

DOMESTIC RUINS

DOMESTIC RUINS
IMAGINING THE NUNNERY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH
LITERATURE

By
ALICIA L. KERFOOT, M.A.

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AUTHOR: Alicia L. Kerfoot, B.A. (University of Waterloo)
M.A. (University of Guelph)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Peter Walmsley

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ABSTRACT

The Catholic nun and nunnery participate in the formation of eighteenth-century gender and national identities. Not only do nuns and nunneries appear in literary works from the Restoration to the Regency period and beyond, they also act as sites upon which major aesthetic, political, cultural and material theories of identity work themselves out in the eighteenth century. This dissertation argues that the antiquarian, literary, and aesthetic understanding of nunneries in the long eighteenth century had everything to do with imagining ideal domestic femininity, and at the same time disavowing that imagination.

I begin with an analysis of the post-Reformation antiquarian treatment of medieval English nunneries, and then apply that analysis to three sites of literary imagination: Alexander Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717), Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783-5), and the gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe (1790-97). I also pair my analyses of these texts with cultural, political, and material contexts such as antiquary John Brand's treatment of Godstow Nunnery, William Beckford's architectural folly Fonthill Abbey, accounts of French émigrés during the Revolution, the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots, and images of monastic ruins and wax bodies.

With these varied contexts in mind, I come to the conclusion that the repression of Roman Catholic identity involves a very specific re-imagining of the nunnery and the nun's body within it; this re-imagination narrates Protestant domestic identity onto the site of female monastic ruins in order to re-signify such mutable sites as fixed symbols of virtuous femininity and maternity. I conclude with a look at how this construction of ideal femininity figures in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1798) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-62), as they both take as their setting a convent-turned-country house. The popular consumption of poetry, antiquarian history and art, novels, and consumer goods converge in my conclusion to show how concerns with a lack of distinction between the public and private are also about a lack of distinction between the ideal and subversive woman, as she is a version of the re-imagined Catholic nun.

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Dedicated to the memory of Alice “Peggy” Kerfoot and Harold Rayton Kerfoot

*The curfew tolls the knell of parting day ...
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
– Thomas Gray*

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Introduction

Domestic Ruins: Unearthing the Spectre of British Femininity

*Who may she be that steals through yonder cloister,
 And, as the beam of evening tints her veil,
 Unconsciously discloses saintly features,
 Inform'd with the high soul of saintly virtue?* – Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 1797.

“And not only on frivolous occasions,” said he, “but in the most important pursuits of life, an object often flatters and charms at a distance, which vanishes into nothing as we approach it; and ’tis well if it leave only disappointment in our hearts. Sometimes a severer monitor is left there.” – Ann Radcliffe, *“On the Supernatural in Poetry,”* 1826.

Unsurprisingly, Ann Radcliffe asks the question that lies at the heart of my dissertation: “Who may she be that steals through yonder cloister?” What sort of femininity does the enclosed nun’s partially hidden “saintly virtue” represent? Radcliffe also constructs the type of imagination that I think epitomizes the idealization of domestic femininity in the eighteenth century when she describes the supernatural as an object that “flatters and charms at a distance” but “vanishes into nothing as we approach it.” Ideal femininity is merely a spectre, or a figment of the imagination that recreates or recalls from the grave a repressed image from the past. Radcliffe imagines the nun and nunnery in much the same way that she does the supernatural, as something ungraspable beneath an aesthetically pleasing *or* horrifically decaying exterior. Imagination, repression, virtue and aesthetic pleasure: all of these terms speak to the British obsession with sites of female monasticism in the long eighteenth century. I wish to connect these terms to the architectural site of the ruined nunnery in the eighteenth-century British landscape, and to explore how antiquarian and fictional literature imagines that decaying architecture - and the ghostly nuns who steal through its cloisters - as representative of British national identity.

There are four ideological sites I wish to focus on in order to develop my argument about the place of the Catholic nun and nunnery in the imagination of ideal eighteenth-century femininity and domesticity. The first is the political site of the domestic sphere, as it relates to the rise of the novel and to middle-class ideals regarding gender, inheritance, family, and virtue. The second is the relationship between the (mutable) architecture of the nunnery and the antiquarian, picturesque, and historical constructions of British national identity that take as their basis an ideological understanding of that architecture (and its ruin) as integral to British selfhood. My third area of focus connects this architectural and historical thread to the repression of these sites and their “uncanny” evocation to the Catholic past; this includes an exploration of the aesthetic relationship between the suffering (or dying) female body and the space she inhabits. In my fourth area of focus I will explain how these three previous

sites come about – or how they are imagined and consumed in order to construct (and deconstruct) ideals about femininity and the domestic sphere. Each chapter will engage with these ideological sites in order to develop an understanding of the role of the nunnery in eighteenth-century British literature and culture. I will begin with a history of monastic ruins and nunneries as they appear in eighteenth-century antiquarian literature and the twenty-first-century study of female monastic history and culture, in order to provide contexts for the literary representation of these spaces in Alexander Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717), Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783-1785), the four major novels of Ann Radcliffe (1790-1797), Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1798), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-1862).

Public and Private Domesticity, Virtue, and Inheritance

I will begin with the political connection between the private domestic sphere and the construction of ideal femininity in the eighteenth century. The imagination of the domestic sphere relies heavily on both positive and negative images of cloistered life. A positive image of the nunnery as an enclosed space for woman that shields her from the corruption of publicity is counterbalanced with an image of the nunnery as a place of stagnancy and decay. In order for this dual image to work, eighteenth-century authors of novels and conduct books must ignore the connection between the medieval nunnery and its community; a connection that the construction of the private sphere similarly relies on and yet denies. Habermas argues that the fictional representation of the family led to an imagination of the private sphere that mirrored the space visible in literature, despite the fact that this meant it was only another extension of a public sphere; those who discussed literature and used it to imagine themselves "formed the public sphere of a rational-critical debate in the world of letters within which the subjectivity originating in the interiority of the conjugal family, by communicating with itself, attained clarity about itself" (51). By deciding that ideal femininity must encapsulate domestic interiority without enclosure and reproduction alongside virginity, authors and readers adapted arguments about monastic femininity that had been prominent since the medieval period; however, they repressed the Catholic elements of the ideal and repackaged it for the Protestant middle-class family.

Christopher Flint investigates Habermas's claim in detail when he explores the idea that "eighteenth-century prose fiction used the family as an instrumental concept in a struggle to resolve cultural tensions that were themselves dependent on competing representations of kinship" (3). Not only did the novel explore what it meant to be private in the public sphere, it also explored what it meant to be public in the private sphere, in other words what it meant to be gendered and imagined in print as an ideal domestic woman. Thus, representations of the family centre largely on issues of public and private femininity, and as Nancy Armstrong argues, "narratives which seemed to be concerned solely with matters of courtship and marriage in fact seized the

authority to say what was female ... they did so in order to contest the reigning notion of kinship relations that attached most power and privilege to certain family lines” (5). Armstrong connects two major issues here: the imagination of femininity and the repression of an outdated aristocracy (one largely associated with the dissolution of the monasteries) in favour of a rising middle class. Despite an eighteenth-century attempt to segregate the political and the domestic, then, the two relied on one another for the existence of gender and class categories.

The task of saying “what was female” leads to a confusing array of voices in the long eighteenth century; many of those voices rely on the connection between the public sphere of literature and the imagination of family and gender in order to subvert or question the very reality of these constructions of self. The topics of sentimentality, virtue, and the gothic all tend to subvert, question, or in turn create new categories of what it means to be an ideal woman. My focus is on how female monasticism acts as the source for all of these trends, and as an aspect of the repressed national self that is necessary for political categories to emerge. Claudia Johnson and Kate Ferguson Ellis both explore how the gothic novel plays a role in the construction and deconstruction of gender ideals. Johnson argues that the focus on sentimentality in literature of the 1790s amounted to a political trend that re-gendered sentiment as masculine, thus divesting women of a means of subversion in the public sphere. The works of women writers of the late eighteenth century, Johnson argues, “culminate as well as assail the sentimental tradition at precisely that moment when it is being reasserted in extreme forms as a political imperative” (14). But the kind of suffering maternity and femininity that these women writers focus on offers another possible source of agency for their heroines, which is a type of monastic femininity that defies boundaries and questions ideal domesticity when it replicates and uncovers the emptiness of the patriarchal ideal. This is not unlike the space that Ellis argues gothic novels capitalize on to subvert domestic ideology, “creating, in a segment of culture directed toward women, a resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posits a sphere of safety for them” (x). The basis of that ideology upon a bifurcated ideal of the virtuous, yet corrupted, nun and the indefinable architectural space of the nunnery is what I wish to explore in this dissertation.

The combination of external bodily and internal spiritual virtue in the imagination of nuns and nunneries also means that they can disrupt barriers. Three categories of feminine identity that representations of monastic femininity both uphold and complicate are virtue, inheritance and reproduction. Corrinne Harol and April Alliston both theorize about virtue, inheritance, and reproduction in literary representations of virginity and suffering. The eighteenth-century denial of an aristocratic heritage in favour of a new form of middle-class femininity, as Harol notes, also meant a renegotiation of the ideal virtue and virginity that was exclusively linked to the history of Roman Catholicism in England, as “sorting out a newly Protestant concept of virginity and marriage was a central component of the transition to a new English Protestant identity” (21). Alliston argues that some eighteenth-century texts by women make visible this inheritance of identity

and ideal virtue from a patriarchal imagination of selfhood, and reads “a line of transmission that has been systematically effaced because it exposes aspects of the construction of the line of transmission of national literary tradition, which, to remain in force, must itself remain implicit and invisible” (2).

I explore the connection between this inheritance of identity and the half-effaced image of the nun and nunnery. Just as the inheritance of an aristocratic identity had to be re-imagined in order for middle-class identity to evolve, so too did the Catholic imagination of femininity have to be realigned with a new understanding of middle-class morality. Virtue as “moral goodness” blurs into its definition as “efficacy, power” and “secret agency” (Johnson 988) because those who construct gender, class, and national identity aim to dictate what is morally good. Both patriarchal institutions and those whom such institutions wish to control can gain power and efficacy from dictating different definitions of the meaning of virtue. Harol notes this struggle as it involves virginity and the female body: “For in the eighteenth century, virginity and virtue become middle-class values: lower classes and the aristocracy are associated with sexual promiscuity while virtue comes to reside ... in the middle-class woman who defends her virginity for its own sake, not primarily in order to transmit the property of her class” (11). Harol’s argument helps to elucidate what it is I wish to argue about the representation of nuns and nunneries in the eighteenth century; while on the one hand antiquarian writers, authors of fiction and poetry, and popular print and periodical culture represented monastic ruins as inextricably linked to a corrupt aristocratic past, on the other hand they sometimes represented the myths of female nuns, saints, and martyrs as similarly inextricably linked to the protection of virtue and virginity that was so important to eighteenth-century middle-class definitions of femininity. The body of the nun was bifurcated based on how she could act as a symbol for virtue and virginity as well as corruption and stagnancy, while the ruined architecture of the monasteries also became symbolic of the antithetical construction of “private” middle-class domesticity alongside the publicity of aristocratic decay and ruin. Thus, the politics, social and familial structures, and religious identities of the eighteenth century all converge in fictions that have everything to do with imagining gender and ideal femininity as they relate to an imagination of the English Catholic past.

Female Monastic Architecture, Ruin, and National Identity

The depiction of monastic architecture in eighteenth-century popular antiquarian literature plays a major role in this imagination of ideal femininity. My argument is that there is a distinct relationship between the medieval nun and nunnery, antiquarian representations of these women and the spaces they inhabited, and the use of monastic ruins to define historical national identity in aesthetic terms. My methodological approach to reading the relationship between female monastic architecture, the histories of the medieval nuns who inhabited such architecture, and eighteenth-century accounts of these sites, brings together

historical and literary criticism on the subjects of nuns, British nationalism, and literary representations of fragment and ruin.

The idea that medieval nuns could gain agency through architectural and gender mutability is a prevalent thread of discussion in the history of nuns and nunneries. Roberta Gilchrist, Silvia Evangelisti, and Mita Choudhury (among many others) express this historical slant in their work on the nunnery both in the medieval period and in the eighteenth century. Gilchrist argues that nuns reproduced prevalent “structural gender relations” through their interaction with material culture (such as building architecture) because, “far from merely *reflecting* society, material culture can be seen to construct, maintain, control and transform social identities and relations” (15); she argues that nuns gained agency through this reproduction of the hegemony of medieval religion.

Similarly, I see eighteenth-century authors manipulating this relationship between material culture and gender identity in order to simultaneously uphold and subvert accepted norms, which in turn leads to the kind of theoretical “ruin” that uncovers such constructions as particularly imaginary. In this manner, nuns point to the mutability – or changeability – of domestic ideals because they are able to manipulate their place and agency from within the physical and mental architecture of the enclosure. As Evangelisti explains, “we are presented with two different narratives of enclosure, reflecting either resistance or acceptance according to how best nuns could keep control over their religious community. In both cases what the nuns demanded – through their actions and writings – was the right to decide for themselves how to organize and govern their collective life” (7). This gender and architectural mutability and female monasticism’s (oftentimes exaggerated) connection to the aristocracy causes eighteenth-century authors to either repress or marshal the narratives of medieval nuns for Protestant purposes.

This marshalling, of course, is connected to the role of Protestant identity in the creation of British nationalism throughout the long eighteenth century. As Linda Colley argues in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, the eighteenth century saw the “invention of Britishness,” a major element of which was the definition of Protestant national self against the Roman Catholic other: “Protestantism coloured the way that Britons approached and interpreted their material life.... determined how most Britons viewed their politics. And an uncompromising Protestantism was the foundation on which their state was explicitly and unapologetically based” (1, 18). The connection between Protestantism and national identity was maintained through material, architectural, and literary images not only of the ideal nun and nunnery (as discussed above) but also through images of monastic (and aristocratic) ruin in the national landscape.

I argue that the connection between female monasticism, architectural ruin, and literary representations of such sites creates a new meaning for the word ruin: one rooted in definitions of ideal femininity, female suffering, and the consumption of the aesthetics of self and text. This is because when the

construction of British national identity takes place at sites that are notoriously connected to change and mutability, and to bodies that are similarly marked by changefulness and bifurcation, the result is an imagination of selfhood; a kind of consumption of self that mimics the way that time and the natural elements consume the monastic architecture of the past. Anne Janowitz's work on ruin poetry, Lee Morrissey's work on literature and architecture, and Elizabeth Wanning Harries's work on the literary fragment are particularly useful when connecting this antithetical need for changeability in order to create national unity to a similar antithetical construction of gender in the period. Janowitz argues for a connection between poetry, nation-making, and the aesthetic of ruin, stating, "in the eighteenth-century ruin sentiment the cultural entity (Britain) was also forged as inextricable from the natural entity (the countryside), not merely superimposed but blended, and the nation came to be understood *as nature*" (5). Similarly, Morrissey argues, "English architecture participates in, responds to, and affects political and social circumstances," just as both literature and architecture rely on metaphor to imagine "social, political, and historical" categories of selfhood (8).

Metaphor does indeed connect the architectural ruin to the representation of such ruins in literary and antiquarian texts, but it also connects the architectural ruin to the bodily "ruin" that may inhabit it, and to the idea that to view a ruin is also to imagine an aesthetic ideal, to dig up and rebury the repressed, and to consume that repressed image. In her study on the fragment in eighteenth-century literature, Harries notes that the form of textual fragment (as we can see it connected to the image of the architectural or female monastic ruin) is a particularly feminine form, and that "the fragment's supposed femininity directs and complicates its deployment and our responses to it" (11). Here we see an ideological connection, then, between architecture and literature, ruin and literature, ruin and the female body, and textual fragmentation and the creation of ideal femininity. The mutable space of the nunnery, the similarly changeable female body, and the use of fragmentation and ruin as metaphor in literature all result from the repression of Roman Catholic femininity in the long eighteenth century.

Repression and the Uncanny Female Monastic Body

The idea that repression forms the basis for the imagination of ideal gender categories leads us back to the construction of domestic space and of private and public spheres. In order for something to be repressed, it must be hidden or secret. Terry Castle poses the question: "Might one argue, extrapolating from Freud, that the uncanny.... itself has a history, originates at a particular historical moment, for particular historical reasons, and that this history has everything to do with that curious ambivalence with which we now regard the eighteenth century?" (7) I agree with her response in the affirmative and develop my own direction of inquiry regarding the importance of repression to eighteenth-century constructions of selfhood. I similarly utilize Freud's essay on the uncanny, especially in terms of his discussion of the word "domestic" or

“undomestic” as it connects repression to the site of the imagined private sphere and in turn to femininity.

The idea of a national uncanny feeling in regard to Catholicism and female monasticism comes as close as possible to answering the question “who may she be who steals through yonder cloister?” In other words, what lies beneath the veil of constructed domesticity? The answer to that question, I posit, is repressed Catholic femininity and the realization that domesticity and national identity are implicitly connected to such femininity. This brings us, once again, to the second epigraph from Ann Radcliffe and to Freud’s explanation of the object that “flatters and charms at a distance,” but “which vanishes into nothing as we approach it” as an uncanny one that “is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes” (Freud 244). Freud gives the example of a story about a couple who “move into a furnished house in which there is a ... table with carvings of crocodiles on it” that haunt the house at night, or “come to life in the dark” (245). His definition of the symbol taking on the full function of the thing it symbolizes is reminiscent of the anxiety that ruined monasteries and nunneries held for those who were afraid of the re-emergence of a Catholic past in eighteenth-century England. Not only that, but his use of the image of the unhomely home connects this feeling of the uncanny specifically to mutable architecture, and as Anthony Vidler argues about the uncanny emergence of the metropolis in the late nineteenth century, “in each case, the uncanny arose, as Freud demonstrated, from the transformation of something that once seemed homely into something decidedly not so, from the *Heimlich*, that is, into the *unheimlich*” (Vidler 6). This fear of a lack of distinction between the private and the public relates directly to the configuration of nuns and nunneries in eighteenth-century literature, and in turn to the superimposition of eighteenth-century ideals about private domesticity onto the symbolic site of the nunnery.

Elisabeth Bronfen notices this mutable association between the symbol and the thing it symbolizes when she critiques the use of the dead or dying female body in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. Her discussion of the erasure of the female body in the process of aesthetic production is similar to my argument about the relationship between the representation of ruined nunneries, nuns’ bodies, and the acts of consuming and imagining such spaces and bodies through textual representation. In her chapter titled “The Lady is a Portrait,” Bronfen discusses the gendering of creation and destruction, and the disruption of a barrier between the two: “The ‘thing’” [ie. the ghostly crocodiles in Freud’s story] “murdered by the symbol, the artist’s work, refers to the maternal function in semiotic space, conceiving and bearing, in an indexical or iconic mode. Yet the effacement and deanimation of the feminine is coupled with another form of animation, resulting from the production of an art work” (125). The imagination of femininity thus effaces any history of nuns as they might have existed in reality; instead they become repressed ghostly images of another time, but

ultimately necessary ones for the production of national identity. Also necessary, however, is their ability to produce through consumption (meaning ruin or death), which can then be extended to literary representations of women who gain agency through either this kind of consumption, or the kind that similarly blurs categories of self-identity (such as the categories of interiority and exteriority that architectural ruins and nunneries blur) through the conspicuous consumption of goods.

Sites of Consumption and Mutability

When Karl Marx describes Fetishism, he has recourse to religious imagery because he wishes to describe the repression of the producer of a commodity in favour of the value that the commodity holds in its social relationship with other things, rather than in its production value. He explains that “the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom” (63). Instead, he observes, there is a “fantastic form of a relation between things” that requires a religious analogy: “In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life.... So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (63). What Marx calls Fetishism is both a version of repression and imagination, and is explicitly linked (as he argues) to a kind of imagination that is necessary for religious belief. What is really the production of the human brain in response to architectural landscape or textual narrative (its imagination of an ideal femininity or its repression of an English Catholic past) becomes endowed with the authority to say what is female or what is British; and when it becomes endowed with such authority it also becomes a way of consuming femininity, ruin, architecture, and commodity.

Dror Wahrman, Deidre Lynch, and Krista Lysack are among the many who explore the relationship between selfhood, literature, and commodity consumption in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; all three critics point to mutability and lack of stability as a common factor in the use of commodities to understand identity. Wahrman argues that “the consequences of commercialization” in the early eighteenth century included: “The fluidity of forms, the unreliability of markers of distinction, the interchangeability and abstraction of all forms of value, the play of appearances without necessary underpinning of substance;” he goes on to maintain that commercialization also resulted in the death of this mutability and an “increasing preoccupation with the plasticity and deceptiveness of appearances” (211). This movement from mutability to anxiety about mutability is also visible in the treatment of female monastic space and in the representation of female bodies within both the home and the nunnery throughout the long eighteenth century. Indeed, arguments about the mutability and exteriority of identity do not belong to eighteenth-century

images of nuns alone, but also exist in medieval texts. What is different about the eighteenth-century representation of these nuns and the spaces they inhabit is the alignment I make here between the mutability of identity as it is associated with the rise of commercialism in the eighteenth century, and the similar role that monastic femininity played before the addition of modern commodity culture to the configuration of gender.

This combination of repressed female monasticism and commodity culture (both object-based and text-based) as the foundation for eighteenth-century definitions of domesticity and gender means that nuns and commercial objects become aligned in fiction from Alexander Pope to Jane Austen, to Mary Elizabeth Braddon (and in many other cases I have yet to explore). Deidre Lynch notices this movement from one kind of self-definition to another in her work on the economy of character:

New commodities, available in new kinds of spaces, put pressure on the norms and the categories that people had formerly invoked to explain the material world and to make its artifacts meaningful. In this context, people used characters ... to renegotiate social relations in their changed, commercialized world [and] to understand how the period's discursive transformations went in hand with new protocols for organizing class relations and for dividing a feminine world from a masculine one. (5)

The mutability of nuns and nunneries thus becomes useful for reacting to eighteenth-century renegotiations of domestic and national identity in the works that I focus on in this dissertation. Just as Krista Lysack argues that mid-nineteenth-century “middle-class women’s shopping ... enabled a variety of cultural and discursive constructions rather than the prescription, imposition, and regulation of a single identity” (7), so too will I argue that the invocation of the architectural space of the nunnery and the nuns’ bodies that inhabit such spaces works to undermine the initial repression of such sites in the construction of ideal femininity and an imagined private domestic sphere. Instead of arguing that it was novels, characters, or commodities alone that enabled eighteenth-century authors to dictate and deconstruct categories of gender and national identity, I wish to argue that the relationship between these formal sites and effaced female monasticism is also of major significance.

Domestic Ruins from Antiquarianism to Sensationalism

I begin this argument with an exploration of how antiquarian accounts of ruined monastic sites affect a historical understanding of the nun and the space of the nunnery, even in twenty-first-century representations of such sites. In the first half of chapter one I argue that the political, religious, and social climate within which antiquaries produced their texts led to different ways of seeing the medieval nunnery in the eighteenth-century landscape; what I mean by “different ways” is that early attempts by antiquaries to preserve Catholic nunneries and monasteries soon turn into re-imaginings of those sites based on Protestant ideologies of domestic space and femininity. Near the end of the century,

antiquarian aesthetics focus not only on the role of monastic ruins in the picturesque landscape, but also on the production of images of ruins for a larger segment of the public, thus emphasizing the importance of consumer culture to later depictions of monastic femininity. The depiction of nuns and nunneries as both ideal sites of enclosure and illicit sites of aristocratic stagnancy points to their mutability despite an antiquarian attempt to distance such configurations of female monasticism.

With this eighteenth-century slant in mind, I then provide a summary of the medieval contexts of nuns and nunneries, in order to acknowledge that when eighteenth-century antiquaries represented monastic femininity they manipulated their sources to emphasize enclosure and aristocracy, rather than representing the dynamic elements of medieval female monasticism. The mutability of space, community, and the nun's struggle to define selfhood outside of a constructed barrier between active and contemplative virtue are picked up by eighteenth-century antiquaries and re-imagined or repressed in relation to an ideal private sphere of Protestant female virtue and virginity.

The third segment of chapter one brings eighteenth-century antiquarian texts and the site of the medieval nunnery together by close-reading the nunneries of Dartford and Romsey in both their medieval and eighteenth-century antiquarian contexts. Reading the medieval contexts of these sites also means reading twenty-first-century historians' perspectives on medieval contexts, which face the same historiographical problems as eighteenth-century antiquaries faced (such as a lack of records and an emphasis on sites with aristocratic ties), but which provide different solutions that in turn facilitate a greater understanding of eighteenth-century contexts. Eighteenth-century Protestant representations of nunneries obscure the possibilities for female agency within the site of the nunnery when they construct these spaces as ideal private domestic spheres, while simultaneously vilifying their association with Catholic "superstition" and malleable monastic femininity.

I will then turn to literary images of the bodies that inhabit such architectural and historical spaces, as I expand on this antithetical imagination of Catholic femininity in my second chapter, which explores Alexander Pope's depiction of female monasticism in "Eloisa to Abelard." Pope's poem offers an earlier and more flexible exploration of femininity than later representations of the nunnery do, such as antiquarian John Brand's 1775 treatment of Godstow Nunnery. In addition to advancing my theory of nunneries and nuns as ultimately mutable symbols of femininity, I also explore the female body's connection with architecture. These two depictions of monastic femininity show that ruins can be used for both a subversively mutable and an ideal cohesive imagination of femininity. Pope closely aligns Eloisa with the architecture of the English ruined convent in order to explore the destructive results of attempting to reconcile bodily and spiritual virtue, while Brand aligns the medieval legend of Rosamond with the ruins of Godstow Abbey in order to show how passionate actions always lead to decay. Eloisa's alignment with the stone architecture of the nunnery gains

her agency and an authorial voice, while Brand completely subsumes Rosamond's identity within the architecture of a late eighteenth-century ideal about beauty and virtue. I also treat this architecture as particularly uncanny (or undomestic and thus indicative of the blurring between imagination and reality in Freud's configuration of the term), and explore the social and psychological implications of basing Protestant femininity on repressed Roman Catholic buildings and symbolic virtue.

Chapter three connects the antiquarian and historical repression of a Catholic past that I delineate in chapter one with images of suffering femininity and maternal inheritance. These images build on those of the female body in the space of the nunnery and similarly question constructions of public and private domesticity through the representation of ruin and inheritance. I align these sites, in turn, with the popular consumption of the picturesque folly and historical fiction in the late eighteenth century when I read Sophia Lee's *The Recess* in terms of its relationship to garden follies (specifically William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey). Lee's text creates female monastic ruin rather than imposing a Protestant ideology onto an already existent Catholic site, which means that her creation of faulty history – or historical fiction – shows how England's Catholic past defines gender identity, as the ideal of a suffering female saint passes from Mary Stuart to her fictional twin daughters. Eighteenth-century antiquarian accounts of Mary Stuart as the ideal suffering woman complicate her Catholic identity, and Lee's fiction shows how narrative voice, images of self-ruin, and popular textual consumption disrupt *and* rely on maternal inheritance. Lee's equivocal construction of the repressed Catholic past also explores the role of the female author, as her fiction attempts to understand the antithetical relationship between public and private negotiations of femininity. The architecture of the novel (in terms of its metaphorical relationship with the aesthetic of the monastic ruin, the garden folly, and socio-political definitions of domesticity) and the female body intersect where the definition between public and private domestic interiors ceases to exist.

The nuns and nunneries in Ann Radcliffe's novels epitomize the connections I forge in my theoretical framework; Radcliffe combines architecture, the body, inheritance, ruin, and consumption to question the construction of a domestic sphere. Because these elements are so densely woven into her works, chapter four will deal exclusively with the architectural space of the nunnery, while in chapter five I will analyse Radcliffe's portrayal of the bodies within such spaces.

Chapter four looks at the relationship between Radcliffe's construction of mutable female monastic architecture and the late-eighteenth-century domestic sphere. Radcliffe constructs her nunneries as both sanctuaries and prisons, and aligns them closely with the familial castle at the same time. I read these sites not only through the aesthetic and antiquarian narratives that form the basis of my analysis of Pope and Lee, but also alongside the changing definition of sanctuary during the French Revolution, and the political negotiations of an ideal English

feudal past. Neither simply a rejection nor affirmation of the aristocratic ideal, Radcliffe's imagination of the nunnery reacts to a specifically feminine wish for agency and fear of imprisonment within the (physical and ideological) architecture of political and religious institutions. She also explores the mutability of landscape when she uses picturesque language to represent the possibilities available in the re-imagination of ruin (as a response to the construction of national identity upon such aesthetics).

Chapter five returns to the nun's body beneath the veil of repressed identity, and takes seriously Radcliffe's metanarrative lesson to "look again" at bodies that seem at first horrific. I return here to a connection between what I define above as the uncanny and the aesthetic production of the symbolic suffering of the maternal body. Instead of looking at the body inside the mutable architecture of the nunnery, though, I turn instead to a definition of the term malleability as a form of bodily mutability. Not only are Radcliffe's nunneries mutable, but she also constructs the female body as a particularly aesthetic site of malleability, which in turn holds similar associations with the nun's body and the role of repressed Catholicism in the political landscape of the late eighteenth century. I explore this connection through a close reading of the metaphorical and actual wax bodies that Radcliffe features in her gothic novels. This focus leads back to a discussion of the passionate and malleable female body as it symbolizes the eighteenth-century fear of the Catholic other apparent in reactions to political events, such as the Gordon Riots of 1780. Depictions of disease and a lack of boundaries between the interior and the exterior of the body also hearken back to the image of the irreconcilable spiritual and bodily virtue of the female monastic body. The imaginative consumption of these bodies (by the reader of Radcliffe's texts) builds upon Sophia Lee's concern with the form of the novel and the consumption of suffering as an element of that form. Indeed, the way that Radcliffe combines architecture, the body, death and consumption with an antithetical theory about mutable public and private space encapsulates the complexity of the eighteenth-century imagination of gender identity.

In my conclusion I return to the relationship between the constructed interiority of domestic space as it relies on the repression of the nun and nunnery. However, I use Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* to explore more fully the transition from the literary representation of the nun and nunnery to the nunnery as the repressed basis for the country house. This approach relies on the definition I give in my above theoretical framework of commodity consumption as a repression of Roman Catholic identity. Female monasticism and the popular consumption of domestic interiors come to form the framework for Austen's gothic satire, as they do in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's mid nineteenth-century sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret*. This is to show that the Catholic femininity that began as a site of some anxiety for patriarchal institutions and antiquarian texts now forms the foundation for the same institutions' control of female bodies and narratives of maternity, consumption, and virtue. However, as both Austen and Braddon show, there still exists within the gothic and later sensation novel a

form of agency when female authors and characters explore the history of convents-turned-country houses. Integral to this exploration is the imagination not just of the history of female monastic architecture, but also of the domestic interior of the dressing room or boudoir.

It is time, now, to return to Ann Radcliffe's question, and to add to it a number of similar questions that the works I focus on here raise for our consideration. All of the following questions are about repressed Catholic identity as it relates to the configuration of bodily femininity within the architectural space of the convent. In *The Italian* Radcliffe asks: "Who may she be that steals through yonder cloister, / Inform'd with the high soul of saintly virtue?" (83); and it is no accident that she asks this question just as Ellena is about to unknowingly meet her mother in the form of a virtuous nun. Pope's *Eloisa* wonders how she can gain agency from enclosure and symbolism when she asks, "How happy is the blameless vestal's lot?" (207) Similarly, when Sophia Lee's heroines cry out at the discovery of some mysterious portraits in their makeshift recess, "'Ah! who can these be?' 'Why do our hearts thus throb before inanimate canvas?'" (10), they discover the aesthetic construction of maternal inheritance; and when the impetuous gothic novel-reader and consumer Catherine Morland wonders, "Would the veil in which Mrs. Tilney had last walked, or the volume in which she had last read, remain to tell what nothing else was allowed to whisper?" (155) we can finally answer Robert Audley's question, "What do we know of the mysteries that may hang about the houses we enter?" (140) with the knowledge that the mystery that lies beneath the veil, the architectural ruin, the portrait, and the country house is that British national and gender identity is constructed upon repressed female monasticism, especially as eighteenth-century antiquarian authors construct it and as authors of poetry and fiction complicate and question its existence. It is upon this premise that I will argue eighteenth-century British domesticity was indeed built upon ruins.

Chapter One

Dissolved Identities and Domestic Ideals: Antiquaries and Nuns

Part I: Reformation to Romanticism, Preservation to Ruin: Monastic Sites in Antiquarian Accounts of England

In this chapter I will chart two major historical movements that both relate to the imagination of domestic identity in eighteenth-century England. The first is the treatment of monastic spaces and ruins by eighteenth-century antiquaries, while the second is the theorization and recovery of the space of the medieval nunnery by both current historians and eighteenth-century antiquaries. A survey of eighteenth-century antiquarianism will reveal an aim to both preserve and deny the presence of Catholic ruins in the English landscape. Part of this impetus to preserve includes an idealization of monastic femininity, while part includes a negation of that same femininity. The first half of this chapter, then, is a story of how antiquaries came to privilege the monastic ruin over the preservation of monastic architecture, and how this fits into the eighteenth-century imagination of ideal femininity and domesticity. The middle section provides an understanding of the role of female monasticism from the middle-ages to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in order to show how and why both ideal femininity and a fear of female agency might arise from images of nuns and nunneries. The final section follows this theory into specific sites of medieval female monasticism and takes a look at how the eighteenth-century imagination of domesticity works at two particular sites of female monastic ruin: Romsey Abbey and Dartford Priory.

Early English antiquaries do not treat the history of the Catholic nunnery in detail. Instead, they select particular spaces, architecture, legends or geographies and focus their narratives of female monasticism on these sites. The nature of antiquarianism means that from generation to generation, throughout the Restoration, eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, antiquarian writers pass similar narratives of female monasticism forward, as elements of their patriarchal and national heritage. The transformation of the English monastic landscape (from the threat of Catholicism to the burial of Catholic history and identity) relies on a progressive manipulation and re-reading of history through the lens of the social and political landscape of each subsequent generation. Church controversy and the popish plot of 1678 and “Jacobite invasion scares in 1717, 1719, 1720-1, 1743-4 and even 1759” (Colley 24) lead to the othering of Catholicism around mid-century, followed by the reincorporation of its icons into national identity at the end of the eighteenth century and after the Catholic emancipation.

Although antiquaries studied the history of Anglo-Saxon, Celt, and Roman Britain, my focus is on those who studied the history of Catholicism, and the importance of Catholicism to English aristocratic identity, as well as to the formation of British national identity. This is because what I particularly wish to chart is the way that nunneries and ruined nunneries offered an ideological basis

for ideal British femininity, despite the fact that antiquaries and historians wished to deny a connection between the monastic past and the Protestant present. The transference of feminine ideals associated with nuns onto feminine ideals associated with the Protestant home meant that Catholic nuns continued to be a part of the imaginary landscape, even as they faced exile and self-reinvention. Accounts of Elizabethan nuns and nunneries (both in exile and in the English landscape), of similar reactions and attempts to reincorporate nuns into France's Revolutionary landscape, and the importance of this Catholic landscape to Protestant reactions to Catholic Emancipation in 1829 all demonstrate that this integral part of British domestic identity – although denied – was certainly never obliterated, and quite possibly only “dissolved” into very malleable notions of self, nation, and domesticity throughout the century.

Not only are the locations and foundations of nunneries obscure and organic from the Anglo-Saxon period to the late medieval period, but the very limits and constructions of gender within those houses and between the founding orders of the houses are unclear and (as historians demonstrate) ultimately obfuscatory. My attempt (and similar antiquarian and historical attempts) to reconstruct the past landscape of English female monasticism leads to fragmentary conclusions that mirror the ruined spaces themselves. The use of architecture to contain women who, in fact, wished to gain agency through architectural space is one of the reasons why antiquarian literature represents English ruins of female monastic buildings as ghostly and unclear; antiquaries prefer to focus on a complete building of enclosure for their navigation of ideas of contemporary domesticity, but they also rely on ruinous buildings to evoke the loss of what was never fully realized, because these spaces are always halfway between endowing and controlling female agency.¹ An overview of the gender and identity expectations of nuns throughout the Middle Ages will help chart the divisive and evidently “ruinous” results that follow any attempt to demarcate clear boundaries between the spiritual and physical ideals and identities of nuns and nunneries; while case studies of Romsey Abbey and Dartford Priory will show how modern historians of medieval history and eighteenth-century antiquaries construct these two sites of female monasticism as mutable and resilient, despite an eighteenth-century tendency to simultaneously control, undermine, and idealize both nuns and the space of the medieval nunnery.

Preserving Religious Sites

After the dissolution of the monasteries began in 1536, some antiquarians began to worry about the preservation of the structures that form the basis for a national nostalgia integral to modern English identity. John Bale (1495-1563), John Leland (c.1503-1552), Raphael Holinshed (c. 1525-1580?), Sir Henry

¹ As Gilchrist explains: “The hegemony of medieval religion conspired to create a *habitus* for women, in which their own desire for spiritual salvation caused them to reproduce the structural gender relations of medieval society through their own agency” (15).

Spelman (1563/4-1641) and John Seldon (1584-1654) provide narratives of the English past that are sensitive to the need for preservation in the face of the Reformation. James P. Carley argues that Leland's notes "are valued particularly for the unique insight they provide into Tudor England, and for their witness to the final phase of English monasticism" (*ODNB*). In this sense, they are the forefathers of antiquarian melancholic identification because they base British identity upon the preservation and reformation of a threatened and partially lost present, as well as an imagined ideal past. Robert Bowyer's engraving for an illustration of the history of England emphasizes the role of early antiquarians in the memorialisation of the past [see figure 1]. The antiquarian figures in this engraving become the very memorials that they initially recorded in order to construct both the past and the futurity of British identity.

In his discussion of Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655, 1661 and 1673), Graham Parry notes that the memorialisation of the past – so essential after the Reformation – proved somewhat more complex during the Interregnum and even after the Restoration:

Monastic ruins were the most visible reminder of the Reformation that had created modern England and that had given Protestant Englishmen their identity: they acted as markers that differentiated the old order from the new. The upholders of the new order, the Protestant gentry, did not want any formidable reminders of the Catholic past, nor did they wish to have a printed record of the titles to their estates before the Dissolution, for so many of them had benefited from that change. (227)

Early antiquaries thus participated in a collective effort to recover histories that would prove useful in the re-telling of the national story. Parry also argues that the combination of "Renaissance historical scholarship with Reformation concerns about national identity and religious ancestry" led to the antiquarian movement in England, because of "the need to establish the existence of an early Christian Church in Britain that developed independently of Rome" (2).

The antiquarian task then becomes one that recovers a Catholic past, but does so in order to re-affirm Protestant identity. Dugdale's concern for saving the buildings and records that form the cornerstone of Anglican identity is apparent in the *Monasticon Anglicanum*, which includes inscriptions from the Anglican sponsors who "had their coat of arms engraved on the plate" (226). Yet negotiating a past Catholic identity is further complicated by contemporary tensions within Protestantism. As Rosemary Hill notes, the *Monasticon* "is a monumental elegy, a lament for the religious and social institutions of the Middle Ages and at the same time a plea for the surviving churches and cathedrals threatened with destruction by Puritanism" (163). The illustrations that Dugdale includes reinforce his emphasis on perseverance as a reaction to loss; they are (for the most part) complete and detailed engravings of cathedrals and churches (Parry 232). Hollar's engraving of Burton-upon-Trent Abbey [figure 2] represents a complete image of the building, while his engravings of Osney Abbey and Gisburn's Sawley Abbey represent ruins [figures 3 and 4]. Later eighteenth-

century engravings of ruined monastic sites do not separate architecture and landscape in this way. Dugdale's intention to preserve sites from Puritan desecration leads to an emphasis on the building as a whole, although he does not describe the images in detail. Parry compares Hollar's etchings in the *Monasticon* to Dugdale's emphasis on factual information, but also notes, "Dugdale himself had little interest in the appearance of the buildings he documented, and never mentions an architectural detail.... He was motivated by the fear that, under the new regime of the English Republic, the cathedrals ... might go the same way as the abbeys" (235). Dugdale preserves the narratives of the foundation of the monasteries, their lands, and wealth, but his text and Hollar and King's illustrations privilege intact architecture, rather than ruins.

Antiquarian scholars who follow Dugdale continue to emphasize preservation. As Theodorus Harmsen notes, "the ruinous effects of the Dissolution of the Monasteries remained clearly visible in the countryside and stirred an eagerness to preserve the monuments of the English medieval past The fear and distrust of their own times was the force behind Dodsworth and Dugdale's antiquarian urgency" (260-261): a fear and distrust that arose from the Anglican concern that Non-conformists would repeat Henry VIII's destruction of Catholic property. This movement from preservation to loss, from text to image, and from a past to a present religious identity is important to the formative antiquarian accounts of English nunneries. Their progressive narratives also underline the way that antiquaries inherited texts from one another and moulded them to fit new socio-political contexts.

Imagining Religious Sites

Restoration and early eighteenth-century antiquaries such as Thomas Tanner and Thomas Hearne find a balance between the religious and political concerns of antiquarianism. They reinterpret and publish the accounts of Leland and Dugdale in an attempt not just to save texts, objects, or sites that their contemporary political and social contexts threaten to ruin, but also to provide a more temperate understanding of past Catholicism. This is because their common task of providing England with a national narrative unites the antiquarian authors, despite the overwhelming religious and political factions of the period. Both Tanner and Hearne wished to publish the work of Leland, who, at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, "travelled through the country viewing the monuments and manuscripts in the monastic libraries while they were being destroyed and emptied of their treasures" (260). As Parry notes, though Leland "was universally acknowledged as the father of antiquarian studies in England, that acclaim had not translated itself into a scholarly publication of his collections" (336). Hearne published Leland's notes as *The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary* in nine volumes, from 1710-12. Similarly, Tanner's *Notitia Monastica* (1695) is a supplement to Dugdale's *Monasticon* which surveys the history of British monasticism (336).

Thomas Hearne's early focus on the textual aspect of monastic antiquarianism is at the leading edge of a movement from the textual construction of ideals to their absorption into the imagery of the landscape that became apparent later in the century. Harmsen argues that antiquarianism first "began to concentrate more on English history and to develop its approach and techniques towards a more object- and image-based antiquarianism ... independent of historical-textual documentation ... in Hearne's time and, significantly, lasted beyond the Augustan Age (165). Indeed, Hearne's task is very much one of multi-layered preservation; he aims to preserve not only the memory of the nation's antiquities, but also Leland's own crumbling manuscripts, which he says were subjected to a dampness "so considerable, and the Damages so many, as 'twas impossible to hinder them from a continual, visible Decay; so that the Leaves of the Itinerary fall to pieces every day" (Hearne, *Itinerary*, vol.I, xiv). This emphasis on the preservation of a text under threat of ruin comes across eloquently in Hearne's description of his exacting replication of Leland's manuscript:

I observ'd Mr. Leland's way of spelling, and omitted nothing, not so much as the Asterisks and other Notes of that nature that had been inserted by him; nor did I leave out even those Words that are plainly redundant, nor pretend to alter or correct those that are manifestly wrong and occasion'd by the hast the Author was in, or else by the Defect of his Memory. (xv)

Hearne stresses his preservation of the antiquarian text, even if that text represents what he sees as incorrect language or defective memory, but he also acknowledges that he aims to fill in the gaps that Leland's original observations (rather than the ruin of his physical text) leave open: "I have fill'd up divers Vacancies, which I have distinguish'd in Crotchets" (xv). Hearne thus takes a middle road in his reading of Leland when he aligns himself with Leland in his task of perseverance, but makes sure to obscure his role as editor from his readers, whom he calls "curious and learned Men, such as are better able to interpret the Author's meaning than I am" (xvi).

Tanner is more careful about directing his reader's interpretation of Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*. He places his text directly in the centre of the national narrative that emerges in the early eighteenth century, and explains the purpose of his publication of Dugdale's text:

So that to satisfie the curiosity of those who are willing to know, when, by whom, and for whom these Religious Houses were Founded, (the Majesty of whose very ruines strike Travellers with admiration.) To Preserve some remembrance of these Structures, once the Glory of our *English* Nation, and of their Founders ... is the design of this Book. Tho' I am not ignorant that the generality of people ever since the Dissolution, have thro' a mistaken zeal, and false prejudices, thought that the very memory of those Great Men, who erected these places, ought to be

buried in the rubbish of those Structures that they design'd should
 perpetuate their Names to Eternity. (preface, b2)

Tanner responds to his contemporary political and religious context in his justification for bringing Dugdale's text to the public. He balances the national importance of the founders of the religious houses against the admiration that travellers have for their very ruin; he also associates their founders with the complete structures, not the ruins, which he then aligns with the "glory" of the nation. Finally, he explains that the harm some see in imagining these structures and men as complete is exaggerated because of "false prejudices" and "unfounded zeal." Tanner holds his textual negotiation of the reader in balance up until this moment, when he identifies prejudice and zealousness as threats to past and present national identity. Instead, he calls for a better opinion of the monasteries, while also maintaining that loss is not his only focus: "And indeed, considering the provisions that are made in the Universities, for the encouragement and attainment of Learning, and the many Hospitals that have been since the Reformation built for the relief of the poor, there is less reason to lament their [the monasteries] loss" (preface, b2).

It is perhaps this attitude that Harmsen refers to when he argues that Hearne and Tanner inherit the "ambivalent attitude of Leland and Bale" (261) towards Catholic sites. Hearne and Tanner advocate the education and community identity that monasteries provided without directly supporting Catholicism. This position also reflects elements of Dugdale's emphasis on preservation – with the added political contexts of Hearne's position as a nonjuror and Tanner's role as a bishop of the Church of England. Richard Sharp records that despite this theological difference, "Thomas Hearne admitted that 'tho' a little low Church, [Tanner] is so extraordinary a good-humoured Person & so communicate that every body admires him' (Remarks, 5.63n.)" (Sharp *ODNB*). The antiquarian task of recovering and protecting an already textually constructed past (in the works of Leland and Dugdale) is one that both thrives on and tends to undermine political and religious difference for Hearne and Tanner. Thus, Tanner can address "the historiographical neglect of monastic studies, pointing to English anti-catholic prejudice and to the apologies made by previous scholars" while also being "cautious, explaining that he did not wish to vindicate superstition and monkish vices" (Harmsen 265-266).

Similarly, "Hearne's friendships with catholic bookmen who were equally concerned with preserving the (pre-)Reformation past may have helped to influence his milder attitude to Catholicism in his work and prevent him from expressing popular anti-catholic sentiments" (Harmsen 267). The political and religious bearings of antiquarian scholars such as Hearne and Tanner may be more flexible because of their study of the Catholic past, but their political and religious roles still dictate different levels or limits to this flexibility. As a low churchman, Tanner distinguishes between capturing the past as a part of English identity, and negating the aspects of it that threaten current English identity; as a nonjuror, Hearne claims an understanding of the position of the English Catholics

as disenfranchised and excluded from Church and political life (Colley 19). English Catholics, “from the late seventeenth century until 1829 ... were not allowed to vote and were excluded from all state offices and from both houses of Parliament in law – if not always in fact – they were treated as potential traitors, as un-British” (Colley 19).

Stevens’s *The History of the Antient Abbeyes, Monasteries, Hospitals, Cathedral and Collegiate Churches* (1722-23) offers an important Catholic contrast to the works of Hearne and Tanner. His rhetorical techniques mark a continuum from the Catholic past to his contemporary antiquarian context, and look forward to the techniques of antiquarian writers from the 1770s into the Romantic era. Stevens was loyal to James II and fought in Ireland for the Jacobite cause from 1689 until the forces were evacuated. He began to publish from about 1695, and G. Martin Murphy notes that Stevens’s “meagre earnings in Grub Street were spent in pursuit of his consuming interest in monastic history” (Murphy *ONDB*). Stevens’s investment in monastic history is clear in his preface, where he praises those who assisted him in the recovery of their own past, specifically a list of individuals who furnished him with the registers or monastic records that enable him to expand Dugdale’s account. For example, he thanks “Ivery Talbot of Lacock, in the County of Wilts” who, “of his generous Disposition to serve the Publick, freely furnished a curious Register Book of the Nunnery of Lacock, which has been in his Family ever since the Dissolution” (ii). In this manner he makes Catholic history about English ancestral history, in turn criticizing those who neglect the monastic past out of religious prejudice.

Stevens also takes issue with those who describe the monasteries as spaces of superstition and debauchery, deftly absorbing Catholicism into issues of national morality:

Thus many of our modern zealous Advocates for Irreligion have represented all the Piety of former Ages as Enthusiasm, and the Seminaries of Learning and Devotion as no better than publick Brothels. Such are the Notions of Deists and Atheists, who value themselves upon reviling all the sacred Mysteries of Christianity, and call all that looks like Piety, Superstition; among whom are some who make an outward Profession of Religion, to no other End than to be the better qualify’d to subvert all that belongs to it. (iii)

In response to the erasure of Catholic identity, Stevens compiles a text that presents English national identity as inseparable from monastic spaces and narratives; he links aristocratic genealogy to the history of Catholicism in England, and struggles with the way that the Catholic past becomes a part of the Anglican landscape. This is why Murphy notices that Stevens treated “pre-Reformation and post-Reformation English Benedictine history as continuous” (*Recusant History* 445). Not only does Stevens see more clearly how Protestant identity inherits Catholic space and narrative, but his portrayal of monastic history underlines its importance to his contemporary political and religious climate. He also makes monastic information available to a wider audience, as one of the

objections to his work was its lack of Latin; Stevens “argued that he was not writing for the professional antiquary, who had all the primary and secondary sources to hand, but for the general reader who wanted a manageable compendium of key documents and modern commentary” (Murphy, *RH* 446). Stevens’s inclusion of a wider (and less-educated) audience makes monastic history a greater part of everyday identity than, initially, most antiquarians desired it to be.

