscurity of self. Moreover, novels such as The Mysteries of Udolpho and Wilke Collins's The Woman in White obviously complicate Freud's model in that one parent figure (often the same sex figure) is often already absent by the novels' first pages.

complication of Sedgwick's model in the context of this thesis is that triangulation in the Feminine Gothic generally occurs among two women and an older man who controls the space in which they co-exist, not among two men and one woman.² Accordingly, this chapter adapts Sedgwick's model to account for the homosocial exchanges of women as well as men. In fact, while I acknowledge the power dynamics of gender, especially in the Gothic genre, this chapter argues that Gothic heroines serve as veils not only to facilitate homosocial bonds, but also more general models of desire, both hetero and homosocial. In this sense, the heroine is not only the veil between the real and the simulated, but also between the two other individuals present in her triangle.

As the mediator between the actual and the simulated, the heroine is a powerful figure. Because, as I argue in Chapter One, the heroine is the reader's point of entry into the text as a parodic double, her status as the mediator of the boundary between the actual and the simulated is analogous to her (and her reader's) status as the mediator(s) of the boundary between the host and guest of parody. That is, if the heroine is a parodied reader, her mediation of the real and the simulated parallels her parodic double's mediation of the parodic text and its target, the interpretation of difference that predicates parody. Of course, as I argue in Chapter One, because the both Joan and Offred are also a parodied authors of the Gothic to an extent, this empowerment might easily be

² An excellent example of this sort of triangulation occurs in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest*, wherein Mme. La Motte is jealous over her younger companion Adeline's friendship with her husband, the novel's patriarchal figure.

confused with collaboration in the system of feminine irreferentiality, an issue that I will address throughout this chapter.

Because the heroine's status as mediator between implied reality and simulation is analogous not only the author/creator of the Gothic text but also of its reader, although the narrative might indicate otherwise, the novel's generic structure offers an alternative to the heroine's perpetual obscurity through which she obtains authority. As Joan and Offred come to occupy the space of the veil, the space between the real and the simulation, each woman analogously occupies the tertiary space of parody, mediated first by its creator, the author, yet which must also be mediated by an interpreter, its reader, in order for parody to have an effect. As the reader enacts interpretation, he or she negotiates the boundaries of the text, just as the heroine negotiates the boundaries of implied reality. For the reader, such an act leads to knowledge and meaning. Accordingly, her parodic double's negotiation, although it may appear to obscure her sense of reality and identity, becomes an empowering means of border control.

Incorporation of Simulation in Lady Oracle

The familial triangles that Joan participates in constitute Gothic spaces that, unlike her other enclosures – her homes, her body, her mind, her novel, and Atwood's novel – are subject not only to the uncanny, the tension between interior and exterior, but

also to a tension that plays itself out on surfaces, veils of desire and character that both disguise and simulate. Such tension occurs most often in triangulated relationships whereby one angle/individual either veils their own motives or those of the other two. As Joan simulates she ultimately embodies the Gothic veil, rendering both her identity and reality obscure. Such are the consequences of Gothic triangulation that Atwood points out and reacts against through parody. When triangulation appears to undermine Joan's success at escaping the Gothic realm of feminine obscurity, parody as a generic trope ensures the referentiality that she loses. When Joan becomes the veil that disguises and deceives, she becomes a space of negotiation not only between two angles of the triangle, but also between the actual and the simulated. Because she is also her reader's intertextual point of entry, Joan becomes a parallel space of negotiation between host and guest of parody. Moreover, because parody relies on the crossing of boundaries that always connotes a difference from its target, be it tone, setting, outcome or any other element that effects interpretation of itself in contrast to its target and vice versa, a referent that connotes its meaning, it generically counters the erasure of the boundaries between reality and simulation that is simulation's consequence, providing for Atwood's heroines an intersubjective parodic alternative.

Joan's relationship with her parents is a version of the archetypal Gothic triangle that she depicts in her *Costume Gothics*:

...the hero, a handsome, well-bred, slightly balding man, dressed in an immaculately tailored tweed cloak, like Sherlock Holmes's, pursued the heroine, crushing his lips to hers in a hansom cab and rumpling her *pelisse*. The villain, equally well-bred and similarly clad, did just about the same thing, except that in addition he thrust his hand inside her *fichu*. The rival female had a lithe body like that of a jungle animal beneath her exquisitely stitched corset, and like all such women, she came to a bad end...But she deserved this, as she'd attempted to reduce the heroine to a life of shame...(188)

The older female rival, like Joan's mother, is thin, shames Joan repeatedly, and ultimately dies. The villain and hero are, I will argue, like the two sides of Joan's father, both benevolent yet menacing. This archetypal Gothic triangle suggests the villain/hero's desire for the heroine. However, as the gendered inversion of Sedwick's model, it would follow that the heroine and her rival may use the hero/villain to facilitate and veil their own mutual homosocial desire. In Lady Oracle, however, whereby this triangle is familial and therefore wrought with Freudian Oedipal implications, it seems that Joan disguises desire for her father by embodying the Gothic veil between actuality and simulation. Freud suggests that, in response to the father's preference for his daughter, female children often wish themselves in the place of their mothers ("Origins" 28). The incest taboo predicates the loss of the daughter's love-object (father), the effect of which is melancholia, the incorporation of his behaviour into her ego ("Mourning and

Melancholia” 131). Correspondingly, Joan ought to attach herself to her mother to avoid a taboo alignment with her father, consequently ‘losing’ her father, and incorporating him into the ego - a repression of one desire replaced with the simulation of another coupled with the simulation of the behavior belonging to desire’s original target.

However, Joan describes her father as an ambiguous man who “most of the time...was simply an absence”(78). Joan’s father is at war for the first five years of her life, and when he returns he is virtually absent in terms of his relationship to her. Joan notes that because the “few things we did together were wordless things”(87), she would

...pretend his voice was the voice of Milton Cross, kindly and informed, describing the singers’ costumes and the passionate, tragic and preposterous events in which they were involved. There he would be, puffing away on the pipe he took up after he quit cigarettes, poking at his house plants and conversing to me about lovers being stabbed or abandoned or betrayed, about jealousy and madness, about unending love triumphing over the grave; and then those chilling voices would drift into the room, raising the hair on the back of my neck, as if he had evoked them. He was a conjuror of spirits, a shaman with the voice of a dry, detached old opera commentator in a tuxedo. Or that’s how I imagined him sounding, when I thought up the conversations I would have liked to have had with him but never did. (87-88)

Because Joan's father is virtually absent, before Joan can incorporate him, emulate him, she must first create him, imagine a version of him that has little relation to the actual, original version. All that Joan does know of her father is that he is an extremely duplicitous man, both healer and killer. At a dinner party, Joan's mother reminds her guests that although her husband is a doctor, in the war his "job was to kill people they thought were fakes"(86). Joan finds that her father both "killed people and raised the dead"(88). Similarly, as Joan grows older she realizes "[t]he thought of going on with the same kind of life for ever depressed me. I wanted to have more than one life..." (168), suggesting an incorporation of her father's duplicity which is also an incorporation of her own construction of this same double figure, a melancholic emulation of an imaginary paradox. Joan's emulation of her father becomes simulation for this very reason; her copying of him refers not to the actual man, but only to her construction of him.