Because Stevens aims to provide more information than the *Monasticon*, he notes quite often, as he does concerning Gracedieu Nunnery, “the *Monasticon* ... has nothing [to say] concerning this Nunnery,” and goes on to augment his account with further information: “this House stood low in a Valley, upon a little Brook, in a solitary Place, compass’d round with an high and strong Stone Wall, within which the Nuns had made a Garden in Resemblance of that upon Mount *Olivet, Gethsemane*, wither CHRIST with *Peter, James, and John*, went up to pray” (59). This extraneous description draws the beauty of the natural landscape alongside the ideal characterization of the nuns who inhabited it, and is an example of the kind of information with which antiquarians would continue to embellish their accounts as they established a history of Great Britain’s monastic ruins throughout the eighteenth century. That Stevens fabricates narrative is interesting, given his emphasis on accuracy as a translator; his “revision of Shelton’s version of *Don Quixote* gained in accuracy what it lost in artistic unity. He preferred fact to fiction, and required a tale to carry a moral” (*ODNB*). Despite his emphasis on the accurate translation of fiction, Stevens has no qualms about augmenting the historical narrative of the Grace Dieu nuns.

These conflicting aims occur because the antiquarian task represents an interpretation of history that is in transition, as many authors note. Arnaldo Momigliano points out that antiquarian study focuses on methods and ideas that get to the heart of historiography:

But the age of Antiquaries meant not only a revolution in taste; it meant a revolution in historical method.... [it] set standards and posed problems of historical method which we can hardly call obsolete today.... They showed how to use non-literary evidence, but they also made people reflect on the difference between collecting facts and interpreting facts.
 (2)

Stevens fills in the gaps of historical narrative with aesthetic details and moral contexts, an antiquarian tendency that becomes most visible in the middle of the century. This tendency emerges because Stevens and others use monastic sites (and for my purposes, specifically female monastic sites) to both undermine and cement the role of Catholicism in the creation of eighteenth-century British identity. As Lucy Peltz and Martin Myrone note, any antiquarian study tends to uncover faults within the construction of historical and contextual boundaries:

The eighteenth-century historian struggled to produce a sense of fixity and permanence despite or, perhaps because of, the uncertainty of his position, caught between (or straddling) the private and the public, the

commercial and the genteel, the intimacies of subjective experience, and the proposal of an all-encompassing national identity.... the antiquarians' apparent willingness to transgress normative boundaries (of social behaviour, of the body, of intellectual disciplines) is useful in highlighting the very existence and the very artificiality of those boundaries. (8)

Some of the important boundaries that grew progressively difficult to decipher for antiquarian scholars were those between text and image, and between landscape and architecture. Stan Mendyk explores the impetus behind (particularly seventeenth-century) antiquarianism as the “desire to draw comparisons with the present in order to educate others. And in some instances the study of ‘fragments’ or ‘memorials’ of the past came to be transcribed into, or ancillary to, the investigation of the fragments or memorials of not the human past but that of the earth itself” (5). Not only do images and descriptions of monastic sites become more intertwined with the natural landscape (as we see in Stevens’ account of Grace Dieu) but the boundary between early antiquarian accounts and later reinterpretations of those accounts gives the very task of accounting for monastic sites an organic and dialogic nature.

A work attributed to Thomas Cox, titled *Magna Britannia antiqua & nova: or, a new, exact, and comprehensive survey of the ancient and present state of Great-Britain* (1738), claims to be a culmination of an already copious burgeoning of antiquarian study, and creates a moralizing narrative out of antiquarian histories. However, it does so in a manner that completely obliterates any identification with the Catholic cornerstones that authors like Tanner, Hearne and Stevens aimed to maintain as part of English identity. Instead, Cox’s text gives an account of the monasteries in order to cement their place in the aristocratic genealogy of identity, and he follows the account of the monasteries (as taken from Tanner, Dugdale and Leland) with accounts of martyrs, “that we may guard ourselves carefully against the Encroachments of Popery” (v). Similarly, Cox takes the concern with learning one step further than Tanner does, by asserting not only that other institutions make up for a loss of monasticism, but also that monasticism did not provide what the replacement institutions do:

And that the Papists may not brag of their Charity, as so very much exceeding that of the Protestants, we have not only in every Parish taken Notice of the Alms-houses, Hospitals, and Work-houses, established and endowed by Protestants, but have subjoined at the End of our Church-History, a Catalogue of the Charity-Schools set up within a few Years in every County, a Bounty of that extensive Nature, both to the present and all future Generations that no History can parallel it, and Papists must ever be silent, as never having done the like, or perhaps ever thought of it. (v)

Cox addresses the loss of charitable and educational sites here by praising the Protestant alternatives, while simultaneously offering Catholic ruins as ideal markers of British history. This represses a sense of loss occasioned by the

dissolution of nunneries and monasteries, but also makes the care of the community a patriarchal task, split along ecclesiastical lines, rather than a feminine or maternal task. This sentiment, along with the emphasis on collaborative and collative authorship, shows that by 1738 (just over ten years after the publication of Stevens's work, and just a few years after the deaths of Hearne and Tanner) the Protestant appropriation of Catholic identity through antiquarian study was evident in public rhetoric.

Illustrating Ruinous Religious Sites

A turn toward detailed artistic representation of the national landscape fits into the more contextualized depiction of monastic sites that we see someone like Stevens utilize, and in this same period (from around the late 1720s to the early 1740s) Samuel and Nathaniel Buck began to represent the national landscape in their published drawings. As Ralph Hyde notes, the Bucks' illustrations are integral to any study of eighteenth-century ruin imagery:

They published 428 engravings of monasteries, abbeys, castles, and other ruins, three unsigned engravings of Fountains Abbey, two town plans, an engraving of Bristol high cross, and eighty-seven long prospects of English and Welsh towns. Collectively their engravings constitute a national survey of ruins of the period, and provide us with an indispensable record of what English and Welsh towns looked like before the industrial revolution. (Hyde *ONDB*)

Not only do antiquaries start to reproduce and embellish their textual inheritance from previous generations, but specific images and sites of ruin start to become more familiar than others when antiquarian histories begin to rely more heavily on the relationship between text and image.

Earlier works, such as Dugdale's, attempt to imagine these sites into re-existence, or at least to preserve them whole, but around the 1730s and 1740s (just after Cox and Stevens flourished) the illustrated accounts of antiquities began to focus on ruins as sites of nationhood. Lucy Peltz charts a domestication of antiquarianism toward the end of the century:

The shift in antiquarian methods from active fieldwork to passive consumption is marked by the increasingly refined, disseminated engravings of the Society.... While these engravings were intended as a privilege of membership, in 1756 the Society decided to make them even more widely available through the separate print shops of Boydell and Tovey. (117)

The public consumption of what was becoming an ever-more-visible past indicates that what began as an attempt to preserve past identity was increasingly a part of contemporary identity-formation. The political climate of the 1750s links this opening up of antiquarianism to the importance of national heritage in the wake of the second Jacobite uprising in 1745. As Linda Colley argues, "The two decades that followed the Battle of Culloden were an intensely creative period in terms of patriotic initiatives and discussion of national identities both in Great

Britain and in other parts of Europe” (85). Colley also argues that communication between the upper and middle classes grew with the increase in patriotic societies: “In some respects, the patriotic societies represented not a bid for autonomy on the part of the middling classes, but a further demonstration of the close links that existed between the trading community and the people above” (92). Antiquarian scholarship was also about finding links between the aristocratic past and the groups who were rising up to replace and reconfigure that past, which is why antiquaries emphasize a communal history in reaction to Jacobite fragmentation and the changing social and economic climate at mid-century. There is a sense, then, that British identity by the 1770s fluctuates between aristocratic genealogical ideals, and ideals of the everyday mass of ordinary things and people. This fluctuation in turn mirrors the way antiquarian works fluctuate across barriers between architecture and landscape, private and public, and ruin and preservation. The ruin of Catholic sites becomes more integral to identity at the end of the century than the preservation of them was after the Reformation (in part because the political climate was very different in the 1770s).²

Hearne criticized Stevens’s 1720s publication because Stevens (as I noted earlier in this chapter) decided to write for a wider audience. In contrast, Francis Grose, in *The Antiquities of England and Wales* (1773-76), makes it clear “that he does not herein pretend to inform the veteran antiquary; but has drawn up these accounts solely for the use of such as are desirous of having, without much trouble, a general knowledge of the subjects treated of in this publication” (iv). John Collinson similarly emphasizes the public usefulness of his project: “The design of the whole is to furnish the public with a compendious account of the most remarkable remains of antiquity in England and Wales” (viii). Collinson also admits it is ruins that speak to the stability of English identity, because their place in the landscape attests to England’s antiquity:

Nor ... is the contemplation of these venerable piles without its use. We not only learn from them the vicissitude of worldly greatness, and how frail the works of men’s hand prove when opposed to the rage of war, or the more powerful ravages of time; but we are furnished by them with a retrospective view of the character and actions of our forefathers. (vi)

The ruins simultaneously cement images of death and of everlasting posterity in the mind of the viewer; and Collinson instructs his readers to found their identity upon the crumbling architecture of their religious and political forefathers. This kind of idealization of ruin is necessary for the creation of British identity –

² Morris notes: “The monarchy and Church had been torn by crises during the 1760s. The Wilkes affair, together with unrest in the American colonies, had awakened misgivings which grew throughout the 1770s. The demoralizing British defeat at Saratoga in October 1777 and the entry of France into the war in February 1778, were followed in the summer of 1779 with a threat of invasion, after Spain also declared war against Britain. Conflicts mounted at home, culminating in the anti-Catholic and anti-Government Gordon Riots in June 1780” (27). These conflicts are partially the result of changing aristocratic ideals about national identity and I discuss their importance to the representation of nunneries in the period in chapter five.

including definitions of masculinity and femininity – because the viewer must repress the correlation between monastic ruins and a past Catholic identity in favour of “the character and actions” of their “forefathers” and a lesson in the mutability inherent in the British national landscape.

Collinson’s *The Beauties of British Antiquity* (1779) is the most intertextual of the later antiquarian works, and this is why it speaks most directly to the textual and visual inheritance of British identity from one set of antiquarian histories to the next. Not only does Collinson compile his text from the fragments of other antiquarian texts, he also refers readers “for views of each ruin to the publications of Mr. Grose, Sandby, and Hearne, whose merits are too well known to need any present encomiums” (vii-viii). Collinson uses other texts to compose his own, and when he does so he not only draws attention to the hereditary nature of antiquarian work, but also to the role of patriarchal lineage in the antiquarian task. This sense of inheritance also appears in eighteenth-century gothic texts by women (including the works of Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe that I focus on in this dissertation), which respond to such patrilineal histories with their own understanding of how antiquarian and other histories of British identity require suffering and sainted femininity and virtue in order to construct national identity. Collinson’s pastiche technique also means he combines attitudes toward Catholicism from Dugdale to Grose in one work, and thus creates an even more ambivalent attitude toward the religious identity that forms the foundation of his patrilineal history; an ambivalence that also stems from the othering of Catholic history, which feminizes it at the same time that it places Catholicism (or a Protestant imagination of Catholic forefathers) in a privileged position.

It is this attempt to incorporate differing religious views and sites into one national identity that characterizes the particular task of even the earliest antiquarians. John Brand grapples with past Catholicism in his 1777 work *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, because he blames past superstitions on an unnamed crowd of everyday people, rather than the esteemed forefathers that Collinson refers to:

Few who are desirous of investigating the popular notions and vulgar ceremonies of our own nation can fail of deducing them, in their first direction, from the time when Popery was our established religion. We shall not wonder that these were able to survive the Reformation, when we consider that, though our own sensible and spirited forefathers were, upon conviction, easily induced to forego religious tenets which had been weighed in the balance and found wanting, yet were the bulk of the people by no means inclined to annihilate the seemingly innocent ceremonies of their former superstitious faith. (x-xi)

Brand is both reductive and equivocal here because he follows his contemporary British identity back to its cornerstone of Catholicism, and then denies that its tenets were anything but faulty, and were only held onto by nameless “bulks” of people, and not aristocratic forefathers.

David Morris brings to light another possibility when he discusses the way that the watercolourist Thomas Hearne depicts religious identity in his illustrations for *The Antiquities of Great Britain* (1778-1806): “Hearne was a staunch defender of both the Anglican Church and the monarchy, and a deferential supporter of aristocratic hegemony exercised within a paternalistic and virtuous moral context. Therefore ... he emphasized the religious and monarchic aspects of Anglo-Saxon history” although he was “careful to voice criticism of both extreme Protestantism and Catholicism” (50). Just as the nonjurors of the early eighteenth century supported conservative policies but not the Church’s support of the monarch, so Hearne (and many of the antiquarians who inherit the texts of the earlier Hearne, Dugdale, and Tanner) supports the ideal of a patriarchal past, but not the extreme notions of superstition or destruction that Catholicism or the Reformation are in danger of being reduced to in antiquarian texts. Antiquaries of the 1770s admire ruins and applaud preservation at the same time, and Hearne notices this in his account of the north side of Furness Abbey:

...the north Door into the Transept, which is said to have been the principal entrance of the Church, is very low, and not exactly in the centre under the Window; notwithstanding which, however disproportioned or deformed this might appear when the Building was intire, it is not to be wished at present that it had been otherwise, as the picturesque appearance of it is improved by this deviation from the rules of architecture. (*North Side of Furness Abbey* 1777). [See figure 5]

Whether or not the Abbey was aesthetically pleasing when it was whole, Hearne admires the effect of its architecture when it is in ruin. Hearne complicates the barrier between ruin and preservation, just as he complicates the barrier between text and illustration because “he produced the drawings for all the plates and also compiled the historical texts that accompanied each print” in addition to becoming “increasingly interested in the visual (and picturesque) appeal of the surfaces and textures of decaying stonework and enveloping trees and vegetation” (Morris 29, 51). Hearne also incorporated contemporary human interactions into his engravings of ruins, and perhaps the most striking image is that of fashionable ladies grappling with the uncooperative natural elements at St. Mary’s Abbey [figure 6]. This communication between art and text is a subtle comment on the immorality of luxury and frivolity at the site of religious patrimony.

Francis Grose, John Collinson, John Brand and the later Thomas Hearne (1744-1817) move toward a greater incorporation of the ruin into the national/antiquarian psyche, and this has much to do with the communication between text and image, and as we will see, is important to their representations of nunneries in contrast to earlier conceptions of nunneries from antiquaries like Tanner, Hearne, Stevens, and Cox. Just as these narratives build upon and react to one another in relation to their social and political contexts, so too did the medieval nunneries transform and respond to their contexts. It is of note that the literary response to the site of the convent mirrors the actual stratification of

meaning that comprised early monastic sites until their dissolution and/or displacement.

Part II: Prison and Sanctuary, Service and Prayer, Virgin and Mother: Medieval Nunneries and the Eighteenth-Century Antiquarian Imagination

The 1885 *Remarks and Collections* of Thomas Hearne (d.1735) contains a reference that draws attention to the importance of gender to the antiquarian study of the monastic landscape; he notes, “In the Ladies Calling the Author wishes the Nunneries had not been dissolved” (17). This is the extent of Hearne’s observation, but as short as it is, it provides an important context for eighteenth-century antiquarian perspectives on gender and monastic identity. Hearne refers to Richard Allestree’s *The Ladies Calling* (1673), a conduct manual that conveys perspectives on ideal feminine behaviour, and includes sections on modesty, meekness, compassion, affability, piety, virgins, wives and widows. In his treatment of virgins Allestree states:

... in the present Roman Church, tho some, and those very great abuses have crept in; yet I think ’twere to be wished, that those who suppress them in this Nation, had confin’d themselves within the bounds of a Reformation, by chusing rather to rectifie and regulate, then abolish them. BUT tho there be not among us such Societies, yet there may be *Nuns* who are not profest. She who has devoted her heart to God, and the better to secure his interest against the most insinuating rival of humane love, intends to admit none, and prays that she may not, do’s by those humble purposes consecrate her self to God: and perhaps more acceptably, then if her presumption should make her more positive, and engage her in a vow, she is not sure to perform. (Part II, Section I, page 3)

Allestree, as Hearne perceives, favours the idea of a nun (as an ideal virtuous woman) without the Catholic associations. Hearne is not alone in his nostalgia for nunneries; Mary Astell echoes Allestree’s sentiment when she argues, “a devout Retirement will not only strengthen and confirm our Souls, that they be not infected by the worlds Corruptions, but likewise so purify and refine them, that they will become Antidotes to expel the Poyson in others, and spread a salutary Air on ev’ry Side” (105). The domestic ideal of self-containment and purity that rises out of the dissolution of the monasteries is very much the same as the domestic ideal that forms the basis for gendered national identity in the eighteenth century. Virtue and retirement not only protect women from the corrupt outside world, they also have the power (according to Astell and many other Protestant thinkers) to “expel the Poyson in others” – an expulsion that also means the repression of the very Catholicism from which Astell derives such images of virtue and retirement.

This mutable sense of identity also applies to English female monastic communities in exile, as they continue to adhere to monasticism despite the

reformation and in defiance of the ruinous state of the nunnery in the English landscape. Claire Walker and Caroline Bowden provide an analysis of the role of seventeenth-century English convents in exile, and as Bowden explains, in 1598 a Benedictine convent for English women was opened in Brussels and “was followed rapidly by others (11 in Flanders by 1630)” (365). It is obvious that female community appealed to these women, but the establishment of community in exile offers a different kind of ideal domesticity than the one that English antiquarians depict in their histories of female monasticism. Lucy Peltz’s analysis of late eighteenth-century antiquarian work attests to the fact that antiquaries re-imagine enclosure in order to build ideal femininity: “men retired from a public sphere gendered masculine to a domestic one gendered feminine” but “the antiquarian esprit was not lost in domestic retreat. It was, instead, modified to this familial setting” (120-121). The problem with arguing for a retreat into the domestic sphere, however, is that the definition between the two spheres was always one that antiquarian studies of ruins, and especially (female) monastic ruins, called into question.

John Stevens draws class alongside proper feminine behaviour, monasticism, and domesticity in his translation of Manuel de Mello’s *Carta de Guia de Casados* under the title of *The Government of a Wife, or, Wholsom and Pleasant Advice for Married Men* (1697), which he intersperses with his own opinions about current and ideal feminine behaviour. He also compares the management of the nation to the management of the domestic sphere when he states in his preface to the reader: “a Kingdom is a great Family, and a Family a little Kingdom; and Ethicks require Policy and Economy, because Man is a little World” (xviii). This philosophical move makes clear the political issues at stake in the configuration of the domestic sphere. Similarly, this connection between the kingdom and the family means that Stevens takes particular issue with the behaviour of female aristocrats, complaining that those who should be “Patterns of Honour and Virtue” in fact “countenance Infamy and Vice by associating themselves with the Professors of it; as if ... the Title of Dutchesse [sic] and Countess would wipe away the name of a Prostitute” (110).³ In other words, domestic virtue should extend to political and aristocratic figureheads, as they (and the women who inhabit the microcosmic spaces that mirror their public forums) should be “patterns” of virtue.

However, Stevens also criticizes the Portuguese and Spanish “custom of keeping Women mewed up” and the more generally aristocratic practice of taking “wives at a venture” (18), as well as of depriving “a Prudent Woman from having a hand in the Purse” which he looks upon as “not only unkind, but inhuman” (33). As uncomfortable as he is with the flexibility of class boundaries as women perform them, Stevens is also uncomfortable with the absolute control of women

³ Murphy surmises that these kinds of views stem from Stevens’ residence at the court of King Charles II, where “his observation of the libertinism prevailing at the court ... had no doubt confirmed him in his attachment to family values” (442).

and their lack of choice in Portuguese society. This critical move toward and away from women's agency mirrors the representation of nunneries in works by Stevens and other antiquaries. The proper or improper female behaviour associated with ruined convents translates from one antiquarian perspective to the next; despite differences in their political, religious and social understandings of the dissolution, the way that these antiquaries construct femininity is very similar.

Thomas Cox, as we saw earlier, conveyed a concern for the loss of some monastic communities only to emphasize the fact that their Protestant replacements were all the better. Ten years after the publication of the work attributed to Cox, his comments continue to be relevant, as an "Asylum or house of Refuge situate in the Parish of Lambeth, in the County of Surry" was established for "the Reception of Friendless and Deserted Orphan Girls" (*An Abstract from the Account of the Asylum...* title page) in 1758. This establishment speaks directly to the lack of convents in the English religious landscape, and links Cox's account of the Protestant re-establishment of hospitable institutions to ones specifically for disenfranchised women. The *Abstract* describes an oversight on the part of charitable institutions in England, and emphasizes the lower class status of the orphans of "soldiers, sailors, and other indigent persons" whose greatest fear (the pamphlet argues) are "the solicitations of the vicious, and ... the dreadful consequences of early seduction" (1). Cox and other antiquarian scholars aim to maintain the virtuous bodies of these female victims in spite of the loss of the ideal space of the Catholic convent; instead of valuing the convent for its ability to educate and perhaps give women (who otherwise have nowhere to go) agency, these eighteenth-century accounts struggle with the philosophical problems of imagining a proper female body as one that is productive, reproductive, yet pure.

By the time that Francis Grose published his *Antiquities of England and Wales* (1773-1776), antiquarian accounts of nunneries contained more detailed anecdotes of the nuns' bodies and the ruined spaces that once contained them. Engravings of the monastic ruins accompany the accounts, and there is a concern to place some aspects of the monastic past safely in the past, as Grose attempts to do when he notes the presence of a concubine at the charter of King Edmund in West-Malling Abbey:

... it may, to reconcile this to our ideas of propriety, be necessary to observe, that concubinage did not then mean what it does at present, but was a kind of legal contract, inferior to that of marriage ... This accounts for the name of *Ælfgefu* being found in such company, on so solemn an occasion; which could not have happened, had the character of concubine been deemed either sinful or dishonourable. (116-117)

Grose imposes late eighteenth-century social and political definitions of marriage onto the medieval convent and medieval culture – a prostitute was not a prostitute, thus she can keep company with nuns without threatening the ideal space of the convent (as Grose sees it).

In order to understand the historical accuracy of antiquarian accounts such as these, and how much they rely on an imagination of the nunnery relevant to the creation of British national and gender identity in the eighteenth century, I will provide an overview (using current scholarship on medieval British and European nunneries) of the history of the nunnery and its construction of gender and space. Eighteenth-century antiquarians used their sources to manipulate, draw on, and emphasize a domestic ideal that was inherent in the history of the formation of the convent as a public *and* private space and the ideal of the nun as both a chaste and silent woman and a public servant. As Jo Ann Kay McNamara argues, “the history of nuns is haunted by the presence of men who often admired them yet feared their own admiration; who controlled them but did not trust them; who invested emotional currency in the mythology of mystery and difference rather than the ideal of understanding and equality” (6). The medieval imagination of the ideal of a nun or a nunnery thus lays the groundwork for the eighteenth-century application of that ideal to contemporary gendered space.

Reading the Medieval Contexts

It is my goal to provide an analysis of the signification of women within the religious and architectural boundaries of the early-modern convent. The nunnery functioned in the English landscape as an architectural and social space that contained or encouraged the freedom of women’s bodies. The aristocratic roots of the nunneries, their navigation of spiritual and social strictures, and their reintegration into the English landscape after the dissolution all factor into the ways that antiquaries saw fit to frame them in the eighteenth century. In fact, the way eighteenth-century antiquaries represent nunneries as sites of extreme virtue or licentious vice not only reflects the contemporary construction of femininity, but is also prevalent in modern historical and archaeological accounts of convents: “Nunneries are lumped together as being poor, scandalous, passive institutions which were eschewed by medieval patrons,” while in reality, “small male houses were equally, if not more, prone to poverty, mismanagement and scandal.... Such stereotypes of nunneries can be refuted when a wider range of documentary sources are considered” (Gilchrist 24). Gilchrist’s frustration at the lack of interest in filling the gap of knowledge about medieval nunneries leads directly back to their representation in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiquarian texts; she asks: “With a tradition of monastic archaeology which stretches back some three centuries to the publication of Sir William Dugdale’s *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655-73), why have we not previously considered how, or whether, nunneries were different from monasteries for men?” (22). Gilchrist’s criticism draws attention to the more mutable reasons for the existence of female houses, and the fact that those who characterized their behaviour as negative had political and socio-economic reasons for doing so.

The antiquarian characterization of nunneries as marginally threatening because of their fluctuation between virtue and vice indicates that there were subversive aspects to their existence, which church fathers and antiquaries alike

wished to control. This depiction of the nunnery speaks to the indelibility of the antiquarian emphasis on the domestic ideal, since even modern scholars have difficulty forging new theories about female monastic spaces, and (as Gilchrist puts it) about “the more fluid, informal and varied monasticism for women” (25). Jo Ann Kay McNamara’s emphasis on the inherent possibilities in the history of nuns (and the fact that they had roles both in the cloister and in the community) also speaks to the ideas of fluidity and agency: “The history of nuns points to a more integrated life for everyone, transcending gender differences and forging a new personality combining those characteristics so unfortunately divided by sex” (6). If it is true that a deeper analysis of female monastic sites will lead to an entirely different (and more fluid, or more androgynous) history of nuns, then it makes sense that early antiquaries choose to read binaries where fluidity exists, and to impose virtue or vice on sites that question the very foundations of ideal domesticity throughout the long eighteenth century and into the Victorian period.

The nunnery was integral to community development throughout the early and later Middle Ages, thus it is no surprise that modern versions of English identity aim to recuperate it as an important religious, architectural, social and economic part of the landscape. Even before the dissolution imposed the status of ruin upon so many monastic sites, the architectural and communal development of the nunneries was ultimately an organic and mutable process. Identifying the locations of nunneries in the English landscape is problematic, since earlier foundations may have become male monasteries, and double houses did not always distinguish themselves as such. Take for example figures 7 through 11, which chart the changing locations of English nunneries from around 630 until after the Norman Conquest in 1066 and up to the dissolution in the 1530s. Sarah Foot maps the presence of female religious houses c.630-c.900 [figure 7], female religious communities in England 871-1066 [figure 8], and nunneries in England, 940-1066 [figure 9]. The variant names Foot uses to describe the female institutions she maps also attest to her observation that even where a group of religious women can be identified, “it is remarkably difficult to draw distinctions between congregations of professed nuns and other groups of women religious: communities of secular canonesses, or vowesses and widows who may have chosen to join with other women in a similar position” (5). The status and location of a nunnery in England depend very much on the historical period that fostered its existence. For example, “the boundary between the secular and the religious way of life for women appears less sharply defined” in the Anglo-Saxon nunneries of the late pre-Conquest era” (Foot 1). Pre-Viking monastic gender is also difficult to trace due to non-specific language: “there is no gender-specific term in Latin or Old English equivalent to the modern ‘nunnery’ by which to denote a monastic community occupied solely by women” (Foot 50). The lack of

clear boundaries and language to delineate a static role for pre-Conquest nuns testifies to the malleability of female monasticism in the early medieval period.⁴

The religious orders of the houses of nuns and canonesses in post-Conquest England include the Benedictine and Order Fontevrault[tine] (founded by Eleanor of Aquitaine cf. Gilchrist 51), Clunaic, Cistercian, Augustinian, Premonstratensian, Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Gilbertine (double-houses), Dominican, Franciscan (or Poor Clares), and Bridgettine (Knowles and Hadcock 493, Power 1-2). The common practice of moving from one order to another also complicates a history of the foundation of the nunneries in England, and draws further attention to the fluidity of the religious expectations from one era to the next. As Knowles and Hadcock explain in their *Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales*:

There is some uncertainty regarding the order of a number of nunneries at their foundation.... For the nuns to change from one order was by no means uncommon. The Cistercian houses apparently enjoyed certain privileges and advantages. Several houses, where the nuns wore the Cistercian habit, were repudiated as not belonging to the order by the Cistercian Chapter General in 1268-70. (251)

Janet E. Burton attributes the growth of the nunneries in Yorkshire, which figures 10 and 11 attest to in comparison with figures 7, 8 and 9, to this twelfth- and early thirteenth-century attraction to changes in female monasticism: “In Yorkshire two of the twelve nunneries known to have been Cistercian at a date *post* 1213 [when the Cistercian opened its general chapter to women] may well have used an adapted form of the Cistercian customs before that date” (4).⁵ The nuns’

⁴ Sally Thompson notices a similar historiographical problem in regard to twelfth-century nunneries, the origins of which she finds under-represented in historical documents such as charters and monastic chronicles. Her map of English nunneries founded after the Norman Conquest, reproduced in figure 11, charts the communities that came into existence after those that are represented in figures 7, 8 and 9. As Thompson notes, Knowles and Hadcock’s lists of nunneries “indicate the existence of at least 142 nunneries by the third quarter of the thirteenth century. Only ten of these were clearly pre-Conquest foundations of earlier communities” (2). Thompson aims to understand the origins of these newly-founded houses despite (or in concert with) their organic appearance in the English landscape: “It may in some cases reflect a slow growth, where the initial focal point was provided by an individual anchoress or by earlier links with another religious institution” (3).

⁵ As Anne Winston-Allen explains, the increase in interest in monastic life with the foundation of the Fontevraud and Premonstratensian orders in eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe led to an overwhelming number of women “taking up a religious form of life” (65). Not only did this lead to “a moratorium on admission of any more women’s houses” but also in response to a concern about “religious laywomen living in unincorporated groups throughout the diocese of Liège, Vitry obtained from newly elected Pope Honorius III (1216-27) his ‘verbal’ consent for women to live in communal houses without belonging to an order or following a rule” (66). The late foundation of the Dominican house of Dartford may also be connected to this flourishing interest in female monasticism, as “the Dominican order took the radical step of divesting itself even of those women’s houses already admitted and decreed that the brothers must henceforth cease providing pastoral care to all female religious communities. Only after some twenty years was a compromise worked out, allowing for sacramental duties to be delegated to secular priests serving as chaplains,

motivation behind their choice of orders remains difficult to pin down for historians such as Burton and Thompson, whose similarly obscure conclusions about the boundaries between religious houses inform their understanding of religious women in the period. Burton concludes that this Cistercian trend in Yorkshire was “only one part of a general movement in the twelfth century ... towards a greater reception and tolerance of women in the religious life, but one which continually received checks and setbacks” (37). S. Thompson argues that the expansion of the new orders of double houses (such as the Gilbertine or the Fontevraud) in the twelfth century may have been prevalent in Benedictine and Augustinian communities earlier, but “the evidence is not clear, with sources often merely hinting at the presence of women linked with a monastery Such vagueness and ambivalence is not in itself surprising, and could reflect growing unease about such partnership between the sexes” (56). These historiographical problems are a symptom of the mutable nature of English female monasticism both in the middle ages and in the eighteenth century. In the absence of concrete historical detail, both modern and early-modern historians focus on defining characteristics of the nunnery such as class, community, enclosure, production, and dissolution. My overview of the nature of medieval female monasticism will cover the same major themes in order to provide a historical context for the case studies of Romsey and Dartford that will follow.

Founding Mothers: Class and Female Agency in the Cloister

The role of the upper-classes in the foundation and maintenance of English nunneries is of great importance to their medieval social identities and eventual dissolution. In the early Anglo-Saxon period, “the first religious houses for women in southern England were founded ... with the direct support and active participation of members of the ruling Kentish royal house” (Foot 36). Of the later medieval nunneries, Eileen Power notes, they “were recruited almost entirely from among the upper classes. They were essentially aristocratic institutions, the refuge of the gently born” (4). However, Foot draws attention to the fact that records survive for those houses with strong royal associations in the pre-Conquest era, arguing that there is a “direct correlation between the association of nine of these nunneries with the West Saxon royal house, their consequent material prosperity and their dominance of the surviving literature” which leads to “a misleading picture of women’s religious observance in the two centuries before the Conquest” (6). An emphasis on houses with strong royal connections results in the attribution of foundation to political power rather than social need. Gilchrist explores this problem in detail in her work on women’s religious communities, where she notes that male houses held “greater political power” and thus were

and women were again admitted to the Dominican order” (Allen 66-67). See also Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women’s Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, ed. and trans. Stephen Rowan (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1995).

better allies “for a Norman baron.... The establishment of a nunnery was seldom an innovation in pious benefaction” (41). Gilchrist considers the alternative to be one that is more socially driven than the aristocratic nunneries might suggest: “The distribution of nunneries, their more modest endowments, and their late foundation dates relative to monasteries suggest that the majority were ... closely linked to gentry of their locality, people concerned with local parish and village affairs and local family ties” (50).⁶ This consideration brings up the question of community in regard to female monasticism, and the relationship between female cloistered communities and their local secular communities.

Spirituality and Community

The word community takes on several levels of meaning in reference to female monastic space; it can apply to the community of nuns, the spiritual community including monks, nuns, the larger church and the godhead, as well as the social and political communities that surrounded the convents. Diane Watt argues that in the Middle Ages “community” evoked “a range of political, socio-economic, legal and metaphorical definitions”; although she also notes, “many of these medieval usages, including some of the most general, may actually exclude women altogether” (8). The particular construction of the space of the nunnery as an ultimately feminine and interior ideal through which public gender, political, and aristocratic identities could be imagined makes it an especially complex form of community, one which continually denies its public role. As McNamara notices of the monastery in the sixth and seventh centuries:

Monasticism developed an elusive prismatic quality. The three great vows and the virtues they personified continued to dominate the spiritual aspect of the regular life, but they manifested themselves in shifting colors of the spectrum that flashed and fractured unpredictably. The enclosed cloister became the welcoming sanctuary, linking isolation and hospitality. Flight from the world meant a mission to the pagan. Poverty was achieved through charity, which attracted donations. Obedience disciplined enterprise, which drew in lands and dependants who required rule and protection. Chastity opened the way to syneisactism. (123)

The attempt to secure a separation from whatever intersections of community happen to be a part of the social and political landscape leads to a reliance on those very communities for the continued existence of the ideal enclosure. Similarly, connections with family and aristocracy forged social boundaries within the walls of the convent, while autonomy within its walls became more possible due to the absence (or the pretence of the absence) of men. In addition, “nuns could win the favour and support of political leaders.... This brought them visibility and prestige. Indeed, convents, and in particular the older and wealthier

⁶ The foundations she refers to are explored by Marilyn Oliva in *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350-1540*. NY: Boydell Press, 1998. Gilchrist also mentions the examples of widow founders at “Godstow, Elstow, Lacock and Marham, among others” (50).

ones, became crucial devotional centres and poles for civic life” (Evangelisti 19).⁷ In this sense, the very presence of the nuns within the convent gestures toward their particular social and political connections.

This is especially noticeable in terms of their roles as charitable and spiritual students and educators.⁸ One important aspect of this combination of enclosure and community is the construction of distinct types: the active Martha or the contemplative Mary.⁹ However, as historians point out, this strict separation of the two roles has more to do with idealizing enclosure than it does with any particular need for the two elements of spiritual life to be separate. McNamara lists examples of women who (in defiance of this enforced binary) combined spiritual with charitable works:

The Sisters of the Common Life ... lived in communities with the dual characteristics of almshouses and convents.... Uncloistered religious women, who generally supported themselves and their charitable endeavours with cloth work, were caught between conflicting practical and ideological demands.... The faint disapprobation that Jesus himself seemed to cast on Martha’s labours was magnified by nervous misogynists who could see nothing but hypocrisy in the piety and charity of latter day ‘Marthas,’ as the directness of beguinages or Sisters of the Common Life were apt to be called. (453)

Involvement in the community, in self-employment or in charitable life, was contrasted with ideal spiritual and contemplative prayer and virtue in this manner. Eighteenth-century constructions of femininity also adopt this double-construction of the virtuous woman in the fiction and literature that defines what the ideal

⁷ Similarly, Foot argues that an investigation of women’s motives for entering the convent leads to an understanding of the ways that the nunnery’s walls are more fluid than they at first appear: “The reasons why women entered the cloister varied considerably and – where these can be determined – often reveal as much about the families to which they belonged as about the individual women themselves. Some women were dedicated to religion by their parents and placed in the cloister in infancy in order to satisfy their family’s devotion vicariously.... Others of the adult women visible within female religious houses may have been educated from childhood within the Church without necessarily having from the outset been destined for life within a nunnery” (40).

⁸ In her chapter titled “The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact, and Fantasy” in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (Ed. Patricia Labalme), Joan M. Ferrante draws attention to the almost cooperative nature of royal and aristocratic education in the Middle Ages: “These women [royal women] were educated either at home or in convents. Some public or nonmonastic schools existed, but we have only scattered information about them. We know of them partly because they were forbidden from time to time.... From these prohibitions, one assumes both that it was acceptable for girls to attend school outside of convents and also that there were coeducational schools” (11).

⁹ The story of Mary and Martha’s interaction with Jesus is in Luke 10: 38-42 and John 12:1-8. Claire Walker explains how the metaphor works: “It is more commonly used to describe the two kinds of religious vocation in the Church: the apostolic ministry and the contemplative life. Thus Martha, who had busily provided hospitality for Christ, represents the active apostolate of charity and social action, while her sister Mary, who had ignored the bustle and listened to Christ’s teaching, epitomizes contemplation and mysticism” (398).

“domestic” space should be. Yet, as Claire Walker demonstrates, practice belied the binaries:

Bound by the terms of strict enclosure, the English nuns reinterpreted the Martha/Mary metaphor to suit their own cloistered circumstances: the choir nuns were referred to as the ‘Marys’ and the lay sisters as the ‘Marthas’ of the convent.... Yet their use of this metaphor was even more complex than this simple dichotomy. To cope with their harsh economic circumstances, the nuns reworked the Martha/Mary metaphor in such a way that the boundaries between religious and secular work were conveniently blurred. (398-399)

This manipulation of the ideal in order to navigate economic and social boundaries is an aspect of the history of nuns and nunneries that ties together the complex and mutable construction of enclosure and the role of production and the arts within those mutable walls.

Reform and Enclosure

The fine line between the agency and subjection of cloistered nuns is one that speaks to the construction and negotiation of gender from the early Middle Ages through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Evangelisti explains, the gendered bodies of nuns attest to “a long-standing Christian tradition that associated female chastity with the protection of a closed environment, whether this was a domestic one or a monastic one” (43). As reformation accounts of the regulation of enclosure at nunneries indicate, this ideal was more easily imagined than it was realized. In spite of this, the Catholic reform of the late medieval period led to an institutionalization of the binaries of enclosure and community, which led in turn to the creation of a number of new orders “motivated by the desire to create an institutional setting more conducive to the observance of the rule” (Prosperi *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* “Catholic Reformation”).¹⁰ The reformation of space and the institutionalization of ideal antithetical enclosure, then, led to the production of religious identity. This kind of compartmentalized reform is of interest in light of the reformation’s aim to institute uniformity alongside strict adherence to the rule, as “a return to the rigid observance of the rule while striving to realize the model of perfection in the religious life.... meant a return to the vow of poverty, with renunciation of personal property; the respect of the cloister; and much more severe inner discipline” (Prosperi *OER*). The Catholic reformation contributed to the configuration of the internal domestic space as one that conforms to a larger ideal; an ideal that I argue can only lead to fragmentation and ruin.

This is why, as McNamara explains, the church placed women in the foreground when it came to containing anxieties about the strict observance of

¹⁰ Adriano Prosperi explains that the term Catholic Reformation, “by the common consensus of historians, has come to be used to designate all those attempts, plans, and initiatives beginning in the 1400s that aimed at a renewal of Christian society and a moral and disciplinary reform of the church *in capite et in membris* (‘in its head and members’)” (*OER*).

rules: “The autonomy of each convent guaranteed its local ties, while episcopal and secular authorities alike reined in any tendency to eccentricity.... Canonesses, in particular, offended reformers anxious to close the circles of the clergy to women” (202). The strict enclosure of female monastic communities who had clear ties to the political, social and economic workings of the larger community became refined through architectural terms, which in turn reinforce the appearance of the ideal. As Evangelisti explains, “monastic architecture contributed to shaping nuns’ lives, liturgical experiences, and schedules” (46), which is why it is so significant that the late sixteenth-century Tridentine reform emphasized “the restructuring of convent architecture.... enclosure required visual as well as physical separation, whereby nuns would neither see the world, nor be seen by it” (47-48).

The architecture of enclosure as a metaphor for nuns’ bodily and spiritual purity comes to fruition with the Tridentine reform and the attempts to implement the decrees of the Council of Trent in the late sixteenth century.¹¹ Indeed, the layers of architecture that protect the nun from the outside world also facilitate her ability to communicate with that world:

The Tridentine idea of the convent emphasized in particular three architectural features: the gate, the parlour, and the church. These three places represented a threshold between the sacred and the secular worlds. Here the closed convent space finished, and the open, public one began.... the real problem in constructing enclosure was to shape the nuns’ complex and subtle interaction with society, making them part of the world without being in it. (Evangelisti 48-49)

Just as the nun’s architectural space enables and disables public interaction, so also is her artistic production both spiritual and economic.

Economics and the Arts

The nun’s ability to possess or create material objects gives her a kind of agency within her architectural enclosure. The supposed poverty of nuns as an integral part of their internal and external identities also informs the production and consumption of goods and artistic objects within the convent. Eileen Power asserts, “in the history of the medieval nunneries of England there is nothing more striking than the constant financial straits to which they were reduced” (161), and she relates this poverty to the physical state of the building: “Time after time visitations revealed houses badly in need of repair and roofs letting in rain or even tumbling about the ears of the nuns” (169). Gilchrist, however, points out that when historians construct nunneries as poor, they fail to take into account the fact that nunneries were founded for different purposes than monasteries were, and this difference is an important part of female monastic identity:

¹¹ English nunneries were also under scrutiny at this time, as they endured visits from those under Cromwell’s supervision; and while containment and enclosure meant repression for European nuns, censure and ejection meant the same for English nuns.

Nunneries were set in liminal places, with regard to both the natural landscape and the topography of towns. Their economic aspirations were never great.... An ideal emerged for nunneries in which isolation was coupled with dependence on institutional structures for labour, religious services, market commodities and cash gifts. It is this paradox of isolation and dependence which sets nunneries apart in the study of medieval monastic settlement. (90-91)

Both Eileen Power and Roberta Gilchrist draw attention to the physical space of the convent to explain its economic roles, and they both explore those physical/economic spaces in terms of the productive or consumptive bodies of the nuns. Eileen Power conflates their financial ruin with architectural ruin, while Gilchrist uses liminal geography to explore the “paradox of isolation and dependence” in her study of material culture. Once again, the space of the cloister proves difficult to define when one considers these interactions between bodies, architecture, and objects.

The patronage and decoration of convents with spiritual and personal images, the use of the arts to generate income, and the manipulation of personal objects and clothing all indicate that gender identity, enclosure, and public production and consumption fragment and blur static constructions of nuns and nunneries. As Evangelisti explains, nuns

... painted, sculpted, worked as miniaturists or engravers, and were involved in all kinds of art and craft works, bookmaking and decorating, needle and textile works, which provided income for their houses.... In some convents, such as fifteenth-century German Dominican houses, the nuns wove devotional tapestries with sacred scenes and images of themselves sitting at the loom, which suggest deep awareness of the spiritual and economic significance of their work, and of their own creative identities. (162)

This self-reflexivity in response to the production of a material object is not unusual, given Gilchrist and others’ accounts of the way that material surroundings shaped the identities of nuns.¹² Not only the architecture of their enclosure, but also their clothing, books, and other devotional objects draw attention to a dual construction of exterior and interior identity.

For example, in her discussion of nuns as patrons and painters, Ann Roberts explains that nuns played an active role “in obtaining images for or enlarging the architecture of their convents.... cloister in practice seems to have been a more permeable fabric than is described by its theory” (237). Nuns use the spiritual enclosure and control of their identities to gain agency, or at least to

¹² Gilchrist specifically argues this in reference to the architectural embellishments of the nunnery: “It is likely that hierarchical spatial divisions were reinforced by the embellishment of architectural features. In this way space becomes a matrix constructed by the location and form of images. Iconographic themes are built through sequences of related sculpture, glass, wall-paintings and ceramic tiles. The pattering of such images would help to establish and cement hierarchical relations” (152).

express themselves (and quite possibly gain economic profit) through the production of art. The result, as Jeffrey Hamburger notes, is characteristically mutable: "...the manufacture of images could be an act of devotion.... At the same time, however, it signified 'to be engaged in worship,' a meaning medieval monasticism took seriously. In the handiwork of nuns, the two meanings converged: work itself was a form of worship" (184).¹³ The combination of self-expression, worship, prayer and work was an ideal, but like enclosure and reform it was an ideal that offered nuns a relatively ambiguous space within which to live.¹⁴ Eighteenth-century accounts of nunneries are attuned to the importance of aesthetics because they must find a balance between the anti-Catholic fear of iconography and the more positive image of female artistic production in a domestic sphere.

Clothing also provided this sort of multifaceted space of self-representation and identity. Although the nuns' habits were meant to signify their enclosed identities, they also complicated any boundary between interior and exterior representations of self – thus making visible a holy vow that is otherwise private (and which signals sexuality). This led to strict rules regarding dress and the contemplation of self in the convent:

Like everything else in the convent, the habit reflected the nuns' virginal status and integrity.... Similarly, many objects were deemed inappropriate for the sacred space of the cloister, such as the kind of things that furnished the patrician domestic interiors.... Mirrors were absolutely forbidden.... Lay and elegant clothes were also prohibited, and nuns were told to avoid ribbons on the habit, perfumed gloves, jewels, badges, and other similar gadgets. (Evangelisti 29)

In addition to these regulations, Evangelisti describes the use of sacramental Christ-child dolls as symbolic objects of motherhood and virginity: "sometimes owned by individual nuns, devotional dolls were part of the monastic trousseau they had carried with them on entering religious life.... Nuns would take care of these dolls, make clothes to dress their naked bodies, and on certain feast days of

¹³ In his study of the Benedictine nunnery of St. Walburg, Hamburger also explains that nuns' artistic production was generally under strict monastic observation: "By statute, nuns' work served as no more than a substitute for the hard manual labor, mandated by the Rule, for which women were deemed unfit" (182), and "the regulations governing monastic handiwork were exacting" (181). Despite this strict control over artistic production, Hamburger notices the same kind of mutable space that the studies of foundation, community and enclosure uncover for us: "Between artistic expression, conceived in modern terms, and selfless anonymity, however, lies a wide array of other possibilities for creating and communicating meaning, few of them envisaged – or disallowed – by monastic legislation" (184).

¹⁴ Hamburger also notes, "As incarnations of the Benedictine ideal of *ora et labora*, the drawings from St. Walburg testify to the efficacy of the reforms initiated at St. Walburg in 1456 by Bishop Johann III von Eych. The renewal of artistic activity was a concomitant of reform, both because of the increased emphasis on literacy and labor brought about by rehabilitation and because of reformers' destruction of corrupt liturgical manuscripts, which had to be replaced by fresh, corrected copies" (190).

the year hold and cuddle them, thus symbolically acting as the Virgin Mary” (156). This sort of validation of self-identity within the strict rules of monastic garb allows for the individual possession of an object – an act that was usually forbidden.

As Jocelyn Wogan-Browne’s account of Edith of Wilton shows, the possession of clothing and objects that indicated class and identity was something nuns did not give up easily. Wogan-Browne suggests that this is because such objects were tied to familial identities outside of the convent as well as spiritual identity: “[Edith’s] Life’s promotion of her contemplative abilities does not exclude Edith’s being, as many late medieval nuns wished to be, a woman wearing some personalized version of clothing, and hence marking rank and individuality” (408-409). Wogan-Browne also points out that for Edith of Wilton, this was as much about maintaining both spiritual and aristocratic status in the habit of a nun: “Thus Edith defeats bishop Æthelwold of Winchester over questions of dress, arguing that under ‘clothing of royal pomp’ (l. 1208) there may be ‘an abundance of good qualities’ ... the Holy Ghost as gladly dwells under a mantle furred with beaver as a rough goat’s fell” (407). Here, the maintenance of spiritual and worldly identity in the face of more static ideals indicates that despite architectural, economic, and sartorial rules Edith of Wilton was able to exist more fluidly within her monastic boundaries.

In contrast, Eileen Power asserts that sartorial independence is questionable not for spiritual reasons, but because “their silks and furs must have cost money which could ill be spared” (211), thus concluding that the poverty of nunneries must in part be due to the nuns’ financial mismanagement. This sort of narrative of blame is also visible in eighteenth-century antiquarian works, as they base their accounts on the ruin and dissolution of monastic space necessary for the advent of Protestant English identity.

Displacement and Dissolution

Because the nunnery always indicated a kind of private symbol of larger political and social trends – an ideal of enclosure that could never exist as such because it was predicated upon its larger socio-political signification – at the Reformation, in exile, during the French Revolution and during the Catholic Emancipation debates, communities of nuns continued to epitomize feminine and domestic ideals. The fact that boundaries were not as clear for nuns and nunneries as both Catholic and Protestant idealists would have them means that despite dissolution, exile and oppression, communities of nuns and other incarnations of religious and educational institutions for women continued to exist after the Reformation. After the dissolution of the monasteries between 1536 and 1539, nuns went into exile, married, or re-formed monastic communities. But the possibilities in ruin were ambiguous because they introduced both repression and agency for nuns, while at the same time adapting the Catholic architectural and feminine ideal into a Protestant rejection of the “unproductive” nun.

Thomas Wolsey (and Thomas Cromwell after him) “preferred to use reform as an excuse for dissolution” and focused on “the immoral lives of monks and nuns” in order to dissolve their houses (McNamara 424).¹⁵ This refusal to acknowledge the ability of the church to dictate the terms of virginity and reproduction characterizes the paradoxical turn to Protestant domestic ideals in the period. Retha M. Warnicke explains that “unlike the Protestants, the Catholics believed that it was possible and even desirable for husbands and wives to overcome sexual temptations. Contending that God had recognized celibacy as the perfect human state, they permitted consenting partners to dwell together in continence, a marital relationship outlawed by reformers” (178). This is perhaps why “a corody holder or a nun like Sister Ryvel at Denny” could go “back to her husband and four children when the crown closed the monastery” (McNamara 424). McNamara goes on to delineate the fate of some of the nuns following the Reformation:

Eventually every house was closed and the nuns turned out without their dowries to seek shelter from their families or live as best they could on meager pensions.... The Six Articles of 1539 declared it a felony to break a vow of chastity.... Lay sisters and novices generally did not receive pensions because it was assumed they could marry. Hungry and abused, many nuns held out in their decaying buildings until forced away and still lived to return under Mary Tudor. (426)

Caught between the Protestant ideal of marriage and a simultaneous emphasis on the vow of chastity, post-Reformation nuns lacked a clear space and a clear identity in English society. However, stories of perseverance and dedication during the Renaissance demonstrate their continued ability to change and adjust.

Mary Champney, Mary Ward, and the English nunneries that survived in exile exemplify the ways that women redefined their spiritual identities in response to the Reformation. Syon Abbey was one English nunnery that managed to exist after the Reformation, right up until they returned to England in 1861. Syon Abbey “did not ... surrender either its seal or its keys” but the remaining nuns and brothers of the house went abroad in 1546 and returned to their former monastery in 1557 during Mary’s reign. They were forced into exile again in 1559, but “managed to survive as a community despite the constant necessity of moving,” finally settling at Lisbon “where the main community remained until 1861. In that year the nuns returned to England and settled at Spettisbury in Dorset” (Hutchinson 11). In her analysis of the life of Mary Champney, Ann M. Hutchinson explains the importance of Champney’s *Life* in terms of the identity of the exiled house:

The Life, though describing events after the monastery’s official suppression, is particularly valuable – it provides a glimpse into the daily

¹⁵ McNamara specifically cites the fact that the “visitors noted thirty-eight nuns who had borne children, but only twenty-seven were actually charged with incontinence and, of those, seventeen were later given crown pensions, which suggests that the charges were unfounded ... often, a sin had long since been expiated and the nun had grown old in good repute” (424).

life of the nuns in exile. Since the reigns of both of Elizabeth's siblings were relatively short, it is not surprising that the Bridgettines, like many other English Catholics, harboured expectations of being re-established in England in the not-too-distant future. Thus, as is so often the case with exiles, the Bridgettines seem to have preserved their cherished traditions with utmost care. (13)

The maintenance of their identities in the face of exile and hardship – Warnicke notes that they underwent “harrowing experiences in exile” (173) – is an example of the importance of religious enclosure to the way these women defined themselves. Hutchinson argues that the life of Mary Champney is especially important, not just because it describes the nuns' activities in suppression, but also because “this author's immediate intention and chief purpose in describing the life and death of Sister Mary Champney is to strengthen the faith of English Catholics who lived in fear at this time and provide them with an inspiring role model” (5).

Mary Ward's adoption of Jesuit rule offers a slightly later example of the same kind of perseverance (and unique assertion) of female monasticism in exile from post-Reformation England. It also provides a narrative of female education that emphasizes the need for flexible boundaries in order to maintain agency in the face of Church and other institutional structures. Mary Ward (1585-1645) was an English Catholic, who initially joined “a community of Poor Clares in Saint-Omer, in Flanders” but who left that community in 1606 to found “a school for Englishwomen, where they taught Catholic girls” in 1609. It was “the first in a long series of colleges for Catholic girls, which grew up all over Europe, under the name of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the English Ladies as it was commonly known” (Evangelisti 212). Ward wished for her community to adopt the Jesuit rule, because “as she wanted to teach girls how to be good Catholics, and not necessarily how to become nuns, she thought that this task was better performed in an open community than in a closed one” and she “saw the active missionary role of the Jesuits in the world as a model for her own mission” (213). This refusal to adopt typical forms of religious femininity in order to provide education for English Catholics constituted a heretical act for Mary Ward. In her attempt to maintain Catholic identity in the face of the English Reformation, Ward also challenges categories of Catholic enclosure and identity. She tried to find “a way for women to participate in active spiritual renewal and fight for the Catholic faith,” but she and her English Ladies “caused concern ... because they were difficult to classify, and blurred the boundaries between the religious and secular spheres. They were religious women whose non-cloistered life made it unthinkable to associate them with nuns – as nuns should be enclosed” (215). This threat of misidentification goes hand-in-hand with the Ladies' exile from England and their goal of education for women whose identities were more malleable than Protestant English or Roman officials wished to acknowledge; for Ward and her ladies fit in neither space and instead sculpted one out for themselves, even in their choice of wardrobe:

The decision of Ward not to adopt conventual dress presented another public relations problem, for it infuriated many of the Catholic faithful, especially in England, where she and her associates traveled in the disguise of gentlewomen to avoid capture by pursuivants. Even her semi-religious habit that allowed for the free movement that was impossible in the traditional garb of the religious, evoked ‘surprise and disgust’ in many circles. (Warnicke 176)

Ward managed to continue her work in the secular form after the Pope refused to sanction her institution, abolished it, and imprisoned her in another convent for two months (Evangelisti 216, Warnicke 176). It was only after her death that the institution flourished, and “in the eighteenth century, the Roman Church finally approved the Institute of English Ladies in its secular form – a decision that was probably motivated by the increasing popularity of the Institute, as well as the demand for institutions devoted to female education” (Evangelisti 217).

Evangelisti also notes that later incarnations of the schools very much replicated English class boundaries and feminine roles, and that “in the end, the institutes of the English Ladies prepared their charges for marriage and family life, following class divisions and reproducing the most stereotypical gender values. This was not what Mary had originally in mind” (218). This is perhaps another reason why they were sanctioned by the Roman Church in the eighteenth century, along with the undeniable demand for the Catholic education of English young ladies. The educational institution was quite nicely tied up in making young English wives and mothers, although as Evangelisti reminds us, there was also “the chance for the unmarried women who joined the group and worked in it to pursue a teaching career living in an institution which was neither a convent nor a family” (218).

Mary Ward’s earlier disguise of a gentlewoman turned out not to be a disguise at all, but a sartorial premonition of a future return to the Church-sanctioned ideal.

The kind of mutable identity that Mary Ward advocated was also important at the English Augustinian convent of St. Monica’s, which was located in Louvain (Warnicke 174). Claire Walker studies the educational aspect of this house in detail, and (as I already mentioned in my above discussion of the Mary/Martha dichotomy) finds that the nuns manipulated their contemplative and ministerial roles in order to maintain an existence during their exile:

Restricted to contemplation behind convent walls, the nuns had to generate income from within the enclosure, through tasks that did not interfere unduly with the daily cycle of formal religious observances.... Just as the cloisters manipulated the position of ‘Mary’ to gain income through the opus dei, so did they adapt ‘Martha’s’ housewifely concerns to generate payment for domestic chores.... The most obvious examples of this manipulation of household activities were the schools and boarding facilities operated by English convents. (408)

The nuns at St. Monica’s could survive spiritually within their enclosure, while simultaneously making connections with the larger English Catholic community

in order to survive financially.¹⁶ In a similar manner to the later incarnations of Mary Ward's English Ladies, they also combined proper domestic education with financial security when they reinforced feminine ideals in their pupils: "Although convent schools and guest houses within the enclosure directly contravened the terms of enclosure, the nuns justified their actions as necessitated by the desperate situation of Catholics in England. Moreover, their activities conformed with traditional roles for gentlewomen" (411). Their plight as exiled English Catholics allowed these nuns the freedom to gain economic agency within the strict rules of enclosure; their roles as educators and nurturers as well as contemplative and spiritual leaders dictated their manipulation of space and identity, rather than restricting it. This fluid movement from one identity to another provides yet another example of the ways that nuns used their social contexts – especially in the form of exile – to maintain or manipulate identities. The educational and maternal aspects of the nunnery remained important throughout the eighteenth century, and became a major point of contention during the French Revolution, when the nuns of St. Monica's "relocated in their homeland while the colony they had founded at Bruges in 1629 was returned to the town of its origin after dwelling in England from 1794 to 1803" (174).

The French Revolution and Catholic Emancipation

The characterization of nuns and nunneries during the French Revolution, and the return and exile of many nuns and monks to England during the revolution are relevant to my discussion of the imagination of Catholic identity in the eighteenth-century English landscape. The ways that the perception of nuns' gender roles changed based on the socio-political characterization of them indicates this malleable treatment of architecture and identity that I argue is inherent to both early modern and modern understandings of nuns. As Mita Choudhury argues, French representations of the convent in the eighteenth century emphasized women's roles as primarily reproductive and domestic:

In the vocation forcée narrative, men of letters were not asking who should control convents and nuns so much as whether the convent had a place in society, especially as its religious purpose seemed to diminish ... A woman's virtue was no longer centered on her Christian morals.... The trial briefs for the mother superiors as well as elements of the forced vow narrative reveal that women were being redefined in terms of their biological capacity to reproduce. (127)

In eighteenth-century France and England virtue lay not in a woman's moral responsibility to God, but in her moral responsibility to reproduce (to the nation and to her husband), which locates her virginity in her physical body rather than in her intangible spirit. Choudhury argues that this questioning of nuns' maternal

¹⁶ As Walker details, "the financial rewards reaped by convents for their educative work far exceeded the price they exacted for the task. The annual schooling and boarding fee paid by the parents of the inmates was often supplemented by further donations and gifts to the house" (409).

roles extended to convent education, which is interesting in terms of the navigation between productive and spiritual ideals that the post-Reformation English convents seemed to perform so well. Choudhury charts the negotiation of female education in Catholic France from the medieval church's suspicion "of women as teachers" to "the early modern church, in the wake of the Reformation," which "viewed these pedagogical 'brides of Christ' as a means of retaining its control over women and families.... teaching orders were responsible for reshaping the female convent into an arena of female education as well as devotion, one that served the needs of a wider cross-section of elite society" (129-130). At the time of the Revolution, though, the nuns' roles as educators of young girls were questioned due to an emphasis on the maternal, reproductive ideals mentioned above.

This questioning of nuns' productivity and femininity seems to be a typical response of the social and political communities that feel threatened by the ambiguous nature of nuns and nunneries. Thus, the suppression of the convents in eighteenth-century France leads to narratives of exile and survival, this time with England as the place of refuge and reintegration. McNamara explains, "English nuns fleeing the Terror or surviving it in 1795, determined to go to England, where the Relief Act had granted Catholics greater toleration, and begin the reestablishment of the monastic way of life there" (566).¹⁷ The English religious landscape, in turn, developed according to this influx of exiled Catholic communities:

There was a great wave of anti-Revolutionary feeling in England. The French clergy, thought of as sufferers victimised by the Revolutionaries, received an astonishingly warm welcome from the most Protestant of the English. Without batting an eyelid, the government set aside large sums to provide the French priests with pensions.... There was approbation for the establishment at public expense of Catholic chapels for the clergy. The English Catholic refugees received a less ecstatic, but still remarkably warm and friendly reception. (Aveling 316)

Because these refugees signified the rejection of a Revolutionary ideal that repudiated the aristocracy, English Protestants treated them as though they were protecting themselves from the same kind of dangerous "other" that Catholicism (superficially) stood for in their rejection of it as a part of their national past in

¹⁷ McNamara's description of the exile of nuns during the French Revolution is uncannily like the descriptions of the fates of nuns during the English suppression of the monasteries: "Estimated numbers of nuns expelled from their communities range from 30,000 to 55,000. Most of them sank into the unknown. Only 6,700 former nuns still living in 1800 resumed their vows. Some 356 nuns and *conversae* are known to have married, mostly to priests combining their poor pensions. Another 700 are known to have found secular employment or otherwise settled in the world as single people and asked to be relieved of their vows between 1800 and 1808. For the rest, we have only flashes of information. Many of the oldest nuns died almost immediately after expulsion. Some of the youngest were seduced or raped. Those who could took refuge with their families, but older nuns often had no families and others found their families had emigrated or had no use for them. When their pensions were not paid, some starved" (566).

order to forge a Protestant domestic idea. Interestingly, Aveling also notes that reception of the English Catholic refugees was less enthusiastic, indicating that the English persisted in their rejection of their own Catholic past.

The economic and social integration of the Catholic émigrés into the English landscape led to both a rejection and acceptance of Catholic education and identity. As a result, all kinds of allowances were made, but were visibly controlled by the Protestant government:

Public funds were earmarked to provide the nuns with pensions, if they applied through a Protestant peer. Protestant grandees offered the nuns rent-free accommodation... The nuns themselves, who had arrived in England in ill-fitting second-hand lay clothes, soon found that they could wear full religious habits indoors without the least question or concern from Protestant neighbours, who usually thought they were French. (316).

The nuns' assumption of the French religious habit gives them agency when their neighbours accept them as "other" – even if they are not.¹⁸

Although they escaped and were reintegrated into the English landscape, the English communities that fled Revolutionary France did not necessarily survive. As the nineteenth century progressed, the women's religious Orders suffered greatly and a number of communities – the Benedictines of Pontoise and Boulogne, the Paris Blue Nuns and the Mary Ward community at Hammersmith – foundered. But on the whole the nuns displayed more staying power and ingenuity than the male religious and recovered their feet faster. (Aveling 321)

That the educational Hammersmith community did not survive is interesting in light of their original purpose to educate Catholic daughters in the hopes that they could one day return to England. It may be that the trend against Catholic educators as un-maternal, which Choudhury notices in pre-Revolutionary France, was too much an aspect of English Protestant cultural identity for the community to survive, even in the anti-Revolutionary contexts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This confusing integration and refusal of identity has much to do with the way that the rejection and idealization of an English Catholic past acted as a cornerstone for national identity. Indeed, in her discussion of Catholic Emancipation, Linda Colley argues that the superstition of a Catholic "other" led to a particularly classed and gendered reaction to Catholicism in the early

¹⁸ Similarly, the loss of identity that monasteries and convents faced as they escaped from Revolutionary France is invested in the people, monastic objects and valuable goods that they are unable to re-transport back to England: "The transplantation of the English from the Continent had its black side also. For the most part the operation was not performed speedily and cleanly. Most religious communities had to endure months or years of imprisonment in France and left behind them there a scattering of unfortunates" (Aveling 318).

nineteenth century.¹⁹ Colley notes that the response to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 was a particularly class-driven one, with middle and upper-class concerns about military expansion and “Catholic service in the British military machine at a time of increasingly large and dangerous wars” playing a role, “but the wider argument – that an intolerance forged in the sixteenth century when England was small and vulnerable was inappropriate for the range and power of the British empire three hundred years later – was an important one” (328). In this sense, the government was consciously re-imagining the British relationship with its Catholic past on terms that repudiated the Catholic religion’s importance to domestic identity, thus effectively erasing its threat to Protestant ideals. For the protesters of the act,

Protestantism was not just a species of religious belief, anymore than Roman Catholicism was. Protestantism was a vital part of who they were now, and the frame through which they looked at the past. The evidence suggests that many ordinary Britons who signed anti-Catholic petitions in 1828-9 saw themselves, quite consciously, as being part of a native tradition of resistance to Catholicism which stretched back for centuries and which seemed, indeed, to be timeless. (Colley 330)

That the identity they imagined relied just as heavily on the aesthetic, architectural, and actual continued existence of Catholicism in the landscape, in literature, and in the nation itself was a consideration that those middle and upper-class citizens who introduced the Act wished both to deny in the face of a larger British nationalism, and to rely on in the construction of particular forms of national selfhood.²⁰

Domestic femininity was one of the ideals that relied heavily on a re-working of the space of enclosure and community that the nunneries exemplified, and – as we have seen – was adapted and rejected by Protestant England in an attempt to encourage physical virtue and maternity. The lower-class female population refused to believe that this way of imagining self was no longer an important part of national identity. Instead, a large number of working-class

¹⁹ Although she admits, “events in Ireland were crucial, of course, in forcing the Tory administration finally to grasp the nettle” and that the cities in Northern England that housed the most Irish immigrants “petitioned strongly against Catholic emancipation in 1829” (328, 329), Colley also argues, “anti-Irish sentiment, whether founded on economic grievances or ethnic prejudice, scarcely explains the sheer scale of the agitation against Catholic emancipation” (330).

²⁰ On the complexity of British responses to the Act, Colley notes: “To many Britons, it seemed that their rulers had palpably failed them – and failed God, history and the nation as well. At first glance, indeed, it is tempting to see the struggle over this issue as just one more example of that withdrawal of the upper classes from their former participation in popular culture which Peter Burke and others have detected in so many European states in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Here, apparently, was a clear case of a backward-looking and still rigidly Protestant population being left in the lurch by an élite that had discarded traditional attitudes in favour of newer and more secular imperatives. Yet, on both sides, alignments were in reality far more complex than this. For not only was Britain’s governing élite divided in its support for Catholic emancipation – the king and a vociferous minority of peers and MPs were furious at the concession – but the people below were by no means united in opposing it” (332).

women signed petitions to Parliament protesting Catholic emancipation. Colley speculates that this could be because women were “more dependent on that traditional, largely oral culture in which Protestant intolerance was so deeply embedded” and suggests that “the prominence of women in this agitation was further confirmation that mass Protestantism was ceasing to be the violent and dangerous movement of the eighteenth century and before” (334).

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, woman’s domestic identity was founded on a rejection of the malleable space of the convent in favour of the productive space of marriage and the family. One of the questions I will be returning to throughout my study of the role of the nunnery in the imagination of English domestic identity is whether the rising middle-class characterization of virtue and productivity in the face of aristocratic stagnancy doubles the imagined space of the convent back upon itself – denying its productivity by associating it with the aristocracy, while simultaneously constructing the nuns as virtuous ideals of enclosed femininity aligned with the constructed private sphere of the late eighteenth century. Are lower-class women, in their reaction to the Emancipation Act of 1829, rejecting not the Act itself, but the Government’s attempt to erase the history of Catholic “othering” that was important to English domestic identity, but about to be forgotten in the face of greater “others”?²¹

This is a question I will aim to explore throughout my work and one that will specifically come to play in my chapter on Ann Radcliffe, and in the forward-looking aims of my conclusion. In an attempt to draw together these histories of both the antiquarian study of female monastic spaces, and the histories of the spaces as they defy the kinds of constructions eighteenth-century antiquarians impose upon them, I will analyze two specific sites of constructed domestic

²¹Dror Wahrman argues that the perception of race as mutable gives way to its reconceptualization “as an essential and immutable category, stamped on the individual,” just as he argues most categories of identity do starting in the 1770s (126). But his understanding of religious categories of identity as vacant, and so malleable, in the *ancien regime* of identity links the early eighteenth-century malleability of gender and sex to a secularism that is in fact obsessed with controlling the very terms of malleability that it attests to. For example, Wahrman argues that in the early century “God’s active and authoritative ordering of the world was superseded by man’s own, more tentative and open-ended, which prompted the reconstitution of the relevant notions and categories of identity” (200). This kind of reordering dictates categories of sex and gender through the construction of an ideal domestic sphere, as I see it, one that relies on a negation of Catholic femininity in order to simply re-construct the same terms of static domesticity *and* malleable agency. When he says that “a new space of potential possibilities opened up around the beginning of the eighteenth century: one in which boundaries of identity called for new demarcation, while the identity categories underpinning them could be imagined, or experimented with, as flexible and malleable” (202) Wahrman does not consider that in some senses this moment of transition from one way of defining self and other, to another seemingly opposite one, is one of many repeated similar moments (not necessarily always of the eighteenth century) – all in order to control the movement and malleability of those who threaten to undermine political, social and religious constructs.

identity in the form of two English nunneries, Romsey Abbey and Dartford Priory.

Part III: Spaces in Contrast: the Eighteenth-Century Image of the Early Modern Convent

Romsey, a pre-Conquest Benedictine house in Hampshire, and Dartford, a fourteenth-century Dominican house in Kent, figure prominently in the historical record; thus, I am able to draw on the same initial sources as the eighteenth-century antiquaries do, but will build on those sources with the social, cultural, material and archaeological perspectives and research that modern scholarship provides.

Romsey Abbey

Romsey was founded c. 907 and dissolved in 1539. Its royal foundation, an infamous instance of kidnapping, and the nuns' particular forms of submission to suppression are the characteristics of its imagined identity in both the eighteenth century and in modern attempts to historically patch together its story. Eighteenth-century images and narratives focus on the male lineage of the site and the power of the monastic community to control women's bodies and identities, while modern historians try to piece together the narratives that the antiquarian accounts leave out, but often reassert similar narratives of self and nation.

Thomas Cox focuses his account on the male royal foundation of the nunnery, and emphasizes the power of aristocratic heritage as evidenced by their control over domestic space:

Rumsey, a Benedictine Monastery, built by King Edward the Elder, for Monks, but changed into a Nunnery by King Edgar, his Grandson, who placed those religious Women there, under the Government of Merwina their Abbess, A.D. 907. He confirmed and enlarged the Endowments of his Grandfather, which were farther increased and again confirmed by King Henry III. and King Edward I. together with all their Liberties. In this Abbey were buried King Edward, and his Son Alfred, and St. Eadburga the Founder's Daughter. (892)

The emphasis here is on the fact that the space was founded first for monks, but changed to a nunnery when King Edward's grandson "placed those religious Women there." Cox also reinforces the male aristocratic control of the female space with his emphasis on the lineage of confirmation from Edgar to Henry III, to Edward I, and with the inclusion of the fact that the male founders and the "founder's daughter" are all buried at this location. This historical narrative is in many senses a copy of earlier narratives left over from the twelfth century, and one that shapes the narratives available to modern historians unless they search for more details in the archaeological, architectural, and documentary remains. As Coldicott recounts:

At the start of his reign, Edward carried out his father's wishes and built the New Minster in Winchester ... as well as completing the first Nunnaminster buildings after the death of his mother. It seems reasonable to assume that the foundation of Romsey Abbey also dates from these years of relative peace before 909 [when the wars with the Danes started]. A date of c.907 is sometimes given and may well be right but it cannot be proved. The chronicles that can be cited are the *Liber de Hyda* which mentions that Edward's daughter Elfleda was at Romsey, and Florence of Worcester who wrote that in 967 'Edgar the Pacific, King of England, placed nuns in the monastery at Romsey founded by his grandfather, Edward the Elder...' Florence compiled his chronicle at the start of the 12th century, using the work of several early writers but he based it particularly on an earlier chronicle written by Marianus Scotus that has since been lost. (6)

In contrast to the eighteenth-century assumption that the source text's emphasis on Edward's action of *placing* the nuns in Romsey is a reliable one, Diana K. Coldicott is careful to emphasize the faulty chain of historical documentation from the tenth to the twelfth century, which results in the loss of documentary evidence in the current era. Because of these modern anxieties about lost narrative, Coldicott augments the eighteenth-century focus on patrilineal heritage when she speculates about *why* Edward the Elder erected another nunnery, which indicates that as a modern historian she does not credit the source of Cox's statement that the site was originally intended for monks. Instead she considers:

As it is evident from Edward's career that he was a thoughtful and patient planner, it seems likely that he would have ... perhaps looked forward to Romsey's development as a future *burh* with a defence potential.... At the practical level he may have felt there was a need to make further provision for widows and unmarried ladies of the royal family (7).²²

This connection between royal and feminine identity in relation to Romsey's religious role ties together claims that eighteenth-century antiquaries emphasize in their focus on women's and nuns' bodies in their accounts.

²² Sarah Foot also speculates about Romsey's foundation in relation to the spiritual revival during Edgar's reign: "Few of the communities of women religious surveyed here can be shown to have been endowed specifically to advance the spiritual ideals promoted through the monastic revolution of Edgar's reign, even though the contemporary rhetorical writing concerning that movement made the involvement of women's houses in the revival explicit, and historians have tended to presume that most of the nunneries newly founded in the tenth century did play a part in the revival of monasticism, as we have already seen. Romsey and Horton are the sole houses which might conceivably be thought to have been established at the height of the reform. There are, however, three conflicting versions of Romsey's origins: John of Worcester stated that King Edgar placed nuns in the house at Romsey which his grandfather, Edward the Elder had founded, but William of Malmesbury thought Edgar himself responsible for the nunnery's creation. The fourteenth-century *Vita S Elfleda* attributed the foundation both to an ealdorman Æthelwold, father of the saint, and to King Edgar" (160-161).

Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's 1731 image of Romsey Nunnery [figure 12] and the *Antiquarian Repertory*'s 1777 image of Romsey's church [figure 13] highlight its aristocratic heritage, sense of community, and the importance of female bodies to both of these ideals. Buck's caption reads:

This Nunnery was founded by K. Edgar for Nunns of the Benedictine Order.... In this the only Child of K. Stephen was profess'd & became Abbess, but was privately convey'd thence & Married by Humphrey of Alsace, Son of an Earl of Flanders, who had two Daughters by her. But Ecclesiastical Authority prevailing, she was forc'd to retire again to this Monastery according to her first Vow. (41)

Buck's focus on the forced movement of Mary de Blois divests her of any agency in the face of the architecture of the monastery and of "Humphrey" of Alsace, who also has a limited amount of power over "ecclesiastical authority."²³ The image this caption accompanies portrays an imposing structure, which overpowers the landscape around it and gives an architectural impression of the Catholic Church's authority over Mary's body, despite her roles of wife and mother (which Buck emphasizes in contrast to "her first Vow"). As an early eighteenth-century antiquary, Buck's focus is on preservation and the incorporation of the authority of the church into the authority of the aristocratic family.

Similarly, the description from the *Repertory* emphasizes Mary's two vows, but in a way that more obviously denies the existence of both simultaneously:

This venerable Pile was the conventual Church of the Nunnery once standing here.... From this Nunnery Matthew of Alsace, son of the Earl of Flanders, found means to convey privately the Princess Mary, the only daughter and heir of King Stephen, then Abbess thereof, whom he married; but by the anathema of the church was obliged to restore her, even after she had borne him two children. (161)

The *Repertory* places the power of the Catholic Church in direct contrast, not to Mary or Matthew of Alsace, but to her reproductive capabilities when the author explains Mary's restoration to the church "even after she had born him two children." Whereas Buck's account explains Mary's return to cloistered life in terms of a "first vow," the 1777 *Repertory* speaks of it in terms of a "restoration" that Matthew must perform despite Mary's familial role. Buck's earlier text also emphasizes her return to English soil, while the *Repertory* more accurately only mentions her restoration to the church. As Coldicott points out, "eventually, after the birth of two daughters, the couple parted and Mary passed her remaining years in a French convent at Montreuil" (33). Both Buck and the *Repertory* obscure the fact that it was a political marriage, and instead focus on the movement to and from the stronghold of the nunnery in a construction of female identity as either

²³ This is Buck's mistake, Mary de Blois was married to Matthew of Alsace (Count of Flanders) who then became count of Boulogne due to Mary's mother Matilda's title of Boulogne.

religious or domestic. As a result, they heighten the myth of abduction and the architectural seclusion in monastic spaces. However the *Repertory*'s image of Romsey distances the eighteenth-century architectural site from the site of the medieval nunnery, especially by referring to the building's identity as the "church" and not what remains of the nunnery. The engraving depicts a quiet country scene of community-living, with townspeople fishing and walking with baskets in hand; it places the community and heritage of the site (the reproductive elements of the story) above the imposing structure to which Buck's earlier engraving gives deference.

Coldicott considers Mary's marriage as a political move on her own part: She was abbess of Romsey by 1160 but then, in spite of her vows, she married Matthew, count of Boulogne, the son of the count of Flanders. Undoubtedly her cousin, Henry II, was largely responsible for promoting the marriage but it is difficult to exonerate Mary entirely. There was so much disapproval of the match in high places that she could surely have avoided it had she been determined to do so. (33)

The ambiguous status of the nunnery as both a prison and a sanctuary – as a space that controls and confines, but in reality is still permeable and changeable – highlights the confusion not only of ideals of femininity in the medieval era, but also in the later centuries (such as the eighteenth century, but not precluding contemporary interpretations of the space). The political actions of women thought to be enclosed within Romsey are indicative of this inability to construct the space of the nunnery as an entirely repressive one. McNamara notes:

This prevailing confusion about the status of women in convents may shed light on a famous case from the end of this period. The Anglo-Saxon princess Edith (later Mathilda) wished to leave Romsey abbey to marry Henry I of England. Despite her claim that she had only put on the veil under her aunt's coercion after she entered the abbey to take refuge from the invading Normans, she had great difficulty persuading ecclesiastical authorities to approve this politically desirable union. (193)

The political agency and amount of control women had over their own protection from the outside world or subjection to the ecclesiastical world was not only in question in eighteenth-century configurations of female monastic space, but also in medieval ones, and current historians struggle to understand the actual mutability of such spaces.

Another account of abduction at Romsey underlines this navigation of female bodily identity that is so important to the way we understand eighteenth-century antiquarian constructions of gender and religious identity (not to mention contemporary ones). Eileen Power tells a story about the 1375 abduction of "Joan, late the wife of Peter Brugge, and her property, consisting of her gold rings, gold brooches or bracelets with precious stones, linen and woollen clothes and furs; her chaplain aiding" (424). The abduction of Joan's body and property in spite of sanctuary questions the impenetrable ideal of the nunnery, but Coldicott questions the culpability of her chaplain and men because "he and all the perpetrators were

pardoned in the course of the next seven years” and “wonders if the lady herself had been not unwilling” (92). This is a surprising consideration, but one that historians (eighteenth-century antiquaries, Power, and even Coldicott) lean toward or away from given the impossibility of knowing the degrees of control or agency that women could acquire from the almost unreadable social and architectural space of the convent. The suppression narratives of Romsey Abbey also draw attention to this problem, which is a very important one for eighteenth-century literature and fiction that attempts to bury or reclaim such mutable aspects of the nunnery.

Romsey was a large nunnery when it was suppressed, containing 25 nuns in addition to the abbess. Knowles and Hadcock assume that at Romsey “the nuns seem to have refused to surrender, so that after the suppression in 1539 the only pension granted was to the chaplain of the abbess” (264). Thomas Cox does not mention this resistance, but merely gives a history of the Abbey’s ownership: “After the Dissolution of this Abbey, divers Messuages, Lands and Tenements, with the Appurtenances lying in the same Parish, and formerly belonging to it, were among other Lands given by King *Edward VI.* to his Uncle, *Thomas Lord Seymour*, then Lord High Admiral of *England*” (892). Cox does not mention why or how Thomas Seymour acquired the lands, nor his particular family connection to them. Volume II of the *Antiquarian Repertory* only explains that the chaplain of the abbess was granted a pension, and not that the nuns were refused one: “Browne Willis, in his History of Abbies, has not only preserved the name of the last Abbess, which was Elizabeth Ryprose, but also that of her chaplain or confessor, Henry Warner, who, at the dissolution had a pension of 11l. 8s. 8d. per ann. assigned him” (161). The *Repertory*’s emphasis on Warner’s pension seems odd in contrast to his specific reference to Ryprose, but there is no speculation about why her pension is lacking.

Coldicott pieces together a different set of circumstances in her book *Hampshire Nunneries*. She explains that Sir Thomas Seymour expressed interest in Romsey Abbey because of a family connection, “for the abbesses of Romsey had had a portion in Wolf Hall, his family’s seat in Wiltshire, by the 15th century” and “his cousins, Katherine and Jane Wadham, who were the sub-prioress and sexton respectively of the abbey” most likely assisted him in this matter (136). Coldicott cites a letter from one John Foster that responds to Seymour’s interest in the nunnery, which seems to indicate that the nuns would not be unhappy to surrender the house to Seymour, although they may have problems with the commissioners (Coldicott 138). Coldicott speculates that pensions may be absent because “Sir Thomas Seymour paid them ... before his execution in 1549” (139). McNamara mentions yet another possibility, and one that heightens the strategic dissolution of the Abbey, but places this within the context of the ways that nuns were able to undermine the crown’s control: “A niece of Queen Jane Seymour at Romsey married the steward after conniving at the dispersion of the community”

(425).²⁴ Thus, McNamara's account gives Jane Seymour's niece, Jane Wadham, more agency than other accounts allow her.

Cox and the *Repertory*, as eighteenth-century sources of imagined medieval identity, focus on the male lineage of the Abbey's lands – they forge a clear connection between the dissolution of the nunnery and the two male figures who were provided for as a result of this dissolution. Their focus is on the royal history of the site, its buried and simultaneously pregnant identity, and the ways that its myths of origin and dissolution confirm a continuous English national investment in landscape – even if that landscape is now buried or reformed into a different kind of church and community. Because these eighteenth-century antiquarian sources fail to search beyond the narratives they read in previous antiquarian texts, the importance of the royal origins, the threat of kidnapping and monastic protection or sheltering of complicated sexuality, and the reinforcement of a lack of attention to the lives of nuns after the dissolution means that the modern historians have their work cut out for them – which leads them to the speculations we see Knowles and Hadcock and Coldicott making above.

Dartford Priory

Dartford Priory was a Dominican house of nuns that followed “the Rule of St Augustine, observed in all Dominican convents, and the constitutions of the Dominican order” (Lee 25). It was founded between 1346 and 1356, by King Edward III (originally proposed by Edward II) and was officially dissolved in 1539, although the narrative of its dissolution provides more evidence of its existence post-dissolution (and questions that existence), than does the antiquarian and historical narrative of Romsey Abbey. In fact, its existence as a “house” before its foundation and after its dissolution forms a major part of its importance to both eighteenth-century and more modern narratives. A focus on Dartford Priory's aristocratic identity, the unique character and mutable boundaries of the Dominican order, as well as the history of its property, pensions and the place of the nuns and the building after the dissolution, all reincorporate this nunnery into English Protestant identity.

In the 1738 work *Magna Britannia Antiqua & Nova*, attributed to Thomas Cox, the author focuses on the nobility and the prosperity of the Priory, specifically at the hands of its male founders, rather than the nuns who made their residence there. He states that Dartford was, “a Nunnery founded by King *Edward*

²⁴Coldicott covers this post-dissolution marriage in more detail, and in a way that explores the need for nuns' mutable identities in the face of the loss of the space of the nunnery. She explains that Jane Wadham (one of the relations of Thomas Seymour mentioned above) married the chaplain and receiver at the abbey. This is the same chaplain who received the only pension after the dissolution, which makes Jane Wadham's manipulation of the dispersion of the nunnery more significantly part of her ability to provide for herself in its absence. Despite her husband's concern after a public outcry against their marriage, Coldicott notes that Wadham “petitioned the king and in 1541 he ordered the bishops of Durham, Rochester and Westminster to hold a commission of enquiry into the marriage with the authority to pronounce it valid if they found it to be so” (146).

III. in the Year 1355 ... for a Prioress ... and 39 Sisters”, and goes on to specify: “The Abbess and Nuns of this Convent ... were for the most Part elected into the Cloister out of the noblest Families of the Nation, and so the Abbess was called Lady. Thus we find that *Bridget*, the fourth Daughter of King *Edward IV.* and the Daughters of the Lords *Scroop* and *Beaumont* were Lady Abbesses of this House” (1241). Cox exaggerates when he extends the rank of nobility to all of the nuns, as does Frederick Newman, in the *Curiosities and Beauties of England Displayed* (c.1795), who returns to the popular information: “The fourth daughter of king *Edward IV.* and several noble persons, were prioresses or nuns in this house at Dartford” (Newman n. pag.). Newman also gives an account of the physical site of the house which secures its royal identity before its foundation:

It is a conjecture of Lambard’s, that there was some religious institution here before the period we have mentioned, or as he expresses himself ‘some fair house of the king’s, or some other,’ on account of the emperor Frederic sending hither in Henry the Third’s time, to demand Isabel, the king’s sister, whom he married by proxy in the town; and he concludes, if there were no such house it would be difficult to find ‘a meet place for so honourable an appointment.’ It has been observed that some large house, whether dedicated to the monastic use or not, might have stood there; but if so, it was most probably given to these nuns. (Newman n. pag.)

Francis Grose also cites this example from Lambard in his earlier account (1773-76), but adds: “Indeed the charter of Edward III, printed in the Monasticon, recites, among other grants, that of the mansion-house in which the nuns then dwelt” (27). This emphasis on an architectural edifice that pre-dates the convent, and inherently contains royal purposes and identities rather than spiritual ties, indicates the strong connection these authors wish to convey between the aristocratic domestic space and the space of the ideal convent (a space that, as they themselves show when they draw attention to its transformation) is more malleable (and depends on that malleability more) than they can admit.

Cox, Newman, and Grose all focus on the quantity of aristocratic nuns at Dartford and a male royal foundation that pre-dates and provides a premise for the nunnery itself. In contrast, modern historian Paul Lee notes, “a small minority of rank and file nuns at Dartford whose names survive were from noble or royal backgrounds” (62), while “most ... recorded in fifteenth and sixteenth-century documents were from families of London merchants and professionals in the royal service and/or from those of local minor gentry” (63). Why, then, are Cox, Grose and Newman all adamant that the nuns at Dartford were universally genteel and aristocratic?

One possibility is that an emphasis on male foundation and Royal endowment is a response to Dartford as a site that exemplifies the possibilities of female agency within the (mutable) walls of the convent. The first indication that eighteenth-century antiquaries were confused by the mutability of Dartford as a religious and domestic site is their understanding of its alignment with the

Dominican and Augustine rule. Thomas Cox does not mention the Dominican context at all, merely stating that Edward III founded Dartford for “39 sisters, to live after the Order and Rule of Canons of St. *Augustine*” (1241). Francis Grose and Frederic Newman both treat the Dominican and Augustine rules as separate, and make sure to mention the control of the nuns by an outside order of friars as their final state of existence before the dissolution: “The prioress and nuns were first of the order of St. Augustine, then of St. Dominic, after that Augustine; again at the dissolution, Dominicans, but under the government of the black friars; and those of Langley, in Hertfordshire, seem to have had that care” (Grose 27). This varied state of existence, as Paul Lee and Nancy Bradley Warren explain it, held more agency for the Prioress than Grose and Newman indicate in their accounts.

As a Dominican house, Dartford was meant to benefit from the support of “a house of resident friars ... however, [Dominic] did not foresee the rapid growth of his second order and the friars began to struggle against this growing burden” (Lee 33). The compromise was for friars “to visit female convents assigned to them, correcting and reforming sisters and their superiors” (33). At Dartford, the important question of the friars’ authority leads to greater questions about the relationship between the nunnery and the outside world, and about the agency Prioresses and Abbesses had in the late medieval era (especially compared to the lack of authority accounts such as Cox’s, Grose’s and Newman’s give them). Dartford’s resident friars, who were from the monastery of Kings Langley, “were intended to shield the nuns from all secular jurisdiction, and their prior was charged with practical responsibility for the buildings as well as with spiritual duties” (34).

However, “the Dartford nuns did not prove to be a passive and easily controlled commodity for the friars of Kings Langley,” and in 1415 they “attempted to escape their subjection to Kings Langley. As the result of a dispute (apparently concerning the election of the prioress), Dartford made a bid for independence, threatening the economic well-being and the spiritual authority of the friars” (Warren xi). The matter became public when the sisters openly rebelled, forcing Pope Martin V’s decision “on 16 July 1418 ... in favour of the Langley friars to whose obedience the sisters were enforced by ecclesiastical censure” (Lee 38). Lee emphasizes the sisters’ continued autonomy even after this battle:

... from 1451, if not earlier, the nuns were allowed to choose their own confessors.... After the separation from Kings Langley the house of friar chaplains in Dartford Priory became a separate entity free of the jurisdiction of any other friary ... In 1481, the master general also stipulated that the confessor chosen by the prioress for the nunnery was not to be made prior.... The prioresses were most likely quite content with this. The provision was perhaps designed to preserve their long-established relative autonomy, whilst ensuring the prior provincial’s oversight. (38-39)

These negotiations of power and fluctuations in political and religious rule speak to the connections between female religious communities and their social and political landscapes. The nuns' attempt to gain independence from their supervising friars, and to control the supervision of their own house, indicates their ability to manipulate the spiritual and architectural boundaries that enclosed them. The fact that Cox, Grose, and Newman prefer to summarize these mutable boundaries as clear and distinctive ones speaks to their anxiety for a patrilineal narrative of ownership.

The antiquarian focus on the endowments and property of the nunnery also reinforce the patrilineal ideal, as do the images of Dartford, its architectural history, and the history of the nuns' bodies and spiritual identities after its dissolution. In contrast, the economic success of the nuns and their important connections to the community of Dartford provide a picture that is less about royal endowment and architectural space, and more about the role of the nuns in the local community and their persistent spiritual identity as a Dominican house after the dissolution.

Cox goes into detail about the provisions made for the nunnery: "King *Edward* endowed them with divers Lands in *Kent* and elsewhere, and other Benefactors, with several Houses and Rents in *London*" (1241). He further delineates the nunnery's properties in later generations: "King *Richard* II. also ... gave them the Manor of *Massingham* in *Norfolk*, with its Fairs, Markets, and Liberties," and "King *Edward*, at the Request of his Daughter and the Sisters, granted them a new Patent of Confirmation and Amendment, and so they enjoyed their Revenues and Liberties till the Dissolution of the Abbies by King *Henry* VIII" (1241).²⁵ Grose also lists the endowments that Edward III and Richard III give to the nunnery: "King Edward III.... grants and confirms to them divers manors, lands and tenements.... King Richard III. gives several manors in Norfolk, for the maintenance of a chaplain to pray for his good estate when living, and his soul after his decease, with those of the founders and benefactors of that monastery" (27). Newman's account of the endowments is not significantly different from Grose's account. All three emphasize the importance of the royal gifts of land and money, although Grose and Newman hint a little more clearly at the system of exchange that the royal patrons set up through their endowment when they point out that Richard III expects a chaplain to "pray for his good estate when living, and his soul after his decease" (27).

This request is not an unusual one, as the nuns were often bequeathed goods and lands in exchange for spiritual services; As Lee notes, "Dartford Priory competed with several other monastic and quasi-monastic institutions in west Kent for gifts of money and property usually made to procure their religious

²⁵ Cox's emphasis on their enjoyment of revenues until the dissolution draws yet another imaginary boundary between pre- and post-dissolution Dartford. As we will see, the Priory's economic interests after the dissolution are also an important aspect of its narrative.

services” (67).²⁶ Not only do these requests for prayers demonstrate a futurity that is interesting in the context of the dissolution and the eighteenth-century antiquarian reinterpretation of the dissolution as a necessary ruin for future salvation, they also speak to a special relationship between the lay community and the cloistered nuns (Lee 76).²⁷

In her study of seventeenth-century English cloisters in exile, Claire Walker explains yet another level of commodity exchange that highlights gender difference and privileges male monastic interaction with the community:

... at the very moment that the Church restricted nuns to the spiritual labor of prayer, it promoted salvation through regular attendance at the sacraments, especially the mass. Nuns, who had always been barred from conducting the eucharist, accordingly had to pay priests to say increasing numbers of masses for those benefactors who believed in the primacy of the sacraments over the prayers of nuns. Catholic reform therefore realigned the status of spiritual labor in a way that had severe economic implications for houses of religious women. (403)

In this manner, the Catholic Church attempted to control the amount of spiritual interaction nuns had with the community – an interaction that the nuns at Dartford seem to have understood as limiting.

Of course there was more than just an exchange of money and land for spiritual capital here, as Warren notes: “Edward III granted the prioress and sisters license to acquire property ... to sustain their community and that of the friars of Kings Langley.... Dartford received numerous endowments, always destined to support not only the sisters but also the friars at Kings Langley” (vii). This endowment of the female house in order to benefit a collaborative community between the male and female houses speaks to the ways that antiquaries aim to show that the female houses both participate in a larger medieval community and are excluded from it. Warren also emphasizes Dartford’s ability to take advantage of what was initially a way to give others support and money:

In spite of its obligation to support Kings Langley, Dartford became, in the course of its history, extraordinarily wealthy.... In the early sixteenth

²⁶ More specifically, Lee explains: “Twenty-eight wills proved in the consistory court of Rochester made between 1438 and 1537 indicated support for Dartford Priory. These were distributed evenly over the hundred-year period, including six legacies in the final decade before the Dissolution.... If the wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury made by inhabitants of Dartford are added to those proved in the consistory court of Rochester, it is found that there are a total of 158 surviving wills made by the inhabitants of Dartford between 1438 and 1537, twenty-eight of them by women. Overall, 16.5 per cent of these testators mentioned Dartford Priory, whether the nuns, the friars, both or without specifying. All of these priory benefactors were laypeople” (74). This kind of evidence of community support makes the nunnery less about aristocratic heritage, and more about the heritage of a thriving community (even commercial) relationship.

²⁷ Lee also explains the participation of the friars in these services, noting that although “the responsibility for organizing obits was ... given to the prioress.... Dartford Priory, like the Minories in London ... used its own friar chaplains, as well as specially employed secular clergy, for the celebration of masses and obits” (77).

century, the prioress, Elizabeth Cressener, drew up the *Rentale* giving detailed records of the house's holdings of land and property together with the rents and services owed to the house. This document testifies not only to the wealth of the house but also to the nuns' skill in business practices. (vii-viii)

This economic management also testifies to Dartford Priory's role in the community, and the ways that the walls of the convent were not (and could not be) as enclosed as the Dominican rule suggested. For example, as the holder of extensive land in Dartford and elsewhere the Priory "was unavoidably connected with its local parish in the practical business of land and property administration" which "brought the prioress into contact with secular officials" (96). Grose and some of the later antiquarian writers grasp onto this sense of community and continued relevance, but turn it into a question of domesticity, and follow the architectural and economic histories of the Priory and the nuns in order to impose an eighteenth-century ideal onto their narratives. This is especially relevant in their treatment of the architectural space and the history of that space after its dissolution.

The images of Dartford Priory in Grose, Newman and Dunkin all portray a coherent domestic site, rather than an obvious ruin [figures 14-16]. Grose's image [figure 14] is very similar to Newman's [figure 15], with human and animal activity in the foreground, and the remaining structure of the Priory predominating the middle ground. There is not much landscape in this ruin engraving, and the lack of overgrowth suggests the continued habitation of the Priory, even if it is only as "a fine gateway, and some contiguous building now used as a farm-house" (Grose 29). Newman's c.1795 engraving emphasizes the front of the building, including the entrance-way and more complete elements of the remaining structure, although he does not address the architecture specifically in his account. Grose's engraving "was drawn anno 1759" (30) and highlights the north-east side of the building (the same view as Newman, but with the front of the building in shade). This emphasis makes visible the ruinous stonework on the side of the building, which more effectively suggests its status as a crumbling edifice. Grose also gives a detailed account from "John Thorpe, Esq. of Bexley, dated November 9, 1771" which updates the 1759 image with the following information:

The site of the abbey was where the farmer's garden and stack-yard now are, and must have been a vast pile of a building; and doubtless very noble, suitable to such great personages as were members of it, as appears by a great number of foundations of cross walls, drains, &c. which have been discovered.... This abbey and its environs took up a great extent of land; for on the north-east side, fronting this view, were the large gardens and orchards, encompassed with the ancient stone wall still entire, and more than half a mile round, inclosing a piece of ground twelve acres, now ... rented by gardeners, to supply the London markets, and famous for producing the best artichokes in England ... The pinnacles

shewn on the top of the gateway [in the 1759 plate] have since been thrown down in placing an iron conductor, to prevent accidents from lightning. (30)

This information establishes the site as both a ruin and a contained and useful part of the landscape. Grose describes the remains of the medieval nunnery and comments on the current usefulness of what is left of the structure, including attempts at its modern preservation that lead to partial ruin of what the building once was (such as the addition of the lightening rod in favour of the pinnacles). Grose also acknowledges that the commerce and communal landscape of the eighteenth century relies on the ruins of past monastic architecture, while later authors like Newman and Dunkin prefer to return to the imagined complete ideal of Catholicism as a kind of Protestant fixture, complete in its role as a ruin.²⁸ The image of Dartford in Dunkin's *History and Antiquities of Dartford* (1844) [figure 16], provides an even more telescoped view of the ruin, with the front edifice displayed prominently and only a few branches of trees visible in the frame of the plate. The drawing represents only a glimpse at the Priory, and Dunkin's emphasis on the loss of the site and its romantic enclosure of female religious explains the lack of current contextual information.

Dunkin's tone is one of melancholic memorial in his 1844 account of Dartford. He first focuses on the religious and educational impact the nuns had on the community, and then goes on to mourn their loss. Of the dissolution he states:

Thus closed this religious House which had existed for one hundred and eighty two years, as a never failing source of relief to the poorest individuals of the neighbourhood, and oft-times an asylum for the widow, the orphan, and broken-hearted female in the upper classes of society. It had long been renowned as the principal *Seminary for the Education of the female Nobility and Gentry in the Country*; and the nuns devoted themselves so entirely to that object, combined with the service of their Redeemer, that even slander breathed not an injurious whisper when spies were sent from the court to get up charges against the religious. (162)

Of the fate of such empathetically framed nuns, Dunkin asserts: "Those of them who had relatives naturally sought asylum in the bosom of their own family or amongst their friends and being released from their religious obligations, probably some of the younger married, while the older were compelled to eke out their days on their miserable pensions" (164-165). Despite the way that he positively frames the nuns' impact on the community and the importance of their loss at the dissolution, Dunkin also assumes that they cannot carry on being nuns outside of their royally sanctioned identity; instead, he assumes that they were married, returned to their families, or subsided on their meagre pensions as non-nuns. Dunkin's Victorian account worries about the lives of the nuns after the

²⁸This is a different kind of preservation than that Stevens and Dugdale aim for in earlier images of ruined nunneries.

dissolution, because he defines the role of the nunnery to be specifically linked to ideal domestic education before the dissolution.

Similarly, C.F.R. Palmer's 1879 history of the Priory follows the nuns' narrative into their exile in France but emphasizes their role in education and their demise in exile. Of the role of the convent, he explains that it "became one of the most celebrated schools in the kingdom, 'to which the best and noblest families of the country sent their relatives both for education and as Nuns'" (257). Palmer follows the narrative of the nuns through an almost-re-instatement during the reign of Queen Mary, followed by an exile into Belgium and Antwerp where, "Elizabeth Cresner continued to be their prioress, and they maintained all the religious observances of their order" (271). Palmer also provides the information, in a note on the same page, that "the English Dominican Sisters were re-established, in 1660, in Belgium. Driven out of Brussels, in 1794, they came into England, and are now flourishing in the Isle of Wight" (271). This acknowledgement of the continued existence of the order, off and on, right up until their exile from Brussels during the era of Newman's own account of the house, is emblematic of Palmer's late Victorian context. He constructs the Dartford nuns just as the eighteenth-century antiquarian scholars do, but the security of domestic identity allows him to reinstate them into the English landscape, rather than focusing on the state of the Priory building after the dissolution.