Through performing simulation, Joan comes to embody the veil, the space between what is real and what is not. As such, Joan's identity gradually deteriorates through her relationship with her parents. Here it seems that Joan in part constructs the Gothic system in that she perpetuates simulation that obscures both the individuals who surround her as well as herself. Just as Joan is both the affect and effect of the uncanny, Joan both constructs herself as the veil and is rendered irreferential by it. However, as I have been arguing, if Joan is the veil she is also that space that negotiates the real and the simulated; she is a powerful mediator of reality, just as the reader of the parodic Gothic

text in which she exists is a powerful mediator of parodic target and parodied appropriation.

Joan's emulation of her father evinces her desire for him. However, Joan's desire to be like her father also implies a desire to assume his role, to be an object of desire to her mother; it is an Oedipal triangle with jarringly anti-Oedipal implications. In this sense, as I have begun to imply, Joan's triangulation resembles Sedgwick's model, that of two women whose desire for one another matches their desire for a man. This is to suggest that Joan's incorporation of her father is not only indicative of desire for his attention, but also for that from her mother. This would mean that, as Kilgour suggests is the case in The Mysteries of Udolpho, the goal of feminine development is not to become the mother and be loved by the father (128), but to be loved by the mother. In this sense, the novel is subversive of phallogentric expectation; the matriarch is given power over the heroine as opposed to the patriarch. Such subversion, of course, is only achieved through veiling and simulation.

Lady Oracle again emphasizes non-Oedipal development through the triangle among Joan, her mother and her aunt Lou. This triangle revises both Freud's and Sedgwick's models of triangulation in that it takes place among three women, thus excluding men from the desires of women and refusing to negate female homosocial desire or homoeroticism. Accordingly, this triangle appears to be a positive engagement for Joan, an alternative to Daly's phallogentric maze, and an opposition to the Gothic in

its denial of male authority. This triangle also subverts the Gothic model in favour of one in which two mother figures compete for the love of a daughter. That is, Joan perceives discord between two women who both take on a maternal role towards her. Kilgour suggests that The Mysteries of Udolpho sets up a reminiscent triangle among Emily, the Marchioness and the villainess Laurentini; although these women do not compete for Emily, she is unsure of which one of them is her mother. Similarly, Joan's mother and aunt do not overtly compete for Joan's affections, yet Joan fantasizes that "Aunt Lou was my real mother, who for some dark but forgivable reason had handed me over to my parents to be brought up"(102). However, whereas Emily learns that her mother is whom she originally believed her to be, Joan's maternity is never really in question. Joan does, however, make a choice concerning who she aligns with: her aunt. According to Freud, this alignment implies that Joan's mother is her love-object, who, through her alignment with Lou Joan loses and might incorporate into her ego. However, when Lou dies, Joan melancholically emulates her, appropriating her name as a novelistic pseudonym. Of course, even as Joan does this she begins to lose weight and take on a physical countenance more like her mother than her aunt. Clearly, then, Joan incorporates/simulates both women to a degree, evinced by her day-dream of the fat tightrope walking ballerina:

In this one I was sitting in a circus tent. It was dark, something was about to happen, the audience was tense with expectation. I was eating popcorn.

Suddenly a spotlight cut through the blackness and focused on a tiny platform at the top of the tent. Upon it stood the Fat Lady from the freak show at the Canadian National Exhibition. She was even fatter than I had imagined her, fatter, than the crude picture of her painted on the hoarding, much fatter than me. She was wearing pink tights with spangles, a short fluffy pink shirt, satin ballet slippers and, on her head, a sparkling tiara...The crowd burst out laughing. They howled, pointed and jeered; they chanted insulting songs. But the Fat Lady, oblivious, began to walk carefully out onto the high wire, while the band played a slow, stately melody. (119)

This figure represents not only Joan's mother and aunt, but also Joan herself. The tight-rope that the Fat Lady walks evinces the duplicity of this day-dream. The rope is reminiscent of the many lines and boundaries in the novel -- between Joan's mother and aunt, the simulated and actual, the host and guest of parody. Accordingly, this day-dream seems to further obscure Joan's sense of reality. However, because the Fat Lady's rope walking actually parallels the tertiary space created by parody - that is, as the Fat Lady walks the rope, she occupies the space between, just as the parodic text occupies the space between its host and guest, just as Joan occupies the space between the real and the simulated through her various emulations and embodiments of the Gothic veil - Joan's dream is not entirely obfuscating, but rather empowering. Again, this space is analogous to the space between the host and guest of parody, that which the reader negotiates to

arrive at the meaning of the parodic text. Accordingly, just as Joan remarks that the Fat Lady “carried a diminutive pink umbrella... a substitute for the wings which [she] longed to pin on her”(119), Atwood pins metaphoric wings on the heroine through her reader so that she might escape the realm of Gothic simulation through a generic trope.

It seems, then, that Joan does not escape the realm of Gothic veils. However, even as Atwood’s parodic heroine fails, Atwood provides her readers with an alternative fate through the very structure of parody. Because she is a veil she negotiates space between the underneath and the outside; she becomes a surface, a veil. Because she is the reader’s parodic double, this status as veil parallels the reader’s role in mediating parody’s host and guest, becomes an act of reading and interpretation that is inherently powerful.

Simulated Sorority in The Handmaid’s Tale:

The Sisterlacræ

Like Joan, Offred often finds herself in a number of relationships that position her as a veil, as a mediator between reality and simulation. And, like Lady Oracle, The Handmaid’s Tale’s aesthetic expression of this phenomenon is triangulation, the creation of an enclosed, obscure space in which feminine desire and drive become simulated and therefore irreferential. In spite of this similarity, however, the types of triangles in each

novel differ greatly. For example, while Joan's triangles imply desire and imagination, Offred's imply repulsion and despair. Moreover, although Joan's triangles are sexual to a degree, they more generally pertain to Joan's engagement with the Gothic script of disguising while representing. Conversely, Offred's triangles exemplify Sedgwick's theory that sexuality is directly related to social power in order to implicate women in the creation of a Gothic republic. Like Lady Oracle, The Handmaid's Tale's triangulation emerges most conspicuously through the family unit, in this case an uncanny Oedipal triangle. However, whereas Lady Oracle depicts the simulation of desire's target as Freudian melancholia, the incorporation of a lost love-object, The Handmaid's Tale figures it very literally as a physical invasion of the female body by that which the woman does not desire; the Commander literally enters Offred during the ceremonies with his wife. Here, contrary to Sedgwick's model, the Gothic inserts a very literal break in the continuum of female homosociality, a man between two women. This break, however, is not self-inflicted as Sedgwick argues is the case with male homosociality, but instead the control of one gender over another's homosocial bonding. It seems then that incorporation in The Handmaid's Tale concerns the control of women's bonds by men. Accordingly, while Lady Oracle portrays the tension between one woman's embodiment of the veil, The Handmaid's Tale insinuates that masculinity places veils on all women to control the spaces of feminine kinship. Again, however, as a parodic text, The Handmaid's Tale reacts against its own implications; through parody Atwood challenges

the notion that masculinity can effectively channel female bonding and distort the feminine.

Serena Joy and the Commander serve as Offred's uncanny parents; they govern her activity and constitute the archetypal Feminine Gothic triangle. Also, because the relationship among these three is sexually charged, it is another version of Freud's Oedipal triangle. However, Offred incorporates neither 'parent' to construct herself in the manner that Joan does. Offred's incorporation is forced; the Commander attempts to 'fertilize' her; she does not will him to be part of her. In place of simulation of a parent figure, then, is rape by the parent figure. Moreover, this fertilization fails; the Commander cannot impregnate Offred. In this sense, Offred does not incorporate either of her uncanny parents, and it appears that in one way at least she escapes Joan's fate of embodying the Gothic veil and disappearing.