In contrast, Cox cuts his narrative of Dartford off at the dissolution when he asserts that the nuns and prioress of Dartford "enjoyed their Revenues and Liberties till the Dissolution of the Abbies by King *Henry VIII*" (1241). Grose and Newman quote Tanner's assertion that the nuns were not restored during Queen Mary's reign, but are equivocal regarding the truth of their reinstatement. Instead, Grose gives an account of the pensions of the abbess and some of the nuns and then turns to a history of the ownership of the building, citing its use as a "royal mansion" under the ownership of King Henry VIII, Lord Thomas Seymour, Lady Anne Cleve, the Friars of Langly (who he says were restored during Queen Mary's reign – but he does not mention the nuns, except to cite Tanner), Queen Elizabeth I, James I, Robert Cecil, Sir Robert Darcy and his heirs, including Edward Darcy, who "sold this mansion and estates to Thomas George, of London, Esq." who left it to his son, who left it to his nephew, whose widow "now wife of Charles Morgan, Esq." possessed it at the time of Grose's account (28-29). This clear lineage makes the site very definitely one that the English landscape naturalizes as non-Catholic, aristocratic and subject to the religious affiliation of its royal owners.

Newman asserts Queen Mary's Protestant identity beneath her Catholic exterior when he denies that the nuns were restored at Dartford:

it is, perhaps, worth observing, that Mary was fond of alterations of her own, and while she professed to be, and really was a Catholic, yet she was pleased with exercising acts of ecclesiastical as well as civil supremacy, by which, paradoxical as it may seem, while it flattered her

in power, she also sought in some measure to establish the Roman Catholic religion, apparently on Protestant principles. (Newman n. pag.) This from an author (if Palmer's note is to be believed) who writes at the same time that the said order was in exile from Brussels and restored at the Isle of Wight. For Newman, the need to establish the Protestant identity of Dartford Priory involves its pictorial representation as a domestic site (not a ruin) and its identity, even in reestablishment, as a Protestant space. Grose similarly naturalizes the landscape, but less clearly as a domestic site, as he draws attention to its status as a ruin of an ideal that forms a whole other ideal of Protestant royal lineage and aesthetic landscape turned into commercial farming land. The Victorian accounts return to a narrative of nuns' bodies, but only in order to idealize their feminine roles as educators and displaced English citizens.

The persistent structure of the Catholic female community is troubling for eighteenth-century authors, who attempt to re-narrate such historical boundaries as clearly Protestant and English ones. The Dartford community demonstrates that such barriers are ultimately imagined ones, both because they can maintain them in the face of dissolution, and because the re-structuring of their "house" and religious identity does not limit their malleable political and social positions in the community (as the Victorian accounts wish to indicate); As Lee explains: "The case of the Dominican nuns demonstrates that dynamic monastic communities which possessed a strong sense of communal identity and monastic vocation were more likely to stay together and even seek eventual re-enclosure in Mary's reign" (110). This strong representation of communal identity and spiritual ideals is partly what the eighteenth-century antiquarian accounts of nunneries rely on, and partly what they wish to bury beneath the aesthetic distancing and re-incorporation of ruins into the English landscape. The use of these spaces to convey fragment, fluctuation, and faulty idealism in the English literature of the eighteenth century has everything to do with the ways that nunneries were constructed as particularly mutable, ideally "feminine" and enclosed spaces in both their medieval contexts and the eighteenth-century antiquarian representations of those contexts.

Chapter Two

Virtuous Stone Bodies: Domestic Ruins in Alexander Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" and John Brand's *On Illicit Love: Written Among the Ruins of Godstow Nunnery*.

Men call me chaste; they do not know the hypocrite I am. They consider purity of the flesh a virtue, though virtue belongs not to the body but to the soul. – Heloise to Abelard, Letter 4, c. 1133-c. 1138.

In chapter one I charted the progress of eighteenth-century antiquarian thought from preservation to ruin, with the understanding that ruin was eventually configured as the preservation of national and gender identity against the Catholic other, specifically the nun and nunnery. Now I turn to literary production in order to show how the nunnery became associated with both illicit and virtuous femininity in the antiquarian and literary imaginations. What follows are just two stories of how sexually illicit women's bodies contribute to the architecture and landscape that defines eighteenth-century British identity.

Alexander Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717) assumes the voice of the twelfth-century scholar and prioress Heloise, whose fame arises from the letters she wrote to her husband, Peter Abelard (also her former tutor and an infamous theologian and monk). Pope most likely adapts his version of Eloisa's voice from John Hughes's English translation of the letters, which was published in 1714.²⁹ Hughes's translation, modern translations, and Pope's poem all capture the tumult that Heloise experiences when her Uncle's kinsmen castrate Abelard and she enters the convent without any desire for a vocation; Heloise struggles with twelfth-century definitions of femininity which resonate with eighteenth-century constructions of domesticity, as she expresses her wish to privilege the soul over the body, and questions definitions of secrecy and publicity. In Pope's "Argument" he places the focus on Heloise's letters "which give so lively a picture of the struggles of grace and nature, virtue and passion" (138). Pope explores Eloisa's unique combination of the natural and the cultural because he wishes to represent her attempt to reconcile her soul and her body, and it is this attempt to reconcile binaries that best captures what I am calling domestic ruin.

John Brand's *On Illicit Love, Written Among the Ruins of Godstow Nunnery* (1775) takes as its subject the legend of twelfth-century mistress to Henry II, Rosamond Clifford, who Henry is said to have hidden in a secret bower at Godstow Nunnery, Oxford. John Brand began his career with poetry but soon turned to antiquarian study; he produced *Observations on Popular Antiquities* in 1777 and became the secretary to the Society of Antiquaries in 1784. The reason I wish to contrast Pope's early representation of female monastic space with Brand's later poem on Rosamond and Godstow Nunnery is because there are clear

²⁹ In the modern introduction to the letters, Radice writes that Hughes's version "is generally considered to be the source" of "Eloisa to Abelard" (l-li). All citations are from the third edition of the letters (1718).

differences between the ways that these two authors choose to imagine female monasticism and sexuality; Pope uses the female monastic space to explore the possibility for a virtue that is not defined by the body, while Brand ties illicit love and ideal virtue directly to the image of the ruined nunnery in the English landscape.³⁰

Both poems use the conflicted relationship between the natural and the artificial to explore ideals about virtue that they ultimately link to the space of the convent, and as a result the bodies of Heloise and Rosamond become inextricably combined with the architectural and stone memorials that tell their stories. This unsuccessful attempt to separate the natural from the artificial acts as a metaphor for the inability of either texts to extricate the symbol from the word, and in turn the repressed Catholic identity that informs ideal virginity from the eighteenth-century version of Protestantism that privileges the virtuous female body, rather than the virtuous female soul. The female body, the natural world, and the word (or language) cannot be extricated from the artificial (or architectural), the symbolic (or imagistic), and the spiritual. Pope sees this problem and addresses it in his use of imagery and language, while Brand (primarily an antiquarian and not a poet) provides a good example of how the maintenance of ideal femininity works in the late eighteenth century. In this chapter I will explore how these two poems configure female virtue and sexuality in terms of a domestic ideal inherent in the “uncanny” architecture of the nunnery, the aesthetics of ruin and decay, and the symbolic virtue of the female body. All of these subjects lead into a discussion of “illicit consumption,” where I will argue for the definition of the term “consumption” as one that describes the philosophical and literary action that happens when one represses identity, reads a text, invokes a symbol, or imbues a ruin with aesthetic quality.

The definition of “consumption” as I wish to use the word implies decay and absorption, ruin and imagination, and is thus another way of describing the antithetical ideas about female virtue and sexuality that critics find particularly bifurcated in the eighteenth century.³¹ Corrinne Harol explains one aspect of this

³⁰The differences between “Eloisa to Abelard” and *On Illicit Love* do not necessarily lie in a Catholic or anti-Catholic mentality either. But because I compare a poem by a poet from a Catholic family with one by a Protestant antiquary, there may be some question about the influence of religious perspective on their portrayal of female bodies and monastic spaces. According to H.T. Dickinson, Pope’s equivocal treatment of politics and religion was partly practical because “as a Catholic, he could never hope for political office and he knew well that Catholicism was associated in the public mind with the treason of Jacobitism” (3). Corrinne Harol also notes Pope’s ambiguous stance: “Pope himself never renounced Catholicism, although he was not fully participating in that faith by the time he wrote *The Rape of the Lock* and although such renunciation would have had significant benefits” (Harol 115). Dickinson also argues that “there are obviously problems in interpreting any satirist or poet, and Pope presents particular difficulties. It is impossible to be absolutely confident that the ‘self’ projected in his poems is the same ‘self’ as the poet in his private life” (2).

³¹By sexually illicit, I mean that the women in these poems represent a kind of female sexuality that was not necessarily sanctioned in the eighteenth century. The desire that Eloisa embodies and the adultery of Rosamond highlight their sexual identities in ways that are illicit in an eighteenth-

double bind in terms of virginity: “Protestant reformers were thus in the awkward position of challenging Mary’s perpetual virginity, her divinity, and her capacity to become an idolatrous object of worship, while simultaneously advocating the importance of virginity at marriage” (113). Eighteenth-century antiquaries divested ruined abbeys, monasteries, nunneries, and priories of their Catholic identity, infusing them with ideas about the antiquity of the English nation; similarly, they divested virginity of any spiritual context, leaving the virgin body to metonymically stand for ideal femininity. As a result, the literary representation of nunneries often lacks or questions barriers between the female body and the architecture that houses it; this is certainly the case for the legends of Heloise and Rosamond, which draw attention to the formation of such bodily architecture.

Architectural Images: Repressing and Constructing Narratives of Femininity

The ruined Catholic nunnery inspires aesthetic thought that results in an exploration of the uncanny foundations of gender and domestic ideals. Terry Castle links the uncanny to the Enlightenment because the ideals of the period favour a laying bare of inner identities: “the eighteenth century in a sense ‘invented the uncanny’ ... the very psychic and cultural transformations that led to the subsequent glorification of the period as an age of reason or enlightenment ... also produced ... a new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse” (8). I argue that these feelings, on a bodily, architectural, and literary level, all stem from a complex repression of the historical and social terms that create self-identity.³² Freud emphasizes the importance of landscape to the uncanny (and identity formation) when he gives an example of the way the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* meld: “*they are like a buried spring or a dried-up pond. One cannot walk over it without always having the feeling that water might come up there again.*” *“Oh, we call it “unheimlich”; you call it “heimlich””* (223). He further explicates: “on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight ... everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (224-225).

century context. Karen Harvey notes, “in the move from one-sex to two-sex, women were reimagined as sexually passive, and the key marker of this was the ‘demotion of the female orgasm’ ... Sexuality has become part of a much larger picture, though, and the modern sexually disenfranchised woman has merged with the domesticated woman of the middle class” (102). Harvey connects the shift from sexual difference as one of degree to one of kind with the domestic ideal of a woman whose role in the (imagined) private sphere signifies her existence.

³²In relation to this, I see Dror Wahrman’s argument that the early eighteenth-century self was malleable while later categories of identity became static, as one that needs to be qualified with the understanding that under the apparent malleability or stasis of gender identity is a history of its association with other ideals (such as Roman Catholic ones) that also explore the relationship between sex, gender, and the body. Rather than arguing that “gender, the behavioural and cultural attributes of masculinity and femininity, collapsed into sex, that is, into the physicality inscribed on the body of every individual” (44), I think that it is more accurate to argue that ideal gender identity was configured as static, while anxiety about clearly marking gender boundaries indicates that the gender play Wahrman associates with the earlier social atmosphere continued to exist beneath the surface of the ideal.

The ruined convents and monasteries in the British landscape are both familiar and unfamiliar because their existence flags both repressed Catholic history and a need to make that history new in order to create a naturalized national identity. The legends of Heloise and Rosamond both depict the disastrous effects of a secret coming to light (Heloise's marriage and Rosamond's bower), and thus both connect repressed selfhood to the architectural space of the nunnery.

Pope's *Eloisa* explores the connection between religious architecture and the dark cavernous spaces that exist beneath exterior identity. When she endows Abelard with the ability to change architectural space with his gaze, *Eloisa* gives him the ability to make light the dark repressed spaces of the convent, which she aligns closely with her conflict between body and soul. Of the Paraclete, which Abelard built, she says:

You raised these hallowed walls; the desert smiled,
 And paradise was opened in the wild.

.....
 In these lone walls (their days eternal bound)
 These moss-grown domes with spiry turrets crowned,
 Where awful arches make a noon-day night,
 And the dim windows shed a solemn light;
 Thy eyes diffused a reconciling ray,
 And gleams of glory brightened all the day.
 But now no face divine contentment wears,
 'Tis all blank sadness, or continual tears. (132-133, 141-148)

The "reconciling ray" of Abelard's gaze is what can change gothic interiors into bright "gleams of glory" according to *Eloisa*. With the term "reconciling" *Eloisa* imagines that Abelard has the ability to combine the secluded interior of the convent with the public exterior, both in his role as proprietor and founder and because of his past (sexual, bodily, but also philosophical) relationship with *Eloisa*. Pope connects *Eloisa*'s conflicted virtue, the ruined building, and Abelard's physical ruin to the image of "blank sadness," or the lack of productivity – both architectural and bodily – that a ruined being or building represents. This alignment of physical countenances and architectural space mirrors early eighteenth-century antiquarian attempts to preserve and consume the Catholic past in print; in order to preserve past identity, "what ought to have remained secret" must be made public and brought into the light.

Rather than calling for an enlightenment of dark, repressed spaces (as Pope's *Eloisa* does) Brand's narrator fails to underscore the many narrative strata of Rosamond's legend and thus represses its complexity and that of Godstow Nunnery and Eleanor of Aquitaine. His "Advertisement" authoritatively relates the history of Godstow: "It was formerly a House of Nuns, famous perhaps on no account so much as for having been the Burial-place of Rosamond, daughter of Lord Clifford, the beautiful Paramour of Henry the Second." Brand follows this history with a short summary of the legend:

This Monarch is said to have built a Labyrinth at Woodstock to conceal [Rosamond] from his jealous Queen, who, during his Absence, when he was called away by an unnatural Rebellion of his Sons, at the supposed Instigation of their Mother, found means to get Access to her, and compelled her to swallow Poison. (2)

Brand focuses on the labyrinth and Eleanor's violence toward Rosamond as a natural consequence of "unnatural" rebellion and lust, reconciling moral ruin, the ruins of the nunnery, and the (un)natural world. Brand draws on this element of the legend when he chooses to emphasize the ruin of Godstow as his inspiration for re-telling a tale of ruined female virtue:

The moral Muse, from yon monastic shade,
 Where frown the Tow'rs by envious Time decay'd,
 Invites my footsteps from the flow'ry plain,
 And calls from Folly's rout to Fancy's train. (30)

The location of the monastic "tow'rs" in the "shade" and near the "flow'ry plain" combines architecture and literary creation (and decay), just as Brand combines a story of "folly" and fallen virtue with "fancy" and imagination. The ruined nunnery is also paramount in other accounts of the legend, and despite Brand's attempt to relegate it to a mere aesthetic image it does have Catholic connotations that would not be lost on an antiquary. Brand's fellow antiquary, Francis Grose, acknowledges Godstow Nunnery as an important place for the creation of legend: "The common people have a story of a subterraneous passage from hence to Woodstock ..." (180). The fear of a repressed Catholic identity beneath the architectural structure of the nunnery, and especially a repressed identity that manifests itself in the form of a secret and sexually illicit underground passageway, testifies to the importance of that same identity to the creation of an uncanny, or "undomestic," sense of national identity.

Both poems idealize the landscape of ancient Britain and France in order to explore eighteenth-century identity and to define it against these past Catholic spaces. As Linda Colley points out, "the continuing resonance of anti-Catholicism throughout Great Britain after 1707 and far into the nineteenth century needs stressing because it is often supposed that intolerance of this kind receded rapidly in the face of growing rationalism and literacy" (22). Indeed, in many ways the idealized views of the convent in ruin poetry, antiquarian works, essays and novels contribute to anti-Catholicism because they utilize Catholic spaces to explore Protestant identity and to re-write history, although many works of fiction also use the image of the convent to undermine that same identity.

Clare Haynes argues that there is a close association between artistic production and Catholicism in the eighteenth century. She comments on the co-existence of "a vision of Catholicism as superstitious and idolatrous and an uncomfortable sense that Catholicism had been, as Gibbon put it, 'the parent of taste'" (102). This alignment of Catholicism with aesthetics and Protestantism with language is the result of an iconoclasm that required careful positioning on the part of Protestant reformers. British identity and Catholic aesthetics are

inseparable through their attempts to reconcile what appears irreconcilable: the female body with the stone architecture of the nunnery, the gothic landscape with Palladian architecture, and passionate love with virtuous femininity. As Anne Janowitz quite rightly notes, “the passage from culture *to* nature, then, which the eighteenth-century image of ruin performs is quite remarkable for its ability to shift the opposition of art and nature into a convergence of not only materials, but also intentions” (5). Pope’s poem highlights the ruin that results from such attempts, but Brand upholds an ideal balance which uncovers his inability to see those subterranean passages of the other that comprise the eighteenth-century British self.

In his *Essay on Man* Pope analyzes the effects of mutable barriers, especially in reference to virtue and vice. The conclusion he comes to recalls the way that landscape, architecture and bodies interact in “Eloisa to Abelard”:

Extremes in Nature equal ends produce,
 In Man they join to some mysterious use;
 Though each by turns the other’s bound invade,
 As, in some well-wrought picture, light and shade,
 And oft so mix, the difference is too nice
 Where ends the virtue, or begins the vice.
 Fools! who from hence into the notion fall,
 That vice or virtue there is none at all.
 If white and black blend, soften, and unite
 A thousand ways, is there no black or white?
 Ask your own heart, and nothing is so plain;
 ’Tis to mistake them, costs the time and pain. (206-216)

It is the boundaries that are imaginary for Pope, not the distinct opposites of black and white or virtue and vice. Light and shade exist separately, but there is no boundary preventing them from combining or becoming confused for aesthetic purposes. Similarly, virtue and vice cannot exist without one another, but since in the construction of human identity they are imagined as separate one must see them as such if one wishes to construct selfhood based on the national ideal. The conflation of extremes without an acknowledgement of the fact that human social structures look down upon such mutability – as the balanced images in the poem demonstrate – can only end in the useless waste of “time and pain.”³³

³³ In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) Burke aligns authority with the father and “fondness and indulgence” with the mother, and then goes on to state that “the sublime,” which is the cause of admiration and love, “always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter [beauty] on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us” (147). The separation between the beautiful and the sublime also concerns Burke, and he cites from the same part of *An Essay on Man* that deals with virtue and vice: “If the qualities of the sublime and beautiful are sometimes found united, does this prove, that they are the same, does it prove, that they are any way allied, does it prove even that they are not opposite and contradictory? Black and white may soften, may blend, but they are not therefore the same” (158). Burke clings resolutely to Pope’s implied moral that it is dangerous to entertain a lack of distinction between opposites, but he fails to see that the danger stems from a

In his reading of a balanced, inoffensive Palladian space in *An Essay on Man*, Morrissey emphasizes that despite its epistolary form, “it is not a personal poem ... to have an interiority could make it too interested” (76). This is only one of the antitheses that appear throughout the poem, as Morrissey notes:

It seems that only those people who can afford to do so can reconcile such oppositions, that their reconciling requires a certain position, similar to that vista enjoyed by reason. However, for Pope, and for the Palladians (or for an epic of disinterestedness), these seeming oppositions are already reconciled by their symmetrical arrangement ... Considered more formally, the same antithesis is also symmetry. (78)

The poem does contain a personal construction of an interior, which comprises a response to the opposing images (of art and nature, for example) that form the exterior of what seems to be neo-Palladianism. Pope offers an impossibility to his reader, and then demonstrates how constructed terms (as Morrissey links them specifically to architecture) can create symmetry out of opposites. The antithetical images are only symmetrical, then, when Pope uses poetic language to construct them as so; when he does this he causes the reader to blend opposites, just as he warns them of it. When the reader constructs the space between, they will either take part in the creation of an ideal British neo-Palladian symmetry, or they will realize that they construct even their own interiority on a problematic antithetical ideal, and will thus use the personal nature of the epistolary form to uncover the fact that the interior is an imagined ideal. The manner in which Morrissey argues Pope combines these antithetical elements to create symmetry relates to my own investigation of the way that monastic ruin works in eighteenth-century literature. If you combine two opposing elements (such as art and nature, or shade and light) the result is an uncanny gothic sphere (of the text, the body, or the space) comprised of an antithetical British Palladian ideal. This is because there is a repressed space of malleability between the two opposite ideals, especially between art and nature, which only textual and architectural ruin can reconcile.

When Pope places Eloisa in the textual space of a heroic epistle and a gothic monastery, he immediately sets her up for a navigation of this antithetical ideal – and in this navigation she embodies the space between the two opposing and seemingly symmetrical opposites. Though Eloisa is at risk of becoming the inert object of religious devotion that the space would make of her, she subverts that objection when she creates herself out of the ruin of her narrative and the broken arches and dark spaces of the nunnery. She addresses the landscape and architecture directly, before denying their power to turn her into the textual ruin she must construct with her own language. She says:

socially constructed ideal of gender difference, because he is obviously invested in that difference. As Ian Balfour notes, the “division of the aesthetic field along gender lines is not only questionable in principle but untenable at the level of rhetoric of the texts that insist on this division ... the very presentation of these ideas was at the time largely a matter of men telling women how such aesthetic distinctions were to be made” (324).

Ye grots and caverns shagged with horrid thorn!
 Shrines! Where their vigils pale-eyed virgins keep,
 And pitying saints, whose statues learn to weep!
 Though cold like you, unmoved and silent grown,
 I have not yet forgot myself to stone. (19-24)

That Eloisa addresses the stones, statues and caverns here indicates the possibility of communication with the structures that contain her and the other nuns. Anthony Vidler notes that “in classical theory the (idealized) body was ... directly projected onto the building, which both stood for it and represented its ideal perfection” but that, “beginning in the eighteenth century... the building no longer simply represented a part or whole of the body but was rather seen as objectifying the various *states* of the body, physical and mental” (70-72). Pope utilizes both the relationship between architecture and the ideal body, and its association with the mental and physical crumbling of that ideal. Eloisa associates the erasure of bodily passion in favour of bodily virtue with her eventual metamorphosis into a stone monument; when she does this she explores the gaps present in the formation of interior identity through social ideals that favour physical virtue over spiritual virtue. The cultural construction of Eloisa’s body and her natural bodily impulses oppose one another to create a bodily ruin: “All is not heaven’s while Abelard has part, / Still rebel nature holds out half my heart; / Nor prayers nor fasts its stubborn pulse restrain” (25-27). Half Abelard’s possession and half heaven’s possession, Eloisa splits herself in the manner that Pope splits art and nature in the poem. Pope reconciles the gap between the two extremes with the direct address of the letter; if half of Eloisa’s identity is Abelard’s and half belongs to heaven, then who speaks? The question leaves Eloisa “torn” and a representative ruin Pope creates out of the segregation between bodily and spiritual virtue.

Similarly, “Eloisa to Abelard” uncovers the use of the naturalized ruin to indicate permanent identity as a struggle rather than the ideal that Anne Janowitz notices ruin poetry strives for:

The ruin serves as the visible guarantor of the antiquity of the nation, but as ivy climbs up and claims the stonework, it also binds culture to nature, presenting the nation under the aspect of nature, and so suggesting national permanence. The poet can manipulate the image of ruin to turn the threat of the encroachment of nature upon culture into the proof of the authenticity of the nation itself. (54)

There are also implications for the construction of gender in terms of the image of ideal ruin as a place where nature and culture, or the gothic and Palladian, combine. If the nation’s proof of authenticity predicates itself on a blending of elements that are also carefully segregated by social constructions, then the ideal mirrors the ruin that it imagines solidifies its identity, because it dictates that those elements must be *both* combined *and* separate – nothing but an imagined interior identity emerges.

Brand's focus on the ruin fails to acknowledge that he mobilizes it in order to impose ideals of virtue. In his "Advertisement" he combines the contemplation of architectural and theoretical ruin:

Frequent Walks in this delightful Recess, sacred to the Moments of Contemplation, suggested the following Thoughts, for the Publication of which, let the alarming Progress of Lewdness, and consequently of Licentiousness of Manners, which indeed threatens the Dissolution of our State, be accepted as an Apology. (2)

Brand sees a direct connection between the legend of Rosamond (which the ruins Godstow nunnery remind him of) and the "dissolution of our state." A lack of adherence to feminine virtue *will* lead to the dissolution of national ideals because it will uncover the obscure foundations of those ideals, just as the dissolution of past Roman Catholic identity is at the cornerstone of the ruined nunnery that inspires those same ideals for Brand. Brand also connects the landscape to the nearby Oxford University when he says: "O hallow'd Haunts! Where Genius loves to stray, / Where silver Isis winds her murm'ring way: / Whence seen from far, aspiring to the skies / The awful Fanes of BRITISH ATHENS rise" (3). For Brand there is a direct indication that the combination of gothic and classical elements with naturalized ruins leads to an unquestionable national identity. As a testament to the importance of the ruined nunnery to the message of his poem, Brand includes an image of one on his title page [figure 17]. However, he fails to see how the combination of gothic and classical or ruined and natural elements actually uncovers the malleability of nature and culture, and that static categories of identity lose their potency as a result.

This lack of self-consciousness is partly due to the fact that Brand writes his poem later in the eighteenth century than Pope does, and so fails to see that ruins construct identity rather than represent it. Morrissey argues that by the time of Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1768), "the natural represented by decay becomes preferable to the natural represented by order; the artfulness represented by rudeness becomes preferable to artfulness represented by a kind of polish" (94). As I stressed in chapter one, this shift from preservation as national identity to ruin as national identity has to do with the repression of the Roman Catholic past in favour of a Protestant reading of monastic ruin.

But the reading of ruins constructs polish and rudeness on similar grounds, so it is apt that nature's beauty both refuses Eloisa solace and mirrors her melancholic loss of identity in Pope's poem:

The darksome pines that o'er yon rocks reclined
 Wave high, and murmur to the hollow wind,
 The wandering streams that shine between the hills,
 The grotts that echo to the tinkling rills,
 No more these scenes my meditation aid,
 Or lull to rest the visionary maid.
 But o'er the twilight groves and dusky caves,
 Long-sounding isles, and intermingled graves,

Black Melancholy sits, and round her throws

A death-like silence, and a dread repose. (154-162)

The beauty of nature is no longer appealing to Eloisa because the more sublime “black melancholy” prevents that kind of self contemplation. Even nature reflects Eloisa’s state of mind, so that there is no solace in the perception of something that only reminds her of her pain. The landscape is “darksome,” “hollow,” “wandering,” and the grotts “echo” – all of which indicate the lack that exists when opposing ideals like virtue and passion attempt to reconcile themselves.

The impossible state that Eloisa wishes for is a melding of masculine and feminine ideals, a combination of art and nature that not only rises from the gothic nature of Pope’s poem, but also the ruin that Eloisa desires to be when she imagines such an impossible combination with the other. As she realizes, this kind of mingling of self and other can only happen in death and in a tangible connection with the decay of death: “Death, only death, can break the lasting chain; / And here, ev’n then, shall my cold dust remain ... / And wait, till ’tis no sin to mix with thine” (173-174, 176). Her wish for destruction in order to escape not only architectural space, but also the cultural construction of gender binaries within that space, indicates both the way that such architecture upholds cultural ideals, and how its subversion (or ruin) calls into question the basis upon which the eighteenth-century imagination constructs identity. As Elizabeth Harries notes, “the cooperation of nature and art that picturesque theorists and sentimental novelists advocated also implies the blending of genders thought completely separate and distinct” (128). Eloisa hopes that the reduction of her body to dust will free her identity from the struggle between passion and virtue, but she also realizes that such a wish is subversive and perhaps not possible: “Yet here for ever, ever must I stay; / Sad proof how well a lover can obey!” (171-172). When death reduces Eloisa to dust, only then will it be possible for her to construct her virtue based on a spiritual identity rather than a bodily one. This is because cultural constructions of femininity create a void between gendered spaces that negates interior identity. If the reader consumes Eloisa as nature consumes her body (into dust) the reader can then fill that void with self-contemplation – but a type of self contemplation that realizes the importance of ruin and negative space. As Anne Williams notes, “the interiors and landscapes by which Pope supplements his representation of the female mind in torment... suggest that the boundaries of the female self are unstable” (51). But the way that Pope has Eloisa evoke architectural ruin and natural landscape as they inform her state of mind and her relationship to ideal virtue does much more than represent an imagined femininity – it also draws the elements of that constructed femininity so clearly as to gain agency for the female voice in the ruin of monastic architecture and virtue: the symbol speaks.

Symbolic Voids: Image, Word, and Catholic Identity

Obsessed with interiors, Pope and Brand both uncover secret spaces (of female desire, of the English landscape). When Pope does so, he expresses

Eloisa's wish for a combination of interiority and exteriority that leads to a lack of interiority which constitutes a textual void – or a space of repression. The close connection between language and image also reminds the reader that the Protestant focus on the word over the icon cannot entirely exist without the Catholic imagery that it attempts to deny. The literary text and the virtuous body both imply a connection to the spiritual (or intangible) that they simultaneously deny, just as the Catholic icon is imbued with spiritual significance: "...even when the sacraments are not being administered, the churches, statues, mosaics, paintings, and stained glass windows are there to lift to God the minds and hearts of those who visit or simply pass by..... icons are endued with divine power and help the whole world to symbolize God" (O'Collins and Farrugia 374). Similarly, Brand attempts to privilege a consistency between interior identity and exterior appearance that crumbles under the repression such a consistency requires. Pope critiques this space of repression, but Brand maintains it as necessary for ideal femininity. Both narratives also meld the symbolic female body with architectural space, the natural world, and with death in the image of the stone monument.

Pope touches on the importance of repression for Eloisa's ideal existence within the convent when she speaks of the need to forget one state in order to absorb another:

Unequal task! a passion to resign,
 For hearts so touched, so pierced, so lost as mine.
 Ere such a soul regains its peaceful state,
 How often must it love, how often hate!
 How often hope, despair, resent, regret,
 Conceal, disdain – do all things but forget.

.....
 Oh come! oh teach me nature to subdue,
 Renounce my love, my life, my self – and you.
 Fill my fond heart with God alone, for he
 Alone can rival, can succeed to thee. (95-100)

Unable to erase repressed (natural) desire for Abelard from her heart, Eloisa's soul cannot experience a "peaceful state" in her role as a nun. A refusal to create a void in her heart, then, results in an excess of emotion and an ability to be neither Abelard's lover nor God's spiritual spouse. In essence, she creates the void against her own will because she is forced into a repression of passionate identity that she cannot move to exterior identity, except to communicate it to the reader. Eloisa also describes the communion between body and textual symbol when she describes reading Abelard's letters in terms that recall the "pitying saints, whose statues learn to weep." She states: "No happier task these faded eyes pursue; / To read and weep is all they now can do" (47-48). Eloisa emphasizes her place as a stone symbol for suffering femininity and the inability to reconcile bodily and spiritual virtue, and she does so by referring again to her equivocal place between reader and text.

Eloisa expresses a wish to fill this space between her position as the reader (a consumer) and a text (consumed by the reader) when she describes the perfect state that used to exist between her and Abelard:

Oh happy state! when souls each other draw,
 When love is liberty, and nature, law:
 All then is full, possessing, and possessed,
 No craving void left aching in the breast. (91-94)

Eloisa focuses on spiritual attraction, the liberty of natural love, and the reciprocal action of possession; she imagines a state where physical and mental sexual identity can coexist, despite her testament to the impossibility of such coexistence after her separation from Abelard – a separation that gives rise to the “craving void” she feels after the dissolution of such a “natural” state.

Anthony Vidler argues that a theory of the uncanny can “help us to interpret the conditions of modern estrangement” and “here it is that the ‘void’... is almost uncannily repeated in the world, that the question of the ‘unhomely home’ finds its most poignant expressions and equally troubling solutions” (13). Freud argues that the uncanny stems from both natural and cultural roots, but is quick to explain that the distinctions between the two origins are not clear ones: “An uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed.... these two classes of uncanny experience are not always sharply distinguishable” (249). The void between passion and virtue, nature and culture, public and private or masculinity and femininity results from the repression of superstitious Catholicism and passionate femininity, as both play a role in the construction of eighteenth-century British identity.

Freud also connects symbol and body in his discussion of the uncanny; he notes that “an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes” (244). The exterior of the female body becomes as symbolic as the tomb is in Eloisa’s construction of herself as both a passionate woman and a living representative of the repressed past. The spirit that calls “or seemed to” call Eloisa to death hints at the way that death undermines repression, loss and symbolic existence: “Here grief forgets to groan, and love to weep, / Ev’n superstition loses every fear: / For God, not man, absolves our frailties here” (314-316). God exists outside of the human construction of symbolic femininity for Eloisa, and thus inside of the void of ruin between the body and imaginative identification. The fear of superstition, too, loses hold without a space of repression. This is why when Pope explores the construction of such physical virtue, or when Brand observes the connection between late eighteenth-century ideal virtue and the medieval landscape, both also rely on a construction of what we consider gothic, or uncanny, in order to explore the place of the female body as a symbol of virtue.

It is this void of lost past narrative that Eloisa wishes to fill with an ideal of perfect union, but which she knows is impossible because it will only result in a self-ruin that leads to yet another false ideal. Eloisa's imagination of the nuns' space in the convent best exemplifies the way that the construction of self in this void brings the ruined ideal to life again. She begins: "How happy is the blameless vestal's lot? / The world forgetting, by the world forgot" (207-8), but soon this ideal image of the "spotless mind" that should be in the void between body and soul, or memory and world, dies away "to sounds of heavenly harps .../ And melts in visions of eternal day" (221-2). These ghostly sisters are uncannily like the imagined space of the convent that Eloisa inhabits; they are like the living stone that Eloisa sees herself as almost embodying – and her wish for death means becoming a ghostly stone monument to the ruinous nature of society's ideals of virtue. She says:

See in her cell sad Eloisa spread,
 Propped on some tomb, a neighbour of the dead.
 In each low wind methinks a spirit calls,
 And more than echoes talk along the walls. (305-8)

Eloisa commands the reader to imagine her almost-dead body, and then reverts back to the first-person narrative voice to align her imagination of ghostly echoes with the reader's own experience of such echoes and ruins as they appear in the English landscape. In this way, the textual space itself captures a loss that is particularly English, and denies the medieval French context of the original letters. This is because Abelard built the Paraclete in 1121 and abandoned it in 1126. Around 1129 he handed the Paraclete over to Heloise. Betty Radice describes the Paraclete as an initially poor and primitive place: "The buildings could not have been more than the small church of wood or stone which the students had built to replace Abelard's original chapel and the primitive cells they had occupied" (xxvii). The graves and ghosts Pope describes in his poem are the uncanny representatives of Eloisa's abandonment as it appears in an architecture that only exists in Pope's eighteenth-century British imagination.

Brand similarly associates beauty with categories of identity when he compares virtue to the predictability of nature:

As soon the streams that down the valleys stray,
 Shall backwards to their fountains force a way!
 Sooner shall Frost its freezing pow'rs forego,

 Than blasted Beauty shall its bloom regain,
 Or female Honour soil'd, remove the stain! (9)

He uses nature and as a metaphor for female virtue, and the implication is that the role of nature is a limited one; each natural element contains an essence of identity that is irreversible, and an inability to perform its identity on its surface corrupts it beyond repair. It is beauty that causes Rosamond's downfall, and Brand warns that it is not a substantial indication of character (despite his metaphorical connection of it with virtue): "How soon the vivid flush of Beauty

flies! / Tho' Blossoms please us, 'tis the Fruit we prize! / With care, O cultivate in earliest youth, / Perennial charms, Faith, Modesty, and Truth!" (9). The cultivation of qualities as though they are flowers continues to connect virtue with physical beauty, despite Brand's attempt to extricate the two. In addition, the emphasis on the fruit's nutritional qualities, as opposed to the blossoms that precede it, turns the female body into a symbol of production and consumption without (again) a significant interior, except one that is to be ingested.

Even while warning against the negative affects of beauty Brand uses natural metaphors for virtue that rely on natural beauty for them to make sense. He grafts culturally constructed natural metaphors onto the bodily in order to conflate them, just as the overgrown ruined nunnery indicates permanent British national identity. That he wishes a static female virtue to arise from this malleability seems somewhat ridiculous, and complicates arguments like Dror Wahrman's that gender went from malleable to fixed categories of identity after 1770, and that there was a "shift from mutability to essence, from imaginable fluidity to fixity, from the potential for individual deviation from general identity categories to an individual identity stamped indelibly on each and every person" (128). Brand seeks to naturalize the links between nunneries, female virtue, and national identity, but as Eloisa and Rosamond show, both stone exteriors and the feminine constructed as a moral foundation prove malleable. The ideal is a static and symbolic connection between beauty and virtue, and the body and its interior identity; but symbols and images are more complex than they appear. Beauty and virtue may be physical symbols of Protestant femininity, but if they are symbolic then they act more as Catholic icons than as Protestant texts.

Virtuous Stone Bodies:

A new kind of virtue arises from Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" – one that he also explores in his *Essay on Man*, and one that the anxious John Brand is careful to exclude women from in *On Illicit Love*. Eloisa argues that there is virtue in true love, and thus virtue can exist outside the social sanction of marriage:

How oft, when pressed to marriage, have I said,
 Curse on all laws but those which love has made?
 Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,
 Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies.
 Let wealth, let honour, wait the wedded dame,
 August her deed, and sacred be her fame;
 Before true passion all those views remove,
 Fame, wealth, and honour! what are you to love? (73-80)

Hughes similarly translates Eloisa's virtue as one that exists despite and because of her passion: "I have hated myself that I might love you; I came hither to ruin myself in a perpetual Imprisonment, that I might make you live quiet and easie. Nothing but Virtue, join'd to a Love perfectly disengaged from the Commerce of the Senses, could have produced such Effects" (Hughes 62). Eloisa predicates her virtue on her ability to love, and since that love exists outside of society's sanction

it makes her virtue less superficial than that of a woman who only marries to obtain the rewards of wealth and honour.

Even in Hughes's translation Heloise complicates what it means to be a woman in her cultural context. She emphasizes the need for love to be separate from "the Commerce of the Senses," which has important implications for Pope's navigation of gender and commerce in the poem. This is because such a separation highlights a lack of distinction between public and private categories of identity, and the fact that they are ultimately imaginary categories. Here Heloise argues that her love for Abelard is above the senses' bodily response, and both Hughes and Pope indicate that this is what makes Eloisa's virtue different from the performed virtue that is so necessary to the commercial value of love and marriage. Pope adds to this Eloisa's passionate desire for Abelard as something she believes should not harm her virtue, although as a nun she knows that in the world and the Church's opinion it must. In this sense, both versions of Eloisa's narrative stress the virtue of the soul to be reconciled with a desire and a passion that has everything to do with erotic love, but both forms of love are outside of the social sanction of the marriage market – which is the more illicit aspect of Eloisa's desire for Abelard. Both Hughes's and Pope's Eloisa reject the sphere of the conjugal family in favour of a more "natural" virtue, which for Eloisa means one that is more spiritual and less located in the body.

In the letters, Abelard gives an account of Heloise's reasons for rejecting a secret marriage, reasons which are validated when the marriage becomes public anyway, with disastrous results:

Heloise went on to the risks I should run in bringing her back, and argued that the name of friend [*amica*] instead of wife would be dearer to her and more honourable for me – only love freely given should keep me for her, not the constriction of a marriage tie.... But at last she saw that her attempts to persuade or dissuade me were making no impression on my foolish obstinacy, and she could not bear to offend me; so amidst deep sighs and tears she ended in these words: 'We shall both be destroyed. All that is left us is suffering as great as our love has been.' In this, as the whole world knows, she showed herself a true prophet. (Abelard 16)

Interestingly, it is Heloise's family's conclusion that Abelard is casting her off in a nunnery that leads his castration. In response to the news that Heloise's uncle is abusing her in an attempt to make public the secret of their marriage, Abelard removed her to a convent of nuns in ... Argenteuil, where she had been brought up and educated as a small girl, and I also had made for her a religious habit of the type worn by novices, with the exception of the veil, and made her put it on. At this news her uncle and his kinsmen and followers imagined that I had tricked them, and had found an easy way of ridding myself of Heloise by making her a nun. (17)

This misreading of public appearances leads to dismemberment and bodily ruin and Pope uses this conflict about publicity and marriage to include in Eloisa's voice a struggle between public and private virtue that also applies to female

authorship in the early eighteenth century. As Ros Ballaster explains, “the early eighteenth century, then, saw a split between female-authored pious and didactic love fiction, stressing the virtues of chastity or sentimental marriage, and erotic fiction by women, with its voyeuristic attention to the combined pleasures and ravages of seduction” (33). In many ways Eloisa also embodies this literary schism, and Pope uses her voice to show how the consumption of either a virtuous or an illicit female body still amounts to an imagination of the female body by the reader. In this sense he also comments on how difficult it is for a female author to navigate her private and public identities when he takes on just such a voice.

In “Eloisa to Abelard,” Eloisa’s depiction of her conflict between passionate love and the regulation of that passion within her nun’s body and within the cloister is also apparent in the narrative structure of the poem. She combines her passion while reading Abelard’s letter with a withering action that the convent imposes on her body:

Line after line my gushing eyes o’erflow,
 Led through a sad variety of woe:
 Now warm in love, now withering in my bloom,
 Lost in a convent’s solitary gloom!
 There stern religion quenched th’unwilling flame,
 There died the best of passions, love and fame. (35-40)

Eloisa expresses bodily responses – like tears – as warm and life-filled, while her existence in the convent results in the withering of Eloisa’s body; its literal wasting away in the convent’s “gloom” provides a visual image of how ideals about female sexuality erase the virtue of bodily passion and turn it into unproductive stone. Similarly, Eloisa constantly interchanges her first person voice with a second person voice that commands the reader to “see” Eloisa, or asks rhetorically why she did not have a voice to act or command when Abelard was disfigured: “where, where was Eloïse? Her voice, her hand, / Her poniard, had opposed the dire command” (101-102). Although she breaks off this questioning format to once again show the reader the rest through her bodily performance rather than speech: “I can no more; by shame, by rage suppressed, Let tears, and burning blushes speak the rest” (105-106).

Similarly, Pope’s use of binary oppositions that meld and move inward, rather than staying distinct and directing a concrete ideal of identity, imagine a space of negativity in Eloisa’s body. Eloisa can gain agency in death because she exchanges her passionate exterior for – and combines it with – the dust and stone exterior of death:

Ah then, thy once-loved Eloisa see!
 It will be then no crime to gaze on me.
 See from my cheek the transient roses fly!
 See the last sparkle languish in my eye!
 Till every motion, pulse, and breath be o’er;
 And ev’n my Abelard beloved no more.
 O Death all-eloquent! you only prove

What dust we dote on, when 'tis man we love. (329-336)

Eloisa turns herself into a stone monument here, as she slowly performs for her reader the draining of physicality from her existence; the result is an emphasis on the soul of the statue and a comment on the error of basing virtue on physical identity. Kenneth Gross argues that the statue provides “a feeling of *interiority*” because “statues, public and external as they are, have the character of those highly cathected psychic images or ‘internal objects’ that people the space of the mind. We are not just buried in our statues, our statues are buried in us” (32-33). This complication between exterior and interior identity not only recalls Freud’s definitions of the uncanny as they relate to Eloisa, but it also helps us to draw important conclusions about the representation of Rosamond in antiquarian works. Brand attempts to fill the complex space between exterior and interior with ideal images of the virtuous female body that repress the implications of Rosamond’s legend.

The synopsis of the fate of Rosamond takes up less than half of Brand’s poem, while he dedicates the rest of the poem to a call for the moral reform of women. The transition from legend to didactic instruction happens when the muse, “having glean’d her store / From ages *past*, to *future* fram’d her lore” and instructs the reader: “Transcribe the Tale, that on this wall is wrought, / The Tablet hangs a Toilette for your thought!” (Brand 7-8). The tablet Brand references here is “the History of Rosamond inscribed on the wall of the chapel” (8). He does not go into detail about the inscription on the wall, but his use of natural metaphors for beauty and virtue recall the inscription, “Hic jacet in tumba Rosa mundi non Rosa munda, / Non redolet sed olet quae redolere solet.”

In 1791 *The Gentleman’s Magazine* published an account of the legend of Rosamond and a history of the site of Godstow Nunnery. The account references many of the antiquaries I deal with in chapter one, and attests to the popularity of antiquarian accounts of nunneries and monasteries in the late eighteenth century. It translates the inscription on the wall of the chapel at Godstow as:

The rose of the world but not the cleane flower
 Is now here graven to whom beauty was lent
 In this grave full darke now is her bowre
 That by her life was sweete and redolent
 But now that she is from this life blent
 Though shee were sweete now foully doth she stinke
 A mirror good for all men that on her thinke. (985)

Obviously not a direct translation of the epitaph, the lesson here is about the corruptibility of death and not of illicit sexuality. The dark and decaying tomb obscures Rosamond’s beauty, not her own misuse of beauty; although it is also a reflection of the secret bower that Henry built for her when she was alive. Brand also emphasizes the role of the inscription as a mirror, not “for all men,” but for women, who can replace their frivolous “toilette” with a contemplation of the dangers of illicit sexuality.

The Gentleman's Magazine also states that the inscription is painted on the North wall of the chapel where Rosamund was buried, which it labels M in the accompanying plan of Godstow Nunnery [see figure 18]. The plan of Godstow Nunnery emphasizes the empty spaces that its ruin creates, but it also tries to fill those spaces by listing for the reader the architecture that used to exist in each empty space.³⁴ It focuses on the place and appearance of Rosamond's tomb with great detail. The author purposely demystifies the image of the cup on Rosamond's tomb:

Mr. Allen, of Gloucester-hall, describes the tomb, when taken up and broken in pieces, as having 'on it *interchangeable weavings*, drawn out and decked with roses, red and green, and the picture of the cup, out of which she drank the poison given her by the Queen, carved in the stone.' I confess myself strongly inclined to believe this intended for a cross fleuri, such as was frequent on the coffin-lids of ecclesiastics, and the cup for a chalice, as often found thereon. (985)

The two opinions of the image of the cup are also apparent in antiquary Francis Grose's account of the legend of Rosamond's death at the hands of Eleanor, which he says is "a popular story, but it is by no means supported by history ... the story of the poison is thought to have taken its rise from the figure of the cup, engraved as an ornament on her tomb" (178). The misreading of the "ornament" of the cup on Rosamond's tomb as the one that poisoned her in the legend draws attention to the close connection between her stone coffin, its surface, and her body inside it. An engraving of a stone coffin at Godstow [figure 19], which *The Gentleman's Magazine* says "Mr. Grose was shewn" and was "pretended to be that from which Rosamund's bones were taken ... seemed to be contrived for two bodies, having been divided in the middle by a ridge of stone running from head to foot" (986). The emptiness of the tomb and the ruined barrier down its centre underscore the mutability of constructed space after death, and draw attention to the superficiality of socially constructed ideals. This image of universal decay and the focus on death's decay of beauty in the chapter-house wall transcription, convey the corruptibility of the human body in general, not just the female body.

However, the fact that Rosamond's body was also moved from opposite the high altar in the church, to the aforementioned chapel, and then disturbed again at the time of the Reformation also indicates uneasiness with an illicit female body, even in death. Francis Grose (writing in the 1770s) tells us that Rosamond's body remained opposite the high altar at Godstow
 till the year 1191; when ... Hugh Bishop of Lincoln, visiting the nunnery of Godstow, went into the church to pray; where observing a tomb

³⁴ It lists A and B as "the arches of the principal entrance, still remaining, though the room over them, and the round tower at the side, have long since been demolished ... C is a tower ... D and E may have been doors communicating with the church, whose site is marked F, and its altar G. HHH are apartments of the nunnery with the cloister ... K, the outer wall, in part remaining, without the tower; the door N is stopped up. M is the chapel wherein Rosamund was buried, having a wooden roof" (985).

covered with silk, and lighted by a profusion of wax tapers, he inquired to whom it belonged; and being answered to Rosamond ... the bishop, in a fit of zeal, exclaimed: Take this harlot from hence! and bury her without the church, lest through her the christian religion should be scandalized; and that other women, warned by her example, may refrain from unlawful and adulterous love. (178)

Grose's account (which epitomizes most eighteenth-century antiquarian accounts) shows how the threat of Rosamond's dead body is in other women's consumption of its burial spot and its exterior coverings, just as Brand argues that beauty without virtue will affect the state of the nation:

For yours, for Albion's sake retard her flight;
 When Virtue sets, 'tis Beauty's blackest night

.....
 Find civil Order to Confusion hurl'd
 And mental Darkness overwhelm the world! (11-12)

Brand goes on to apply the floral metaphor that the inscription on Rosamond's tomb implies to her beauty, and also relies on the image of poison to make his point: "Vice draws her deadliest bane from Beauty's pow'r, / The rankest poison from the richest Flow'r!" (18). Brand turns what was a reference to the decaying body and the rank smell of a sweet flower, into a metaphor for how vice corrupts the female body internally. The "rankest poison" is not visible on the surface of the flower, but vice can draw "her deadliest bane" from the interior of that superficial beauty. Just as Rosamond's tomb presents an empty space that suggests the decay of human ideals, so too does Brand base his fear of the interior of the body (similar to the Bishop's fear) on its exterior, and attempts to eradicate the interior:

O Woman! Source of ev'ry dear delight,
 That draws th' enamour'd soul, and charms the sight!
 In whom concentrates each attractive grace,
 That decks the mind, and deifies the face!
 Your rubied lips distill Aurora's dew,
 Your breath has sweets that Hybla never knew:
 Your eyes outshine the silver orbs of night;
 Serenely gay, and mild with soften'd light! (18)

When Brand focuses on exterior beauty as an indication of interior virtue, he undermines his warning against superficiality. As noted earlier, he bases his wish that the exterior represent the exact replica of the interior on the fear that there is a mutable boundary between the two. Beauty without virtue, according to Brand, is useless: "For ah! in vain your beauties Heav'n bestow'd, / If vicious Passion foul their fair abode!" (18). He argues that virtue or grace "decks the mind," which indicates that it drapes itself over what is the mind, while beauty dwells in a home (the body) that passion can foul. In none of these configurations does Brand attempt to go beneath the surface identity of woman – she is continually a physical symbol for him. But Rosamond's place as a symbol for corrupted virtue

is not as simple as Brand wishes it to be; her body represents a schism between illicit love and saintly legend that he ignores in order to express his didactic tale for the nation.

Rosamond's place as a saint also exists in reference to her body and in relation to its expression on stone. The message in antiquarian works tends to be one of corruption and redemption, while Brand fails to focus on redemption because it disrupts his symbolic construction of Rosamond, and because it allows for a Catholic basis to his instructive narrative. Grose gives an account of the opening of Rosamond's tomb that emphasizes the decay of the body with a more positive image:

But it was the destiny of this unfortunate lady to find no rest for her corpse; for after the Reformation her coffin was discovered and opened, of which Leland gives the following account: 'Rosamundes Tume, at Godstow Nunnery, was taken up a late; it is a stone with this inscription, Tumba Rosamundae, her bones were closed in lede, and within that, bones were closed yn letter; when it was opened there was a swete smell came out of it.' (178-9)

This account unravels the layers of identity that construct Rosamond as a legend to reveal a "swete smell," which indicates the construction of beauty in decay. This is the kind of decay that Eloisa says will erase the sinful nature of mingling bodies, and there are other indications that Rosamond's body was not necessarily illicit in death for many chroniclers of her legend. In the 1738 antiquarian work attributed to Thomas Cox, the author tells us that after Rosamond's death she was "esteemed a true Penitent, and on that Account saved; whereupon there was a Cross erected hard by *Godstow* Monastery, with this Inscription:

*Qui meat hac, oret, signumq; salutis adoret.
 Utque sibi detur veniam, Rosamunda precetur.*

In *English* thus:

Whoe'er thou art, that travellest this way,
 Worship our Saviour's Cross, and after pray:
 That thou by *Rosamunda's* Intercession,
 Mayest be pardon'd every Transgression. (478)

In Cox's account Rosamond gains the ability to intercede for travellers, which aligns her repentant body with the Christian cross. Grose similarly allows for interpretation: "Notwithstanding the opinion of the bishop of Lincoln, Rosamond was considered after her death as little less than a saint, as appears by the following inscription on a cross" (179). In contrast, *The Gentleman's Magazine's* 1791 account reverses Rosamond's intercession, and has the traveller interceding for her redemption. The author says the cross is "not addressed to Rosamund as a saint, as some have falsely imagined, but to implore the intercession of travellers to the Saviour of the world, to procure pardon for her transgression" (986). The later account is uncomfortable with the representation of Rosamond as anything but a symbolic and transgressive body, which also reflects a wish to repress the

Catholic context of the earlier legend – a dead female body (especially an illicit one) has no business interceding with Christ on behalf of the living.

Grose adds another narrative (which is also in Cox's account, but which *The Gentleman's Magazine* doesn't mention) that testifies to Rosamond's saintly position:

Rosamond, during her residence at her bower, made several visits to Godstow; where being frequently reproved for the life she led, and threatened with the consequences of a future state, she always answered, she knew she should be saved; and as a token to them, shewed a tree which she said would be turned into stone, when she was with the saints in heaven. Soon after her death this wonderful metamorphosis happened, and the stone was shewn to strangers, at Godstow, till the time of the dissolution. (179)

Rosamond's power to turn a living object into a stone one mirrors the accounts of her empty tomb that stress her bodily identity; it illustrates the mutability between living beings and stone, which in turn uncovers the constructed role of exterior symbols. It also recalls for us the way that Eloisa similarly drains herself of physical identity and creates of herself a stone body. The fact that the tree was shown to visitors up to the dissolution emphasizes the Catholic foundation of the legend, which is an element Brand represses in his poem. However, he also relies on this repressed understanding of the metamorphosis of a living object into a stone body when he constructs Rosamond as a symbol for the reader's consumption.

Illicit Consumption

As I explained earlier in this chapter, the idea of consumption draws together many of the issues I deal with in terms of the representation of ruin, domesticity, the text and the reader, and the body. Four definitions of the word apply: 1: "the action or fact of destroying or being destroyed; destruction." 2: "The action or process of decaying, wasting away, or wearing out." 3: "The action or fact of eating or drinking something, or of using something up in activity," and 4: "The purchase and use of goods, services, materials, or energy" (*OED*). These definitions obviously interact with one another; I am interested in the interaction between the different meanings of the word consumption at the site of the ruined nunnery, in terms of the aesthetics of the illicit female body, in reference to the configuration of public and private spheres, and in the production of literary and antiquarian texts. Combined together, they amount to the way I am also thinking of "imagination" when I say that the literature of the eighteenth century imagined national and gender identity based on a repressed (decayed) Catholic past. In the last section of this chapter my focus will be on the way that both Brand and Pope align the decay and ruin of monastic architecture with the female body in order to control what kind of consumption the reader performs.

Although he hints at redemption when his muse commands Rosamond to seek repentance, Brand's focus on her earthly punishment indicates his need to use her body as a symbolic warning:

There mourn, frail Maid! till o'er the murky gloom,
 Repentance shine to mitigate thy doom:
 By Man unheard, unwept, and unforgiv'n,
 The mercy Earth denies, draw down from Heav'n!

.....
 Be warn'd ye Fair (she cried) by Clifford's fate,
 What vengeful woes on lawless love await! (7-8)

Despite the possibility of heavenly redemption, it is the earthly punishment that Brand's readers are supposed to fear. The value of female beauty must be discernable on the surface for Brand, who relates it directly to commercial trade when women "more than deform their Maker's choicest grace, / And marr the mintage of the fairest face!" (19). According to Brand, women destroy the natural grace God gave them when they use false forms of beautification, and thereby devalue their original "mintage" as a living image of God. Brand constructs femininity as a kind of surface – a stone tomb of identity that must be filled consistently in order for it to accomplish the proper kind of symbolic role for a "moral" national identity. But his strong objection to the mutability between extremes indicates the emptiness of the space between exterior and interior:

Yet shall the Muse, indignant of your charms,
 'Gainst female falshood wield her dreaded arms.
 Tho' lavish Nature ev'ry grace bestows,
 And blends the Lilly with the vermeil Rose;
 The faultless form, with the celestial face,
 Attempter'd to Proportion's sweetest grace. (19-20)

Female falsehood devalues the woman's exterior, and thus indicates the imaginative nature of the moral ideal of chastity and honour. It is in this sense that Brand constructs Rosamond almost as if she is a ruin. He emphasizes a continuity between interior and exterior that erases the very interior he attempts to construct, especially since his construction depends on blending beauty with virtue as "the Lilly with the vermeil Rose" rather than segregating them. This repression of the very basis of an ideal constructs Rosamond as an uncanny space in Brand's poem.

Brand erases Rosamond's Catholic context, he does not give her the advantage of sainthood that earlier eighteenth-century antiquarians do, and he reconstructs her beauty as a caution against superficiality that relies on the very blending of states his poem admonishes. This is because the stone monuments that comprise the legend of Rosamond draw too much attention to the constructed nature of history, identity, and femininity. The interior of identity is only the repetition of the stone monuments that construct it, as Kenneth Gross notes: "Fixed and invisible as internal objects are, they can constitute a threat to all future attempts to construct a self, even as they are part of the foundation on which that self must be constructed" (36). Brand wishes his reader to look into the

mirror of Rosamond's narrative and see how true beauty reflects national identity. His refusal to acknowledge that the basis of this identity negates its existence results in the reader's consumption of the very nothingness of exteriority he warns against.

Pope, on the other hand, uses this antithesis to teach his reader the constructed nature of identity. Eloisa finally wishes: "May one kind grave unite each hapless name, / And graft my love immortal on thy fame!" (343-44). In death she imagines the perfect combination of art and nature that she cannot accomplish in life, due to the imaginary boundaries between femininity and masculinity and public and private. When Eloisa is dead the walls of the Paraclete will no longer force an imagination of separateness on her and Abelard, but will instead reinforce their unity, not unlike Rosamond's deteriorated coffin. The image of grafting love onto fame also suggests the combination of internal passion and public rhetoric, which is also what the publication of the letters and Pope's poem accomplish.

Hughes's translation of the letters includes a frontispiece that draws the reader's attention to the public consumption of Eloisa's private passion. The frontispiece is an engraving of a couple (presumably Heloise and Abelard) studying together and wearing what appears to be mid-to-late sixteenth-century dress [figure 20].³⁵ This brings the physicality of the authors directly to the reader's attention and also draws them out of their twelfth-century French context. The word frontispiece also calls to mind its architectural meaning as the "principal face or front of a building" or "decorated entrance to a building" (*OED*). Hughes includes a decorated entrance to the text that reminds the reader of the connection between bodies and the texts they produce. It also captures the complementary nature of their bodies, as the composition of the engraving relies on an asymmetrical barrier down the middle of the image. Abelard leans forward, as does one book and one part of the curtain above him, another book and the lower half of the curtain lean in the opposite direction. His body, too, makes the same "v" shape as he leans his head, one arm, and one foot toward Heloise. On Heloise's side of the engraving all of the books are straight, the curtain hangs straight, and her body remains on her side of the engraving; the only contact between them is a clasp of the hands. Despite the linear nature of Heloise's side of the engraving, a shadow falls toward Abelard, and the position of her body does mimic his. The negative space between them indicates a lack of distance between bodies, and while Abelard's body leans into Heloise's, the straightness of the

³⁵ Heloise wears an "upstanding collar," which appears in portraiture around 1550 (Ribero and Cumming 83), has sleeves reminiscent of c.1560, and cuffs c.1540 (84, 78). Abelard's ruff puts his costume around the same time period, c. 1560 (85), with baggy breeches reminiscent of c.1592 (98) and puffed sleeves that could represent a time period anywhere between 1536 and 1548 (77 and 81). This inconsistency with the twelfth-century context of the letters suggests that the engraver, Elisha Kirkall (1681/2-1742), imagines the French Heloise and Abelard as a much more recent introduction into English literature. It is of note that he places them in costumes from around the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in Great Britain in 1539.

composition on her side and the falling of light and shadow indicates that it is perhaps her soul that leans into Abelard's body. The asymmetrical composition also calls to mind Pope's emphasis on the blending of light and shade, and the fact that the combination of opposites results in ruin, or negativity. In Kirkall's composition this is certainly the case, and the way that it ushers the reader into the space between Heloise and Abelard is similar to Eloisa's attempt to reconcile physical desire with spiritual virtue.

Pope's Eloisa calls for communication with Abelard, and imagines him in relation to her space within the convent and his death in relation to her own: "Then too, when fate shall thy fair frame destroy, / (That cause of all my guilt, and all my joy) / In trance ecstatic may thy pangs be drowned" (337-339). Death offers the perfect combination of self and other and of body and stone architecture for Eloisa. She also calls on her reader to perform the same incorporation of her narrative and stone monument into their identities, in order to understand that the internal construction of self identity bases itself upon ruin. She dictates:

If ever chance two wandering lovers brings
 To Paraclete's white walls and silver springs,
 O'er the pale marble shall they join their heads,
 And drink the falling tears each other sheds;
 Then sadly say, with mutual pity moved,
 'Oh may we never love as these have loved!' (343-352)

The wandering lovers consume Eloisa and Abelard's mingled body by observing the stone exterior that covers it. They also sympathetically consume one another's tears in a way that encourages the same kind of mingling that Eloisa attempts at the cost of ruin.

Constructed boundaries are mutable and lead to ruin because English identity bases itself on the repressed object of Catholicism and illicit femininity. Just as death can erase the void between these extremes, so can an incorporation of ruin into the natural landscape and aesthetic provide a basis for identity that imagines there is a difference between the ideal self and the repressed object it consumes. The combination of passion and virtue that Eloisa desires is illicit because it suggests that there can be a combination, but it also draws attention to the fact that the ideal separation of these extremes relies on their confusion and combination. Sue Wiseman notices this antithetical combination in her discussion of late eighteenth-century female sexuality:

the confounding and mixing of discourses, combined with a disavowal or attenuation of the connection between the breast and the sexual organs (as in the cult of beauty) permitted the internalization of the pleasures of the luxurious breast into the political symbol of the virtuous breast which, in order to act as a powerful symbol, requires precisely the sexual reading it invites and disavows. (484)

Brand's mobilization of Rosamond as a symbol of illicit femininity substantiates Wiseman's point about the female body. Eloisa encourages her reader to incorporate the surface of her coffin into their understanding of her identity

because they will then see the constructs of virtuous femininity. As Jennifer Blair argues about the convent, “these attempts to come to know and reproduce the convent interior work in such a way as to keep both those who make them, and those who subsequently encounter them, at the surface” (70). Eloisa’s textual representation of herself, both because it is a letter and because it holds a mirror up to the reader, leads to a self evaluation that confuses the notions of public and private which construct ideal femininity.

Eloisa tells the reader that “if some relenting eye / Glance on the stone where our cold relics lie, / Devotion’s self shall steal a thought from heaven, / One human tear shall drop, and be forgiven” (55-58). In this metatextual self-examination, Eloisa shows Abelard that the power of her epistolary form is such that she can create a text as resilient as their stone coffin. She imagines into existence not only death, but the consumption of death on which Pope’s poem relies.³⁶ There is nothingness beneath Eloisa’s epistolary narrative, but I think that it is a productive nothingness because her passionate self-narrative uncovers the social constructs that dictate a non-existent female inner self.³⁷ In Auguste Bernard’s c.1780 painting *Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard* [figure 21], Bernard constructs an imagined passionate inner self for his subject through the connection between her body and the texts her mind absorbs. Despite the emphasis on her illicit imagination, there is no clue to the exact nature of her inner thoughts, which the viewer must construct for themselves and thus participate in the imagination of a non-existent interior. Part of the communication of this lack is also due to the epistolary form of the narrative, which confuses the boundaries between the writer, the intended reader, and the actual reader; all three agents become both readers and writers, imagining the other only to imagine his or herself.

The header for Hughes’s preface to the letters [figure 22] offers the reader a visual image of this confusion of boundaries, and of what Pope accomplishes in

³⁶ In Hughes’s translation Heloise also expounds on the ability of letters to express desire through language. This recalls the manner in which she brings Abelard’s portrait to life and to realize their death and future fame: “I have your picture in my Room, I never pass by it without stopping to look at it; and yet when you were present with me I scarce ever cast my Eyes upon it: If a Picture, which is but a mute Representation of an Object, can give such Pleasure, what cannot Letters inspire? They have Souls, they can speak, they have in them all that Force which expresses the Transports of the Heart; they have all the Fire of our Passions, they can raise them as much as if the Persons themselves were present” (59). In her desire for a letter from Abelard, then, Heloise here constructs the possibility for the virtuous soul to express itself in letters, as Pope’s poem demonstrates.

³⁷ Anne Elizabeth Carson sees this conception as an autoerotic one, with Eloisa’s text as a form of masturbation that holds the mirror up, not to Abelard (who she argues is already stone), but up to Eloisa herself: “From emptiness – which, Lacquer assures us, is how masturbation is regarded, as a tantalizing *nothingness* – comes a narrative of truth, imagination, and the self” (620). Carson argues that Eloisa produces the text in response to this self-reflection: “we might argue that as the actual child born of Eloisa and Abelard’s natural copulative union disappears in the demise of that union, the metaphorical literary child that Eloisa begets in a state of solitary confinement bespeaks its own tormented, ‘onanistic’ inception” (626).

“Eloisa to Abelard.” An artist figure appears in an engraving of a ruin, and copies down a visual image of that same ruin. The ruin in the engraving is overgrown, part of the natural landscape, and the viewer (both inside the engraving and outside of it) is as much a part of the landscape as the ruin. Not only does the imagined tourist interpret the ruin based on his own aesthetic identity, Hughes’s connection between the reader, the viewer and the text that follows also blurs boundaries between visual and written art. The nature of the combination of text and image heightens the aura of mutability between art and nature, especially since Kirkall “made or exploited one very marketable discovery: ‘an Invention of engraving on the same sort of Metal which Types are cast with’” (Clayton *ODNB*). This meant that Kirkall could print both the image and the type in the same print run, rather than having to run them separately. In Pope’s poem the combination of poet, author, reader, and imagined viewer also provide layers of identification that question whether anything other than imagination can provide the basis for an interior.

Some of Pope’s female readers responded to Eloisa’s voice in the same way that the header for Hughes’s translation suggests the viewer should respond: they made their own copies. Claudia Thomas argues that female responses to Pope helped to introduce them into the literary marketplace “with skills partly learned from Pope’s frequently reproduced texts,” and that his accessibility for women was “because of his physical and political disabilities and his middle-class status” (189).³⁸ His choice to take on the female voice in “Eloisa to Abelard” uncovers the emptiness of social structures of femininity, and as Anne Williams notes, “opens up spaces that heretofore have been kept secret by the very nature of the cultural structure and the powers that have ordained it” (65). But if Pope’s position allows him to uncover the emptiness beneath the aesthetic structure of women’s bodies and their existence in solitary monasteries, Claudia Thomas notes that his female readers “invariably cleared their heroines of deliberate immorality” (176) because when faced with the ruin of domestic identity, these women choose to vindicate “feminine passion while protecting their own reputations” (180). I believe this is because of the type of void that Eloisa’s narrative creates between what are constructed as separate spheres. She holds the mirror up to her female reader, and the reader must either construct her identity as completely imaginary, or incorporate into the self a ruined stone body that can only reinforce her uncanny position; she must either become the conflicted virtuous woman of passion that Eloisa represents (and face ruin), or she must incorporate Eloisa’s stone monument to the impossibility of the combination of these two extremes into herself and become a representative of the ghostly ideal of the virtuous, private, and natural femininity that forms national identity.

³⁸ Linda Zionkowski also discusses this contemporary notion of Pope as a non-gender specific writer: “By pleasing the ‘Generality of Readers’ rather than an elite male group, and by neglecting instruction in favour of turning a profit, writers like Pope supposedly forsake the character appropriate to their gender” (100).

The epistolary form itself highlights the impossibility of the latter. Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook notes that the letter “became an emblem of the private; while keeping its actual function as an agent of the public exchange of knowledge ... it took on the general connotations it still holds for us today, intimately identified with the body, especially a female body, and the somatic terrain of the emotions,” and that “the epistolary genre was central to the construction and definition of the categories of public and private” (6-7). Women’s responses to “Eloisa to Abelard” acknowledge that if they construct themselves outside of the imagined boundaries the poem flags, they will lose agency in the social context that dictates who they should be. Pope’s position blurs gender boundaries in a way that his eighteenth-century female readers identify with, and which they reproduce (in their own ways) in a commercial market that also constructs their position as mutable: “The capacity of women, or of notions of femininity, to be represented as at once central and peripheral to the workings of commerce gives them a kind of moral ascendancy” (Guest 47). The balancing act that the women who adopt Eloisa’s voice must perform mirrors the balancing of opposite images in Pope’s poem, as well as his combination of feminine and masculine voices, and his incorporation of seemingly opposite forms of architecture and imagery. Eloisa’s solitary confinement, much like the reader’s constructed identity, only exists if one denies the ruinous nature of the imaginary boundaries between public and private that the poem uncovers.

The consumption of such terms forces the reader to see that the body, architecture, the tomb, and the text all form an exterior surface ideal, which covers over the repressed and ruined history that is the basis for eighteenth-century British identity. Guest notes that “the imaginary space in which instability can be tolerated is most obviously defined by its location at what was beginning to seem the permeable periphery between public and private life” (47-48). That imaginary space – somewhat like the “craving void” that Eloisa wishes to erase in order to completely possess Abelard – is a space that Pope relies on to capture “the struggles of grace and nature, virtue and passion” and that Brand denies the existence of when his moral muse commands the reader to “transcribe the Tale, that on this wall is wrought” (8). The female ornament of ideal beauty, virtue, and maternity cannot be an illicit one if she is to be a symbol for stable national identity. Just as Pope’s female readers find agency within a cultural context that demands stable barriers and superficial symbols, so too does the image of the nunnery provide a productive space in which Sophia Lee can imagine the possibilities and limitations of female inheritance and an alternative history of England.

Chapter Three

Inherited Maternal Follies: Ruinous History in Sophia Lee's *The Recess*

And yet could you Reader have believed it possible that some hardened & zealous Protestants have even abused [Mary Stuart] for that steadfastness in the Catholic Religion which reflected on her so much credit? But this is a striking proof of their narrow souls & prejudiced Judgements who accuse her. – Jane Austen, The History of England (1791)

Jane Austen's satirical treatment of Mary Stuart's Catholic suffering is representative of the important debate about Mary's virtue (or lack of virtue) in the late eighteenth century – a debate that Sophia Lee's *The Recess; or a Tale of Other Times* (1783-85) takes as its focus. In this chapter I will move my analysis of the connection between nunneries and domesticity into a discussion of history and historical gothic fiction as it imagines the inheritance of female suffering and virtue. So far, I have argued that the eighteenth-century imagination of national and gender identity was partly based on an imagination of the nun and (ruined) nunnery in the English landscape; that the nun's ability to transcend the boundaries between public and private led to an uncomfortable repression of Catholic female monasticism in English antiquarian texts; and that such texts relied on an ideal of the enclosed and virtuous nun and nunnery to construct eighteenth-century English domestic space. In the previous chapter I discussed the differences between how early and late eighteenth-century literature align antithetical female virtue with the space of the convent. In this chapter, I will connect images of ruin, the nunnery, public and private space, and symbolic virtue to the idea of female inheritance and the aesthetic fad for the monastic folly in the late eighteenth century. I will do this by developing my analysis of virtue and consumption, and by adding the term "fault" to my theoretical lexicon. The definitions of fault (the noun) that I wish to focus on are: 1: "A defect, imperfection, blameable quality or feature ... a. in moral character ... b. in physical or intellectual constitution, appearance, structure, workmanship, etc.," 2: "an unsound or damaged place; a flaw, crack," and 3: "Deficiency, lack, scarcity, want of (something specified)," which is an early usage, 1300-1591(*OED*), but one that I think Sophia Lee might have had in mind since she sets her tale in the Renaissance, and since Johnson also defines fault as a "defect; want; absence" (1160). If virtue is an imagination of ideal enclosed virginity based on the female body and its relationship to architectural space, then fault signifies the absence of such an ideal when repression, loss, ruin, (or what I have been referring to as consumption) uncover it as an imagined one. Once again, I will use the term consumption to argue about the ways that narratives of national identity imagine text, architecture, and bodies; and once again I will investigate how these definitions of consumption appear in depictions of female suffering, architectural ruin, virtuous femininity, and domestic identity.

In *The Recess* Sophia Lee uses the fictional twin daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots (Matilda and Ellinor) to imagine an alternate history of England. Lee fashions a gothic narrative in the form of Matilda's letter to a friend, and embedded within that letter is Ellinor's epistle to Matilda. The narrative follows the twins from a secluded recess beneath a country house to the court of Elizabeth and beyond; Matilda eventually travels to France and Jamaica, while Ellinor's adventures take her to Ireland and Scotland. Lee bases her tale on the ruins of England's religious and national past, and she posits a theory of what I call destructive maternal inheritance. This inheritance passes ideal femininity and the negative results of that ideal from generation to generation, with fragmentation, death, and ruin as the only ways to recuperate any semblance of agency; these forms of dissolution offer Lee's heroines agency because they dismantle static categories of gender and religious identity.

This theory is indebted to April Alliston's similar reading of maternal inheritance in *The Recess* and to Judith Butler's understanding of gendered identity, as she explores it in *Gender Trouble*. For Alliston, maternal inheritance is characterized by a "double bind" or what I have been calling antithetical femininity, and which I see arising from a repression of female monastic identity. Alliston also links objects and architecture to this maternal inheritance which she says *The Recess* uses to literalize "female exile and entrapment rather than female desire and agency. Each of these literal sites, matrixlike, repeats the tension of the double bind and opens a new way through it" (153). Alliston also sees this new way through enclosure and exile as a particularly epistolary one, wherein maternal inheritance also means an inheritance of violent history:

Female relations are always already contained within the same enclosure of exile. They have inherited the same history, and any demand for that history by one from another can only produce a repetition, a reframing of the same history, whose difference can be disturbing, because it discloses the failures of sympathy by recreating, rather than bridging, the gap between them. (178)

But differences in maternal histories also uncover malleability and agency. This is where Judith Butler's understanding of "subversive bodily acts" comes into my argument. Because Lee's text acts as an architectural folly – representing ruin as a fiction that questions historical categories of identity – her characters can question identity through consumption and destruction. When Butler discusses Wittig, she thinks about the ways that ideal constructions of gender ultimately destroy themselves, and how literary texts have a particular access to this destruction of boundaries:

To universalize the point of view of women is simultaneously to destroy the category of women and to establish the possibility of a new humanism. Destruction is thus always restoration – that is, the destruction of a set of categories that introduce artificial divisions into an otherwise unified ontology. (152)

When Lee constructs her text as an object of historical ruin for her readers' consumption, and posits that bodies and architectural spaces emphasize the uncanny and melancholic nature of eighteenth-century British identity, she encourages her reader to question the socio-political and religious constructs of selfhood.

This means that Lee's history relies as heavily on constructed façade as one of the popular follies of the mid-to-late eighteenth century (such as Beckford's Fonthill, or Walpole's Strawberry Hill).³⁹ Beckford's Fonthill Abbey, which he began in the 1790s as a garden ornament, expanded as his primary home, and which fell into physical and financial ruin by 1823, is a good architectural example of the connections between historical fiction and sham ruins. Not only does Fonthill Abbey blur similar boundaries to those that Lee blurs in *The Recess*, it also shows how picturesque and gothic aesthetics focus on medieval inheritance and a repressed Catholic past. Beckford constructs a Romantic edifice that substantiates an English reliance on the dissolved and ruined past in order to claim national heritage. Similarly, Sophia Lee purposefully constructs a faulty narrative in order to draw attention to the ethics of consuming ruin or suffering – as her characters inherit this particular aesthetic from their Catholic mother. Although I intend to focus on Lee's textual creation of gothic folly, the construction and progress of Beckford's Fonthill Abbey will, at times, offer an architectural parallel to my analysis of Lee's narrative [see figure 23]. This is not to suggest that Beckford was directly influenced by Lee's text, but that her construction of ruin and space indicates an apt understanding of the prevailing basis of national identity on the Catholic, gothic, and picturesque aesthetics which Beckford's structure also illuminates.⁴⁰

Several facets of identity-construction intersect in Lee's exposure of the architecture of a gothic narrative: the importance of Catholicism to eighteenth-century identity, and specifically feminine identity; the aesthetics of architectural, textual and bodily ruin or folly; and the consumption of both Catholic sites of ruin and feminine suffering in order to construct Protestant English identity upon a

³⁹ The term folly is a particularly apt one because it can apply to "a popular name for any costly structure considered to have shown folly in the builder" (meaning 5a. in the *OED*) as well as to "madness, insanity, mania" (meaning 4) and a lack of virtue, as in "lewdness, wantonness" (meaning 3). In the context of the late eighteenth century, the word also refers specifically to a temporary garden ornament, or structure made to appear like that which it is not, such as a sham ruin or temple. Morrissey argues that Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* is a folly because he builds "a mid-eighteenth-century British sham ruin – pretending to suggest historical period through detailing and a state of disrepair" (124).

⁴⁰ Beckford's extended stay in Portugal from 1793-1796 is one influence on the construction of Fonthill Abbey that many biographers note. He adopted the patron saint of Lisbon, Saint Anthony of Padua, and owned his wish for a chapel at Stops' Beacon dedicated to this saint (Aldrich 118). Aldrich also mentions the "fact that the site of the future Fonthill Abbey was near to ruins of a medieval priory" (120) and John Rutter describes "the origin of Fonthill Abbey in 1823.... as a 'convent' which would be a striking decorative feature in a garden scene made picturesque by being partly in ruin" (Gemmett 72).

disenfranchised or fragmented other (be it a religious, political, or gendered other). Lee blurs the distinctions between these foundational elements of identity in order to question what maternal inheritance (architectural, textual, or bodily) means for her female characters.

Ideal Ruins

A search for national identity in the fragments of an Elizabethan past informs Lee's construction of imagined textual and architectural history. The Elizabethan era is the obvious choice for any exploration of national identity; not only was it an age in which Protestant identity was solidified with the Settlement of 1559 and the creation of the Church of England, but it was also an age in which the repression of Catholicism quite literally showed itself in the creation of Elizabeth's persona as the "Virgin Queen." If "Elizabeth's reign established the principle that being loyal meant being a Protestant as defined in the 1559 Settlement" (Sharpe 240), it also meant that Elizabeth could create "for herself during her long reign an androgynous identity which gave her a unique protean power. She could offer her unbroached female body to invoke the iconic power of the Virgin herself, chosen by God.... She could as readily become the mother of her people when she wished to convey love and careful nurture" (Dunn 107). Elizabeth, then, in her repression of Mary, Queen of Scots, performs the burial of Catholic identity that is necessary for the creation of ideal English femininity; a femininity that re-enacts the kind of bodily virtue that the Catholic nun possesses. *The Recess* creates a history that explores the complexities of historical self while simultaneously erasing the religious and gender categories that are necessary for accepted narratives of the sublime and beautiful, the picturesque, or Protestant and Catholic identity to succeed. Mary, Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I, as ornamental spectres of national identity, highlight eighteenth-century historians' struggle to understand the difference between fact and historical fiction. Lee uses these ornamental female bodies to explore the connection between architectural ruin and gendered space – and she does this through a manipulation of narrative fragment.

Lee points to fragment and fault (as both absence and error) as the true representatives of history in her "advertisement," which immediately introduces the antithetical nature of ideal images:

As painting can only preserve the most striking characteristics of the form, history perpetuates only those of the soul; while too often the best and worst actions of princes proceed from partialities and prejudices, which live in their hearts, and are buried with them. The depredations of time have left chasms in the story, which sometimes only heightens the pathos. An inviolable respect for truth would not permit me to attempt connecting these, even where they appeared faulty. (5)

Here, Lee emphasizes the fragmentary nature of any creation that claims to represent human identity or history as complete. The faulty space between exterior appearance and interior thought, Lee suggests, cannot be filled with

speculation. She poses the theory that with fragment and ruin come the most powerful narratives, and with false completeness the most passive. Sham ruins, then, are more self-reflexive than sham castles, while real ruins actually draw less attention to their construction as ideals, and so offer a less subversive possibility than that of a sham ruin. Thus, the false chasms in the story provide Lee's characters with the most possibility for overcoming their maternal inheritance of powerless suffering.

This metatextual theory calls to mind the conflict between antiquaries and historians in the mid-to late eighteenth century, and links Lee's text to debate about the popular consumption of the past. Hadyn White argues that until after the French Revolution "historiography was conventionally regarded as a literary art.... Although eighteenth-century theorists distinguished rather rigidly ... between 'fact' and 'fancy,' they did not on the whole view historiography as a representation of the facts unalloyed by elements of fancy" (25).⁴¹ Lee sees the consumption of fault as necessary for the ethical construction of history and her use of fiction to convey this point complicates the matter and makes it a political one: all history is partially fictional and to represent it as truth is unethical, while all fiction implies the consumption of a subjected or "ruined" other that is integral to historical identity. Richard Maxwell also notices that Lee's fiction is more about working through political representations of gendered identity than about merely imagining an alternative history; in his comparison of Lee's work to the Abbé Prévost's *Le Philosophe anglais ou Histoire de Monsieur Cleveland* (1731-39), Maxwell argues that Lee recuperates the gaps that "impossible historical continuity" create, and that such chasms "take the form of repressed collective memories, facts willed or decreed to be fictions and thus, necessarily sent into exile.... It is the space of rejected tradition and also, equally, the space of novelistic invention" (169).

But Lee does not simply invent her folly in order to construct chasms; she invents it as a comment on the political aesthetic of those chasms (possible through repression), and the ways that the eighteenth-century reader consumes historical fiction in order to solidify a ghostly self. To do this, Lee's fiction portrays architecture that is aesthetically pleasing because partly in ruin, secluded, and mysterious in its embodiment of past Catholic identity; as such it probes the fractured and ornamental basis of English identity. *The Recess's* fragmented narrative and its emphasis on inherited maternal ruin, insanity, and death draw the

⁴¹ In his study of the antiquary Francis Grose, Stephen Bending points out that representations of the past also have much to do with contemporary consumption: "The issue turns, that is, on the question of what kind of history and what kind of audience the antiquarian might be addressing, on how an antiquarian account of the past might be engaging with a commercial present" (523). Devony Looser also notes, "At the end of the eighteenth century, revolutionary activity and nationalist feelings in Great Britain and on the Continent increased people's desire to understand the past, perhaps as a way to explain the present. History gained readers among the middling and even working classes in the latter part of the century, when literacy rates for men averaged one in two and for women, one in three" (15).

reader's attention to the impossibility of ideal historical narratives of religious, national, and gender identity. As Margaret Anne Doody points out, the "historical unreality of these beings [Matilda and Ellinor], whose lives are not to be found recorded on any page of history, works, oddly, in the novel as a kind of substantiation" of their lives (554). However, the textual fragmentation and buried identities of Matilda and Ellinor reconstruct historical narrative as a ruin, and when they do so they question any substantiation of history.

Lee's comment on femininity and maternity relies on and responds to the equivocal architecture of the recess, as it is a pivotal icon for the emptiness and the potential that comes from the ruin of such constructs; but Lee also refashions history through the fragmentation and re-imagination of historical narrative as a feminine manuscript under constant revision. As Matilda explains: "How have I wept the moment I quitted the Recess – a moment I then lived but in the hope of! To be always erring, is the weakness of humanity, and to be always repenting, its punishment" (10). The power to create a fictional narrative of identity as if it is a historical one puts the writer *and* reader in positions of identity production. Sophia Lee assumes this position from the very preface of her text, and is careful to involve her reader in the same process by providing two major points of view. As Ellinor so aptly points out when she begins her narrative to Matilda in the second half of the novel: "I lay my heart unveiled before you, its passions, its pride, its prejudices; condemn them not my sister, however they may contradict your own." Of Lord Leicester she says: "Astonishing that two agreeing in every instance till that moment, should for the first time differ in so decided a manner!" (155). This alternate point of view forces the reader to consider the fallibility of human accounts, and thus of historical narrative. In this way, Lee's history pays distinct attention to the possibilities for feminine identity that come from questioning the past. As Doody understands, in Lee's ideal "every action is doomed to loss – and dread; every relationship is fated to be fractured by history" (555). Lee constructs a historical maternal ideal in order to uncover its emptiness and its susceptibility to fragmentation at the first test of existence.

Theories of Ruin and Inheritance

An architectural ruin, or what remains of a division that once existed between an exterior and interior, is an apt metaphor for the act of understanding the self as an aesthetic ideal built upon painful destruction.⁴² The ruin becomes

⁴² As I point out in chapter two, in his argument that late eighteenth-century categories of identity "became personal, interiorized, essential, even innate" and made "synonymous with self," Dror Wahrman notices a resistance to differences between interiority and exteriority that indicates a necessary ruin – or a false covering of the fragmentation of self – in order to realize modern (static) selfhood (276). There is a necessity for ruin (albeit not necessarily an acknowledged one) if one wishes to conflate interior and exterior identities in the attempt to create a "whole" ideal self (295). In this sense, what Wahrman characterizes as a modern sense of self actually requires the mutability that he argues frames the *ancien régime* of identity.

such an excellent representation of the conflation of interior and exterior identity that it in turn becomes an ideal aesthetic, and repressed or lost elements of the self are refigured as integral to the creation of identity. As Ian Balfour suggests, “the fragmented body of a great hero comes across not only as sublime, but in its very fragmented character it allows the viewer to imagine its missing parts as the most beautiful imaginable, the ideal of the ideal” (333). In *The Built, The Unbuilt and the Unbuildable* Robert Harbison also notes that ruins are ideal; he relates human perception to the decay of the building when he argues that “ruins are a way of seeing” and that although they are a physical reality, “since the eighteenth century [ruins] are never just problems of maintenance. Rather ... the forecast of ruin, engages our feelings about where we see ourselves in history, early or late, and (in poignant cases) our feelings about how the world will end” (99). Ruins (as a way of seeing for the characters in *The Recess*) capture lost identity, create national identity, and conflate interior and exterior ideals; they strip bare the architecture of the self and call into question boundaries between the past and the present, fiction and fact, and masculine sublimity and feminine beauty.

In addition to carefully delineating the boundaries between femininity and masculinity, British authors, architects and historians were invested in the creation of an ideal national inheritance in the late eighteenth century. Beckford’s attempt to capture this ideal at Fonthill Abbey provides an intriguing counterpart to Lee’s criticism of inherited identity in *The Recess*. Both the architectural folly and the historical novel fabricate ruin in order to blur boundaries and question the very identities they construct. Beckford bases his structure on lost Catholic identity, his experience of the continental other, and his attempt to recapture his personal past in architectural form. His focus on the combination of the folly’s interior and exterior and of fancy and reason in his writing both question the construction of ideal textual and architectural boundaries. Dick Claésson writes on Beckford’s narrative construction of himself through the combination of fancy and reason, and concludes:

The operative terms here, when reading Beckford, are *recollection*, *contemplation*, *reverie* and *dream*, all of which, though according to Locke not only closely related to the process of perception but also to the orderly organisation of ideas, are usurped by Beckford as codewords of the imagination, coalescing into a language concerned with the imagination and the reverie, and forming a grammar of fictional creation. (129)

With Fonthill Abbey, Beckford participates in a theory of garden ornamentation that questions the assumption that ideal architecture must be orderly.

Architectural or textual follies also explore the idea of hereditary ruin, which both imagines ideal identity and simultaneously undermines that very imagination by making its absence a legacy. An ambiguous surface is integral to the construction and destruction of a definition between art and nature or interiority and exteriority, and as Morrissey says of *The Castle of Otranto*, “Like a folly, the novel, having raised the possibility that its supposed castle might

actually exist, tells a story in which, from its surprising beginning to its ambiguous ending, readers are left wondering whether anything is what it seems” (126).⁴³ In the folly, surface appearance indicates an internal identity that simply does not exist – history as the eighteenth-century architect creates it is only fancy – but the placement of these edifices in the natural landscape calls to mind other ruins that *do* contain historical “interiors” but whose ruinous “exteriors” the viewer ideologically reconstructs to repress the memory of Catholic identity: monastic ruins. Lee constructs her novel with many ontological concerns that also come to the forefront in the contemplation of architectural ruins. Ideal interiors, the antithetical relationship between the body and the soul, art and nature, and the epistemological concerns of sensibility all forge a strong connection between Lee’s historical fiction and monastic ruins – be they real or imagined.

Flawed inheritance is at work in *The Recess*, as beauty, imprisonment, and grief socially construct the female self. Matilda and Ellinor are doomed to repeat their mother’s mistakes because her suffering exists within their physical and social selves. This idea of inheritance resonates more clearly with the aesthetic aims of the text, and with ideas about reproduction from the Renaissance into the eighteenth century. Jenny Davidson explicitly links the negotiation of natural and artificial boundaries to breeding and inheritance when she explains how “breeding folds nature into culture” by offering “a hereditarian model in which birth determines one’s character and one’s place in the world” alongside “a model that emphasizes the power of education and other environmental influences to shape essentially malleable human beings into whatever form is deemed best” (1). For the characters in *The Recess*, this definition of breeding also epitomizes their physical space; Matilda and Ellinor inherit enclosure in the recess, which in turn affects their understanding of identity. Felicity Nussbaum discusses the importance of female inheritance as it provides a gendered notion of defect. She notes that the mother’s “reproductive power is compromised by immoderate desire, and her womb, the defective appendage, makes manifest the mother’s hidden faults and produces a more definitive secondary category of flawed femininity in the second generation” (36). Hidden faults (absences, gaps between physical and spiritual virtue, errors) become more visible and repetitive the more productive the female body; as a result the ruin that arises from faulty ideal femininity gets reworked as a folly by the generations who inherit it. In a similar move, Kate Ferguson Ellis refers to gothic writers as “Milton’s progeny” because they take up the question of an ideal domestic sphere and “crack it open,” as Alliston says of patriarchal forms of inheritance (Ellis 35). It is my argument that Lee’s text retells history in a fragmented state in order to warn future female generations of the fallibility of a female identity that frames social and political expectations as “ideal.” This technique creates a resonance between text,

⁴³ Hélène Frichot notes in her discussion of Deleuze’s Baroque house, “this threshold, or flexible membrane between material constituents and immaterial forces also recalls in its fine details the surface of sense, which Deleuze has developed from that marvellous line of separation the Stoics drew between bodies and incorporeal effects” (66).

architecture and the maternal body that draws attention to the empty follies (even as it replicates them) of eighteenth-century religious, national and gender ideals.

Ideal Queens, Ideal Convents

When Lee chooses to focus on Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart she explores some of the major issues surrounding British history and how it dictates eighteenth-century identity. *The Annual Biography and Obituary* for 1825 claims that Lee was inspired by both architecture and text to create her folly:

While a mere child she ... visited Winchester; the monastic institutions and historical interest attached to that spot ... retained a place in her recollection many years after. Brooding over that, and accidentally perusing Hurd's Dialogues, she imaged to herself the possibility of framing a story that might blend historical characters with fictitious events, and both with picturesque scenery. The brilliant court of Elizabeth struck her to be the suitable aera for such a fiction, and the events of "The Recess, or a Tale of other Times," gradually developed themselves. (129-130)

This biographical excerpt places the motivation for Lee's imagined historical narrative in *her* past, which draws greater attention to the movement of time in relation to the gestation of ideas and ability to imagine narratives. It also draws together her perusal of Hurd's dialogues and her remembrance of architecture from childhood – which brings text, memory, and monastic space all into the biographer's image of Sophia Lee's imagination. The accidental discovery of narrative and its careful gestation over a set period suggests more unity than *The Recess* actually offers as a fragmented and heteroglossic text.

When she re-writes the history of Mary Stuart, Lee works against the eighteenth-century ideal of "unity and moral utility" and more in league with what was viewed as the fragmented history that characterized the Middle Ages (Lynch 60). Lee's use of this type of history in which "the depredations of time have left chasms in the story" makes her story an architectural folly, which in turn dissolves gender binaries and melds Catholic history with a Protestant ideal of monastic seclusion outside of the Catholic convent (Lee 5). Mrs Marlow explains that the recess

was once inhabited by nuns of the order of St. Winifred, but deserted before the abolition of Convents ... when the Reformation ... robbed the monks of their vast domains, the ancestor of Lord Scrope obtained this land of the king; he pulled down the monastery to erect a convenient mansion ... and discovered a secret passage from thence to the Convent ... the nobleman ... professed the reformed religion, but not able to forget that in which he had been brought up, his house became the asylum of ... the unrequited fathers ... he had the stones removed cautiously by the holy fathers, and found the place well arched and paved, and free from damp ... Thus, in a few years, each father had his own cell, and a monastery was hid among the ruins of the convent. (22-23)

The mutability of the buried ruins of St. Winifred's convent and its subterranean connection to the Protestant country house emphasize the architectural layers that comprise national identity. As the vault at Ely in figure 24 (from James Storer's *The Antiquarian Itinerary*, 1818) depicts, the interior spaces of the convent were romanticized by eighteenth-century antiquaries, just as Lee describes the recess as "well arched and paved, and free from damp" (Storer 4).

This account of the recess also figures it as a particularly androgynous space, as the monks hide within what used to be a female monastic space. Mrs Marlow further emphasizes the malleability of the secret ruins when she explains her use of them: "This solitude ... was inexpressibly agreeable to me; it had all the advantages of a nunnery, without the tie to continue in it; a restriction the most likely to make retirement odious" (Lee 24). Not only does the recess act as a nunnery, a make-shift monastery, Mrs Marlow's Protestant-like nunnery, and Matilda and Ellinor's refuge from Elizabeth, it also becomes an important metaphor for the malleability of historical text; Lee places the imaginary daughters of Mary Stuart in an architectural space as conflicted as the historical narratives of their mother. In fact, eighteenth-century historians were not exactly sure what to do with Mary Stuart's narrative. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis explains that Mary Stuart plays an important role in "an emerging historiography whose peculiar topology reflects a certain attitude toward the uses of emotion on the one hand and the possibility of cultural coherence in Britain on the other" ("Mary Stuart's 'Fatal Box'" 429). Historical narratives accomplish this coherence through their sentimental portrayals of Mary Stuart as a feminine ideal that later generations can look to for inheritance. Lewis also notes that "Mary's transformation into a domestic and sentimental icon accompanied and ultimately sped the feminization and domestication of British culture" ("Ev'ry Lost Relation" 181).

In *The Recess*, the painted portraits of Mary Stuart and the Duke of Norfolk offer the only mirror of parental identity that the twins have growing up; Mary's portrait becomes an icon for their inheritance of suffering, fragmentation, and ornamental (or ideal) femininity. Indeed, Matilda's narrative functions in a very similar manner to Mary's portrait, which elicits "a thousand melting sensations" and acts as a mirror for Matilda, as Mrs Marlow tells her "look in the glass ... and you will see her [Mary's] perfect image" (Lee 10, 27). The complexity of the portrait's existence somewhere between the public and private spheres also mirrors the insubstantiality of Matilda and Ellinor's existence and the fragmented manuscript that carries their narrative. When they view the portraits, they react to the unsettling space between the recess and the world:

'Ah! who can these be?' cried we both together. 'Why do our hearts thus throb before inanimate canvas? ... We walked arm in arm round, and moralized on every portrait, but none interested us like these ... a young heart is frequently engrossed by a favorite idea, amid all the glare of the great world; nor is it then wonderful ours were thus possessed when entombed alive in such a narrow boundary ... we lived in the presence of

these pictures as if they understood us, and blushed when we were guilty of the slightest folly. (10)

Matilda and Ellinor moralize on other portraits, but they feel a mysterious sentiment attached to the portraits of their parents, which engross them as a “favorite idea.” Matilda describes their response to the portraits in sentimental terms, but counters this ideal consumption with two important phrases: “amid all the glare of the great world” and “entombed alive in such a narrow boundary” draw attention to the double role of the portraits (which are both hidden and public artefacts) in Matilda and Ellinor’s own “young hearts” as they are “possessed” by ideal dreams, and embarrassed by “the slightest folly.”

In this important first review of their parents’ portraits, the twins have all the information they need to understand the faulty nature of ideal representations of paternal or maternal identity. They wish to uncover the mystery of what lies beneath the ornamental portrayal of Mary Stuart, but the novel goes on to demonstrate that there is no interior layer of identity for anyone who falls for ideal sentiment as Matilda and Ellinor do – both inside and outside of the recess. As Alison Conway notes:

The novel and the portrait appear at the centre of eighteenth-century debates in England about the nature of private interests and about women’s relation to those interests ... the genres were able to turn the idea of private interests into a principle of aesthetic pleasure by sustaining a paradoxical vision of female character as both an idealized object of virtue and an erotic icon. (14-15)

The paradox that Conway notes here is central to the fragmentation of Lee’s narrative in *The Recess*, not least because Mary Stuart’s historical life was subject to the same confusion between virtue and vice, seclusion and fame, or fact and fiction that characterize portraits, novels, and architectural follies. As Lewis argues, “Mary Stuart can be neither sequentially narrated nor properly read. Rather, she embodies the multiple, the particular, the indeterminate – and ultimately the unreadable – as these qualities interrupt unified, linear, and didactic systems of representation” (“Ev’ry Lost Relation” 6-7). This antithetical identity is not only a good metaphor for ideal femininity, it is also characteristic of the way that historians read medieval nuns. As Elizabeth Mazzola notes, Mary’s domestic identity was both private and public: “Uncomfortably confined within a series of English houses under lock and key for nineteen years, Mary was both a state secret and infamous royal figure” (387). It is no wonder, then, that her portrait stalls Matilda and Ellinor’s attempts to moralize. Multiple representations of Mary also complicate Mrs Marlow’s claim that all Matilda need do is look in the mirror to see the image of her mother, since her mother’s image differs with every sentimental attempt at her portrait or narrative.

An engraving from *The Antiquarian Repertory* (c.1778) testifies to the fragmentary nature of Mary Stuart’s history, as the metonymic treatment of her disembodied head and portrait come to symbolize that fragmentation [figure 25]. A letter to the editor explains the context of the image:

Against a pillar in the church of St. Andrew, is a monument in memory of the unhappy Mary, Queen of Scotland, of which the following account was given me ... [the] Ladies of the Bed-chamber ... were permitted to retire hither, and to take the head of their mistress with them, which they interred near a pillar opposite the chapel of the holy sacrament ... on the pillar they placed the portrait of the Queen, of which I herewith send you a copy; it is in an oval frame, and is ... well executed; the face extremely beautiful, and much differing from any other I have seen ... It is said this portrait was painted in France soon after she first became a widow. (Godfrey 202)

Foremost in this writer's claim is that this is a copy of a portrait that Mary's ladies in waiting took with them to Antwerp. He emphasizes the myth that her head is buried beneath the portrait (which he later dismisses as impossible) and so makes a direct association between Mary Stuart's likeness, her beauty, her dismemberment, and her widowhood.⁴⁴ In making these ornamental associations he cements a romantic ideal that associates suffering with beauty and feminine virtue; this is the same ideal that Sophia Lee undermines with her fragmented portrait of Mary Stuart and her daughters' fractured maternal inheritance in *The Recess*.

The engravings of Mary Stuart in Robert Bowyer's *A series of one hundred and ninety-six engravings ... illustrative of the history of England* (1812) similarly mourn a feminine ideal and focus on her suffering and dismemberment (117-118). One engraving features a monument that displays Mary's image, with classical figures weeping over it [figure 26], and the other is of her execution [figure 27]. Both engravings emphasize Mary's suffering and the erotic consumption of her image. In figure 26 the monument to her suffering is almost completely overgrown by foliage. The natural landscape and the classical style of the image rely on the combination of art and nature to elicit longing for ideal feminine beauty. In figure 27 Mary's white garments set against the black armour of her executioner emphasize her virtue. The women in the engraving turn away, while the men are both literally and figuratively wearing masks – the executioner's steely and introspective gaze suggests an unwillingness to murder the Scottish Queen. Mary herself is blindfolded, and the viewer of the engraving has the strange sense that theirs is the only gaze that rests on her, as the executioner looks introspectively past her. Because it is an unreturned gaze it is

⁴⁴ The mention of Mary's widowhood flags competing narratives of her character, because of her implication in the death of her husband, Lord Darnley, and her remarriage to Lord Bothwell. As Alison Weir explains in her account of Lord Darnley's murder, "after the murder, which led to [Mary's] enforced abdication and her long imprisonment in England, she became a contentious figure. Scottish Calvinists saw her as an adulteress and murderess ... while Mary's Catholic and loyalist supporters regarded her as a wronged heroine ... It was not until the eighteenth century ... that Mary was seen as a woman who allowed her emotions to rule her acts and was therefore responsible to a degree for her own destruction. Historians such as David Hume and William Robertson criticised her for succumbing to overt and unwise passions" (3-4).

impossible to impute to Mary any identity but that which the viewer imagines she has – a form of consumption that combines the erotic imagination of the moment just before death, with the virtuous suffering of a now faceless queen.