The narrative of the novel, however, does not always indicate this. Offred describes the Handmaid's appearance as "[a] shape, red with white wings around the face, a shape like mine, a nondescript woman in red..."(23). Not only do the wings, like a veil, obscure Offred's vision of the world, they also disguise her true appearance from the eyes of others. In this very literal sense, Offred is almost always subject to the effects of the veil. And, living in a society where women are reduced to reproductive roles, wearing this costume reifies Offred as a veil herself; she embodies its function.

Offred notes that in order to get through the ceremonies, “[o]ne detaches oneself”(117), suggesting that the Commander is “preoccupied, like a man humming to himself in the shower without knowing he’s humming”(116) and implying the detachment and displacement of the thoughts and desires of those who are engaged in the sexual act. The consequence of such displacement, as I have argued, is the loss of the referent, the real reason behind the triangle – the simulation of sorority. To illustrate that this is hollow simulation, not only is the physical shape of a triangle hollow, but so is that which is at the center of the ceremony: Offred’s womb. Because the womb is perpetually empty, the referent that drives this triangulation – a child - is missing.

Moreover, the acts that Offred is forced to perform imply the veil’s contagion, its ability to subsume she who wears it. Accordingly, as I have suggested, Offred is not the only woman in this tale who must wear a veil, but rather a metonymic representation. During the ceremonies, Offred, Serena and the Commander participate in both emotional and physical displacement. Serena Joy lies beneath Offred while the Commander has intercourse with her, a displaced version of the sexual act that would occur between the Commander and his wife, could she reproduce. Here Offred mediates between the Commander and Serena Joy, in accordance with a Sedgwickian model of simulated desire. Already, Offred analogizes the parodic line, mediating the desires between two figures just as the parodic line mediates between the textual host and guest. Clearly, the desires of the Commander and his Wife are complex and disparate, and not necessarily

for each other; Serena Joy wants a child, and the Commander's desires include extra-marital satisfaction and the maintenance of his position and society.

In Gilead, such ceremonies are meant to indicate women helping women. Clearly, however, these ceremonies are simulations of sorority, and as such do not refer to sorority at all, but something else. The triangles are inverse Sedgwickian models in that they are comprised of two women and one man. Accordingly, it would seem that a man mediates the mutual desire of two women. However, this inverse reveals a disruption in the power dynamics of gendered triangulation. Instead of women channeling mutual desire through a man, using him to facilitate and simulate, making him embody the veil, the man controls the two women, penetrating one while symbolically "fucking" the other.³ In this sense, both women embody the veil that masculinity places on them; both Offred and Serena Joy engage in activity that simulates sorority – one woman providing a child to another woman – but that refers to male dominance, implying that the bonding among women in this society becomes simulation and disappears under male power. Just so, during the ceremonies, both Offred and Serena Joy lie beneath "the large white canopy of Serena Joy's outsized colonial-style four-poster bed, suspended like a sagging cloud above [them], a cloud sprigged with tiny drops of silver rain"(115). Here the canopy becomes a veil that subsumes not only the Handmaid, but also the Wife, and never the Commander.

³ That is, of course, in Dworkin's sense of the word, as an imperialistic control.

Aunt Lydia provides the following justification for this sort of triangulation:

Women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task. Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonable or humane. Your daughters will have greater freedom. We are working towards the goal of a little garden for each one, each one of you...(203)

This passage is reminiscent of my earlier discussion of the garden as a male controlled domain of women, analogous to the Gothic household and Daly's male linguistic maze. This garden, like the one that Serena Joy works, provides only the illusion of female control. Thus, it becomes an uncanny space in which the true domination, that of men, is repressed in favour of the illusion of feminine power. The illusion, of course, is what constitutes the maze; it is a male space that like language confuses and robs women of their knowledge of self and sense of unitedness. However, as I have begun to argue, the ceremonies themselves are a form of simulation. The actual result of triangulation for Offred and Serena Joy is not a sense of sorority, but rivalry. Although Offred recalls that she initially wanted to "sororize" (a word Offred realizes does not exist) with her last Wife, "to turn her into an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who would understand and protect [her]"(19), not only is Serena Joy jealous of Offred, so Offred becomes confusedly jealous of her: "Partly I was jealous of her; but how could I be jealous of a

woman so obviously dried up and unhappy? You can only be jealous of someone who has something you think you ought to have yourself. Nevertheless I was jealous”(201).

Aunt Lydia’s justification for the treatment of Handmaids adapts a Sedgwickian argument that female desire exists on a continuum in which their desire to serve the interests of other women correlates to the notion of women loving women; Serena Joy and Offred do, after all, participate in an explicitly sexual triangle in order to “serve the interests of women.” Because each woman wants to be in the position of the other, the desires of each woman that ought to be for Fred are merely displaced onto him and truly meant for each other. However, not only do women in this society clearly suffer, but the continuum, although never explicitly referred to, is forced by masculinity through the triangulated sexual act of the ceremonies. Ironically, what forces the continuum also breaks it – the presence of the phallus, the entry of the penis. As Aunt Lydia suggests, women like Offred and Serena Joy are serving implicitly male appointed tasks, not their own interests; they are acting in a masculine script. In other words, the triangulation between Offred, Serena Joy and the Commander serves no positive function for either woman, but is instead a justification for the construction of a patriarchal society that hegemonically forces women to collaborate with men. The supposed relationship of sorority in which Offred and Serena Joy exist fails to serve the interests of the female gender; they are forced by the male counterpart of the triangle to compete with each other under the guise of sorority for the maintenance of a society that subverts feminine

corollary. Again, the Gothic's paradoxical protection/menace dichotomy comes into effect. In this sense, female homosocial bonding is not mediated by or hidden by the third male party as Sedgwick's model suggests is the inverse with regard to male homosocial bonding, but destroyed by it. Although the Commander is the mediator of the triangle and should therefore be the figure analogous to the veil, he actually drapes the veil over his women, inscribing a simulated sorority onto them to sustain his own power.

However, through her communications with Ofglen and her discovery of the Mayday resistance, Offred learns "there is an us then, a we"(211), a form of sorority that actually refers to itself and is therefore not simulation. Upon this discovery Offred notes that "hope [was] rising in [her], like sap in a tree. Blood in a wound. We have made an opening"(211). Offred's choice of words here call to mind two distinct images: first, a wounding of masculinity, a break through its power; and second, menstruation, the bleeding vagina that is not a female wound but an implication of the one power that women have - particularly in Gilead - and men do not: the power to give birth. It suggests that there is a resistance to the fraternal regime, a source of power in the very aspect of women that Gilead uses to oppress them: their bodies. In the context of my argument that as the Gileadian woman comes to embody the Gothic veil she also embodies the parodic boundary that empowers her as mediator between the true and the

false, the notion that the oppressed female body is also her source of power suggests a strong correlation between The Handmaid's Tale's form and content.