In the context of these eighteenth-century engravings, Lee's concern with the fragmentation of Matilda and Ellinor's identities due to their seclusion, its publicity, and their live burial under the maternal inheritance of suffering, has as much to do with viewing and consuming ideal femininity in general, as it does with Mary Stuart's femininity in particular. It is no mistake that the portraits hide the secret entrance into the subterranean passages that lead to the country house: "But judge of my astonishment, when I found the so often-sought entrance was a door of the size of that portrait which first gave me such singular sensations, and which I perceived was made to fall together, with a spring almost imperceptible" (Lee 15). Similarly, when Lord Leicester discovers Matilda and Ellinor in the deserted grounds of the ruined recess, he does not question their identity because he can read their maternal inheritance in their bodily appearance and secluded retreat: "for how should a less lovely mother give being to such children, and how, otherwise, should such matchless beauty and elegance be hid in a desert!" (41). Leicester shows how tenuous the twins' secretive and constructed identities are when he thus provides the proof for their existence.⁴⁵ Lee may seem to promise "that her novel will follow prescriptions for the proper reconstruction of character and event recently expounded by historians like David Hume and William Robertson," but what she relies on is the fact that such an attempt at sequential or consistent historical narrative only leads her characters toward death and destruction (Lewis, "Ev'ry Lost Relation," 171). Lee's use of Mary Stuart relies both on the inconsistencies of Mary's historical character and the ideal femininity that Lee herself constructs in Mary's children only to deconstruct through a fragmented narrative.

⁴⁵ Susan Greenfield gives an overview of the common plot of mother-daughter resemblance in her book *Mothering Daughters*. She argues that the repetition of this motif "suggests it achieved something of a mythic status" (54). The ideal for Greenfield is predicated on the father's resemblance and ownership of the daughter, which "highlights the fallacy of the father's law, exposing the inequity illogic, and downright danger of his right to name the kin" (56). The physical appearance of Matilda and Ellinor documents both their mother and father's identities but it is the maternal inheritance of suffering and secret identity that they must reckon with, which (to follow Greenfield's logic) makes the maternal inheritance a paternally dictated one (their father places them in the recess and then dies) that has more to do with gender than genes. This maternal inheritance is also disinheritance, of the type that Ruth Perry speaks of as particularly relevant to the eighteenth century: "But the drift of this bilateral, cognatic kin system to a lineage system defined predominantly through marriage of first-born sons ... had the consequence of disinheriting daughters. Visible signs of this consequence are everywhere in the literature of the period ... most dramatically in tearful tales of daughters long-separated from their fathers but recognized and lovingly claimed in the end because of their uncanny resemblance to their dear departed mothers" (*Novel Relations* 40-41). In *The Recess* Matilda and Ellinor's resemblance to their parents leads them to both maternal inheritance and disinheritance, with no parental reconciliation – especially not with a father.

Inheritance and Genealogy:

Part of Lee's critique of historical narrative lies in her characters' ability to substantiate their identities in genealogical form. When Queen Elizabeth strikes Ellinor with a devotional book and finds on her unconscious person what Ellinor calls "the dearer part of my existence, those testimonials of my birth, which were one day to fix my rank in life" (Lee 171), Elizabeth tears them "into atoms, she never thought small enough" (171). The power of genealogical texts to dictate national identity was an important element of antiquarian study from the sixteenth through to the eighteenth century.⁴⁶ The importance of Ellinor's documents as a substantiation of her identity reflects a particularly eighteenth-century emphasis on the written word. In one sense, Ellinor's papers should not hold sway over her identity, while in another sense they *are* her identity. Much as seventeenth-century antiquaries valued copies of the Magna Carta because it validated a continuous and "British" common law, so too do Ellinor's papers confirm a secret identity that is also ultimately visible in her body and in her narrative (Pocock 45). As Woolf explains, during the seventeenth century "a much more intimate connection between the familial and the national pasts" developed, "and genealogy itself became more generally recognized as an aid to historical writing and antiquarian scholarship rather than as an end in itself" (98).

Late eighteenth-century British identity relies heavily on this early connection between familial and national history. In a detailed genealogical chart, William Beckford traces his lineage from William, Lord Latimer through his mother, Maria Hamilton [figure 28]. Similarly, inherited identity informs his construction of Fonthill. Gemmett cites the *European Magazine* (1797), which explains that Beckford's choice of an Abbey for his building project at Fonthill was because,

Beckford's father during the period of his ownership ordered the demolition of a medieval church, dedicated to St Nicholas, because it was located too close to the principal mansion. This church contained monuments to ... ancestors of the Beckfords ... which were examples of expert sixteenth-century workmanship, [and] became 'exposed to the open air' and 'neglected till their ornaments became mutilated and their inscriptions effaced'. The construction of Fonthill Abbey, then, would be an opportunity to redress a debt of the past while paying homage to his ancestors. (78)

⁴⁶ As Daniel Woolf explains, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ancestral identity was important to parliamentary reform: "This regular appeal to ancestral liberties as a kind of inheritance, passed down over the centuries, was intimately related to the defence of the 'ancient constitution', since the laws of England, whether they derived from time immemorial or from specific, time-bound precedent, were at bottom the product of ancestral wisdom and experience" (85).

The mutilation of ideal past ornaments also provides an important comparison point between Beckford's attempt to recuperate loss, and Lee's similar story of maternal loss and narrative recuperation.

Part of this ruin of ideal narrative is visible in Lee's depiction of the sanctuary and prison of the recess, and its construction of ruinous maternal inheritance. Mrs Marlow's death doubles Matilda and Ellinor's maternal loss, as Father Anthony becomes their sole protector. It is at this point that the recess becomes more ominous:

Our solitude being deprived of its ornament, appeared uniform, melancholy, and disgusting. Obligated to hide in our hearts all the little follies and wishes we had been used to reveal to Mrs. Marlow without fear, we conversed with the Father only upon moral and indifferent topics. (Lee 36)

Not only is the recess more threatening, but the twins also restrain the "follies" that comprise their identities. The manner in which Matilda and Ellinor escape from the recess into the natural world echoes this repression of identity:

On turning round, to observe how the entrance was hid, we perceived a high raised tomb, at each corner of which stood a gigantic statue of a man in armour, as if to guard it, two of whom were now headless. Some famous knight, as appeared by his numerous ensigns, lay on the tomb. The meagre skeleton had struck an arrow through his shield into his heart; his eyes were turned to the cross which St. Winifred held before him. Nothing could be better contrived than this entrance, for however rude the sculpture, the ornamental parts took the eye from the body of the tomb. (38)

Surface ornament (of the kind that Matilda uses to describe what Mrs Marlow means to her and Ellinor) distracts the eye from the portal between live burial and worldly existence (which will mean death for both Matilda and Ellinor). Ghosts without clear identities in both the ruined sanctuary and the overgrown natural world, Matilda and Ellinor embody the doubled maternal inheritance of subversive and repressive ruin and sensibility that Lee's text aims to recreate with the image of Mary Stuart. They crawl through the grave, and into architecture that mirrors that of the recess in its fragmentation and mutability.

The knights that guard the tomb are headless, while the effigy of the knight buried here turns his eyes to an icon representing St. Winifred – a nun and saint who preserved her virginity and was martyred by decapitation. The author of *A Description of England and Wales* (1769-70) [see figure 29] emphasizes the legacy of her legend to both architecture and landscape when he notes that St. Winifred's Well takes "its name from a celebrated spring, which, according to the Popish legends ... rose miraculously from the blood of St. Winefrid, a Christian virgin, who was ravished and beheaded in this place.... Over the head of it, was built a chapel dedicated to [her]" (68-69). Saint Winifred's virginity, her association with Catholicism, and the natural and architectural elements that break that association in order to make Holy Well an appropriate English Protestant site

of historical identity all add another layer of narrative to Lee's "tale of other times." The emphasis on virginity and decapitation also place Matilda and Ellinor in an architectural space dedicated to a legendary tale of female suffering and buried Catholic identity.

The editor of the 1713 edition of *The Life and Miracles of St. Wenefrede* appropriates this legendary spot for Protestant consumption when he divests St. Winifred of her miraculous powers: "...if a Miracle were wrought at *Holy-well*" must it "be wrought by St. *Wenefrede*, or by God for her Sake, and at her *Intercession*? God ... may hear the Prayers of such as call upon him faithfully at *Holy-well* ... and yet the Saint of *Holy-well* may have no Share in that good Issue" (11).⁴⁷ Protestantism reduces St. Winifred's dismembered body to an empty icon, which condenses her narrative into a sensational tale of beauty, devotion, virtue, suffering and death. It is no mistake that Lee reminds her reader of Winifred's narrative as Matilda and Ellinor move from the recess into the architectural and natural ruins that will introduce them to female suffering and a fragmentation of identity not unlike St. Winifred's.

Ruinous Ideals

The moment that the spectres of Matilda and Ellinor escape into the landscape of the ruin, they are fated to inherit bodily and mental fragmentation. Such disintegration of self stems from their entrance into a narrative that intertwines art and nature, fact and fiction, and fault and virtue.⁴⁸ This is because the natural world that Matilda and Ellinor escape into complicates ruin and aesthetic space as much as the recess they leave does:

...the prospect was wild and awful to excess ... heaps of stones were fallen from the building, among which, trees and bushes had sprung up, and half involved the dropping pillars. Tall fragments of it sometimes remained, which seemed to sway about with every blast, and from whose mouldering top hung clusters and spires of ivy. In other parts, ruined cloisters yet lent a refuge from the weather, and sullenly shut out the day; while long echoes wandered through the whole at the touch of the lightest foot ... the wood beyond, added to the magnificence of art the variety of nature. (38)

This description balances every ruinous action with a reaction. The landscape relies heavily on the artificial world, and the presence of the human "echoes" throughout the whole. Just as the recess is both a sanctuary and a prison for

⁴⁷This excerpt is from William Fleetwood's eighteenth-century introduction to the text.

⁴⁸ April Alliston argues that some women's writing (including *The Recess*) draws attention to the patrilineal construction of virtue through narrative techniques: "The fictions read here literally 'deconstruct' the patriline borders of the nation as *patrie* in that they expose the fictional basis of its construction, and its form as a paradoxical, rather than a rational, natural, or legible line" (3). The manner in which *The Recess* constructs and draws attention to the necessary deconstruction of English ideals near the end of the eighteenth century makes it an imagined domestic space/narrative that purposely ruins itself.

Matilda and Ellinor, so the ruined cloisters lend refuge and “sullenly shut out the day.” This use of language to paint a scene that balances art and nature is a picturesque technique, popularized by William Gilpin’s works beginning with his *Dialogue upon the gardens of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham, at Stow in Buckinghamshire* (1748).⁴⁹ A poetic preface to the second edition of the *Dialogue* personifies the ideal combination of art and nature at Stow:

“Separate these Rivals thus aspire to Fame, / But both misguided lose their purpos’d Aim” until, “Baffled in each Attempt, at length they cease / Their fierce Dispute, unite in Leagues of Peace ... / To give an Effort of their Powers at Stow.” Gilpin ends the poem with the exclamation: “What cannot *Art* and *Nature* do!” (n. pag) The first edition of the *Dialogue* does not include this poem, but it does include an epigraph from Pope’s *Windsor Forest* on the title page: “*Here Order in Variety we see, / Where all Things differ, yet where all agree*” (Gilpin, title page). This theory of variety, like that of ideal femininity, maintains that opposite ideals in the same landscape will result in ideal unity; but as my discussion of Pope’s “Eloisa to Abelard” has shown, this ideal is not necessarily as simple as Pope’s theory of it seems to convey. With ideal unity comes a form of ruin that points to the impossibility of picturesque landscape (and both the beautiful and sublime elements within such a landscape).

Elizabeth Harries discusses the contradictory act of blending nature and art while simultaneously identifying them with gender divisions:

... these connections complicate the by now familiar tropes of the union of the artful and the natural that run through eighteenth-century discussions of artificial ruins and sentimental novels. The cooperation of nature and art that picturesque theorists and sentimental novelists advocated also implies the blending of genders thought completely separate and distinct. To bring art and nature together is also to challenge the conventional polarity of male and female. (128)

The conflation art and nature may be acceptable as a constructed ideal of the picturesque, but Lee’s historical fiction questions it, fragments it, and argues for its impossibility. For Lee, the integration of past religious architecture into the current natural scene emphasizes the fact that it is impossible to combine the natural with the artificial while simultaneously preserving accepted gender and religious identities.

Beckford’s design of Fonthill Abbey incorporates art into nature in a similar manner; as Gemmet explains, the Abbey’s interior blended “harmoniously with the external landscape to create one of the most important examples of the picturesque interior for this period. The long corridor-like galleries ... reproduced the landscape effect of a tree-lined avenue ... similar to that which could be

⁴⁹ As Alexander Ross explains, Gilpin’s theory of the picturesque grew from the mid-eighteenth century forward: “As the *Dialogue* passed through three editions and was plagiarized in 1750 by George Bickham, it must have been fairly widely known long before Gilpin published his *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (1792); and before his six tours appeared (1782-1809)” (5).

found” in the “winding paths of the estate” (109). For an edifice that was originally intended as a garden ornament (and built with the appropriate materials) this kind of integration between interior and exterior makes sense. It also participates in the picturesque tradition in a similar manner to Lee’s description of the ruins of the recess when it complicates the boundary between interior and exterior identity. The fact that Beckford eventually used the Abbey as a domestic space also makes its purpose as a building unclear and foreshadows the inherent structural problems (or the “faults”) that would cause it to become a ruin.⁵⁰

For Anthony Vidler a building that brings together what seems to be at odds is an uncanny one: “The apparently irreconcilable demands for the absolute negation of the past and full ‘restoration’ of the past here meet in their inevitable reliance on a language of architectural forms that seem, on the surface at least, to echo already used-up motifs *en abîme*” (13-14). Lee’s textual architecture creates a new history (rather than relying on an already existent history created by the passage of time); as a result, she fills an empty space (as Vidler terms such creations) and the culmination is an undomestic home – an uncanny creation that haunts itself with its non-existent heroines.⁵¹ Alliston argues that this doubled narrative transmission to the reader performs “a fragmentation that is really a faulty *mise-en-abyme*, a multiplication of wholes that are *not* perfect mirror images of one another but include a ‘false detail’ of difference” (163). It is this “false detail,” or folly, that offers an at once public and private voice to the uncanny Stuart twins, and which questions any ideal architecture of the domestic.

Fonthill Abbey again provides an example of how the ruin aesthetics that Lee uses continue to inform architectural and national identity into the early nineteenth century. Gemmett tracks Beckford’s decision to make Fonthill Abbey his primary residence to his entertainment of Lord Nelson.⁵² This event sheds

⁵⁰ Megan Aldrich notes that Beckford’s original purpose for the Abbey as a pleasure building “to ornament his estate, rather than as a residence” resulted in the use of materials that would lead to its ruin: “The building would have had a very asymmetrical, picturesque silhouette, and it was being constructed rapidly of timber and cement. This somewhat impermanent construction was standard practice for eighteenth-century garden architecture, and Wyatt had a particular interest in the use of cement” (121).

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud’s definition of the uncanny relies on the term domestic as well, and might be described as an undomestic identity that must face its origin: “In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* [‘homely’] into its opposite, *das Unheimliche* (p. 226); for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling’s definition [p. 224] of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light” (Freud “The ‘Uncanny’” 241). The narratives of Matilda and Ellinor, as they become fragmented, draw attention to this uncovering, or recreating of a past that brings to light the ruinous nature of the ideals that form the basis of British identity.

⁵² Gemmett notes: “It was soon after Nelson’s visit that Beckford decided to make the Abbey more suitable as a residence. He made a major decision to move forward with these plans by ordering the demolition of the colonnade and wings of the Fonthill mansion. The stone gathered from the

light on the transformation of Fonthill from ornament to domestic ruin. The unfinished state of the Abbey at the time of Nelson's entertainment there adds to *The Gentleman's Magazine's* description of it, as it focuses on the lights of the procession and "their effects, contrasted with the deep shades which fell on the walls, battlements, and turrets, of the different groups of the edifice. Some parts of the light struck on the walls and arches of the great tower, till it vanished by degrees into an awful gloom at its summit" (*The Gentleman's Magazine* 297) and again on the departure:

On leaving this strange nocturnal scene of vast buildings and extensive forest, now rendered dimly and partially visible by the declining light of lamps and torches, and the twinkling of a few scattered stars in a clouded sky, the company seemed, as soon as they had passed the sacred boundary of the great wall, as if waking from a dream, or just freed from the influence of some magic spell. And at this moment that I am recapitulating in my mind the particulars of the description I have been writing to you, I can scarcely help doubting whether the whole of the last evening's entertainment were a reality, or only the visionary coinage of fancy. (Tresham 298)

Tresham's eyewitness experience of this uncanny space results in an inability to believe in its existence because it is both secret and simultaneously public when Beckford displays it for Lord Nelson [figure 30]. In fact, *The Gentleman's Magazine* constructs the event much like an historical performance for the public's consumption. As Dick Claésson argues, the *Gentleman's Magazine* "provided the public with a detailed account of Nelson's visit to Fonthill, an account that ran more or less parallel to what might be construed as the implicit theatrical intentions of the fête" (24). Tresham's emphasis on the combination of fancy and reality supports the ideal image of a picturesque folly. Nelson's visit to Fonthill Abbey calls into question barriers between the past and the present with its early nineteenth-century imagination of the "antient Catholic times."⁵³

This state somewhere between reality and fancy also characterizes Matilda and Ellinor's insubstantiality, and breaks into disrepair the accepted narrative of maternal inheritance that they seem destined to repeat. Matilda foresees this break in the chain of maternal inheritance (and also the male-centred impetus that forms the machinery of it) when she dreams at the foot of Lord Leicester's coffin, which echoes the coffin of escape and confinement at the recess. She dreams that Lord

pile could be used at the Abbey" (86). Not only did Beckford decide to inhabit the Abbey, he also demolished most of his mansion in order to do so.

⁵³ Claésson cites a contemporary response to the visit that comments on the combination of the Roman and Gothic elements of the entertainment in Tresham's account: "The writer, indeed, doubts his entertainment being otherwise than the 'visionary coinage of fancy;' and so do I; or else, in this long announced mansion of 'imitation,' we should never have found at last the Gothic and the Roman 'ways,' of reviving our antient customs and our antient architecture'. [Signed] 'An Architect' [John Carter (1748-1817)]" (25).

Leicester enfolds her daughter Mary in his arms, but when she looks up again she realizes that maternal inheritance is not all that it seems:

Lord Leicester was ascending with his daughter in his arms. I demanded her with agonizing cries; and, catching at a mantle which yet seemed within my reach, it fell upon me like the crash of nature, burying me under an immoveable weight. I awakened at the moment. 'Tis but a dream, cried my scared heart, but such a dream as the horrors of the approaching moment alone could counterpoise. (Lee 136)

Matilda awaits her marriage to her deceptive French relative, Mortimer, and dreams of the implications behind male ownership of female inheritance in a way that reveals the necessity of death to break the ideal, or “dream” that accepted patrilineal descent imposes on maternal inheritance. April Alliston notes, “the maternal inheritance, the exemplary education in virtue and the narrative of the mother’s death, turns out to be a ghostly and ineffectual double of the patrimony” (“Value of a Literary Legacy” 120). The dream is indicative of the social reality of marriage and of Mary’s (both Matilda’s mother and her daughter’s) fate, and it makes it clear that what appears to be an ideal is not one at all for the fragmented Stuart women. Instead, the dream of death and the insubstantial world between the enclosure (notice that Matilda is buried “under an immoveable weight”) points to the necessity of breaking the maternal chain of inheritance in order to put forward a new ideal of narrative empowerment through fragment, ruin, death, live burial, and revised history.

Matilda’s experience of the convent in France (where Leicester dies and she dreams the above dream) also acts as a metaphor for this faulty construction and repression of self that makes up English national identity. Matilda and Leicester go to Matilda’s aunt, Lady Mortimer, expecting sanctuary. Instead, Lady Mortimer gives Leicester up to Queen Elizabeth’s emissaries, who murder him. When Matilda comes out of a deep mourning that leads to temporary madness, she confuses the French nunnery with the Recess from her childhood: “‘Heavens!’ cried I, surveying [a French nun’s] habit in amazement, (for ’till then I had never seen a nun) ‘where am I? surely in the Recess; and the grave has given up its former inhabitants for my relief and comfort?’” (124). But Matilda is mistaken, and this nun is just one of many who offer not sanctuary, but surveillance. Matilda becomes (once again) a bodily battleground for religious ideology: “The Superior approached, and in an authoritative decisive voice informed me, that Lady Mortimer, in right of her relationship, had placed me entirely under their care and protection, relying on their pious endeavours both for the recovery of my reason and my principles” (125). What was a battle over repressed English Catholic identity at the Recess, becomes at the convent in France a battle between English and French Catholic identity, and in turn blurs the boundary between Matilda’s maternal inheritance and England’s rejection and fear of its own Catholic others. Indeed, Lee emphasizes self-violence and repression when she has Elizabeth’s emissaries kill Leicester at this site that connects Matilda’s French Catholic and her English Protestant identities.

Ellinor's body also becomes a metaphorical battleground for the foundation of British selfhood on the negation of the Catholic other. In Ireland rebels capture Ellinor and she describes them as

a set of beings who in complexion alone bore any resemblance to myself, their language, manners, and lives, seeming no more analogous, than those of the inhabitants of the Torrid Zone. I laboured in vain to comprehend them, or to make myself understood, and was in despair giving up the attempt, when the priest already mentioned came to my relief. (224)

Only a priest can mediate between the Irish rebels and Ellinor's English understanding; a liminal being similar to Ellinor, he takes up a position between national selves that Ellinor becomes accustomed to as her narrative progresses. When she returns to England from a temporary imprisonment in Scotland, Ellinor takes possession of a ruined castle that she describes in particularly Catholic terms; she refers to it as "an elegant ruin" and says it "might rather be termed the residence of the anchorite, Solitude.... Embosomed in the maternal arms of nature; safe in the obscure and solitary situation of this ivied asylum, here my affrighted soul, like a scared bird, faintly folds up its weary wings!" (255). Ellinor's movement from Ireland to Scotland, to a ruin she aligns with religious solitude, mirrors Matilda's movement from France to Jamaica and back to the ruins of England, and of Ellinor. The narrative movement of both sisters aligns English concepts of otherness with an ideological self, and Lee establishes so close a connection between the English landscape, its ruins, and the Stuart sisters that it is impossible to deny her alignment of physical and mental decay with a national aesthetic of ruin that also informs gender identity.

Ellinor's first moment of mental fragmentation (indicated by asterisks) occurs right after her forced marriage to Lord Arlington at the threat of the death of her mother (which occurs in any case). She exclaims, "Wedded – lost – annihilated," and before the asterisks (during the marriage) she acknowledges that her "abstracted mind pursued a thousand distant ideas" (182). Madness, marriage, and the death of self and mother are all connected in Ellinor's narrative: "Alas, my sister, by a refinement in barbarity, our sainted mother was led to execution, almost at the very moment I was defaming you and myself to save her. This climax of grief and misfortune was too mighty for my reason" (182). Though the maternal inheritance is complete, it effaces itself for a narrative agency that is much more promising. Doody recognizes this space between narratives when she notes, "The buried life (as symbolized by the life of the Recess itself) is confining, dim, unsatisfactory ... But life in the world is irrational and brutal The only choice seems to be between two dreams – lethargic reverie, or nightmare" (559). It is the space between what Doody sees as two choices that indicates the narrative possibility of the fragment and ruined ideal. Because Elizabeth's attempt to erase Matilda and Ellinor's identities annexes one ideal of ruin (that of Mary Stuart), a new maternal inheritance of the ruin of that ruin results in the agency

that, despite the deaths of Mary Stuart, Ellinor, Mary Matilda's daughter, and Matilda herself, exists in the narrative that the reader consumes.

Ellinor expresses this power through ruin when she asserts her identity in madness: "Oh, these cruel wanderings! – but I dare not attempt to correct or to avoid them, lest in the very effort reason evaporate, and one inconsiderate stroke should confuse my whole story" (Lee 185). Like the "chasms in the story" (5) that the editor dare not touch, Ellinor again acknowledges the need for ruin in order to maintain agency when Lord Arlington decides to raze the ruins that signify her and Matilda's identities (as they exist in relation to their maternal inheritance). Although she acknowledges that "it was dreadful to think of annihilating every trace of my youth; every object which could remind me I had ever been beloved or connected" she also grants that it "was yet more dreadful to me to risque the little peace I had been able to collect from the wreck of all my hopes" (199). Ellinor allows Arlington to destroy the ruins because she hopes to see Essex again, an action that will lead her more deeply into the complete ruin that drives her narrative; her agency is predicated on a textual replication of ruin that the reader completes through their consumption of it.⁵⁴

This narrative action uncovers the fact that British ideals of gender identity are predicated on follies as empty and ultimately made for public consumption as Beckford's Fonthill Abbey was, which Robert Gemmett acknowledges was "a memorable Palace of Art, a magnificent scenic effect in a magnificent setting, but beneath the beauty of its surface appeal there was its inherent fragility and insubstantial character that would have dire consequences in time" (116). Such an unstable ideal, as Lee narrates it, topples the accepted histories that eighteenth-century society built its identity upon and indicates a fragmented narrative that can offer many more possibilities in ruin than the ideal can as an imagined whole.

The Consumption of Gaudy Mausoleums

On her return to England from Jamaica, Matilda suddenly realizes that England is in ruins. The buildings and landscapes that made the Elizabethan age so glorious are consumed by time and luxury only to reveal their unstable internal structures. Matilda lands at Greenwich, and returns to the familiar made unfamiliar:

⁵⁴ A recap (from chapter two) of how I am defining consumption might be necessary at this point: Four definitions of the word apply: 1: "the action or fact of destroying or being destroyed; destruction." 2: "The action or process of decaying, wasting away, or wearing out." 3: "The action or fact of eating or drinking something, or of using something up in activity," and 4: "The purchase and use of goods, services, materials, or energy" (*OED*). These definitions obviously interact with one another; I am interested in the interaction between the different meanings of the word consumption at the site of the ruined nunnery, in terms of the aesthetics of the illicit female body, in reference to the configuration of public and private spheres, and in the production of literary and antiquarian texts. Combined together, they amount to the way I am also thinking of "imagination" when I say that the literature of the eighteenth century imagined national and gender identity based on a repressed (decayed) Catholic past.

Greenwich, which I had seen the seat of gaiety, empire, and magnificence, now appeared a dreary solitude. The tide in silence laved the walls of a deserted palace, which verging to decay like its past possessors, seemed but a gaudy mausoleum. I paused over these fragile memorials of human grandeur, as the boat bore me towards the shore; and half surmised the strangeness that might await me there. (Lee 154)

Matilda associates the consumptive decay of architecture with the decay of human identity, which gives her an uncanny feeling of “strangeness;” she returns to see that what she once thought were domestic ideals, actually lead to madness and architectural ruin. Because of her madness, Ellinor’s body represents only a shell of the identity that it once held, but as such it gains more agency for her than she had when she based her identity on her imagined maternal inheritance. Matilda speaks of Ellinor as if she is a fragment reminiscent of Greenwich palace when she describes their meeting:

I had shuddered at the murder of my mother – I had groaned on the coffin of my husband – I had wept a thousand times over the helpless infant who trembled at my bosom – but all these terrible sensations were combined when my sad eyes rested on those still so dear to me. – When I saw all their playful lustre quenched, and set in insensibility – when I felt that heart, once the seat of every feminine grace and virtue, throb wild and unconscious. (270)

Matilda retains the impression of her meeting with the mad Ellinor because it represents the power of a consumed body to escape an inherited maternal identity and still to retain it in its absence and ruin (perhaps an uncanny power). The reader consumes Ellinor’s ruin multiple times, as she stages her own death, goes mad, and then actually dies (in this sense she is like the ruined recess). She is wild and unconscious where once she maintained feminine grace and virtue; she physically represents the insanity, ruin and fragmentation of self that work to uncover the instability of feminine ideals. Matilda’s sensibility also consumes Ellinor’s unresponsive body, as she shudders, groans, and weeps when she raises her eyes to Ellinor’s. In those eyes, Matilda must face her own erasure, which will make it possible for yet another sensitive female to consume (in the sense of imagine and absorb) her fragmented narrative, and Ellinor’s within it. This is an example of the *mise en abîme* that Alliston and Vidler mention when they talk about epistolary narrative and uncanny architecture, but it is also the sort of repetition of author-character-reader-based consumption and confusion that I see Eloisa performing in “Eloisa to Abelard,” and which I think characterizes the construction of texts by authors who are aware of their own place in the marketplace of self-identity. This stance is integral if I am to understand how the imagination of female monasticism constructs ideal femininity, while simultaneously providing agency through mutability.

It might be helpful to look at a different site of consumption in order to understand Matilda’s enactment of it when she views bodily and architectural ruins in *The Recess*. In 1823, the year after William Beckford’s Fonthill Abbey

was opened for public viewing and auction, *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* published an essay titled “A Day at Fonthill Abbey” (VIII, 368-80). The author concludes with an emphasis on the way that natural and artificial ideals mingle in response to Beckford’s folly and his financial ruin:

Even now, when the idle crowds that at present haunt and disturb this peace-hallowed spot have quitted it for a few hours, and in the sweet mornings before they have broken in upon it, we have seen the hares sporting about within a few yards of our feet like kittens, and heard the birds sing to each other upon the bough above our head, as if the place were all their own. For this alone, if for nothing else, we shall never cease to regret that any cause, but the inevitable one of death, should have laid bare the secret beauties of Fonthill Abbey. (Gemmett, Appendix I, 342)

Beckford’s Abbey was opened to the public after the ruin of his financial affairs caused the necessity of a public sale in 1822: “The admission tickets issued with the catalogue for a guinea granted multitudes access to the building and the grounds” (118). However, this anticipated sale did not commence before Beckford sold the estate to Lord Farquhar, who put the contents up for public auction again in 1823. A ticket to the sale shows a print of the abbey, with a prominent display of Beckford’s family crests [figure 31]. The public participated in an immense auction of the fine art, books, and artifacts that Beckford collected as part of his ideal imagination of British historical identity: “Among the furniture, for example, there were the chairs that once belonged to Cardinal Wolsey from his palace at Esher; the ebony state bed of Henry VII with its crimson damask hangings and purple quilt worked with gold ... [and] the Holbein cabinet designed for Henry VIII” (Gemmett 137). Now guests could consume (purchase, own, and absorb) objects that had historical significance, but at the same time they were fragmenting – or ruining – Beckford’s attempt to imagine his own version of English identity; visitors to Fonthill Abbey were consuming Beckford’s faults along with his particular imagination of identity.

The sale and resultant consumption of the interior of the Abbey was soon followed by the fall of the exterior, as the octagon tower fell under an unstable foundation in 1825 (139). Gemmett notes that Farquhar (according to Redding) thought about “bequeathing Fonthill back to Beckford” and that “when Beckford was asked whether he would have liked this legacy, he replied, ‘Good heavens, yes, I should have been in extacy at it, for it would have falsified the old proverb, “You can’t eat your cake and have it too” ’” (141). This image of double consumption (in the sense of eating or using something up) brings us back to the productive possibilities in the ruin of ruins – or the consumption of the fragmented text with an awareness of its previous consumption. The ruins of Fonthill Abbey were not prey to popular consumption in the way that its contents were – and one reason may be that anyone who might see aesthetic possibilities in the ruins of Fonthill Abbey must face the fact that they represent the ruin of an ideal of ruin. In this sense, the viewer must question the very foundations of their

conception of what was ideal about the folly, and what made a constructed ideal of a past era so important to English identity.

Stephen Clarke explains that “the ruins were not much sought out or described or illustrated” and goes on to quote the impressions of J.B. Papworth in 1829 or 1830, who “visited the site merely to comment that it was ‘not capable of inspiring any other than painful thoughts of the instability of human affairs – and high towers’” (194). In 1835 J.C. Loudon notes: “The shattered remains of lath and plaster, studwork, and bricks, and bond timber; and, above all, the long strings of tarred pack-thread hanging from the nails and other remains ... have a tattered appearance, the very opposite of the grandeur produced by durability of execution” (qtd. in Clarke 194). At Fonthill, the visible underpinnings of a constructed ideal might perform productive work after all, if the viewer has the courage to face them. Henry Venn Lansdown’s 1844 account captures the demise of an ideal predicated on architectural magnificence that calls to mind Matilda’s description of Greenwich as the “seat of gaiety, empire, and magnificence” (Lee 154); Clarke writes that at Fonthill, Lansdown

... was confronted with ‘an astonishing assemblage of ruins ... the magnificent eastern transept with its two beautiful octangular towers, still rising to the height of 120 feet, but roofless and desolate; the three stately windows, 60 feet high, as open to the sky as Glastonbury Abbey; in the rooms once adorned with choicest paintings and rarities trees are growing ... Of all desolate scenes there are none so desolate as those which we now see as ruins, and which were lately the abode of splendor and magnificence. (195)

In fact, Matilda’s description of Ellinor’s madness resonates with Lansdown’s picturesque image of the ruined folly, which indicates how closely Lee aligns picturesque garden ornaments and female bodies.

Matilda’s understanding of self-ruin and decay (both in terms of consumption) progresses when she revisits Kenilworth Castle. She again understands that ruined buildings represent a consumption of self that her own narrative relies on to break accepted maternal inheritance and enable a new kind of femininity; one that is not based on the sensibility that Matilda mobilizes in her readers, as they consume that feeling of sympathy at the site of ruin until they realize it is no longer present to be consumed.⁵⁵ In this sense, the text becomes the

⁵⁵ In *Virtue’s Faults* Alliston calls this a failure of sympathy, while I see it as a consumption of ruin that draws attention to the emptiness of a sympathy that does not acknowledge its predication on a ruined ideal. Alliston states: “The space for avoiding the threatened fault becomes smaller and smaller, until the act of avoiding fault becomes itself the fault to be avoided. The originary fault that will determine the cleft structure of the narrative, which in turn allows for an enactment of transmission to a sympathetic reader that escapes the logic of the double bind, is a failure of sympathy” (151). The originary fault of fragmented historical transmission is so present in the double narrative, and thus in the reader’s mind, that a reader who continues to consume the narrative without questioning her own sympathetic responses will be continually made aware that she consumes the ruin of what she finds ideal about the narrative. In this sense I do not think that sympathy exactly fails; instead, Lee uncovers the impossibility of ethical consumption.

gaudy mausoleum that Greenwich is, the empty body that Ellinor is, and what happens to Matilda when she sees Kenilworth:

My soul turned from the well-known scene, and sickened alike at sight of the reviving verdure, and the splendid mansion, to me alas, only a gay mausoleum ... ah, though the exterior was the same, how strange seemed the alteration within! ... A numerous body of diligent mechanics were plodding in those halls in which Elizabeth had feasted ... My ears were suddenly stunned with the noise of a hundred looms. (274)

Kenilworth, an empty shell of past royal splendour, is now a commercial space that stuns Matilda. This is an important anachronistic addition to Lee's text; the fact that she does not choose to structurally ruin Kenilworth (as she did Greenwich) but indicates its demise in the presence of commercial activity draws the reader's attention to their own consumption of the text as a material and commercial object, and what that means for their identity and their control over the ideals or ruined ideals that they decide to complete or ignore in the text. As Dror Wahrman notes:

If commerce was crucial to the emergence of the *ancien régime* of identity, it also brought with it the seeds of this regime's subsequent demise. For with the potential for new imaginings ... came also increasing unease, an unease that accompanied the gradual erosion of confidence in familiar notions of identity and the increasing preoccupation with the plasticity and deceptiveness of appearances. (211)

Lee ruins the recess in order to replace the inheritance of feminine suffering and maternal loss with something more progressive. She describes the ruin of Greenwich because it is a sign of that old inheritance, and she re-imagines Kenilworth in the context of eighteenth-century consumerism in order to demonstrate how the reader should not accept the ruin blindly, but should realize their role in the textual construction of ideal identity, and refuse to imagine the spaces between textual fragments as beautiful ones. Matilda provides an example for the reader not only in the narrative of death she passes onto Adelaide, who she tells to "check every painful emotion by recollecting that I shall then be past the power of suffering" (326), but also in her refusal to view the ruins of Kenilworth:

By incidents of this kind, one becomes painfully and instantaneously sensible of advancing into life. When first we find ourselves sailing with the imperceptible current of time ... we glide swiftly on, scarce sensible of our progress, till the stream revisits some favorite spot: alas, so visible is the desolation of the shortest interval, that we grow old in a moment, and submit once more to the tide, willing rather to share the ruin than review it. (274)

To review the ruin is to consume what has already been consumed (exactly what the reader of this text is supposed to be doing). Matilda instructs the reader not to distance his or herself from the text by repeating its ruin on an aesthetic level, but to participate in the ruin and re-imagine categories of identity rather than devour the narrative in sympathy. Such a revision does not make the narrative beautiful

or affecting at all, but rather makes it painful and encourages a new kind of consumption (truly participatory) in the same way that it does a new kind of maternal inheritance (that of narrative agency through fragment and death). Alliston argues that the narrative form of the text encourages new thought as well, but one that relies “on readers who, coming upon it in another country and in a wholly different historical frame ... have the sympathy to read a text whose faults may enable them to ‘give birth to new ideas’ ... through its secret communications” (*Virtue’s Faults* 187).

The text provides a greater lesson on how to give birth to those new ideas when it consumes itself by representing the ruined ruin, and leaves the reader aware of their own participation in consumption and their ability to negate the institutional ideal of the suffering woman, just as Matilda and Ellinor destroy and embody the powers and inherent problems of that very ideal. Because the structural elements that provide the foundation for buildings, bodies, and identities also lead to the collapse of the very spaces they help to create, the reader or viewer of the ruin must contemplate the shaky nature of imagined ideals and must do so in direct relation to his or her own contemporary society, not just the historical setting of *The Recess*.

Follies and historical fictions inspire a more complex reaction from the viewer than a historical ruin does, because they see the ideal as it is constructed from the foundation to the dénouement, and they take part in the consumption that makes it a ruin.⁵⁶ In Hurd’s *Dialogues* Dr. Arbuthnot, Kenelm Digby and Joseph Addison view the remains of Kenilworth Castle, at which Dr. Arbuthnot claims “we are all of us not a little affected with the sight of these ruins. They even create a melancholy in me ... of so delightful a kind, that I would not exchange it, methinks, for any brisker sensation” (98). Addison clarifies that what Arbuthnot feels is not pain at all, and draws attention to the negative effects of building an ideal of the current age on the ruins of the past:

I know not ... what pain it may give you to contemplate these triumphs of time and fortune. For my part, I am not sensible of the mixt sensation you speak of. I feel a pleasure indeed; but it is sincere, and, as I conceive, may be easily accounted for. ’Tis nothing more, I believe, than a fiction of the imagination, which makes me think I am taking a revenge on the once prosperous and overshadowing height, PRAEUMBRANS FASTIGIUM, as somebody expresses it, of inordinate Greatness. (98)

⁵⁶ Fiona Price notes that there is a difference between consuming and ethically watching a spectacle at a distance: “the notion of disinterested sensibility was undermined by its connection with vision; these difficulties were even more evident when disinterestedness was developed as part of the discourse of art criticism. I contend that Gothic fiction queries how the disinterested yet ethical spectator might be distinguished from the inhumane, voyeuristic consumer” (1). The point that I make here about *The Recess* is that there is no space where the spectator of ruin is not a voyeuristic consumer because if they simultaneously deny their participation in both the creation of the ideal and the ruin of that ideal while they consume it, they only erase their own identity. Because that erasure can never be only pleasant, the unethical viewer denies that there is an ideal that they participate in at all, and so also disarms typical sentimental ways of viewing.

These are not the “holy tears with which virtue consecrates misfortune” that Matilda wishes her reader to shed before looking for her “in a better world;” they are, rather, words that indicate the power of imagination to prompt a sympathy that has more to do with ideal identity than with actual ruin (Lee 326). That Matilda imagines her ideal reader in Adelaide, whom she notes will consume the narrative just as she is expected to (with ideal virtue at the site of suffering), uncovers the resilience of maternal inheritance. It also encourages the reader to think about reading the reader (Adelaide) as they review the ruined ideal ruin (the recess), or the fragmented fragment (the text, or the bodies of Matilda and Ellinor). This final emphasis on the virtuous consumption of suffering implies that it is impossible for Lee’s eighteenth-century reader to see the ideal in anything but their own imagined cultural context, and to realize that to consume it means to acknowledge it is built upon ruin. Ann Radcliffe’s construction of female monastic space as particularly changeable and paradoxical relies upon this kind of consumption to question eighteenth-century domestic identities after Sophia Lee.

Chapter Four

Prison and Sanctuary: Ann Radcliffe's Mutable Nunneries

Stone bodies, inherited follies, mutable nunneries: These architectural surfaces and spaces all culminate in the work of novelist Ann Radcliffe. Eloisa and Rosamond become stone monuments to the uncanny construction of domesticity upon the repressed Catholic past; Matilda and Ellinor inherit an existence as unstable as a flawed garden folly, but find agency in the ruination of that inheritance; the characters in the novels of Ann Radcliffe take us back to all of these sites, and explore an unstable barrier between public and private spaces that recalls the site of the medieval nunnery as I explored it in chapter one. Radcliffe's novels both construct the epitome of that imagination of British domesticity upon the ruins of the medieval Catholic past, and best demonstrate the agency that can result from the lack of distinction between public and private space. These final two chapters explore architecture and bodies in terms of their mutability, or ability to move between spaces and obscure boundaries both in an effort to conform and in an effort to gain agency and identity. The first chapter focuses on the way that Radcliffe's nunneries represent this mutability, while the second chapter uses the image of wax to explore the mutability of the bodies she represents within those architectural spaces. After analyzing the changeability of nunneries in all of Radcliffe's major novels, this chapter connects such "ruin" to the aesthetic consumption of picturesque and sublime landscape as Radcliffe constructs it in her travels; this links the consumption of architectural space to that of the bodies within that space and leads us into a discussion of malleable femininity and wax bodies in chapter five.

Ann Radcliffe understands the power of imagination and the mutability of gender identity; she understands the necessary consumption of self that happens at sites of imaginative completion, such as ruins, and that these spaces are apt metaphors for the kinds of gender roles that her characters learn to manipulate. Radcliffe's gothic novels, then, are about hidden or unreadable sites of agency within the apparent confinement of domestic spaces, specifically nunneries. Rather than uncovering a secret history of England, the novels write English loss and ruin onto other landscapes and contemplate domestic space through this displacement. Their treatment of the nunnery as a mutable space – somewhere between a prison and a sanctuary – is symptomatic of other mutable boundaries in the novels that also call into question the construction of aesthetics, suffering, religion, and gender. It is this mutability that draws together intersections between representations of Catholic nuns and nunneries, sites of ruin and dilapidation, and representations of dead and dying bodies (wax or otherwise). The political, historical, antiquarian, and religious contexts of a repressed English Catholic past and the very contemporary French Revolution offer important layers of context for what initially seem to be merely internal or superficial gothic narratives.

This is because Radcliffe's architectural spaces replicate themselves irrespective of location or purpose. Her walls, doors, passageways and closets are

as notable for their fluidity as they are for their rigidity, which makes each repetition completely different from *and* exchangeable with the next. This antithetical representation endows the aesthetic details of surfaces with almost human qualities at times. For example, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* the Count De Villefort is about to break down a door at Chateau-le-Blanc,

when he observed its singular beauty, and with-held the blow. It appeared, on the first glance, to be of ebony, so dark and close was its grain and so high its polish; but it proved to be only of larch wood, of the growth of Provence, then famous for its forests of larch. The beauty of its polished hue and of its delicate carvings determined the Count to spare this door, and he returned to that leading from the back stair-case. (560)

In this case, one door is not exchangeable with another because one holds aesthetic sway over the proprietor of the household; Villefort stays his weapon and lets the door survive to continue to please other viewers. Not only does it embody a local history worth preserving, but the door also appears to be of a higher quality on first glance. This discourse of preservation and beauty, as we saw in chapter one, relates directly to English antiquarian theories of landscape and architecture, and Radcliffe offers a discourse on human occupation and imagination that is integral to ways of seeing the English past.

The major difference, then, between one space and the next lies in the details visible behind the convent walls or within the castle passageways; it is the human bodies that comprise the difference between prison and sanctuary. Yet these bodies also reflect the indistinct architecture and landscapes that outline Radcliffe's work, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick shows in her pivotal essay "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel." Sedgwick's discussion of what is "between the veil and the flesh" quite rightly identifies perceived individuality in the face of repetition as the marker of selfhood for these texts: "The self expressed or explored by these conventions is all surface, but its perimeter is neither fixed nor obvious: the veil? the countenance? the heart?" (261). For Radcliffe, the self lies between all of the aesthetic and textual metaphors that Sedgwick proposes: the veil, the countenance, the heart, colour, landscape, and music; and all of these evoke partially hidden spaces in order to question the illusion of a stable self.⁵⁷ However, for Radcliffe the epistemological power of these sites lies in their attachment to temporal and architectural narratives of containment and enclosure, as well as sanctuary and protection. Like Sophia Lee, Radcliffe reanimates the human forms that once inhabited the ruin, in order to understand how architectural and aesthetic spaces dictate categories of identity.

⁵⁷ Sedgwick explains: "The shift from the play of different colors to the brooding on the presence or absence of color (of color absolutely considered, but usually only one color, and that one always purple or red) in a perceived scene or tapestry or face or veil represents the magnetism of the bipolar, exercised at the cost of sapping any system that has three irreducible primaries. (The presence or absence of color in these landscapes is exactly analogous to the presence or absence of music, which very frequently succeeds the withdrawing colors of twilight...)" (264).

This aim is visible in Radcliffe's first work, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), which opens with a description of the Castle of Athlin, a "pile ... venerable from its antiquity, and from its Gothic structure; but more venerable from the virtues which it enclosed" (3). Similarly, *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) introduces "the magnificent remains of a castle, which formerly belonged to the noble house of Mazzini," and "a solemn history ... contained in a manuscript in [the monastery] library" (1). *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) warns that La Motte's "sordid interest" and financial ruin will lead him to the decay of "virtue and ... taste," as he "stept at midnight into the carriage which was to bear him far from Paris" (1). *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) opens an already mutable scene to the reader at the site of "the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert," where the reader looks "from its windows" to see "the view was bounded by the majestic Pyrenées, whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen, and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along, were sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine, that swept downward to their base" (1). This home does not necessarily sound like "the resort / of love, of joy, of peace and plenty" (1) that the epigraph promises, especially since Radcliffe wastes no time in trapping the reader within its architecture, as he or she looks out on the changeable landscape. *The Italian* (1797) also opens with a movement from exterior to interior, as English travellers in Italy "stop before the portico of the *Santa Maria del Pianto*.... The magnificence of this portico, though impaired by time, excited so much admiration, that the travellers were curious to survey the structure to which it belonged, and with this intention they ascended the marble steps that led to it" (1). Bodies enclosed in walls, in movement, looking out, entering in, and surveying the ruin of containment all introduce Ann Radcliffe's readers to her Gothic narratives. Quite obviously, Radcliffe interrogates the ability of domestic and monastic architecture to shape narratives of self identity.

This is why a closer look at Radcliffe's nunneries and nuns (and how they compare to other forms of familial architecture and bodies in the novels) uncovers a surprising refusal to construct self in relation to fixed surface and interior identities of community, sanctuary, prison and home. I maintain that the English antiquarian study of medieval monastic ruins informs this refusal, as antiquarianism relied on a repressed connection with the Catholic past in order to construct modern categories of British identity – especially femininity. But that repressed past offers more possible agency through mutability than most eighteenth-century antiquaries were willing to admit, and the fact that Radcliffe picks up on both the freeing and dangerous nature of this characterization of women and nuns as mutable, and the home or nunnery as equally changeable, means that she works through complicated gender constructs while seeming to condone fixed categories of femininity.

Prison and Sanctuary

For Radcliffe, the family home and the nunnery are interchangeably mutable. She constructs both spaces as prisons and sanctuaries, and this double-sided image leads to the theoretical ruin of both as ideal spaces. A nunnery may change from a prison to a sanctuary not only from work to work, but also from chapter to chapter, and even from word to word. Literary critics such as Claudia Johnson, Kate Ferguson Ellis, Terry Castle, and Diane Long Hoeveler note this gender malleability as it appears in Radcliffe's use of sensibility and victimization, and focus on familial and political constructions in the novels.

In *Gothic Feminism*, Hoeveler notices: "The Catholic Church, which is featured prominently in each one of her major novels, holds a certain ambivalent allure for Radcliffe, largely because of what we can detect as an attraction to the notion of all-female communities" (53), while Kate Ferguson Ellis argues that the Catholic Church, "because it is not part of the real landscape of England, can be used in the Gothic to point up abuses existing in real institutions such as the family (48). It is true that Radcliffe uses the Catholic Church to critique the institution of the family, but she does so within a culture still obsessed with its Catholic past."⁵⁸ Terry Castle frames this obsession in terms of sentimental feeling when she argues that Radcliffe's images of aesthetic haunting "epitomize a phenomenon in Radcliffe we might call the supernaturalization of everyday life. Old-fashioned ghosts, it is true, have disappeared from the fictional world, but a new kind of apparition takes their place" (125). In addition to forming a kind of sensibility that calls up the repressed other, this "haunting" is also a symptom of Radcliffe's understanding of the national landscape, and the ways repressed past spaces like nunneries confound traditional boundaries. In her discussion of sentimentality, suffering, and gender mutability Claudia Johnson points out that criticism of Radcliffean gothic "has been psychoanalytic, at least in part because it has been so easy to believe that decaying castles could not possibly represent actual, material features of the European countryside inscribing the still surviving feudal past" (76). Instead, Radcliffe represents "actual, material features" of the English countryside alongside what she sees as the imagination of those spaces in contemporary English aesthetic thought. Her imagination of monastic space responds to eighteenth-century antiquarian narratives of femininity, but Radcliffe also investigates the relationship between this antithetical construction of female monastic space, and the domestic sphere as a whole.

Imagining Eighteenth-Century Nunneries

Brenda Tooley, Ana M. Acosta, Katherine Rogers, and Bridget Hill all attest to the importance of the idea of the "protestant nunnery" in eighteenth-century thought, and in Radcliffe's work in particular, but it is also true that this

⁵⁸ As I discuss in detail in chapter one of this work, publications such as Thomas Hearne's *The Antiquities of Great Britain* (1778-1806), made the monastic and feudal history of England available to a wider audience, through picturesque descriptions and artistic representations of ruins.

reconstruction looks to ways of controlling as well as freeing female behaviour. Bridget Hill notes that authors' imagination of the space of the convent informs their critique of marriage and women's education in terms of the loss of a space of control or freedom: "If such ideas were based on myth it was a powerful and persistent one. It was believed that the education as well as the piety of women had suffered in consequence of the dissolution, and that unmarried women had been left singularly unprovided for" (117). As Hill explains, the idea was not far from the truth, although part of the attraction of the nunnery also had to do with the imagined control over virtuous femininity that could result from it: a control that had the potential to both empower and disempower women. It is my argument that Radcliffe's construction of the space of the nunnery as both a sanctuary and a prison reflects this Protestant nostalgia for lost Catholic space, which builds ideal femininity on a specifically Roman Catholic past. In this sense, my argument differs from Hill's, who claims that her article on Protestant nunneries does not intend "to embrace a study of Catholic nunneries either in this country or on the Continent" and that an explanation for "the persistence of the idea of a 'Protestant nunnery' over so long a period ... does not lie in Catholicism" but "is demonstrated by the fact that so many of those putting forward the idea go to considerable lengths to stress their anti-Catholicism" (129). The rejection of Catholicism as a source for the prevalence of the idea of the Protestant nunnery is a faulty exclusion; Catholic nunneries continued not only to inform the antithetical construction of femininity, but also existed as ruins in the English landscape.

Katherine M. Rogers argues that representations of Convents in English and French literature were similar, despite the fact that French authors had direct experience with convents, and that this similarity "shows how Enlightenment secularism conditioned everyone's thinking, regardless of nationality" (313). There are several problems with this argument. One of the major connections that Rogers does not make is between an English Catholic past and the construction of public and private space (and gender ideals) upon that past in eighteenth-century fiction. This has Rogers arguing that representations of nuns are picturesque rather than social (299) and that Radcliffe's representations in particular "are typical in presenting convents as picturesque but devoid of moral or spiritual value" (300). In actuality, the picturesque nature of these "ruins" of Catholicism as they exist in the English imagination are ultimately social in nature, and Radcliffe has the freedom to explore space and identity through their connection to France, medieval England, the eighteenth-century English landscape, and the "private" sphere of the home.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For Radcliffe, as we shall see, there is no such place as the private sphere. She uses nunneries to show the ways that domestic space becomes public space, and the fact that this can either be conducive to justice and freedom, or a source of imprisonment. Her mutable nunneries offer either community or surveillance based on their alignment with male or aristocratic surveillance that does not serve the freedom of constructed individuality. This construction of the domestic is in line with the ways that Habermas and Foucault argue public space grew up out of an imagination

Indeed, even the idea of a protestant form of monastic agency acknowledges that this agency must be from within an ultimately patriarchal institution.⁶⁰ Acosta argues that toleration for the convent was only allowable for the “convent novels” she investigates if productive marriage was impossible, and even then:

By association, free and consensual marriage and the Protestant convent are equated on one side ... with forced marriages and Roman Catholic convents squarely on the other.... Catholicism, arranged marriages, and despotic parents were assigned to the dark past; Protestantism, sensible families, and women able to make their own decisions under the guidance of their parents were the way of the present and future. (20)

While the novels Acosta discusses offer the Protestant nunnery as an option similar to a sentimental marriage, Radcliffe draws the Catholic (or imagined-as-Catholic) nunnery into a space of agency *or* oppression between forced and sentimental marriage.⁶¹ In this sense, she also comments on eighteenth-century historical and philosophical debates about progress.⁶² By setting her novels in a past (or recent past, as in *The Italian*) that uncovers modern narratives of selfhood, Radcliffe undermines the very narratives of middle-class progress that she seemingly avows. Progress toward marriage, then, is no progress at all if the past is simply an imagined landscape that reflects the foundational aspects of modern identity. Hoeveler argues that Radcliffe’s temporal landscapes are as “unreal ... as was Walpole’s claptrap estate Strawberry Hill. There is an intense desire in all of these moves to construct history as fantasy, to pretend that the

of the private, and of the ideal individual agent. Habermas notes: “...the independence of the property owner in the market and in his own business was complemented by the dependence of the wife and children on the male head of the family; private autonomy in the former realm was transformed into authority in the latter and made any pretended freedom of individuals illusory” (47). Foucault argues of pre-Revolutionary France: “Of course, it had long been asserted that a country had to be populated if it hoped to be rich and powerful; but this was the first time that a society had affirmed, in a constant way, that its future and its fortune were tied not only to the number and the uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organization, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex” (*History of Sexuality Vol. I*, 26).

⁶⁰ Of *The Italian* Tooley notes, “Ellena achieves/discovers a bounded and relational selfhood within the purview of the very institutions, religious and familial, that throughout the novel threaten her life” (64).

⁶¹ In addition, Acosta discusses a convent novel – *The History of Indiana Danby* – that represents a woman who tries to make a vow of chastity outside of either the Protestant or Catholic churches (Acosta 26). This type of vow is characteristic of female canonesses of the early Middle Ages, who “always maintained that they took no permanent vows and retained both their property and their freedom to marry. A convent might provide a setting conducive to respectable courtship or seek out the limits of the permissible” (McNamara 191). But it is this sort of fluidity that was lost with the tightening of patriarchal control later in the Middle Ages.

⁶² In *Ancients against Moderns* Joan DeJean provides an analysis of the culture wars of the eighteenth century, noting: “When the original Ancients and Moderns went to war, they debated the issue of human perfectibility exclusively on literary grounds: if modern authors were superior to their ancient precursors, then it followed logically ... that modern men were likewise superior to their counterparts in previous ages” (16).

external world of time and space can be contained and commodified...” (65). But the point for Radcliffe is that external and internal worlds (which are indistinct) rely on constructions of self that look back to Catholic and medieval ideals, which means that modern gender ideals are as faulty (or as mutable) as the medieval ones that English Protestants rely on (and simultaneously deny) to create national categories of identity.

Eighteenth-century antiquarian works respond to the same complex relationship between public and private roles for nuns – with an emphasis on constructing ideal femininity and repressing or refiguring English Catholic history. The *Magna Britannia Antiqua & Nova* (1738 – attributed to Thomas Cox) explains that the founder of Lacock nunnery “having continued seven Years a Widow, entertained a Purpose to build some Monastery for the Health of her own Soul, and those of her Husband, Children, Heirs, and all her Ancestors” (187). In contrast, it characterizes the nuns of Amesbury as more changeable: “the nuns for some time continued strictly devout and chaste; but in the Reign of King Hen. II. AD 1177, the Nuns being then about thirty in Number, were expelled from this House for their Incontinency and notorious Scandal” (183). In an attempt to keep the ideal and bury the danger of superstition or unruliness, antiquaries like Cox made an obvious effort to explain why Catholic ruins were an aesthetic part of Protestant ideals.

Of the monastic ruins of St. Edmund at Bury [figure 32], the *Antiquarian Repertory* states in 1775: “The ruins exhibit a mournful spectacle of decayed magnificence, and though few perhaps wish to see them repaired, and possessed by their antient inhabitants; yet one cannot help lamenting the downfall of such noble edifices, which some how or other might have been rendered useful” (25-27). The author mourns aesthetic, architectural and productive loss, but not personal loss (the inhabitants represent the danger of nostalgia). The antithetical construction of femininity as both virtuous and unruly when not properly enclosed, and the ruin as both indicative of an ideal past and an image to negate that past shows that ruins are also about the dangerous encroachment of one boundary on another, as well as the remnant of an ideal, but decayed, enclosure.⁶³ Thus, ruins work both to imagine ideal spaces of enclosed femininity and to undermine those spaces as imagined ones. The empty spaces of the ruin, which only suggest past architecture, can thus be freeing or imprisoning (like the nunnery), and it is this dichotomy that Ann Radcliffe uses to question the gender boundaries of the late eighteenth century.

⁶³ Anne Janowitz explains this ruin ideology: “The poet can manipulate the image of ruin to turn the threat of the encroachment of nature upon culture into the proof of the authenticity of the nation itself” (55). As Lucy Peltz and Martin Myrone argue, antiquarians are “the producers of objects and texts that raise significant questions of the dialectic between text and image, the status of historical truth and the nature of aesthetic quality” (5).

Ann Radcliffe's Mutable Nunneries

From 1790-1797 narratives of ruin and displacement held several political and aesthetic connotations. For my purposes, discourses on history and antiquity (involving progress and ruin), reaction to the French Revolution and the emigration of Roman Catholic nuns into England, discourses of the sublime and the beautiful, and the picturesque inform the majority of my historical analysis. These contexts all intersect with literary and artistic portrayals of the convent in the period, which varied widely based on socio-political and religious point of view. That all of these contexts affect Radcliffe's gothic aesthetic is without a doubt, but what I wish to argue is how they inform a construction/destruction of static gender roles for her heroines, specifically in terms of architecture of the convent and the bodies that inhabit its space. It is not my goal to "pin down" Radcliffe's own political or religious outlook, since part of my argument is that she advocates a more mutable form of self, but I will not ignore arguments about her place in the political and religious confusion that characterized the 1790s.

Exile and Sanctuary in *A Sicilian Romance*

The narrator of *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) makes a direct connection between the contemplation of ruins, national identity, and the narrative of confinement and escape that Radcliffe unfolds: "I walked over the loose fragments of stone, which lay scattered through the immense area of the fabric, and surveyed the sublimity and grandeur of the ruins, I recurred, by a natural association of ideas, to the times when these walls stood proudly in their original splendour," but a nearby friar soon corrects the narrator: "These walls ... were once the seat of luxury and vice. They exhibited a singular instance of the retribution of Heaven, and were from that period forsaken, and abandoned to decay" (1). The historical value of the ruined walls lies in the manuscript that unearths their human significance. As ruins, the narrator can read the castle walls as anything he likes, but as ruins with an attached human narrative he must understand that they represent a crumbled home and prison. This is because the manuscript tells the story of the Marquis Mazzini, who keeps his wife confined in the bowels of the family castle, while he abuses his daughters and son within the visible part of the architecture. When she stumbles across her mother's cavernous prison Julia finds "to her inexpressible surprize" she is "in a subterranean abode belonging to the southern buildings of the castle of Mazzini!" (175). The remains of ideal femininity and lost maternity make the space uncannily like the ruins of a nunnery, and the marchioness refers to the spot as "this recess of horror" (176).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ This in contrast to the more equivocal space of Sophia Lee's recess, which Radcliffe was aware of according to The *Annual Register*'s 1824 obituary for Sophia Lee, which Miles quotes from McIntyre: "'it is to be remarked that Mrs Radcliffe (then Miss Ward), resident in Bath, and acquainted in Miss Lee's family, though too young to have appeared herself as a writer, was among the warmest admirers of *The Recess*' (McIntyre 1920: 11)" (Miles 23). Charlotte Smith also groups Radcliffe and Lee together when she complains of a dearth of good books in 1802: "I have had no time to read lately & think, from what I hear from those who have, that there never

The recess, as much as it represents the solitude and supposed poverty of a monastic cell, is in fact worse than a convent for these women. When Julia decides to help her mother escape her prison, she says to her: “A convent may afford for the present a safe asylum; and whatever shall happen, surely no fate you may hereafter encounter can be more dreadful than the one you now experience” (181). This distinction between the prison beneath the home and the sanctuary available in the convent complicates readings such as Diane Hoeveler’s, who argues that Radcliffe’s agenda is an unequivocally bourgeois Protestant one; of forced marriage or the veil she says: “The promise of fertility becomes sterility in either case. Princes and monks, both are just so much historical residue, the embodiments of an earlier historical moment that the bourgeoisie wants to eradicate so that the world can be made safe for the Protestant, enlightened, and democratic middle class” (67). This might be the agenda of many anti-Catholic representations of the convent, but this is not the case for Radcliffe. Instead, the space of the nunnery most often produces either a replication of domestic imprisonment and abuse or ideal female community, and Radcliffe ties both contexts to the inheritance of femininity from the mother figure (thus not completely eradicating aristocratic inheritance). As Julia tells her mother when they are both trapped under the castle:

But when I consider that in remaining here, I am condemned only to the sufferings which my mother has so long endured, and that this confinement will enable me to soften, by tender sympathy, the asperity of her misfortunes, I ought to submit to my present situation with complacency, even did a marriage with the duke appear less hateful to me. (182)

Imprisonment with her mother is preferable to forced marriage for Julia because it means she can practice tender sympathy and feminine suffering, but these sentiments are not that different from the architecture that inspires them; the asylum and the prison do not differ substantially for women who define themselves based on their subjection to architecture.

Earlier in the novel Julia flees from a forced marriage to the Duke de Luovo to the mutable asylum of the Abbey of St. Augustin. First the convent offers her relief: “She was received by the abbot with a sort of paternal affection, and by the nuns with officious kindness. Comforted by these circumstances, and by the tranquil appearance of every thing around her, she retired to rest, and passed the night in peaceful slumbers” (113). When she represents sanctuary, Radcliffe does not only depict foreign religious and judicial systems, she also looks back (with overwhelming favour) on the idea of sanctuary in medieval England. The sanctuary that many of her heroines experience is a flawed or

were fewer books of entertainment merely less worth reading.... Mrs Ratcliffe [sic] is restrained [sic] by the authority of her husband from calling any more ‘spirits from the vasty deep’ of her imagination, the Lees seem to have laid by the pen for some time...” (To Joseph Cooper Walker, London, late March-early April 1802, pg. 416-417, *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Judith Phillips Stanton).

corrupted form of the justice that Gervase Rosser shows benefited from a strong form of community governance in the Middle Ages: "... the functioning of sanctuary ... depended, first and foremost, upon the involvement of the local community.... the collective behaviour of neighbours, whether in village or town, was a crucial determinant of the power of sanctuary in the European Middle Ages" (60). In Radcliffe's depiction of sanctuary, however, there is always the threat that the agent of power will undermine what she represents as a religious right. As Rosser explains,

of other reasons for the legal dismantling of sanctuary privileges between the early sixteenth and the early eighteenth century, the most pressing was the growth of establishment fears of social disturbance.... The early stages of these developments contributed to Thomas Cromwell's plan 'for the utter destruction of sanctuaries.' (76)

The established power's fear of the control commoners have over justice is a theme that Radcliffe's heroines constantly face.

However, the fear alone does not guarantee that commoners do have any control over justice. Despite its initial sanctuary, the abbey Julia takes shelter in contains within it the architecture and ideals of enclosure, which soon work themselves to the surface: "Julia, sheltered in the obscure recesses of St Augustin, endeavoured to attain a degree of that tranquility which so strikingly characterized the scenes around her ... [the abbey] was founded in the twelfth century, and stood a proud monument of monkish superstition and princely magnificence" (116-117). The foundation of the abbey upon superstition and luxury taints Julia's shelter, and the attitude of the Abate confirms this more sinister aspect of her retreat; he tells her: "If you assume the veil, you are safe within the pale of the church from temporal violence. If you neglect or refuse to do this ... I shall be compelled at last to resign you" (141). Caught between the pride of the Abate and that of her father, Julia's sanctuary at St Augustin depends on her ability to manipulate her position between monastic and marriageable femininity. When he finds that she claims sanctuary to escape the will of her father, the Abate tells Julia: "You have profaned our sanctuary with your crime. You have brought insult upon our sacred order, and have caused bold and impious defiance of our high prerogative," to which she responds: "When I sheltered myself within these walls, it was to be presumed that they would protect me from injustice; and with what other term than injustice would you, Sir, distinguish the conduct of the marquis, if the fear of his power did not overcome the dictates of truth?" (132). Her father's aristocratic power (not unlike Henry VIII's) threatens Julia's sanctuary, and her choice of the veil as the lesser of the two evils emphasizes this fact.

The female votaries of this community offer a more positive connection for Julia, who finds "much pleasure in the conversation of the nuns, many of whom were uncommonly amiable, and the dignified sweetness of whose manners formed a charm irresistibly attractive" (113). This type of construction reflects not only the unstable definition of sanctuary (the female community does not have

control over the Abate's decision to implement it), but also Revolutionary representations of the convent, which Mita Choudhury explains "cast the convent as a despotic site. Nuns, however, they saw as victims" (157). Radcliffe's depiction of these nuns as ideal women under the despotic control of an unpredictable Abate is in line with early Revolutionary views of the nun as a victim of the space of the convent. However, her return to the convent as the only acceptable alternative to the domestic sphere also comments on the problems that arise after the dissolution of the monasteries (both in medieval England and in contemporary France). Julia's attempt to stay under the protection of either the nunnery or companionate marriage reminds Radcliffe's reader of the destitute and monstrous female body that cannot reintegrate itself into the architecture of reproductive femininity. Similarly, antiquarian accounts of British nunneries (as we saw in chapter one) account for the financial and social position of the nuns and nunneries after the dissolution, but also delineate nuns' attempts to maintain their architectural agency for as long as possible (as in the case of Dartford Priory).

The assumption that displaced nuns would simply marry or be reintegrated into the social landscape was one that benefited the economic and biopolitical aims of King Henry VIII's government as much as it did the government of the French Revolution. As Owlen Hufton notes, the Assembly's "real interest in 1790 was to lay hold of church property without causing undue hardship, and in terms which presented the activity as one which would promote moral regeneration" (57). This meant over-idealizing the role of marriage and reproduction as a fall-out of displacement, despite the fact that "reintegration into society through marriage was hardly a likelihood for most of the women," whose average age "in 1789 was often over fifty" (58, 57). This left nuns between the two architectural enclosures, and the similarly ill-defined spaces between the convent and the home in both the 1530s and the 1790s draw into relief the fact that the idealization of both spaces was detrimental to cohesive female identity. Evangelisti notes that after the Napoleonic suppression of Italian convents "nuns were not always welcomed back into their families" and asks also: "could the mentality of eighteenth-century men and women cope with such a hybrid female identity as the ex-nun?" (232) Her rhetorical answer is "no," and Radcliffe's depiction of convents similarly reflects the instability of the early 1790s, as she villainizes the aristocracy only to return her heroines to a reorganization of aristocratic space; however, before she does so Radcliffe explores the dangers and freedoms of the indistinct or mutable (ruined) space between sanctuary and imprisonment in both the convent and the home.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Radcliffe's depiction of this space is not due to either an anti-Catholic or pro-Catholic stance, and by association it is not necessarily a Jacobin or anti-Jacobin take on aristocracy. The mutable space between the convent and the home (or the sanctuary and the prison, as both can be either) represents an argument about national identity that relies on political and class-based contexts to explore its terms. Robert Miles maintains that "Radcliffe did not flirt with the transgressive because she was, deep down, a subversive. Her oppositional sensibilities were rather those of the

Domestic Asylum and Imprisonment in *The Romance of the Forest*

The Romance of the Forest (1791) characterizes almost every space as an asylum-turned-prison. Adeline moves from an imprisoning convent, to the refuge of a ruined abbey, to the sanctuary of an ideal pastoral family. Radcliffe delineates the importance of ruins to human identity early in the novel, when La Motte compares himself to the ruined abbey in which he takes up residence: “‘A few years,’ said he, ‘and I shall become like the mortals on whose reliques I now gaze, and, like them too, I may be the subject of meditation to a succeeding generation, which shall totter but a little while over the object they contemplate, ere they also sink into the dust’” (16). Layers of humans subject to the ruin of decay and architectural containment give Adeline “a kind of pleasing dread” (18), which later becomes pure dread when La Motte imprisons her in the abbey; he tells her, “‘Here you must remain for the present ... in a confinement, which is, perhaps, almost as involuntary on my part as it can be on yours’” (207). Because the Marquis de Montalt controls La Motte, he in turn imprisons Adeline, whose sanctuary in La Motte’s ruined abbey then becomes a prison. Adeline moves laterally from one architectural representation of aristocratic luxury and ruin to another until she reaches the paradise-like abode of La Luc, where mythologies of Protestant middle-class morality abound.

Adeline’s experience of asylum so far requires the narrator to spend a great deal of time reassuring the reader that this is actually a refuge for her. In one sense, this movement mirrors the eighteenth-century idea of the progress of English history, which “was seen as an organic process in which the ‘tyranny of the crown’ and the impulse for a ‘free constitution’ gradually found themselves reconciled in the perfected shape of the British constitutional monarchy, the organism gloriously bursting out of its shell in 1688” (Miles 59). But Radcliffe’s depiction of a simultaneous progress toward ruin (as La Motte sees it) and nature (as La Luc sees it) troubles La Luc’s wish for an easily readable other: “trust me, a bad heart and a *truly* philosophical head has never yet been united in the same individual” (*RF* 270). If this is true, then asylums should always be asylums and not possible prisons, as Adeline experiences them.

A lack of distinction between the nunnery that Adeline leaves and the world she leaves it for also ruins any ideal construction of a barrier between domestic space and the public world. Just as the nunnery excludes Adeline “from the cheerful intercourse of society – from the pleasant view of nature – almost from the light of day” (37), so too do her escape from the nunnery and her sanctuary in the ruined abbey lead to imprisonment. When her foster father takes her from the nunnery only to imprison her in a secluded house, Adeline realizes that the outside world and the interior of the convent are not that different: “I

dissenting ‘middling classes’. But Radcliffe wrote at a time when even fence-sitting could look dubious” (56). In her depictions of nuns and nunneries we can see Radcliffe using popular gender and national aesthetic forms to express a lack of secure space for the wandering female body.

almost fancied myself again in the convent Is this a part of the world I have so fondly contemplated? said I” (40). Despite Adeline’s refusal to take the veil, she does consider the nunnery as an option before the Marquis and La Motte re-imprison her. She responds to Theodore’s worry that she is “destitute of friends and protection” by telling him: “I am thinking how I may avoid a situation so deplorable ... They say there is a convent, which receives borders, within a few miles, and thither I wish to go” (192). Adeline’s return to the possibility of refuge in a convent reminds the reader that her escape does not lead to the ideal domestic dreams she envisions.⁶⁶ Instead, architectural spaces turn out to be as unreadable as the bodies that inhabit them: La Motte saves Adeline, only to imprison her; the Marquis de Montalt is Adeline’s uncle; Theodore is La Luc’s son; and in perhaps the most perplexing metanarrative twist, Adeline is not Adeline, since it is “the name given by her foster mother” (334).

Female Community and Aristocratic Identity in *The Italian*

Ideal female community appears in more detail in *The Italian* (1797), which emphasizes the character of the Abbess as the major influence over the role of the convent as either a sanctuary or a prison:

... to the wisdom and virtue of the Superior, the sisterhood was principally indebted She was dignified without haughtiness, religious without bigotry, and mild, though decisive and firm In her lectures to the nuns she seldom touched upon points of faith, but explained and enforced the moral duties, particularly such as were most practicable in the society to which she belonged ... the practice of sisterly kindness, universal charity, and the most pure and elevated devotion. (299-300)

Radcliffe recalls Mary Astell’s wish for a protestant version of a convent in this description of the Abbess of *Santa della Pi ta*. She also incorporates the Italian nunnery into the ideal English landscape in the same way that antiquaries incorporated the ruined nunnery into their illustrated histories of England. The abbess is not too extreme in her character or actions, and she fits perfectly into the

⁶⁶ LeLancourt also represents almost an entirely superficial and unreadable space, since it unites (through La Luc) all kinds of seemingly opposite aesthetic ideals; it “was an exception to the general character of the country, and to the usual effects of an arbitrary government; it was flourishing, healthy, and happy; and these advantages it chiefly owed to the activity and attention of the benevolent clergyman whose cure it was” (240). Claudia Johnson notices that this space combines political extremes for an ideal (almost anti-temporal) space, “for [La Luc’s] sentimental practice has transformed what would otherwise be a site of misery into an idyl of wholesomeness, and it has also synthesized the French and English national polities” (87). In this sense, it represents the possibility inherent in every fictional space as well as the regulation of every represented utopia; La Luc “cures” and supervises the operation of LeLancourt, and offers up a government that is not arbitrary but all the same a champion of “the philosophy of nature, directed by common sense” (RF 245). This idyllic retreat appears to be the perfect balance of any number of late eighteenth-century ideals, but the instability of other asylums causes the reader to mistrust even this perfect one.

“society to which she belongs.” Just as nunneries get to the heart of ideal femininity for English antiquaries, so too does the abbess represent an ideal form of femininity (and maternity) for Radcliffe’s text. However, this makes her as spectre-like as the women who once inhabited the ruins in the English countryside, and the political position of the émigré nun in 1797 speaks to this combination of Protestant and Catholic ideal femininity.

One narrative of escape from France and integration into English society appears in the Jerningham letters, the history of which Margaret J. Mason gives in her “Nuns of the Jerningham Letters: The Hon. Catherine Dillon (1752-1797) and Anne Nevill (1754-1824), Benedictines at Bodney Hall.” Mason explains that the nuns and their servant “managed to baffle officials, soldiers and mob and escape from Montargis in 1792” (38), after which they “went to Bodney Hall near Brandon in Norfolk ... to begin arranging it for the Community” (39). There, they set up a school where “the daughters of English and Irish Catholics and French émigrés” learned “respect for their religion, proper behaviour, and application to their studies,” which included “lessons in French, English, needlework, drawing ... and singing” (40). Radcliffe’s *Daughters of Pity* also particularly [excel] in music” (300), and she is careful to place the source of this excellence in “the well-regulated sensibility of their own minds” (301). The regulation of internal sensibility in order to produce external results (the music) advocates an ideal balance that sets this group of nuns apart from others in the novels; the English domestic ideal of coherent internal and external identity (the perfect combination of public and private femininity) is realized in an Italian convent. Radcliffe complicates theological and bodily boundaries in order to imagine ideal femininity in her depiction of Santa della Pieta, and although she does not make direct reference to émigré convents like that at Bodney Hall, the narrative of Bodney Hall (a French and English Catholic nunnery in an English country house) complicates the clear pattern of “othering” that some critics use to categorize Radcliffe’s representation of convents in *The Italian*.

For example, Rogers argues, “this convent and its superior can be admirable because they are not distinguishably Roman Catholic or monastic” (302), while Miles maintains, “the convent of Santa della Pieta, although ostensibly Catholic, actually enjoys a Protestant regime owing to the enlightenment of the Superior” (157). Others argue that the Superior offers a version of Radcliffe’s own religious ideals. Robert J. Mayhew aligns the abbess with what he argues are Radcliffe’s latitudinarian beliefs, despite the fact that “Radcliffe’s attitude towards Roman Catholics here was much more tolerant than that of the founders of latitudinarianism,” explaining that “English attitudes to Roman Catholics became more tolerant throughout the century, notably in the 1790s when the defence of the established order in church and state in the aftermath of the French Revolution became more important than denominational infighting” (603). But this does not explain Radcliffe’s earlier representation of the space of the convent as both sanctuary and prison. Instead, it explains away a construction of space and character that uncovers a loss visible in the English

religious landscape. Radcliffe, in a way, plays a trick on her readers here. To categorize Santa della Pieta's abbess as Protestant is to allow for a Protestant affinity with the Catholic landscape, while to maintain that she is Catholic allows for a space of religious freedom that does not judge based on theology. It is the malleability of the convent space that both allows for sanctuary and undermines it. As Brenda Tooley argues: "The 'good' abbess's refusal to specify the connection between doctrinal purity and personal faith enables a reprieve from institutional violence, thus allowing an arena, *at once institutional and marginal*, where silence and apparent conformity disguise 'safe' dissent. In this location, at this moment in the narrative, Ellena encounters sanctuary" (64). This configuration of sanctuary overwhelmingly resembles the place of the émigré nun in a space like Bodney Hall.

In contrast, the convent of San Stefano offers an image of the type of prison that also exists beneath the surface of ideal domestic space in late eighteenth-century England:

Ellena's hope of pity vanished as her eyes glanced ... on the countenance of the nun characterised by a gloomy malignity, which seemed ready to inflict upon others some portion of the unhappiness she herself suffered. As she glided forward with soundless step, her white drapery, floating along these solemn avenues ... she seemed like a spectre newly risen from the grave, rather than a living being. (67)

The abbess embodies an image of the Catholic past as English antiquaries saw it; ghostly and other, she has the power to highlight the very dangerous mutability of the Catholic nunnery. Radcliffe complicates this mutability when she associates a negative image of female monasticism with the aristocracy and domestic ideals of private space, effectively replacing the antiquarian fear of mutability with their idealistic representation of aristocratic femininity: mutability becomes positive, while aristocratic domesticity becomes negative. It is the fear of an absence of religious or moral context that this creation of the Catholic other reveals.

Indeed, the overwhelming emphasis on the aristocratic status of nuns in English antiquarian works seems to make safe the kind of agency that both the superiors in *The Italian* display. In this case, though, the aristocratic assumption allows for Ellena's feudally driven agency to emerge, while the Lady Abbess of Santa della Pieta forms a new ideal "aristocratic" woman. The Superior of San Stefano, "herself a woman of some distinction, believed that of all possible crimes, next to that of sacrilege, offences against persons of rank were least pardonable" (67). Ellena tells her: "the sanctuary is prophaned ... it is become a prison. It is only when the Superior ceases to respect the precepts of the holy religion, the precepts which teach her justice and benevolence, that she herself is no longer respected" (84). The ancient "holy religion" and "the ancient dignity" of the aristocratic family are set at odds here, despite the fact that both arise from an idea of self that goes back to feudal England.

In this alignment between corrupt aristocracy and Catholicism, Radcliffe draws together debate about the Magna Carta, the French Revolution, and how the

past figures into both religious and political ideals of community and sanctuary. Ideas of “Britishness” revolved around both an aristocratic past and a rising middle class, while anti-Catholicism was important largely because “there was a broad agreement as to the origin of the ‘British’ Constitution: Magna Carta and the Glorious Revolution figured centrally in most accounts” (Miles 158). Thus, much anti-Catholic feeling was tied to the maintenance of a Protestant monarchy through the Glorious Revolution, and even though the Magna Carta could be traced to a non-Protestant past, it was the work of historians and antiquarians to make that past inherently Protestant and tied to British liberty. As Colley notes, Protestantism and anti-Catholicism were “such powerful and pervasive emotions” even outside of their legal place because “official intolerance, like mass intolerance, was rooted in something far more intangible, in fear most of all, and in the way that Britons chose to remember and interpret their own past” (19).

This is why Sir Edward Coke’s work to apply thirteenth-century common law to seventeenth-century legal practice, and thus compose a history of cohesive national identity – “so that the men of 1628 could believe that they were not only repeating the solemn act of 1215, but taking part in a recurrent drama of English history at least as old as the Conquest” (Pocock 45) – is so important to the erasure of Catholicism from English history and national identity. Radcliffe’s focus on feudal laws and practices ties in with both an understanding of the maintenance of English law, as well as antiquarian accounts of monastic space. As Pocock notes, the

process, by which Coke discovers the rights of parliament and property in a feudal document of the thirteenth century, was at bottom one with ... the revitalization of the common law so that precedents and principles laid down by the king’s courts in the attempt to govern a feudal society could be used and found apt in the freeholding and mercantile England of James I. (45)

Respect for the feudal idea of community and sanctuary is important to Radcliffe’s understanding of agency through architecture because it combines secular and church laws and offers a repressed ideal that continued to be important to English identity, despite its repression. As Rosser explains, “polemics on the subject written between late antiquity and the seventeenth century ... accepted sanctuary in some form as a crucial right within any state.... even after the Act of 1624 which abolished all but a few sanctuaries for debtors, Henry Spelman in 1664 [takes] the continuance of sanctuary in England ... for granted” (59).

But sanctuary (and the coherent history of the Magna Carta) is partly mutable because of the Revolutionary context, which divides ideas of the constitution as changeable along political lines, rather than acknowledging its continued mutability in terms of community involvement. Both veneration for the Glorious Revolution, and an endorsement of the sentiment of the French Revolution result in anti-Catholic feelings, but these feelings are in a way entirely different from one another. One stems from a nationalistic veneration of the

medieval past and the other from an anti-aristocratic idea of progress. Radcliffe's novels complicate a clear political stance because they aim to navigate the possibilities for violence and asylum in both extremes, and in this sense her work mirrors the confusion of the era; as Miles explains:

By mid-decade ... the serene, Whiggish certainties of England's blessed history were shattered, even as they were loudly insisted upon. The public mood – looking both ways at once – had become deeply confused.... the past and the future – remnants of medievalism and harbingers of industrialisation – confusingly overlapped. (67)

Radcliffe uses this confusion – especially in *The Italian* – to represent femininity and feminine space as equally subject to the political mutability of the age. Female identity is tied up in issues like the gothic constitution and anti-Catholicism because the definitions of self that rely on those national and religious constructions and repressions of other times dictate distinct ideals of maternity and femininity; sanctuary is so important because it represents the lack of spatial security and the threat of violence that both a reliance on an ancient and unchangeable constitution and a modern progression toward middle-class morality and motherhood hold.⁶⁷

In contrast to Claudia Johnson's belief that the movement away from aristocratic power, towards "tender domesticity" and "a reactionary drive to defend authority and validate its efficacy" renders everything established in the first instance pointless in *The Italian* and that "Radcliffe thus both indulges and finally represses the tendencies of gothic to assail the old regime" (123), I believe that she uses the spaces of the convent, the prison, and the aristocratic home to complicate every ideal of gothicism or progress; both the "tender domesticity" of the home and the "insolence and callousness of the old regime" exist in the space of the convent – and thus the legal or philosophical freedom of the hero or heroine (as Johnson and others argue there is a confusing malleability of gender here) lies within their ability to manipulate the space around them.

In one example of this, Radcliffe underscores the mutability of San Stefano through Ellena's ability to escape mental enclosure when she views the natural landscape through the window of her turret: "Hither she could come, and her soul, refreshed by the views it afforded, would acquire strength to bear her ... thro' the persecutions that might await her" (90). Within the nunnery-as-prison, Ellena finds a momentary sanctuary both in the turret, and in the person of Olivia,

⁶⁷ As Johnson notices, "Radcliffe's representations of unbounded cruelty in *The Italian* appear to have as much to do with commonplace anxiety about France and observations about England as they do with fantasies about the distant Mediterranean countries" (120). In addition, Vivaldi's experience in the prison of the inquisition does not only comment on the Bastille, but also on English legal traditions. As Beth Swan explains: "Although torture per se was no longer in use in late eighteenth-century England, the frequent anxious allusions to Inquisitorial tribunals and extortive practices in English writers of the time do not derive entirely from horror at what happened abroad" (200). Radcliffe explores this modern/feudal connection to the power of the aristocracy to imprison, and the power of church sanctuary to protect from injustice in *Gaston de Blondville* (composed 1802-03).

who turns out to be her mother. Olivia's narrative also acts as a testimony to the malleability of monastic space. She seeks refuge from Schedoni at the convent of San Stefano, and she eventually seeks sanctuary from San Stefano at Santa della Pieta, highlighting the dichotomy of the nunnery as both a prison and a sanctuary. Similarly, mistaken familial identity and false death protect Ellena and Olivia from violence at the hands of Schedoni. Schedoni's belief that Ellena is his dead daughter prevents her murder, while Olivia's false death and seclusion in the convent also undermine Schedoni's attempt to murder her. No clear ideal space exists for these women, which Radcliffe reminds the reader of when Olivia relinquishes Ellena to Vivaldi, and considers "that ... she should not lose her, since the vicinity of Vivaldi's residence to *La Pieta* would permit a frequent intercourse with the convent" (411). The convent and the aristocratic home are so close as to be interchangeable here, and Radcliffe's historical timeline, although an overwhelmingly matriarchal one, points to the ways that social structures continue to inhibit female community and sanctuary.

Feeling Seclusion and Freedom in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

In contrast, Blanche's release from the convent in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) provides an ideal view of the natural world against the seclusion of the nunnery. Blanche thinks, "I have lived in this glorious world so long ... and never till now beheld such a prospect – never experienced these delights! ... I have been shut in a cloister from the view of these beautiful appearances How can the poor nuns and friars feel the full fervour of devotion, if they never see the sun rise, or set?" (472). The sublimity of nature, however, is just as dangerous as the seclusion of the convent (166), and the combination of the beauty of nature and monastic ruins popular in antiquarian drawings like that of Netley Abby [figure 33] positions Blanche as a conduit between seclusion and the romantic landscape. This is because Blanche represses her connection to monastic architecture, while admiring the natural landscape that in many antiquarian engravings encroaches dangerously (and "sublimely" or in an aesthetically pleasing manner) on the architecture of the convent. As a figure who admires from within what she observes as the need to repress monastic architecture, Blanche offers an ideal (but perhaps two-dimensional) picturesque form.

The nunnery of St. Clair also undermines Blanche's description of enclosure, when it provides the integral piece of the puzzle which solves one of the mysteries of *Udolpho*, and also tempts Emily with its tranquility and sanctuary: "During her stay at the convent, the peace and sanctity that reigned within, the tranquil beauty of the scenery without, and the delicate attentions of the abbess and the nuns ... almost tempted her to ... devote herself to the cloister" (89). The lack of productivity that tempts Emily mirrors the sensibility that her father warns her about when he says "All excess is vicious; even that sorrow, which is amiable in its origin, becomes a selfish and unjust passion, if indulged at the expence of our duties" (20). The final words of the novel reiterate this emphasis on productivity in the face of ideal reclusion "O! Useful may it be to

have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain” (672). However, the sublime landscape, the secluded cloister, the imprisoning castle, and the false or real decaying body all lead to the same superficial “usefulness” – one that the novel, because it constructs all spaces with positive and negative opportunities for usefulness, undermines as simply an ideal imagination of a boundary between the interior and exterior, the body and the grave, or the natural and artificial world.

The transformative powers of imprisonment and escape also indicate that environment constructs human identity. As St. Aubert’s appearance demonstrates when he sees the convent of St. Clair, the impact of the architecture of identity and the political and social contexts that surround that architecture are difficult to escape; Emily observes:

... the clouds of grief, mingled with a faint expression of horror,
 gathering on his brow; his countenance became fixed, and, touched as it
 now was by the silver whiteness of the moon-light, he resembled one of
 those marble statues of a monument, which seem to bend, in hopeless
 sorrow, over the ashes of the dead, shewn
 by the blunted light

That the dim moon through painted casements lends. (71)

The murder of St. Aubert’s sister at the hands of her husband is a striking example of domestic ruin. St Aubert’s association of this memory with the convent, and Radcliffe’s use of Charlotte Smith’s poem *The Emigrants* (which deals with the gothic horror of murder in, and exile from, Revolutionary France), undermine the ideals of the convent and home. The negative characterization of the French convent at the end of the eighteenth century also had much to do with objections to aristocratic privilege; as Choudhury notes, “this critique of convent education dovetailed into a larger attack on elite society and particularly a denunciation of aristocratic women convents, convent education, and female reproduction were tied directly to a larger concern – depopulation and the health of the nation” (138).

The Emigrants emphasizes the connection Radcliffe makes for both Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Ellena in *The Italian* between aristocratic exile, gender, and an imagined landscape. Michael Wiley argues that Charlotte Smith’s depiction of the émigrés relies on a reorganization of English landscape and values that Smith imagines is necessary before any progress can occur: “Smith’s map in *The Emigrants* challenges the dominant organizations and significations of British and European spaces, offering instead a peaceful, egalitarian replacement, a replacement which, she suggests, is immanent in nature itself” (57). Susan J. Wolfson argues that Smith imagines this space as ultimately a feminine one, in order to comment on the unproductive nature of war: “Smith brings the ‘male’ world of warfare into the ‘female’ world of home. She was one of the first poets in the 1790s to do this, and it was not easy in early 1793 to be against a war with France, even in terms of ‘female’ values” (534).

Thus, Radcliffe’s quotation (which makes reference to “the feudal Chief, whose Gothic battlements / Frown on the plain beneath, returning home / From

distant lands, alone and in disguise”) comes right after Smith draws a picture of maternity sacrificed to war:

A wretched Woman, pale and breathless, flies!

.....
 Among the thickets, where she trembling seeks
 A temporary shelter – clasping close
 To her hard-heaving heart her sleeping child,
 All she could rescue of the innocent groupe
 That yesterday surrounded her [.]

.....
 True to maternal tenderness, she tries
 To save the unconscious infant from the storm
 In which she perishes; and to protect
 This last dear object of her ruin’d hopes
 From prowling monsters, that from other hills
 More inaccessible, the wilder wastes,
 Lur’d by the scent of slaughter, follow fierce
 Contending hosts, and to polluted fields
 Add dire increase of horrors[.] – But alas!
 The Mother and the Infant perish both!—
 (258,263-267,282-291)

Radcliffe draws together the nunnery and domestic violence when she makes reference to Smith’s picture of anti-war maternity here. The reference underscores the ideal productivity that Emily believes is at odds with the convent, but also undermines the maternal domestic sphere as equally unproductive because masculine ideals of femininity control it. Of the two imagined spaces, then, the nunnery comes out as the most productive one, since it uncovers familial connections and reconstitutes maternity for both Ellena of *The Italian* and for Emily of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. When Emily discovers, from the abbess of St. Clair, “the Marchioness de Villeroi to have been the sister of Mons. St. Aubert, [she is] ... released from an anxious and painful conjecture, occasioned by the rash assertion of Signora Laurentini, concerning her birth and the honour of her parents” and especially from “such reluctance to believe herself the daughter of any other, than her, whom she had always considered and loved as a mother” (663). Despite the convent’s supposed unproductive nature, it produces much narrative maternity in Radcliffe’s work.

Radcliffe’s references to the ideals of the French Revolution also demonstrate the importance of social, political and architectural context to ideal femininity and education. As she notes of a group of religious women she encounters in Germany: “there is a Chapter of Noble Ladies, of whom two thirds are Protestants, and one third Catholic; an arrangement which probably accounts for their having no settled and common residence” (*Journey* 341). In Radcliffe’s observation here, the lack of distinction between Protestantism and Catholicism

leads to a lack of distinctive space, and this characterization in turn mirrors the equivocal nature of convents in her novels.

Radcliffe's Mutable Aesthetic Theory

A similar antithetical construction resonates in Radcliffe's use of the sublime and picturesque, and this in turn hinges on a consumption of not only the mutable spaces she offers up to her readers, but also the figures, forms, or bodies within those spaces. Radcliffe's picturesque description of the English monastic ruins of Furness Abbey [figures 34-35] in her *Journey Made in the Summer of 1794* relies on both an aesthetic of ruin and an aesthetic of permanence. Radcliffe explains that the view inspires "luxurious melancholy" because "the character of the deserted ruin is scrupulously preserved in the surrounding area; no spade has dared to level the inequalities, which fallen fragments have occasioned in the ground, or shears to clip the wild fern and underwood, that overspread it" (488). Ruin and preservation seem completely in league in her description, yet they simultaneously point out the kinds of mutable boundaries that her descriptions of nuns and nunneries do in her novels. The wish for an unchangeable identity that also represents the "melancholy" of a divided, or temporally progressive, view of humanity is an impossible one.

Radcliffe also imagines the ruin as a whole when she calls on "fancy" to construct the monastic site as it might have been:

The midnight procession of monks ... appeared to the "mind's eye" issuing to the choir ... the organ swelled a solemn peal. To fancy, the strain still echoed feebly along the arcades and died in the breeze among the woods.... It was easy to imagine the abbot ... seated beneath the ... canopy of the four stalls ... high over which is now perched a solitary yew-tree, a black funeral memento to the living of those who once sat below. (490-491)

Radcliffe places her body in the proper perspective to call up images of other bodies from her "mind's eye" and project them onto the ruin before her. Similarly, when she describes the Marchesa's villa on the bay in *The Italian* she depicts "a shadowy perspective, beyond which appeared the ample waters of the gulf, where the light sails of feluccas, and the spreading canvas of larger vessels, glided upon the scene and passed away, as in a camera obscura" (292). Although this is a very different scene – set in Italy and reliant on water-imagery – Radcliffe uses the same principles of vision and imagination as she does in her description of Furness Abbey.

This type of description is partly what Castle calls the "spectralization of the Other" and partly a form of picturesque viewing that relies on the fragmentation of interior and exterior boundaries to produce its effects. Castle investigates mourning and the inversion of imagination and the supernatural in her analysis of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: "what once was real (the supernatural) has become unreal; what once was unreal (the imagery of the mind) has become real. In the very process of reversal, however, the two realms are confused; the archaic

language of the supernatural contaminates the new language of mental experience” (135). One reason for the lack of cohesive boundary between the gothic language of the supernatural and the modern language of the “natural” picturesque or Lockean experience is that there is an essential form of consumption (imagination and internalization) in both. In one sense, Radcliffe exhibits an ideal example of Gilpin’s theory of the picturesque, which Francesca Orestano argues involves both perception and imagination: “Gilpin observes that his rules for composing landscape are a successful compromise between the realism of the camera obscura and the effect produced by the unfinished on the imagination” (45). The fragment or ruin requires the viewer to observe in a particular manner, which also creates the scene before them; “gothic elements are wont to hide in the intricacy of design, in the claro-obscuro, in those dark areas where sublime objects challenge the rational descriptive eye” (Orestano 53).

As Keane notes, this sublimity lurks within what seem to be picturesque descriptions: “the reader is both subjected to and distanced from each aesthetic experience.... when the distance between subject and object is less well-defined, or at night, when outlines are obscured and their walls seem infinite, the ruins take on the character of the sublime. Similarly, whilst protagonists are free to wander inside ... the picturesque prevails” (38). Radcliffe complicates a clear distinction between the picturesque and the sublime, and invites her readers to elaborate on the shady images in her texts. For Radcliffe, the fear of a repressed self is the same as the fear of death, but both fears (when viewed from an aesthetic distance) are sublime in the sense that they allow the viewer/reader to consider the fragmentation or repression of self without giving up the ideal of a coherent identity. In this sense her sublime is one that on some level must accept the voluntary consumption of a self (rather than a complete annihilation of self), which is a form of acceptance of lack or loss. The picturesque sketches or sublime landscapes and terrors that her heroines observe, then, should properly be consumed twice by her readers – once through the character’s eye and once through the “mind’s eye” of the reader.

When this double-looking happens at the site of a monastic ruin, the repressed Catholic past and its impact on ways of seeing the Protestant present come into play. In his discussion of Claude Lorrain’s biblical landscapes as the origin for a re-invention of the picturesque in the late eighteenth-century, Alan Liu argues that the institutional narrative of the Church, which “told human history in narrative scenes that were literally part of its institution – of its walls and altars” (86), became through “Claude and seventeenth-century Classicism” a nostalgic form that “was not Counter-Reformation sectarianism but the nostalgically peaceful universality of the Church *before* the Reformation” (87). With this premise in mind, Liu comes to the conclusion that, “arising through the forgetting of both narrative and the major institution served by narrative, the picturesque was a counter-institution” which acted something like a divested Catholic icon when its proponents viewed landscape through the frame of a Claude glass:

Picturesque arrest was evacuated liturgy. Fixed in a ritual posture of religiosity named repose, back turned to the world, and eyes adoring a mirror with hinged case not unlike a reliquary, the picturesque tourist stood in worship. But what he worshipped was ...[a]... Protestant [art] substituting for the image of the Virgin or of the saints: landscape. (87)

Radcliffe questions the Protestant nationalism that the picturesque/sublime abbey elicits when she imagines it as whole, and calls up repressed images – specifically the monks' dead bodies – of the Catholic past.

She does this to greater effect in her novels, which use the sublime and picturesque illustration of Catholic bodies to complicate gender divisions, and in turn to complicate divisions between the sublime, beautiful, and picturesque. Gilpin considers the human figure “an object of the mixed kind, partaking both of the *beautiful*, and the *picturesque*” (11), but Radcliffe constructs such bodies as sublime – enclosing them in abbeys and castles and covering them with veils, as well as complicating their gendered sensibilities; the repressed Catholic space is inherent in the construction of femininity and bodily consumption as much as it is in landscape and architecture.⁶⁸ What Castle sees happening as a result of this implosion of boundaries – “the constant denial of physical death results, paradoxically, in an indifference toward life itself” (135) – is ultimately a consumer-based reaction that gets to the heart of why Radcliffe uses bodies to manipulate the consumer of fiction (the reader). In order to make familiar the unfamiliar (or the repressed) readers must read surface images twice, or imagine them at the risk of divesting themselves of a carefully-constructed identity.

⁶⁸ Mirella Agorni points out that when women (like Radcliffe) respond to the picturesque “their ambiguous position as female aesthetic subjects allowed them to reject the point of view of the universalized perceiver, in favour of that characterizing the ‘particular’ perceiver who could no longer deny the existence of the material world.... The principal result of women’s reassessment of aesthetics was the creation of a new subject position for women, who were enabled to enter the discourses of art or landscape in a position of authority, albeit a marginal one. This new subjectivity no longer defined itself in terms of autonomy: rather, it established an ethical relationship with its surroundings” (24).