Unfortunately, Offred succumbs to her role in the Gothic script before she gains the courage to participate in resistance to it. When Offred comments that she either steps into darkness or light, she might as well be saying she either leaves on or takes off her veil. As readers, we are never given the answer. Although this may seem frustratingly ambiguous, it is also part of Atwood's parodic narrative that implies the Gothic heroine's freedom. It may seem odd that a woman wearing a veil representative of her own invisibility and simulation can indicate her freedom. However, such is the process of subversion within a genre wrought with veils and deception. Offred must not remove her veil, for it renders her part of the space between the real and the simulated. As a parodic figure, wearing the veil maintains Offred not only on the Gothic boundary between feminine referentiality and erasure, but also on the parodic line between the Gothic host and its subversive guest. There, Offred, like her audience/reader, can always interpret, always negotiate, a genre that notoriously abuses her. If she were to escape, her readers could not, for there would be no sacrificial literary character to reveal the Gothic system to them.

IV. Parodic Performativity:

Incredible Women and The Terrified Herstory

“Every myth is a version of the truth...” (Atwood, *Lady Oracle*)

“Even if its false news, it must mean something.”(Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*)

As Atwood's “Gothic Letter on a Hot Night” implies, what a woman in the Gothic can say is not necessarily dependent on the implied reality of her textual universe, but often instead on her version of it. As I have been arguing, the Gothic system clouds feminine reality through uncanny interiors and veiled surfaces, denying heroines both authority and escape from the realm that denies it. Even as the Feminine Gothic is a genre largely written by women, it denies the power of the feminine voice not only by perpetually distorting women's experiences with terror, but also by discrediting their expressions of these experiences. Because the Gothic heroine can only express that which she knows – ambiguity and obscurity - her voice becomes a self-undermining reference to the illegitimate, an expression of ‘reality’ that subverts the heroine's ability to relate even the façade with any authority. When Atwood parodies the markedly feminine incredible expression of illegitimacy found in the Feminine Gothic, she reacts against it, returning authority to the feminine voice. Illegitimacy notwithstanding, the heroine speaks. Accordingly, even in the archetypal Gothic her very voice is a form of subversion that occupies the space between the sayable and the unsayable with regard to

the genre's rules of believable, legitimate expression. In both Lady Oracle and The Handmaid's Tale the heroine's occupation of the space between the sayable and unsayable once more emerges in a parodic analogy whereby her voice, like the parodic boundary between host and guest, negotiates the meaning of expression as opposed to a self-undermining affirmation of illegitimacy. In this way, again Atwood offers a generic alternative to the oppression of the Gothic heroine, by analogizing her engagement with speech to her reader's engagement with parodic boundaries, enabling at the very least an analogous escape from the Gothic's de-legitimization of women's voices.

Peter Melville Logan's 1996 article "Narrating Hysteria: *Caleb Willaims* and the Cultural History of Nerves" traces the association of nervous narratives and women's social conditions to eighteenth-century novels. Logan outlines increasing associations in the Georgian medical community between nervous disorders or hysteria and social conditions that manifested themselves in novels in which heroes and heroines alike suffer with illnesses that correlate to their unjust social situation (2). Logan uses the medical writing of Dr. Thomas Trotter to characterize these nervous disorders as

An inaptitude to muscular action, or some pain in exerting it; an irksomeness, or dislike to attend to business and the common affairs of life; a selfish desire of engrossing the sympathy and attention of others to the narration of their own sufferings; with fickleness and insteadness of temper, even to irascibility; and accompanied more or less with dyspeptic symptoms.

(qtd. in Logan 3)

Although at times the Gothic heroine is subject to a number of these symptoms, the desire to narrate sufferings in order to incite sympathy in the hearer (reader) of the tale is the focus of both Logan's article and this chapter. Logan notes that although all of the other symptoms on Trotter's list "impede action", this particular symptom "enables narration"(3). It is therefore this symptom that Logan associates with contemporary hypochondria, a disorder that compels its sufferer to explain his or her suffering, yet which simultaneously undermines the narrative by virtue of the disorder itself so that narratives of injustice are symptomatic of correlated hysterical conditions. Accordingly, the very narratives that express injustice are undermined by the symptoms of injustice.

In spite of their appearances in both Masculine and Feminine Gothic novels, as Logan notes, the body believed to be predisposed to nervous disorders in eighteenth century medical discourse "[was] always gendered female"(5). Accordingly, the identification of the nervous narrative becomes a system that 'silences' women by rendering their expression illegitimate, outside of believable social criticism. If a woman tells a story of suffering that she reflects in the illness apparent on her body, it is an easy dismissal of her suffering to suggest that the tale she tells is in itself hysterical, that she is telling a nervous narrative, that her story is self-undermining and not part of 'legitimate' History. However, as is the case with the uncanny, it is impossible to determine if such narratives are the products of feminine hysteria or the products of the male-inspired terror

in the women who tell them. The audience/reader is therefore left wondering if these self-undermining narratives are self-undermining at all, or if they indicate a cultural history of the trivialization of women.

It seems that the Gothic genre reflects theories such as Trotter's as it subverts the feminine voice into the category of illegitimate and unbelievable expressions of the already illegitimate and unbelievable. In this sense, the Gothic portrays women's expressions as not only outside of credibility, but also outside of a structure of power that dictates what will be part of sanctioned, authoritative expression. Similarly, In Excitable Speech Judith Butler addresses the power dynamics inherent in what is sayable and what is not, suggesting that the state draws the line between each (77). Accordingly, speech has the power to injure; it not only represents power, but is power (74). However, Butler notes that even as the state sanctions speech out of a drive to protect its citizens, it also uses speech to silence others (85). Butler therefore points out that the state not only draws the legal line between the sayable and the unsayable, it also decides which types of speech are harmful and which are not. Accordingly, speech does not actually become harmful until the state renders it so (96). Similarly, there is in the Gothic a hegemonic system of masculine authority based on centuries of phallocentrism and domination of women that control the speech of its female characters so that what they say is often outside of the believable or credible.

However, in spite of a phallocentric effort to silence women, the Gothic heroine

speaks; it is impractical to fully silence women in female-centred and targeted novels. Accordingly, their speech exists, although as inauthentic and outside of legitimate authoritative narrative. The heroine's persistent speech, even in its incredible form, reveals rebellion against the phallogentric boundaries of narrative authority. In fact, by speaking in a system that undermines female speech, the heroine negotiates the space between the sanctioned sayable and the unsayable for women. In doing so, the Gothic heroine once more parodies her audience, the reader of parody, negotiating the boundary between "legal" and "illegal" speech just as he or she negotiates the space between parody's host and guest. Just as the reader of parody enacts border control between the counterinfluential realms of host and guest in the parodic space, so the Gothic heroine enacts subversive border control between the realms of the phallogentric system and feminine expression. Both revolt against the supposed "protection" of boundaries, not only through their heroines' persistent speech in a system that undercuts the feminine voice, but also through their consequential status as negotiators of legitimate expression, analogous to the negotiation of parodic boundaries that predicates parody's meaning. In this sense, Atwood's heroines once more find themselves in enabling analogies with their readers, controlling the Gothic space that confines and obscures their legitimacy.

Disruptive Poetics or Terror Narrative?:

The Subversion of the Feminine Voice in Lady Oracle

Joan's publisher, Sturgess, tells her that she need not worry about how good her poetry is, that she need only be aware that it is terrific: "Don't you worry your pretty little head about good. We'll worry about good, that's our business, right? I know just the way to handle this. I mean, there's lots of good, but this is *terrific*" (274). Sturgess's comments imply a significant distinction between what is good or credible, and what is terrific or fantastic that haunts Lady Oracle. Etymologically, the word terrific is taken from the latin *terrificus*, to cause terror, *ficus* meaning to cause or make, and *terror* meaning dread or fear (Skeat, 637). Of course, with the definition of terror most often associated with the Gothic genre being Burke's imagination inspiring fear, when Sturgess tells Joan that her work is terrific as opposed to good, he inadvertently associates it with Terror Gothic: those novels that, although not critically acclaimed, are widely popular due to their tendency to portray and inspire the sort of fear that I have argued obscures reality in place of imagination. Terror, then, in this case, is duplicitous; it both congratulates and dismisses Joan's poetry, a fitting word for Sturgess to use as he condescendingly praises Joan's (or "my dear" and "little lady" as Sturgess addresses her) work. Sturgess carefully notes that deciding what is good is the business of the publishers. So too, apparently, is it his business to decide what is terrific. Here is yet another instance in which masculine authority controls feminine expression in Lady Oracle. In fact, Sturgess goes so far as to tell Joan, "You're incredible...just stay that

way”(284). These associations further undermine the quality of Joan’s expression while simultaneously trivializing the audience that would receive it. Of course, as both Sturgess, and later *The Royal Porcupine* point out, Joan’s book is “a combination of Rod McKuen and Kahlil Gibran”(289). For Sturgess, this means that Joan’s book will be as successful as *The Bible* (273), yet *The Royal Porcupine* implies that it means that Joan is “a publishing success”, “a successful bad writer”(290). In this sense, Joan’s writing is, like the feminine authorial voice of the Costume Gothic, and like the incredible voices of the women within them, undermined by a masculine system of criticism. However, in spite of this, as the *Royal Porcupine* points out, Joan is a commercial success; her books are read. In this way, although Joan’s expression is undermined, it is also extremely culturally conspicuous; Joan’s expression challenges the system that undermines it by virtue of its popularity and visibility. Thus, Joan’s “*Lady Oracle*” negotiates the space between the sayable and the unsayable, the legitimate and the illegitimate. Here, Joan’s voice is analogous to the reader’s negotiation of the parodic boundary between host and guest; instead of submitting to a binary of legitimacy and illegitimacy, Joan’s voice becomes a third space between these elements that challenges the very distinction between them, enabling her participation in a credible and legitimate system that she herself in part constructs.

Sturgess’s categorization of Joan’s writing as terrific is particularly jarring given that *Lady Oracle* (so titled by Sturgess himself – yet another indication of masculine

control over women's (textual) spaces) is Joan's first attempt at writing outside of the Gothic genre. However, although Joan's poetry is automatic writing that her subconscious completes while she is entranced, and is therefore apparently unlike the novels that she writes according to a Gothic script, it is as full of Gothic conventions – journeys into depths that represent the human mind, ambiguous male figures and language that leaves meaning veiled and somewhat obscure. The persistence of these conventions in a sub (conscious) text implies that the Gothic script is in fact embedded in Joan's psyche, that as Daly argues the "male myths" exist even in the minds of women. In this sense, Joan is not the first author/creator of the Gothic system in which she finds herself.

Of course, Joan's poetry is not a perfect version of the Gothic; there are several incongruities. The similarity with difference that lies between Joan's poetry and her prose allows her to parody the Gothic in a way that her novels do not for most of Lady Oracle. That is, as subconscious writing Joan's poetry contains references to events of her own life, whereas her novels are largely scripted. It is only when she begins to include her self in her novels that Joan's Costume Gothics become parody, resistant to the genre's limitations. That Joan's poetry can be parody and also automatic writing implies not only that her subconscious is embedded with the Gothic script, but that her subconscious is, like Atwood's parody, and like her own parody becomes, embedded with rebellion against the Gothic script. Here Joan is, like Atwood, an author of the

Gothic script who plays with its possibilities and limitations.

The connection between the subconscious and the expression of rebellion against a script that allows male domination cannot help but yield a discussion of psychoanalysis, particularly reactions to the Jacques Lacan's language system.

According to Lacan, language is a Symbolic and inherently masculine system that represses the feminine and authentic Real. Lacan thus extends Freud's Oedipal complex to linguistics, suggesting that just as the son must "lose" his mother and align with his father to avoid the incest taboo, human development involves a "loss" of the feminine authentic Real in place of the masculine Symbolic system of representation (Butler 79). The obvious complaint against this theory is that, if Lacan is adapting the Oedipus complex, he assumes that all human development is male, and gives no account of a feminine ambivalence towards the father whom she must ultimately "lose." The association of the authentic to the feminine, then, might seem in opposition to the claims of this thesis that in the Gothic women's experiences are never authentic. Of course, Lacan is not only referring to an implied reality, but also to an inherent and subsuming feminine Truth that can be represented through masculine symbols such as words. While Lacan admits that this system grants only representation and not actuality to the masculine, he also denies the presence of the feminine in the economy of language, thus permanently erasing the feminine from culture (Butler 28). The Gothic suits Lacan's theory quite nicely; it robs women of proximity not only to the authentic feminine Real

through language, but also of proximity to implied reality through the narrative that this same system constructs.

It seems that while Joan adopts this script of feminine irreferentiality, she likewise begins to rebel against it through her automatic writing. This sort of writing is reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's notion that poetic language allows the retrieval of the maternal, disrupting Lacan's paternal law (Butler 80). Kristeva argues that poetic language is occasioned by Lacan's authentic Real. In this sense, the symbolic and semiotic engage in a symbiotic relationship. Butler notes, of course, that Kristeva undermines the subversiveness of her model through her association of that which occasions the Symbolic with the maternal body, which implies Lacan's gendered economy of language (81). Moreover, Kristeva's emphasis on castration, or, the child's realization that the mother's body is "replete," as a definitive moment in identity development that predicates the Symbolic order, depends on a psychoanalytical model that constructs women as inherently lacking.

Joan's writing is also reminiscent of H el ene Cixous's "feminine writing," a means of expression that refuses lineareality and singular meaning (53). According to Cixous, feminine writing is like outpouring, flowing or vomiting (54), forms of release that negate the incorporation of the Symbolic as primary phallic signifier into language. That is, Joan's writing as parodic gothic has multiple entrances and meanings that reject the singular force of Lacan's system. Atwood's parodic text compounds this

phenomenon, inviting its readers to question the dichotomies and archetypes of the phallogentric Gothic genre.

Although Joan's writing appears to be a version of the anti-Oedipal styles I have briefly outlined, evidence that Lacan's language system is an inept theory and that Joan is beginning to transcend the male-dominated Gothic script, the very means by which she constructs her words imply the contrary. Like Kristeva's, Cixous's opposition to Lacan's system depends on the gendering of language; to suggest that the feminine can be attained through certain modes of writing is to affirm that the Symbolic is always and inherently paternal and therefore masculine. Such an affirmation might suggest that Joan's poetry is still firmly within the confines of Daly's linguistic maze of masculine deception. Gendered language notwithstanding, the setting in which Joan writes her poetry implicates it as a self-undermining rebellion against the Gothic. Joan's poetry begins when she places herself in front of a mirror and "stare[s] at the candle in the mirror, the mirror candle"(266). Joan notes that "there was more than one candle, there were three, and I knew that if I moved the two sides of the mirror toward me there would be an infinite number of candles, extending in a line as far as I could see..."(266). Here the candles that Joan looks at become simulacrum, reflections of reflections. In this sense, although Joan's writing appears to be a more authentic type of writing than her Gothic Romances, it seems to be likewise predicated on copying copies, and accordingly part of a system of feminine obfuscation. This notion is even more evident upon

consideration of the triple mirror in which Joan's mother puts on her make-up. In this mirror, just as Fran covers her face to create a simulacrum of the feminine, so her three-way mirror reflects copies of her face that endlessly reflect one another such that they no longer refer to the original referent woman. As Joan remembers, "[i]nstead of making her happier, these sessions appeared to make her sadder, if she saw behind the mirror some fleeting image she was unable to capture or duplicate"(75).

However, it is while within the walls of a three-way mirror that Joan writes the first word of her poetry: "bow." With the help of her paperback Roget's Thesaurus Joan finds multiple definitions for this one word:

bow –n. curtsy, obeisance, salaam (RESPECT, GESTURE); prow, stem, nose (FRONT); longbow, crossbow (ARMS); curve, bend, arch (CURVE, BEND).
 bow –n. nod, salaam, curtsy (RESPECT, GESTURE); arch, round, incline (CURVE, BEND); cringe, stoop kneel (SLAVERY); submit, yield, defer (SUBMISSION). (267)

Moreover, this word appears in "Lady of Shalott" as "bowshot," "bower," and "imbower," that which can wound, that which can contain, and that which does contain. This one word, then, is simultaneously multiply referential and revealing of the masculine system of singular containment inherent in and analogous to the Gothic. Here Joan begins to rebel against the Gothic script embedded in her psyche.

In spite of its status as parodic Gothic, masculine 'authorities' undermine Joan's

poetry as much as her Gothic novels. Concerning her secret career as a novelist, Joan notes that Arthur and his friends would criticize Joan's novels as "worse than trash, for didn't they exploit the masses, corrupt by distracting, and perpetuate degrading stereotypes of women as helpless and persecuted?"(36). Joan's fear of how Arthur and his friends will react to her novels is not without justification in a culture that derides the popular as without merit. Of course, as Atwood points out through her very parody of the Gothic, the genre possesses cultural significance, not in spite of, but particularly given its popularity. It seems that in Lady Oracle stereotypical masculine 'authority' undermines such feminine cultural forms, controlling the heroine's textual space like her duplicitous Gothic home. However, Joan's perceptions of how her literature is or would be received is exactly that – perceptual. As such, it is once again difficult to discern whether Joan's fear concerning her writing is culturally justifiable, a female fear of male disapproval, or a product of terror, part of what Trotter would define as Joan's nervous narrative to us, her hypothetical audience. Not only is Joan's expression under scrutiny, but so is her interpretation of that very scrutiny. As a result, Joan angrily questions, "who the hell was Arthur to talk about social relevance?" adding, "[s]ometimes his goddamn theories and ideologies made me puke. The truth was that I dealt in hope, I offered a vision of a better world, however preposterous. Was that so terrible?"(38). Joan's reaction here is again reminiscent of Cixous's feminine style, whereby expression becomes an excess, like vomiting forth expressive forms. Again, the root *terror* comes

into play in Joan's description of her writing. When she questions whether her writing of a better world is terrible, she is also asking if her so-called better world is a product of terror, an undermining narrative by virtue of the social condition and subsequent nervous hypochondria that construct it.

It seems, then, that Joan's imaginative 'Terror Gothic' writing is deemed inferior to other modes of writing, thus undermining the female voice once again. Atwood herself, however, offers an alternative perspective on this. Meyers quotes Atwood's 1981 address to Amnesty International:

[I]t is the human mind also that can summon up the power to resist, that can imagine a better world than the one before it, that can retain memory and courage in the face of unspeakable suffering...If the imagination were a negligible thing and the act of writing a mere frill, as many in this society would like to believe, regimes all over the world would not be at such pains to exterminate them...The writer, unless he is a mere word processor, retains three attributes that power-mad regimes cannot tolerate: a human imagination, in the many forms it may take; the power to communicate; and hope. (qtd. in Meyers, 141).

Similarly, one can infer that with regard to the Feminine Gothic, if Joan's novels and poetry were merely terrific, there would be no need to restrict them into the category of fiction for women, of popular trash or the occult. Thus it seems that Atwood offers a hopeful moral that the conclusion to Lady Oracle echoes when Joan becomes a

celebrated author. It is here that Joan begins to negotiate the sayable and the unsayable; she becomes the regulating line between what has been systematically reified as dangerous and subversive, and what is accepted as part of a legitimate system. As the mediator of this line, like the mediator of the line created by the veil between the real and the simulated, Joan becomes analogous to the tertiary space created by parody, between host and guest, to negotiate meaning instead of suffer under suspicions of credibility. However, as I have already pointed out, Joan makes the decision to stop writing Gothics. If her Gothics are now parody, encoded criticism of the Gothic script, she also ceases to encode and criticize. In the first chapter of this thesis I argue that her failure to stop writing Gothics might indicate her failure to escape Daly's maze, a construct that might be the result of female collusion in the Gothic script. However, it is also apparent that Joan's decision to stop writing Gothics might also suggest that she will always remain in Daly's maze; because Joan abandons her now parodic versions of the Gothic, she also abandons her rebellion against it. Instead, she decides to move forward and enters the realm of science fiction, a genre notorious for its repetition of the past's errors. Ten years later Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale reveals that change is not always in a forward movement.

His-terical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*?

As a dystopian social science fiction novel that also parodies the Gothic, The Handmaid's Tale does what Lady Oracle predicts; it moves forward into the future of fiction written

by women to reveal what sorts of scripts and mazes will persist. Not surprisingly, one of these scripts is still Gothic. This script that is most notably embedded into the psyche's of Gilead's citizens through Newspeak, the republic's means of forcing submission to its codes of law, religion and language. Hilde Staels describes Gileadian discourse as a discourse of absolutism: "In a society that functionalizes language to the extreme, the potential polysemy of discourse is replaced by absolutely homogenous, univocal discourse"(115). Even more than Lady Oracle, The Handmaid's Tale is a first-person narrative told by a woman faced with social injustice, a narrative eighteenth-century science might dismiss as the effects of society and the nervous female body. The conclusion to The Handmaid's Tale reveals that it is a story within a story; it is a Gothic parody that contains Offred's story, later in the context of an academic conference. Yet even before this conference frames Offred's tale her audience is aware of the self-undermining nature of her narrative. From the beginning of the text, Offred offers her world to her audience in the same manner in which it is presented to her – in glimpses out from under a habit. This is not to suggest that Atwood purports the self-undermining narratives of women. Rather, through parodic difference and structure Atwood challenges this Gothic rule, and offers empowering alternatives to her heroines.

Offred bases most of her narrative on memory, hearsay, or tales twice removed. Accordingly, Offred's tale is outside of narrative reality's "legitimate" Truth. However, as Glenn Wilmot argues, this is not necessarily oppressive. In his exploration of the film

adaptation of The Handmaid's Tale Wilmot remarks that in The Handmaid's Tale freedom is achieved through temporal play – memory and imagination – that “escapes its material condition at that moment”(171). Wilmot notes, “The Handmaid's Tale is exemplary, for it is a story about power whose message is clearly grounded in the *presentational* power of its media and *representational* power of its narrative events, it is a story in which it is important, above all else and before your very eyes, that the medium be one with the message”(170). In this sense, Offred is empowered by her marginality; it is the result of a narrative-based alternative that also finds its analogous escape route from the Gothic in parody.

One particularly useful example of how imagination enables alternative narrative is Offred's retelling of Moira's escape. Offred gives the entire adventure to her hypothetical audience through Moira's voice, explaining “I can't remember, exactly, because I had no way of writing it down. I've filled it out for her as much as I can”(306). Offred admits that Moira only gave her “the outlines” of her story, yet she provides a detailed account of her friend's rebellion. As Wilmot notes, “Offred's voice itself does not encourage us to see her tale as history”; it is in the present tense, thus ongoing and ever changing (159). In spite of Offred's mode of speech, however, she continues to speak. In doing so, as Staels argues, “from her periphery of society, Offred breaks through the discursive Law of the theocracy”(118). Such a manner of telling a tale is reminiscent of Kristeva's poetic voice, an alternative to Lacan's Symbolic order. Just so,

Staels notes that Offred's narrative is a form of Kristeva's poetic language in that it "resists the reduction of reality to coded concepts of individuals and reified objects"(120). Accordingly, Offred's reconstruction of an escape narrative accounts not only for Moira's escape from the Red Centre, but also for an analogous linguistic escape from a masculinist economy. Moreover, this linguistic analogy parallels the overriding parodic analogy of this entire thesis, that the heroine finds through parody a generic escape route from the Gothic system of feminine oppression.

Although it seems that in this sense Offred begins a subversion of the Symbolic Law through her poetic language, Professor Piexoto affirms Offred's phallo/patricentric oppression at the Twelfth Symposium of Gileadian Studies. Here Piexoto's 'narrative' reacts to Offred's, a metonymic representation of his-terical fear of subversion of the paternal master signifier. As Lee Briscoe Thompson points out, the Professor's refusal to refer to Offred's tape as a manuscript implies his devaluation of her narrative. Thompson's assumption that this also indicates a general devaluation of all female narratives seems a reach outside of the context of the Gothic. However, if one is to remember that this is, in fact, a Gothic parody, the failure of Piexoto to address Offred's manuscript as what it is becomes reminiscent of the sentiments of both Trotter and Sturgess. Moreover, as Thompson points out, Piexoto makes not one but three belittlements of women: the comparison of a charming dinner to a charming female chairperson; the association of a woman's tale with a woman's tail; and the appendage of

the letter F to 'the underground railroad' in order to link not only the plight of African slaves to women, but to associated frailty with women (49). Thompson also notes that only eleven percent of the conference proceedings refer directly to Offred, while fifty-one percent concerns the identity of Fred (53), reminding one that the identity of our villain continues to plague the Gothic, and that the complexity of the heroine's culpability and victimhood is often overlooked.

Thompson provides a detailed account of how the Gileadean Symposium blurs Offred's identity, rendering her tale a metonymic female experience to be studied by the powerful as part of history. As Professor Piexoto remarks, "our author, then, was one of many, and must be seen within the broad outlines of the moment in history of which she was a part"(380). This remark is in stark opposition to Offred's filling in of Moira's outline; whereas Offred is willing to provide details that may include multiple interpretations, Piexoto is not. In this sense, Piexoto represents opposition to challenges to the singular, Paternal Law of signification such as the poetic voice and the feminine style. Because Atwood's text closes on this conference it seems that Offred's narrative is ultimately undermined by stereotypical masculine rule, that, like the heroines of the archetypal Feminine Gothic, Offred returns to her status as illegitimate. Thompson does not note, however, Atwood's emphasis that this conference appears only as a partial transcript. The fact that the conference appears as a partial transcript and therefore is likewise in need of some 'filling out' implies that the masculine voice is as perceptible to

illegitimacy as the Gothic portrays the feminine. Not only does a man at an academic conference undermine Offred's story as inauthentic, but Atwood reciprocates through her appendage of a mere portion of his undermining transcript. This being said, the historical notes to The Handmaid's Tale do not necessarily undermine Offred's narrative so much as they admit that no voice is a master signifier.

The very existence of the conference indicates that in spite of challenges to feminine authority, Offred's tale is nonetheless culturally significant. Just so, like Joan's, Offred's resilient voice in the face of the Gothic's system of oppression implies feminine rebellion against a system of de-legitimization. She negotiates the space between the sayable and unsayable, just as the parodic reader negotiates the space between parody's host and guest. In this sense, Offred is, like Joan, provided with a parodic doppelganger who interprets, reads, and promotes the multiple entrances of the Gothic. Accordingly, through this analogy, Offred attains some of the authority that she is denied throughout her tale. More than this, however, by persisting to speak in a system that 'silences' by undermining women's expressions, Offred blurs the lines between the legitimate and illegitimate to arrive at a third level of expression: a negation of legitimacy's boundaries.

V. The Power of Reading Conclusions:

Cultural Intersubjectivity and Gothic Criticism

“As all historians know, the past is a great darkness, and filled with echoes. Voices may reach us from it; but what they say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come; and try as we may, we cannot always decipher them precisely in the clearer light of our own day.

Applause

Are there any questions?”

(Atwood, The Handmaid’s Tale)

Professor Piexoto’s conclusion upon examining Offred’s tale is that the matrices of the past obscure history’s voices, and that, accordingly, even in the so-called clearer light of the present their meanings are uncertain. His audience blindly applauds this conclusion, or rather, this non-conclusion, this admission of the historian’s inability to ascertain Truth in spite of an ironic twentieth-century-centric assuredness that the present does, in fact, possess a clearer light than its past with which to interpret meaning. As though to distinguish her readers from Piexoto’s audience, that is to ensure that her readers read – interpret – Piexoto’s (non)conclusion, Atwood’s voice seemingly infiltrates the novel in its last words as the question period of the Gileadian Symposium begins, reminding us that yes, there are questions to be asked of such a conclusion, or at least that there ought to be now that we have, as readers of Atwood’s parody, traversed

Gothic labyrinths, decoded Gothic veils, and heard the voice of the “silenced” Gothic heroine. While Piexoto dismisses the ambiguity of Offred’s Gothic tale as shrouded by the very nature of history, thus compounding its Gothicism by presuming the normality of withheld knowledge, Atwood subtly suggests that, instead of reaffirming Gothic ambiguity, we might as how, and why, and for whom, it comes into effect.

As Piexoto’s - or rather Atwood’s - last words imply, not only do a number of questions remain regarding the Feminine Gothic, but there is a corresponding ambiguity regarding the ways in which critics answer them. Contemporary Gothic criticism moves its readers not only towards issues concerning the authenticity of the female voice, but to the authenticity of the experience of being female, and to the problematics of feminine subversion through a discursive formation that excludes women from “legitimate” narrative reality. How then to move criticism of the Feminine Gothic towards female empowerment without ignoring the fact that it is a genre whose obscurities consistently rob women of fully stable grounds for subversion? How to acknowledge that the plight of the Gothic critic is not unlike the plight of the historian, plagued with obscurity and darkness that is especially clouded around women, similar to that which haunts the Gothic heroine, without throwing up one’s hands and admitting that it is simply not possible to use this genre as a feminist tool? The answer lies in both Lady Oracle and The Handmaid’s Tale. Atwood critiques the Gothic not by attempting to remove the cloud and arrive at Truth, as Piexoto attempts and fails to do, but by questioning why any narrative might be constructed this way, and what might be first, its ramifications, and second, its alternative.

For Atwood, the alternative to the Gothic lies not outside of it, but within it. That is, her criticism of the Gothic is subversive in that it appears to submit to the Gothic script of feminine obscurity when it actually inserts an encoded escape route for her heroine. This escape route is the generic structure of parody, a trope that allows the entry of its readers into the text, and is reliant on intersubjectivity and interpretation in order to thrive. Parody constructs Atwood's heroines as her readers' point of entry into the text; just as the heroine crosses numerous boundaries, some of which promise her escape from abuse and some of which affirm her status as victim, so the reader of parody crosses generic and textual boundaries. While the Gothic heroine typically must cross boundaries in order to arrive at knowledge of space and self, the reader of parody does so to create textual meaning, the differences between parodied target and parodic text. Although, as I have implied, the heroine often crosses boundaries that result in the affirmation of her victimhood, such as the psychic transgressions of the uncanny that obscure and shroud her knowledge, the reader of parody always moves across the line between target and guest to interpret, to negotiate meaning, to promote awareness and criticism. Accordingly, parody of the uncanny promotes successful boundary crossings, modeling it within the text for the reader. Parody of veiling and simulation situates this parodic double on the boundary itself, negotiating between both parody's host and guest as well as between narrative real and imitation so that she might recognize the proposes of borders instead of succumbing to their power. Similarly, parody of the heroine's self-undermining narrative affords authority to her expression by positioning her as the mediator between the sayable and the unsayable, again parallel to the reader's mediation

between host and guest, in a phallogentric regime of language that otherwise “silences” women’s speech. In such a context, Atwood’s parody is a form of subversion of the Gothic system that may seem to submit to the Gothic script by portraying her heroines as trapped within it. However, Atwood’s parody challenges Gothic containment in that it provides a generic structure whereby her readers analogize Gothic heroines who are capable of play with boundary crossing that promotes knowledge over obscurity, and therefore movement over containment.

As I argue in Chapter Three, Atwood proposes the cultural significance of writing as a potentially disruptive power. In spite of her novels’ depictions of inauthentic female experiences, she insists that through the expression of imagination the human mind might transcend injustice, that writing might have the potential to effect cultural change. However, Atwood fails to remind her audience of that which she addresses repeatedly throughout both Lady Oracle and The Handmaid’s Tale: in order for writing to be effective, there must be reading. This means not only that words must be registered but also that they must be read; they must be interpreted. Like parody, writing to be read, to be interpreted, requires the crossing over of boundaries, the intersubjective play between mind and text. Such is the basis of intersubjectivity, the notion that just as the reader reads the text, so the text reads the reader, that both engage in a relationship of counter-influence parallel to that between the host and guest of parody. In order for writing to have an effect, therefore, intersubjectivity must exist. Not surprisingly, then, particularly in its association with women, intersubjectivity has a cultural history of fear. A fundamental complaint against the Gothic novel in the eighteenth century was that overly

sensible women would succumb to its influence and become terrified paranoiacs. This “protection” of women is in itself Gothic; it implies the same sort of withholding of knowledge from women to maintain their position in the domestic enclosure apart from any influence from beyond its walls that I discuss in Chapter One. Moreover, to suggest that reading the Gothic will generate terror in women is to suggest that the abuse that it portrays is a non-reality; it is to undermine feminine fear in the same manner that the Gothic does and dismiss the abuse of women as merely a notion concocted by terrified minds. Accordingly, to fear intersubjectivity in terms of women and the Gothic is to fear women’s knowledge of their own abuse. Here is the symptom of writing’s power that Atwood refers to, the notion that the powerful will attempt to control that which has the potential to disrupt their regime. It is no surprise that Atwood’s parodies of the Gothic place such emphasis on the play between women and the word, on the control over women’s interaction with the word. If we are to understand reading in terms of interpretation, and writing in terms of expression, both Joan and Offred experience each with great difficulty; men discourage Joan and prohibit Offred from engaging their own experiences with the word, from both writing and reading.

It is through reading to interpret that critics come to conclusions. Through my reading I have come to the conclusion that Atwood’s novels depict a contemporary female Gothic experience in which women are not merely victimized by men, but more dangerously robbed of an authentic experience of this very victimization, rendering the subversion of the Gothic impossible. I have come to the conclusion that Atwood reveals this phenomenon through the parody of Gothic conventions that distort and recreate the

reality of its heroine. I have come to the conclusion that Atwood's readings of the Gothic are what Kilgour suggests is the function of interpretation: "a way of gaining power over and so breaking away from the past" (222). Moreover, I have come to the conclusion that through parody Atwood's heroines can read, can interpret, and can thus transcend the Gothic regime of Truth that excludes the feminine. However, although Kilgour promotes interpretation as power, she provides this warning to her readers:

Interpretation gives us an illusion of control, especially as it has itself become increasingly idealized as a more authentically heroic and creative act than writing, a means of an ideal communal construction of the text that offers an alternative to the rampant possessive individualism of artistic creation. Even so, we are sensitive to the possibility, illustrated already in *Godwin*, that reading will itself become an assertion of power. The gothic critic can always turn into a rational villain who, as Fred Botting suggests, extends Victor's quest by ripping apart old texts, 'to produce new and hideous progenies that have lives of their own', and battling for narrative authority, to realize 'a unifying will to dominate and control the text'. (222)

Here Kilgour warns that reading has the potential not only to empower, but also to corrupt with power, that through adopting the Gothic to our own issues we as readers and critics we might imperialistically impose our own plights onto the text, eroding its original meaning like a Gothic ruin. Can reading possibly provide a solution to the female Gothic experience? Not if, as Kilgour warns, this is the equivalent to

manipulating the genre as a Gothic villain would his female captor, forcing it (her) into a critical room wherein its (her) original meaning is repressed and ultimately uncanny.

Most striking in Kilgour's argument is her choice of words. Rather than suggest that reading gives us control, she suggests that reading gives us the illusion of control, that in acting as Gothic villains through reading texts, critics are only given the idea of control as opposed to its reality. In this sense, then, the critic is more like the Gothic heroine than the villain; his or her perceptions of control are analogous to the heroine's uncanny and simulated perceptions of reality. Accordingly, he or she is not only the Gothic villain, but perhaps also a Gothic victim immersed in projections of alternatives to victimhood instead of finding actual alternatives in narrative reality. However, as a parodic writer, Atwood does far more; instead of projecting onto the Gothic text through criticism, she subversively encodes her criticism into the genre. In this way, Atwood engages simultaneously in both writing and reading, both expression and interpretation; she is neither the critical villain who manipulates the text nor the critical heroine/victim whose perceptions are of this same obscured textual space. Instead, Atwood reconstructs the Gothic; she is a Gothic author who refuses to submit to its literary history of male domination and lack of female authority by inviting her audience to interpret this history, and traverse the parodic channels of escape from the Gothic de-legitimization of women.

Reading Atwood's parodies of the Gothic reminds one that popular Gothic romances such as the ones Joan writes are read by millions of women every year. As a genre so closely and consistently associated with its influences on women, one cannot help but wonder at its of cultural intersubjective effects. Atwood tells us, though Joan,

“they read my books. Figure that out” (38). The self-reflexivity of this command is undeniable; Atwood demands that her readers interpret and engage in the reciprocal engagement with the text that eighteenth-century opponents of women reading Gothic novels would deny them. As such, it seems that Atwood’s parodic Gothic is not merely criticism of the Gothic that concludes, that decides, that locks its victim text in an uncanny space, but one that, thanks to and parallel to parody, is capable of a continuous act of interpretation, the perpetual interplay between interior and exterior that not only marks the plight of the Gothic woman, but the task of the Gothic critic, male or female. This occurs not only between the host and guest of Atwood’s parody, an essential element to her criticism of the genre, but also between reader and text, an essential element to her locating of the Gothic experience in the twentieth century, so that we can continue to ask of Atwood’s texts, as does Professor Piexoto “Are there any questions?”

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