Chapter Five

Ann Radcliffe's Wax Bodies

At the end of chapter four, I suggested that Radcliffe asks her characters and readers to observe surface images twice, or risk relying on a repressed imagination of the other to define self; I take this idea as the textual format for my second chapter on the novels of Ann Radcliffe. When Markman Ellis points out that Radcliffe asks the reader to “look again” at what is behind the curtain in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, he does so while falling prey to Radcliffe's mutable bodies:

The narrator's admonition to Emily to ‘look again’ serves as a warning against excess sensibility. As well as indicating that the corpse is a wax-work fake, the reader's second look behind the curtain supplies additional information about its appearance, clothes and the disfiguring worms. By prolonging the moment of clarification, Radcliffe reinforces the extent to which the narrator positions the reader as Emily (unable to take a second look). (5)

In theory, this characterization of the reader rings true; but Ellis confuses two of the bodies Emily views in *Udolpho*, and indeed, the reader never does get a glimpse of what is behind the black veil, as Emily does. What the reader does see is a *real* dying – not-quite-dead – body (albeit one that also makes Emily faint) and when Radcliffe asks the reader to “look again” it is at the wax body for the first time. This is what I aim to do here. Our first glance was at the mutable architecture of nunneries in Radcliffe's novels; our second look will be at the bodies within those spaces, and how they similarly represent an aesthetic of mutability that relies on repressed constructions of Catholic femininity. The kind of mutability that these bodies exhibit is best described as a malleable mutability. The word mutable implies a “disposition to change; variableness, inconstancy; fickleness” and a “liability or tendency to change” (*OED*), and this is how I have been using the word up until now. Dr. Johnson defines mutability as “changeableness; not continuance in the same state” (184), and it is in this definition that the word interacts with malleability. When I use the word malleability in this chapter it is to metaphorically and aesthetically indicate both an ability to be impressed upon by ideals or images, and an ability to impress ones images or ideals upon another. The definition of the word malleable, then, as “capable of being fashioned or adapted; adaptable, pliable” (*OED*) implies a change of state – a mutability – that despite the lack of agency in the malleable object contains the possibility for the object to change again at a future date (if it once more changes state and is worked upon by an outside object or image). The alignment of femininity with malleability divests women of the ability to impact others, but a combination of mutable and malleable identity (as is present in Radcliffe's heroines) makes the ideal “soft” female body more difficult to identify, especially when it is viewed in terms of its connection to a lack of definition between interior and exterior identity, and to repressed female monastic mutability.

Catholic Objects and Images

Radcliffe introduces *The Italian* with English tourists' consumption of Italian culture not only because such forms of consumption are central to her understanding of English feudal sanctuary and monastic architecture, but also because they are indicative of the malleability of aesthetic ideals in the eighteenth-century marketplace. From an argument about the humanity of sanctuary – even for murderers – the dialogue turns to a site of confession and the aesthetic consumption of that site. The Italian tells the Englishman: "...observe yonder confessional ... that beyond the pillars on the left of the aisle, below a painted window. Have you discovered it? The colours of the glass throw, instead of light, a shade over that part of the church, which, perhaps, prevents your distinguishing what I mean!" (3) The layers of shade and secrecy and the promise of enlightenment through text – the Italian has "in writing" a confession heard at this spot and promises to send his friend "the volume" (3) – emphasize the consumptive act of viewing and reading, especially viewing and reading repressed bodies like that of the murderer.

When the Englishman sees the assassin "stealing from the confessional across the choir" he is "shocked on again beholding him" and turns "his eyes, and hastily ... [quits] the church" (4). Here, Radcliffe links the sublime body of the other to the consumption of textual narrative. In doing so, she theorizes the significance of "beholding again" the image of the repressed. Diego Saglia connects this sight with Vivaldi's sight of the monk in the ruins of the fortress of Paluzzi: "The Roman ruin ... is a harbinger of the sublime just like the hooded figure or the confessional in the prologue. And since obscurity and solemnity momentarily check the desire to see, the ruin, the confessional and the mysterious monk are at the same time both symbols and agents of repression" (4).

Radcliffe constructs visual images in the same manner as these bodily and architectural images, and many of the pictures or artistic surfaces in the novels attest to a feminine mutability that requires a double-take. She links these images not only to a long history of gender mutability that theorizes the power of "looking" but also to a Catholic past that invests art with supernatural power. Clare Haynes argues that "the role of the image was [ambiguous] in the Church of England" and that "art was, as a category, associated with Catholicism in England" (102). She goes on to explore how images were used in the eighteenth-century Church, and concludes, "the history of images in the Church of England reaches to the heart of the Reformation: to the debate about the proper way to worship God, the primacy of the Word over the image and the question of an individual's power to judge properly" (105).

These are issues that Radcliffe's characters also struggle with in regard to the mutability of surface and bodily representations of gender and the history of selfhood; they constantly encounter the power of surfaces, of voices, and of texts to affect the way they perceive and implement "proper" justice. But the illegibility of these surfaces and voices, inherent in their mutability, also causes a fear of

finding oneself under the mysterious veil of what is classified as other. This is why the Kantian position of the “I” as one that overpowers the object in the action of sublime contemplation or consumption does not necessarily apply to Radcliffe’s construction of the Italian (or continental) object in her novels. Neither does she advocate complete control over the distance between self and other, which drives Burke’s understanding of the sublime. Instead, her heroes and heroines use the sublimity inherent in the power of mutability to allow objects (the natural world, bodies, paintings) to subject them to terror (because they refuse at first to look more than once); they also become like those objects when they voice their “sublime” power over the villains who, in turn, are victims of a more complex repression of the constructed selfhood the protagonists espouse.

Ellena does this when she constructs Olivia’s countenance as an object of art. Even when Olivia lifts her veil, Ellena continues to superficially construct her as a sublime object, rather than as someone with an interior narrative; Ellena discovers

a countenance ... touched with a melancholy kind of resignation ... paleness ... prevailed over it, and ... disappeared only when the momentary energy of devotion seemed to lift her spirit above this world.... At those moments her blue eyes were raised towards Heaven, with such meek, yet fervent love, such sublime enthusiasm as the heads of Guido sometimes display, and which renewed, with Ellena, all the enchanting effects of the voice she had just heard. (86)

Not only does this disrupt Burke’s assumption that what is beautiful cannot be sublime, it also constructs Olivia as an artistic artefact that Ellena refuses to fully probe, since she reads her countenance as if its disembodied aesthetic qualities represent Olivia’s soul.

That this simultaneous mystification and demystification takes place at the level of surface perception, means that the readers (or critics) and the characters of Radcliffe’s novels must choose whether they are going to be part of a Protestant demystification of Catholic aesthetic, or whether they will acknowledge that Catholic femininity forms the basis for Protestant ideals and fears of maternal agency. As Haynes notes, “images were still intimately associated with superstition and this was perceived to be the major stumbling block for the development of painting and sculpture.... Protestantism had somehow to be brought to work within a model of the operation of the fine arts and the arts within Protestantism” (29). The Burkean and Kantian definitions of the sublime perhaps achieve this through their subjection or abjection of objects or constructions of binary oppositions. But Radcliffe constructs malleable art that works its way under surfaces, disturbs self identification and appears mystical unless those brave enough to look again perceive that it is part of their society’s repression of self-construction. The fact that Radcliffe opens *The Italian* with English tourists attempting (but failing) to do this ideological work means that she is aware of the ways that the Grand Tour relies on a false form of othering and a very constructed way of seeing Catholic art and architecture.

Revealing Wax Interiors in *The Italian*

This construction of an aesthetic space between extremes resonates with the kinds of consumption of the arts that Ellena facilitates in *The Italian*. She represses her connection to the mutable power that nuns traditionally gain through art, and hides her commercial and productive use of art for financial stability.⁶⁹ Radcliffe's narrator tells us: "Ellena could have endured poverty, but not contempt; and it was to protect herself from this effect of the narrow prejudices of the world around her, that she had so cautiously concealed from it a knowledge of the industry, which did honor to her character" (9). But Ellena's rejection of these connections only causes problems for her, and it is when she dares to look again at aesthetic surfaces and uncover her connections to them that she gains agency and sanctuary. At the same time, she becomes part of the larger patriarchal structure (through heterosexual marriage) when she does this, but with the knowledge that mutability exists beneath the surface. Just as nuns used the arts for survival and agency, so too can Ellena manipulate her economic and domestic situation through aesthetic production and malleability.

When Ellena secretly takes part in the production of ornaments for the aristocracy, her position foreshadows a buried connection to the upper-classes and uncovers the convent as a place of aesthetic production that highlights its indistinct social position in the eighteenth-century. Vivaldi is

ignorant of what was very true, though very secret, that she [Ellena] ... passed whole days in embroidering silks, which were disposed of to the nuns of a neighbouring convent, who sold them to the Neapolitan ladies, that visited their grate, at a very high advantage. He little thought, that a beautiful robe, which he had often seen his mother wear, was worked by Ellena; nor that some copies from the antique, which ornamented a cabinet of the Vivaldi palace, were drawn by her hand. (9)

Like artistic nuns, whose economic and aesthetic influence moves beyond the grate and into the homes of their aristocratic patrons, Ellena claims a place in the Vivaldi household.⁷⁰ This natural artistic ability also hints at Ellena's aristocratic identity, while simultaneously associating her with a middle-class work ethic. In a similar manner, antiquarian narratives emphasize nuns' aristocratic background while ignoring or burying the role of middle-class families in the population of

⁶⁹ See my discussion in Chapter One of the use of the arts in medieval convents, and how this relates to antiquarian representations of the agency nuns gained through things like textiles and clothing: "The patronage and decoration of convents with spiritual and personal images, the use of the arts to generate income, and the navigation of personal objects and clothing all indicate that gender identity, enclosure, and public production and consumption fragment and blur static constructions of nuns and nunneries."

⁷⁰ Recall Evangelisti's explanation of nuns' economic position in terms of the arts: "nuns painted, sculpted, worked as miniaturists or engravers, and were involved in all kinds of art and craft works, bookmaking and decorating, needle and textile works, which provided income for their houses" (162).

convents.⁷¹ In *The Italian*, the nunnery's association with aristocratic arts distances the site from narratives of monastic poverty, while simultaneously showing how those arts are part of an elaborate market-exchange that supports the convent's internal economy.

Interior aristocratic identity and external middle-class business sense create layers of class-comment, which are not easy to "unveil." Claudia Johnson notes, in *The Italian* "cowls and veils are often literal stratagems of concealment, and the unravelling of the plot in its simplest sense entails removing these shrouds and identifying at long last who the persons beneath them really are" (126). However, it is impossible to uncover who characters "really are" because their constructed selves rely on so many combinations of ideals as to make identity an impossible category. The aristocratic house conceals middle-class aesthetics, which are secretly aristocratic aesthetics feigning middle-class industry. Just as eighteenth-century constructs of nuns rely on both an ideal virginity and a negative lack of reproduction, so too do class constructs rely on categories that are only imaginary. Later Johnson furthers her argument to note the double-veiling I've been talking about here: "Sensitivity is recontained by authoritarian rigor, and the established institutions of Church (the Inquisition) and State (the Marchese), having first been stripped of their moral authority, are reclothed, remystified" (133). Rather than seeing this reclothing exclusively as Radcliffe's comment on the inability to escape certain patriarchal institutions (which it partly is), I think there is another side to this layered construction of veiling that reflects the malleability (in addition to its mutability) of the nunnery and of femininity to the extent that eighteenth-century constructions of the nunnery attempt to reinstitute and deny paradoxes of female monasticism.

One of these paradoxes lies in an anatomical understanding of the relationship between the female imagination and the malleable body. This medieval and Renaissance understanding of the relationship between interior and exterior identity is important to the artistic production and antithetical construction of women in Radcliffe's texts. Ellena's belief that Schedoni is her father lies in her certainty that she wears her father's portrait. Her imagination of her familial identity relies on this misreading of artistic representation, but her discomfort with her internal malleability (and her mistake) shows how the power of artistic representation controls emotional and bodily representations of interiority; the portrait both confuses self-perception and clarifies it. Ellena's identification of the image as her father causes correct readings of it (as Schedoni recognizes himself, as Olivia recognizes her second husband) to become shocking. Ellena's changeability also moves from her interior imagination out towards others, and in turn affects their malleability (the picture acts upon her as a hammer does upon metal, but she acts upon Schedoni in the same way). When

⁷¹ See chapter one for the example of Dartford Priory, where "a small minority of rank and file nuns ... whose names survive were from noble or royal backgrounds" while "most ... recorded in fifteenth and sixteenth-century documents were from families of London merchants and professionals in the royal service and/or from those of local minor gentry" (Lee 63).

Schedoni approaches Ellena to kill her, the veil of her dress and the visibility of her internal state trouble him:

Her dress perplexed him; it would interrupt the blow, and he stooped to examine whether he could turn her robe aside, without waking her. As the light passed over her face, he perceived that the smile had vanished – the visions of her sleep were changed, for tears stole from beneath her eye-lids, and her features suffered a slight convulsion. She spoke! ... But her words were inward and indistinct, and convinced him that she still slumbered. (254)

Ellena's internal state is visible in her sleeping countenance, and affects Schedoni's resolution to kill her because she confounds the boundary between sleep and consciousness. Malleability (the ability for her external appearance and her dress to affect Schedoni) and mutability (her ability to transcend the boundary between sleep and consciousness) work together to protect Ellena from violence.

Schedoni's aim to lift Ellena's clothes so that he may better murder her leads only to his discovery of a repressed self, which in turn imprints itself on his malleable body and mind:

... drawing aside the lawn from her bosom, he once more raised [the dagger] to strike; when, after gazing for an instant, some new cause of horror seemed to seize all his frame, and he stood for some moments aghast and motionless like a statue. His respiration was short and laborious, chilly drops stood on his forehead, and all his faculties of mind seemed suspended. When he recovered, he stooped to examine again the miniature, which had occasioned this revolution, and which had lain concealed beneath the lawn that he withdrew. (234-35)

Ellena's state between dreaming and waking and Schedoni's reaction to his own portrait both contain elements that draw on an association of feminine traits with wax. The idea that women were much like wax, because cold and moist, and that they were more susceptible to imagination and memory because of this malleability stems from the "theory which relates bodily humours to mental characteristics; a combination of cold and moist produces a retentive memory because, like wax, impressions ... remain fixed.... Imagination is thought to be stronger in woman because cold and moist objects are subject to metamorphosis [and] ... mental changeability" (Maclean 42). Radcliffe uses the thesis that women are more malleable than men to trouble categories of gender, just as she relies on mutability in order to give her characters agency. Images pressed upon the heroine's mind do not uncover her father's identity, but rather confirm her connection to her maternal inheritance. In turn, characters like Schedoni react with the cold moist impressions that Renaissance notions of femininity expounded. Radcliffe's female characters, then, are both malleable and elicit wax-like reactions from other characters, but they gain certain types of agency from their connections to maternal malleability and artistic power. In turn, they disrupt idealized notions of female suffering when they force the viewer (in the above case both Schedoni and the reader) to consider their repressed identities.

André Peirre Pinson's *Woman with a Teardrop* (1748) [figure 36] is a coloured wax head that elicits the same kind of reaction (ultimately an examination of what makes female interiority and suffering so delightful to the viewer) and offers the viewer an anatomical lesson about the actual interior of a female head, since it opens to show a sagittal section of the brain and brain stem. As Joan B. Landes explains, it "does not portray a woman in a state of deep lamentation, histrionic grief, or, most subversively, *jouissance*.... the glistening tear on her cheek, her slightly parted lips – as if she is gently exhaling – and beautiful, dark-lashed (glass) eyes all produce the stunning effect of immediate presence" (55). In contrast to Ellena, this woman's countenance is set; her interior visions do not change the shape and look of her face, and despite a knowledge of the *exact* contents of her head, "she maintains her composure – none of the figure's facial elements is moveable or removable ... the degree to which she appears 'real' can be measured by the distance this wax model achieves from a cadaver and not merely by its ability to mimic a living body" (55). But despite the *Woman's* immovable countenance, her composition of wax still contains a sense of mystery and feminine interiority that cannot be explained away, and the question Landes asks of her is still the pivotal question for the reader who consumes Ellena's changeability and vulnerability: "why does she cry?" (55). Schedoni thinks he knows, and this too exhibits Ellena's ability to impress her malleability onto his body, making his gender indistinct when he consumes her visage.

Inheriting Wax: Theories of Reproduction and Waxed Anatomies

Part of this gender confusion is due to the multifarious narratives of genetic inheritance that abounded in the late eighteenth century. Jenny Davidson notes that in the seventeenth century, Aristotle's idea that "the male makes his contribution to generation from outside the female body, and the child develops within the mother's body simply because that's where the material is" as "a bedstead is formed from the carpenter and the wood, or a ball from the wax and the form" (20) was a prevalent one. Eve Keller explains that this theory of preformation

never really permits an act of generation at all: no being is *created* through the interaction of male and female parts; rather, the beings are always in some sense already there, virtually embedded in a single parent's germ.... the purpose of coitus is either, in the ovist version of the theory, for the sperm to activate the embryo's growth in the egg or, in the spermatist version, for the animalcule to find an appropriate nidus or egg in which to grow.... In ovist preformation, therefore, the miniature exists in some sense even before the egg is fertilized, presumably by some form of 'irradiation' or vaporous action. (148-149)

Davidson explains further, that the mother was (to a certain extent) responsible for the appearance of the child in late seventeenth-century theories, but "increasingly ... investigators turned to a new mechanism for explaining the unpredictable

patterns of resemblance premised on the notion that the mother's imagination could somehow transmit to the fetus whatever sights or thoughts struck her most forcefully" (Davidson 21). This is why, "for some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theorists of generation, a child comes to resemble his or her father primarily because the mother is thinking about the father at the moment of conception, and the significance of resemblance as a proof of legitimacy is thereby eroded" (23). The "miniature" preformed portrait of identity, then, lies dormant until the act of sex uncovers what awaits in the maternal imagination (and in turn, in the child).

The themes of uncovering, imprinting, imagining and forming all relate to maternity and repressed monasticism as well. In her work on Italian wax anatomist Anna Morandi Manzolini (1714-1774), Lucia Dacome presents a connection between wax-work, maternity, and spirituality that returns us to Radcliffe's use of travel narratives and to her own wax-work in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Dacome argues that the association of wax with procreation and gender changed when "eighteenth-century anatomical models contributed to transform wax from a substance that was traditionally considered a medium of the supernatural into a marker of the natural world" (529). Wax made mutable the very boundary between the natural and the artificial that the monastic ruin did in the English landscape. Dacome explains that wax anatomist Morandi's productive body – "by 1754 she had given birth to six children" – made the physician Giovanni Bianchi's "portrayal of Morandi as a mother and a modeller [echo] long-standing views of the power of the maternal imagination to model the soft physical matter of the unborn child" (530). But Dacome also notes that such malleability relates to sainthood and the indistinct border between the natural and the supernatural:

In mid eighteenth-century Bologna, [nun] Laura Chiarini ... contributed to the tradition of baby dolls of Jesus and the Virgin Mary made in wax ... Eight days after Chiarini was buried, her cadaver was exhumed and found not only incorrupt and fragrant but also 'palpable as if she were alive'. Winning over the stiffness of death and acquiring some of the very features of lifelikeness that characterized her waxworks, Chiarini's own body became the evidence of the authenticity of her inspiration. (539)

This distinct connection between female sainthood, malleability, and suspect supernatural iconography gives us a deeper understanding of the wax-work explanation in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* which so many critics are willing to say is Radcliffe's way of explaining away Emily's horror. In fact, with an understanding of the importance of wax to monasticism, gender, anatomy and popular culture, it is the reader who should be horrified at the lack of distinction between what are supposed to be firm categories: life and death, male and female, and flesh and wax.

The Traveling Wax Body in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

Radcliffe's awareness of the culture of wax-work is apparent in her representation of the waxen figure in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Mirella Agorni's statement that Radcliffe was familiar with "travel texts such as Grosley's ... and Piozzi's" (29) led me to wonder how such travel narratives deal with images of the foreign wax-work. Excerpts from Grosley and Piozzi, alongside Radcliffe's own account of the wax body in *Udolpho*, show that she constructs that body with prevailing cultural experiences of the other close at hand.

In his *New Observations on Italy and its Inhabitants* (1769) Pierre Jean Grosely constructs for his reader an image of a "beautiful young woman" who died while her lover was away. On his return her lover

... got the vault to be opened, and there she was seen in reality, as we saw her represented in wax. Extremely beautiful, among the damp regions of the dead; a lizard is sucking her mouth, a worm is creeping out of one of her cheeks, a mouse is gnawing on one of her ears, and a huge swollen [sic] toad on her forehead is preying on one of her eyes. I own, at first sight, I took this to be no more than a pious contrivance for mortifying pride, and alienating the heart from too violent a love of sublunary inticements [sic]; but I have since been convinced of its possibility. (204-205)

Hester Lynch Piozzi, in her *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* (1789), mentions "specimens of a human figure in wax [that] are the work of a woman, whose picture is accordingly set up in the school: they are reckoned incomparable of their kind, and bring to one's fancy Milton's fine description of our first parents: Two of far nobler kind -- erect and tall" (181). Piozzi does not mention the name of the female wax modeller, although she does connect the image with "la Dottorressa Laura Bassi [who] gave lectures not many years ago in this very spot, upon the mathematics and natural philosophy, till she grew very old and infirm" (181). Piozzi goes on to describe "a marble tablet, with an inscription more pious than pompous ... placed to [Bassi's] memory" and depicts her guide's focus on death and commemoration: "turning away his eyes -- while they filled with tears -- *tutti muosono* [all must die], added he, and I followed; as nothing either of energy or pathos could be added to a reflection so just, so tender, and so true" (181-182).

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* Radcliffe similarly constructs the retrospective explanation of the object behind the black veil as a narrative of discovery for her reader, thus making it sound very similar to the above two travel narratives:

It may be remembered, that, in a chamber of Udolpho, hung a black veil ... which afterwards disclosed an object, that had overwhelmed [Emily] with horror; for, on lifting it, there appeared ... within a recess of the wall, a human figure of ghastly paleness, stretched at its length, and dressed in the habiliments of the grave.... the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms, which were visible on the features and

hands.... Had she dared to look again ... she would have perceived, that the figure before her was not human, but formed of wax.... This image was so horribly natural, that it is not surprising Emily should have mistaken it for the object it resembled. (662-663)

Both Grosley's and Piozzi's texts enact a viewing of the wax body, and both speak to the inherent gender politics that arise from such a viewing, as well as the scientific and Catholic connotations that the representations indicate; Radcliffe does not do any differently in her description of what Emily refuses to see. Indeed, Radcliffe depicts an interesting combination of the anatomical and the memento mori, just as both Grosley and Piozzi do, and like them she links these images to heterosexual love and a combination of Protestant and Catholic religious iconography. Grosely's predisposition to read the waxen body as a memento mori changes into a reconsideration of it as an accurate representation of beauty and death, while Piozzi links anatomical wax figures first to Milton, then to female malleability and scholarship, and that combination to a particular kind of visual memento mori. Emily reads the waxen figure as a real representation of female death (she assumes it is the body of Laurentini), while Radcliffe's narrator tells us that the original viewer read it as a memento mori, and the family who inherits the Catholic symbol refuses to acknowledge it, but veils it and divests it of its religious value.

Keane argues that this "evacuation of the original content ... [echoes] the effects of the Reformation.... the rituals of Catholic culture, emptied of original content, dispersed and individualised, become the forms of Protestant identity" (34-35). But the waxen form, with its connections to female malleability, education and monastic tradition, brings to the forefront the possibility for female agency despite overwhelming patriarchal organizations, and is more than just an empty shell of Catholic tradition turned into Protestant history; it is also a symbol for the repression of female oppression *and* agency which the Protestant reader wishes would remain behind the curtain.

Instead, Radcliffe's narrator draws the images of female death and suffering to the surface, and even when the wax figure seems to separate these images from the female body, it still holds their impression for Emily. In the possibilities of the wax-work there is a dichotomy that also resembles the antithetical femininity that is so striking in both the history of English nunneries, the antiquarian accounts of those nunneries, and in the gothic narratives of Pope, Lee, and Radcliffe; in the eighteenth century, wax was used to create anatomical images of "living" beings, Catholic memento mori of dead or dying bodies, and life-like (or death-like) replicas of contemporary famous persons. The distinction between suffering female body and the wax-work impression of that body is as malleable as the distinction between murderer and victim, or nun and mistress in this context. Instead of labelling this space as one that "realigns the novel with the dominant discourse of male sentimentality by dramatically regendering almost all the guilt and suffering in the novel" (Johnson 114), I think that it offers a perfect

example of the agency and oppression that occur simultaneously at the site of aesthetic femininity and the reader's consumption of that (malleable) ideal.

It is no mistake that we find Laurentini in the guise of the dying Sister Agnes at the end of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Her name suggests another wax context in the form of the *Agnus Dei*, "a small cake made out of the wax of Easter candles, which was impressed with the figure of Jesus as the lamb and blessed by the pope" (Dacome 541) [Figure 37].⁷² Laurentini's dying body is not that different from the waxen image of death that Emily assumes is Laurentini; her suffering cleanses her of her evil (just as the *Agnus Dei* was meant to cleanse), and places her between enlightenment and obfuscation, as Emily learns:

With a degree of horror, that almost deprived her of sense, she now believed she looked upon a murderer ... yet Emily was still lost in the labyrinth of perplexities, and, not knowing how to ask the questions, which might lead to truth, she could only hint at them in broken sentences. 'Your sudden departure from Udolpho' – said she. Laurentini groaned. 'The reports that followed it,' continued Emily – 'The west chamber – the mournful veil – the object it conceals! – when murders are committed -----' The nun shrieked.... Laurentini fell into convulsions, as she uttered the last words; and Emily, unable any longer to endure the horror of the scene, hurried from the room... (Radcliffe 648)

Laurentini forces Emily to remember the wax figure behind "the mournful veil" and when she does so, she re-enacts the horror of the decaying body for Emily, who flees because she must face the murdered body again; Emily's mind aesthetically confuses the murderer Laurentini's body with what she believes is the murdered corpse, and what the reader will find out is a wax figure. The layered bodies accumulate in a palimpsest of Catholic, anatomical, and maternal waxes. Emily first associates the wax body with Laurentini as a victim of Montoni's violence, which in turn aligns her with Emily's aunt (Madame Montoni), but upon Laurentini's confession that waxen image changes into a vision of Emily's other aunt (the Marchioness de Villeroi) and her suffering and dying body, which is a mirror-like image of Emily's own body. What Emily thinks she sees behind the curtain then, turns out to be a displaced version of her own dead body, an *Agnus Dei* for others (the reader) to consume in order to gain redemption for their sin of illicitly viewing of the suffering female body; or a *memento mori* to remind the reader of their own deaths, and how they consume

⁷² Gilchrist also notes that the *Agnus Dei* was an image particularly prevalent at nunneries: "this image represents the sacrifice of Christ, and appears to have been common in the sacristies of nunneries" (*Gender* 158). She also provides an image of an *Agnus Dei* carved on a corbel in the sacristy at Lacock (Wilts.), which she links to similar portrayals of the sacred heart: "In one case, excavations at the site of an English nunnery recovered a carved Sacred Heart, an image that identified with the suffering body of Christ, and which is rarely found in England. This piece from Dartford Dominican Nunnery (Kent) is wholly in keeping with the Eucharistic and mystical themes that dominated later medieval female piety: the Sacred Heart was crucial to the visions of Mechthild of Hackeborn, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Julian of Norwich" (*Archaeologies* 97).

the scene of death when they repress the past (female/Catholic) mutability of human identity.

Oddly, in her study of the wax figure in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Courtney Wennerstrom identifies it as a male body, and this may be due to the same mistake that Markman Ellis makes when he conflates the body of the dying soldier with that of the waxen form behind the black curtain. As a result, Wennerstrom concludes,

When the copy of a dead man ‘formed of wax’ takes the place of the fetish object, a dead woman ... men, or male readers, at least, really do ‘suffer,’ as Johnson describes.... Radcliffe turns the masculine gaze back on itself, leaving the reader to stare blankly at a remnant of a punishment inflicted on a male body, by other men – a monument to homoeroticism masquerading as ‘monkish superstition.’ (204)

Radcliffe does not identify the dead body as either male or female, it is merely human; it is up to the reader to decide what “sex of suffering” (in the words of Claudia Johnson again) he or she will consume. It is true that Radcliffe requires the reader to see in the dead body a vision of themselves, but it is not true that the dead body has a gender; instead it is figured female, represented as “human,” and its wax malleability and association with Catholicism mean it is a figure of both oppression in the form of passive, passionate femininity, and of agency in its association with religious consumption, reproduction and scientific learning. The “life-like” representation of a dead and decaying body questions the boundaries that comprise gender roles, while its association with both Catholicism and science positions it in the unique place that also positions Radcliffe’s nunneries as sanctuaries: looking backward to the ideal English community and legal identity and forward to the émigrés of the French Revolution and the overwhelming emphasis on the ideal private, feminized domestic sphere.

Sister Agnes warns Emily that she should “beware of the first indulgence of the passions” (646), because they “are the seeds of vices as well as virtues, from which either may spring, accordingly as they are nurtured. Unhappy they who have never been taught the art to govern them!” (647). Becoming an ideal woman requires the art of living between the passions of good and evil – and controlling the passions is an unnatural way of becoming a wax figure of oneself; something inside the female figure wells up and spills over the boundaries of the body if the passions rule the subject, but if the subject artfully conceals the passions she gains sanctity and loses agency – she becomes a veiled icon that others consume because it is so mysteriously removed from the exposure of its interior. But the interior spilling out can also be an erotic site, and Radcliffe’s representation of surface gender identity and the aesthetic consumption of that identity indicates that she is aware of the awkward place a female reader puts herself when she (ostensibly) consumes her own suffering body.

Lady Anna Riggs-Miller, another female viewer of subjected female bodies, recounts the horror of female consumption of self. Of the seventeenth-century Sicilian wax-modeller Gaetano Giulio Zumbo, she states in her *Letters*

from *Italy* (1776), “here is an ingenious representation in wax of the five stages of the plague; it is terrifying to contemplate ... and was executed by Gaetano Zummo [sic], of Catane [?] in Sicily; also another piece of wax-work representing a dead head, attended with circumstances and a variety that inspire horror” (97-98). [See figures 38 and 39] What Lady Anna finds terrifying to contemplate is the “lifelike” nature of the bodies in various states of decay, as well as the “circumstances” that emphasize the unpleasantness of death: “Zummo’s purpose here is to portray the suffering human being. Thus, the *Head* represents the consequences of a wretched man’s death throes, whereas the bodies in the *Theatres* are writhing in pain. If organic matter is meant to decay, pain must then represent the inevitable fate of human beings” (Ceglia 2).

Similarly, the *Medici Venus* [figure 40], a wax anatomical figure “largely the work of Clemente Susini (1754-1814)” (3), and other Florentine models seem to Ceglia “to be aware of what is happening to them and ... to be conscious sacrificial lambs on a dissecting-room table.... The *Venus* seems to delight in her own suffering. Aesthetically” (4). In addition, the *Venus* is pregnant, despite the fact that neither the foetus nor the pregnant body are represented accurately, since an accurate representation “would have both rendered her less fascinating and dissipated the final surprise.... this waxwork was created to be an ideal female body rather than a truthful representation of its organs” (4). The surprise of ideal maternal identity, then, is an aesthetic that was important to both artistic, literary, and scientific representations of women, but one that was also associated with suffering, passion, and the sexual consumption of the image of the exposed female body.

Radcliffe plays with this expectation when she uncovers maternal connections in miniatures, under veils, in prisons, in nunneries, on deathbeds and through wax. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* pictures make as much of an impression as they do in *The Italian*, and in both *The Romance of the Forest* and *A Sicilian Romance* maternal miniatures elicit the extreme passion and impressions of identity that all artwork reveals, but only the miniature connects to maternal (and negative paternal) identity in these novels. Emily views two portraits of women who are *not* her mother (although there is a threat that one might be, according to Laurentini), and they create a passionate response in her. She becomes interested when Sister Agnes produces a replica of a portrait that was among Emily’s father’s possessions (saying it is Emily’s mirror image), but she trembles when Sister Agnes uncovers a miniature of herself, as Emily remembers it from a larger portrait at Udolpho: “Her eyes had scarcely glanced upon” the miniature “before her trembling hands had nearly suffered it to fall.... In silent astonishment, Emily continued to gaze alternately upon the picture and the dying nun, endeavouring to trace a resemblance between them, which no longer existed” (645-646). Both the suffering “mother” and the passionate nun appear in portrait form, which not only emphasizes the mutability of art, but also of ideal femininity. As Alison Conway argues, “female portraiture became the focal point for critical commentary as a result of its ability to incite both desire and virtue....

Both novels and portraits ... were able to turn the idea of private interests into a principle of aesthetic pleasure by sustaining a paradoxical vision of female character as both an idealized object of virtue and an erotic icon” (14-15).

The multiple layers of representation (and mistaken representation) in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* also speak to the construction of wax images in the eighteenth century: what is more real, the thing or the copy of the thing? In his discussion of obstetric waxes, Lyle Massey explains that eighteenth-century debate about the relationship “between images and bodies” in wax anatomical models focused on complaints “that, if not sufficiently based on actual dissections, the waxes tended to emphasize aesthetic over scientific qualities.... for this reason ... an eighteenth-century anatomy professor ... states that engravings produced for or by the greatest anatomists of the day were the best guidelines for wax anatomies” (96). The slippage between scientific representation and aesthetic ideal, as well as between wax figure and anatomical engraving is one that is also apparent in the artistic forms that – for all their mimesis – hide secrets and misrepresent as well as uncover connections between female bodies and female spaces in Radcliffe’s works.

Maternal Seals and Waxed Criminals in *The Romance of the Forest*

In *The Romance of the Forest* artistic persuasion similarly threatens to impress the suggestion of illicit consumption upon Adeline’s mind. The lady Abbess at the convent where Adeline’s “father” places her, would rather denounce and terrify, “than ... persuade and allure” (36) initially, but when the Abbess finds Adeline “unmoved by menace” she easily turns “to more subtle measures: she condescended to smile, and even to flatter ... she painted the character of a vestal in the most beautiful tints of art” (37). When the Marquis kidnaps Adeline, he takes her to his castle where “the walls were painted in fresco, representing scenes from Ovid, and hung above with silk drawn up in festoons and richly fringed... ‘What can this mean’ said she: ‘Is this a charm to lure me to destruction?’” (156-7). The Abbess and the Marquis use verbal and artistic surfaces to target Adeline’s vulnerable malleability and to impress images upon her mind, as both language-based and visual arts have the power to create (malleable) identity.

Adeline is susceptible to these arts because she lacks a clear identity until her mother’s wax seal sets in motion a number of events that lead her to her mother’s portrait and a clear maternal position within the utopia of Lelencourt at the end of the novel, as “the indigent and unhappy rejoiced in their [Adeline and Theodore’s] benevolence, the virtuous and enlightened in their friendship, and their children in parents whose example impressed upon their hearts the precepts offered to their understandings” (363). Adeline’s parents also impress their precepts upon her heart, but they do so from the grave and through material objects; the maternal seal impressed upon wax reveals the secret of Adeline’s birth to her father’s brother (and his murderer) the Marquis de Montalt: “This discovery was effected by means of a seal, bearing the arms of her mother’s family, which was impressed on the note his servant had found” (344-45). When

he discovers her identity, Adeline's uncle entertains the possibility of once again staining his "soul with human blood" (344), and indicates his own impressionability when he considers this option. The seal he sees is also a symbol for Adeline's precarious place between feminine ideals at this point in the novel; she is either being charmed by illicit sexuality or lured by monastic solitude, and the act of imprinting the seal upon her letter gives her an identity where she does not have one.

The seal itself exists in a space between two mothers (or two constructions of maternity):

As the history of the seal which revealed the birth of Adeline is rather remarkable, it may not be amiss to mention, that it was stolen from the Marquis, together with a gold watch, by Jean d'Aunoy [Adeline's foster father]: the watch was soon disposed of, but the seal had been kept as a pretty trinket by his wife, and at her death went with Adeline among her clothes to the convent. Adeline had carefully preserved it, because it had once belonged to the woman whom she believed to have been her mother. (345)

As we now know, the seal *did* belong to the woman who was Adeline's mother, but also to her foster mother. Since Adeline's seal lies somewhere between frivolous ornamentation, ideal aristocratic femininity, and personal relic, it takes on some of the characteristics of the repressed English Catholic nunnery.⁷³ The seal also makes public what is (and should not be) secret, thus it disturbs the privacy of a female aristocratic seal, and gains more power through its role as a recognizable object than through its intended function. When Adeline uses the seal, it acts as a kind of supernatural charm that, once impressed on a document, gives it an identity that it did not before possess. For Adeline, the wax impression of the seal uncovers her secret identity, but also demonstrates how identity is as malleable as the wax that the seal imprints itself upon. At the same time, an argument about the inherent truth of identity complicates this kind of malleability when Adeline looks upon the picture of her mother, and when she reads her father's narrative (which she also preserves as a relic of selfhood).

The miniature of Adeline's mother addresses the same questions of resemblance that Ellena's resemblance to Olivia do in *The Italian* and Emily's resemblance to the Marchioness de Villeroi do in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. M. Verneuil tells Adeline: "To those who remember the late Marchioness, your

⁷³ Interestingly, whether Radcliffe knows of the connection or not, the image of the maternal seal also calls up images of Abbesses' seals, which were less gendered than were aristocratic women's seals in the medieval period. As Margaret Schaus explains: "That laywomen's seals operated at a private level is further highlighted by the sealing practices of queens, which were limited to documents concerning matters domestic and personal, their seals never being endowed with the symbolic value of the king's seal as representative of the authority of the state. In the monastic world, however, role and function trumped gender for seals of abbesses appear in contexts similar to those of abbots" (732).

features bring sufficient evidence of your birth.... You may form some judgement of this yourself,' added M. Verneuil, taking a miniature from his pocket. 'This was your amiable mother'" (350). Adeline takes on the form of the picture as she gazes upon it, and identifies it as her mother based on the passion it elicits:

Adeline's countenance changed; she received the picture eagerly.... It was not the resemblance she studied, but the countenance – the mild and beautiful countenance of her parent, whose blue eyes, full of tender sweetness, seemed bent upon her's; while a soft smile played on her lips; Adeline pressed the picture to her's.... At length, with a deep sigh, she said, 'This surely *was* my mother.' (350)

When Adeline looks on the picture, the physical and emotional resemblances between mother and daughter depend on the daughter's ability to mirror her mother's expression of passion and her relationship to her father's suffering. As Adeline exclaims, "Had she *but* lived, O my poor father! you had been spared" (350). Adeline presses the picture to her lips in an attempt to become the ideal aristocratic woman that the picture and the seal confirm she is. Her father's narrative holds an equal amount of passion for Adeline, and his identity equally impresses itself upon hers; Radcliffe's narrative of fraternal violence confounds the gendered construct of a suffering woman in this case, and Adeline consumes her father's manuscript just as illicitly as the reader does Adeline's suffering.

Adeline is aware of this aspect of consumption, as she puts the manuscript down several times due to her fear of supernatural retribution: "Her imagination, wrought upon by these reflections, again became sensible to every impression, she feared to look round, lest she should again see some dreadful phantom" (141). The manuscript makes an impression on her mind and heightens Adeline's imagination; the fact that it turns out to be her father's manuscript means that the heightened imagination and consumption it elicits is one that questions a strict division between feminine fancy and masculine reason. Adeline tries to control her wish to consume another's suffering, but she lays down the manuscript again, and tries "to argue herself into composure. 'What have I to fear?' said she, 'I am at least innocent, and I shall not be punished for the crime of another'" (142). Distancing herself from the narrative of suffering, Adeline tries to make reading more of a sublime than a horrific experience. Despite her attempt, she cannot do this because the manuscript is already imprinted on her mind and closely related to her identity as a suffering daughter.

This metanarrative action not only comments on the consumption of dead and dying bodies (male or female) that reading gothic romances requires, it also comments on other popular cultural forms of entertainment that require a consumption of suffering and death – one of them being the wax-works of eighteenth-century Paris and London, and the popular crime narratives they depicted. Adeline's father's tale resembles the details that surround a very popular waxwork figure in the Paris exhibition of M. Curtis, Madame Tussaud's mentor. At his waxworks in Paris Curtis displayed the head of the poisoner Antoine-François Desrues (1744-1777), who

by deception, acquired a château for 130,000 *livres*. He had neither the money, nor the intention to pay for it. The seller, Monsier de la Motte, accepted a bill of exchange, which his wife collected. Desrues offered her a cup of chocolate before she set off to cash the bill. It was laced with poison and opium. Desrues dumped her body in a chest in a large hole he had dug ready in his basement. A few days later the son turned up, to be told that his mother had collected the money and had left ... Desrues offered the son a lift and a chocolate drink ... doctored in the same way. (Pilbeam 18-19)

This crime narrative not only became popular criminal folklore in Paris, but there was also a London publication of the narrative entitled, *L'Espion anglois, ou correspondance secrete entre milord All'eye et milord All'ear* (1783). It is likely that Radcliffe heard of the tale, and if she did then her account of a similar crime in *The Romance of the Forest* replaces hidden female bodies with male ones, and the son seeking out the mother's whereabouts becomes a daughter.⁷⁴ Adeline's father writes that his guard told him he "should not be permitted to live long ... and bade [him] chuse whether [he] would die by poison or the sword" (140). The position of the late Marquis also recalls the remains of Madame La Motte in the crime narrative: "When La Motte was informed ... that [Adeline's] father had been murdered at the Abbey of St. Clair, he instantly remembered ... the skeleton he found in the stone room leading to the subterranean cells" and did not doubt, "from the situation in which it lay, hid in a chest in an obscure room strongly guarded, that [he] had seen the remains of the late Marquis" (347).

The crime narrative's most intriguing image for the public, though, was that of the murderer's body: "On 6 May 1777 the perpetrator, Desrues, was executed in the Place de Grève; but what particularly excited public interest was the fact that Desrues was said to be a hermaphrodite.... This ... in conjunction with his bravery during his slow and brutal execution ... confirmed his place in criminal folklore. His mortal remains were revered as relics" (Berridge 27). The criminal's lack of distinct gender makes this crime more malleable in the public imagination; they see both the criminal and the victims as worthy of public attention and admiration, and the waxwork figure of the criminal attests to this fascination. Radcliffe moulds her tale, if not on the tale of Desrues and the La Mottes, then on other crime narratives that caught the public imagination and appeared in print and alternate forms of public media (like wax-works or plays).

⁷⁴ As far as I am aware, no other critics make the connection between this case and *The Romance of the Forest*. However, there other popular connections to the name de la Motte, as Chloe Chard points out in a note on the subject in the 1992 Oxford World's Classics edition of the text: "the name which La Motte ... is given is one which had become notorious in the seventeen-eighties as a result of the trial, in France, resulting from the 'affair of the queen's necklace' ... in which one of the accused was Jeanne de Luz, de Saint-Rémy, or de Valois, comtess de la Motte. This name might also have been suggested, however, by that of the 'Monsieur De La Motte' ... whose fables are cited as the source of several poems in Dodsley (an anthology which contains a number of the works quoted in *The Romance of the Forest*)" (367).

She understands the public hunger for tales of murder and consumption and challenges her reader to admit their place in this public forum.

Adeline impresses her mother's picture upon her mind, just as she impresses her seal on the letter she sends Montalt. She also preserves her father's manuscript "with the pious enthusiasm so sacred a relique deserved" (355), which calls to mind the way that the public consume the "reliques" of famous murderers and victims. Adeline consumes her parents' possessions, possessions which epitomize their identities and the narratives of their lives and deaths. But Radcliffe also describes the dead body of the murderer in *The Romance of the Forest*, and associates his aristocratic depravity with poison (just as she does with the murder of the Marchioness de Villeroi and the death of Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Schedoni in *The Italian*, and the Marquis of Mazzini in *A Sicilian Romance*). The Marquis de Montalt's "countenance was suffused with a black, and deadly hue, and impressed with the horrors of death; M. Verneuil turned away, shocked by the spectacle, and on enquiry heard that the Marquis had died by poison" (352-3). Radcliffe uses the same language to describe the Marquis's death as she does to describe Adeline's emotions when she views her father's manuscript and her mother's miniature – the Marquis's countenance is "impressed" with the horrors of death, and those who view his impressed countenance turn away from the "spectacle" as if they are at a wax-works. The consumption of the murderer's body is just as troubling as the consumption of the suffering victim's narrative. Radcliffe comments on this "reality" of death and dying when she encourages her reader to collect scenes of miniature impressions and poisoned corpses and interchange them as if they are the heads on Curtius' waxworks, which he changed when a new public figure emerged by "chiselling the head off a model and replacing it with a freshly moulded face of someone whom the public were more interested in" (Berridge 25).

Wax is a material that moulds for the consumer scenes of crime and suffering, scientific anatomical interiors, and monastic objects of devotion. It is a form that characterizes and reflects what is antithetical about femininity in the eighteenth century as it revises the narratives of the body and bodily identities it inherits from the middle ages to the seventeenth century. Narratives of poison and disease are particularly relevant to the human body, and the wax-works of the eighteenth century rely on this relevance.

Diseased Catholic Bodies: Radcliffe and the Gordon Riots

The same fear and fascination with the power of disease and poison exists as a metaphor in anti-Catholic narratives, such as those produced after the Gordon Riots in June 1780, "when, for a week, the capital appeared quite out of control" (Haydon 213), and in configurations of the passionate and unstable female body.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ The Gordon Riots were in response to the Catholic Relief Act, which was passed in 1778, and "did not give Roman Catholics freedom of worship, but was rather intended to free them from the legal disabilities and persecuting machinery established by William III's Act against Popery. The Act stipulated that Catholics should take an oath of allegiance to the Crown which had been

Radcliffe explores these concerns in *A Sicilian Romance*, with particular attention to the “poison” of improper femininity and domestic violence, as well as the aesthetics of the representational suffering female body. In accounts of the Gordon Riots, the repressed English Catholic past bubbles to the surface and manifests in the fear of imperceptible disease. When the Catholic Relief Act was passed in 1778, Haydon points out that to many Englishmen, “it seemed to violate the Protestant constitution as established in 1689, so often represented as the most perfect constitution in the world” (206). As a result, Lord Gordon and the Protestant Association in England and the Friends to the Protestant Interest in Scotland co-ordinated opposition to the legislation (207). This opposition culminated in the London riots (which started while Lord Gordon was presenting the petition in Parliament), when “following the instructions of the Protestant Association, a body of some 60,000 people gathered in St. George’s Fields, Southwark, with a view to marching to Westminster in order to deliver the Londoners’ petition demanding the repeal of the Relief Act to Parliament” (213). They then went on to destroy homes, chapels, and schools,

but the most serious challenge to authority came when the rioters decided to release from prison those who had been arrested in the disturbances.... At the height of the violence, an attack was unsuccessfully made on the Bank of England.... Two hundred and ten people were killed in the streets, whilst seventy-five subsequently died of wounds. (213-215)

I am interested in the rhetoric of poison and disguise that surrounded the Riots and the implanted fear of Catholicism that the mob (seemed) to associate with the aristocracy and with an ancient English identity. The poison that kills all of Radcliffe’s major aristocratic villains is usually a germ of their own planting (all use poison to commit suicide in order to evade a more public form of execution with the exception of the Count of Mazzini, whose adulterous wife poisons him), and even class distinctions are blurred in this construction when the middle-class reader or viewer consumes this narrative of passion and violence. As Haydon argues, “eighteenth-century anti-Catholicism was a corpus of beliefs possessed of a self-confirming character,” which boasted potent “myths concerning ‘Papists in disguise’” (224-25). The basis of English identity upon the repressed Catholic past, then, acts like a slow-working poison that undermines the very identity it strives to construct. A similar construction is visible in the aesthetic understanding of ruined abbeys and nunneries as both threatening icons

drafted so as to be acceptable to them.... In return for taking the new oath, they were guaranteed freedom from harassment in a number of important areas. They might henceforth purchase land legally.... Catholic priests and schoolmasters were freed from the threat of persecution: they were no longer liable to imprisonment for life if apprehended, whilst the reward of £100 offered to informers who secured the conviction of a priest was dispensed with.... [However,] Catholics remained debarred from posts in public life and positions of trust. They could neither enter the University of Oxford nor take their degrees at the University of Cambridge. Symbolically, recusancy remained an offence ... The Catholics could still not vote. Furthermore, the concessions could only be enjoyed by those who took the new oath.... The Catholics were only allowed to worship freely after the passing of the second Relief Act of 1791” (Haydon 204-5).

of the past and ideal landscapes indicative of English identity, as well as in the construction of femininity as both a passionate poison and a source of maternity. Poison is also imperceptible, mutable, and can impress its existence on the malleable human body.

Haydon provides an apt example of the eighteenth-century reaction to this problem when he sets up a quotation from Edmund Burke, who writes, “we must consider, that the whole Nation has been for a long time guilty of [the rioters’] Crime ... We ought to recollect the poison, which under the Name of antidotes against Popery, ... has been circulated from our Pulpits, & from our presses” (240).⁷⁶ The poison that Burke speaks of is the same one that drives the fear of the Catholic other, which novels such as Radcliffe’s rely on to strike terror in their readers’ hearts; but Radcliffe also relies on the pleasure her readers take from uncovering those Catholic narratives, and exploring the secret selves that they otherwise (and perhaps in the novels as well) consume through violent actions like the Gordon Riots.

One narrative of the riots from *The Sunday Magazine* represses an understanding of past Catholic identity by emphasizing the mythology of disguise and disease that repression relies on. Insisting that the riots were actually the *fault* of Catholic infiltrators, this author draws on images of ruin, disease, poison, and prostitution to make his case:

But the enemies of our holy religion, alarmed at the impending fate of their unhallowed church, mediated in their midnight plots, as in former times, the ruin of the Protestant cause.... From the seats of infamy, the brothels, and all the houses of injustice, they drew forth their numerous abettors ... who mixed in the throng, and attempted to frustrate all the schemes of the Protestants. But they were known by the mark of the beast on their foreheads, the blasphemies which pervaded their tongues, and their acts of plunder and rapine. The sons of Babylon gained their aim....

----- A serpent arm’d
 With mortal sting: About her middle round
 A cry of hell-hounds never ceasing bark’d
 With wide Cerberrean mouth full loud, and rung
 A hideous peal: Yet when they list would creep,
 If ought disturb’d their noise, into her womb,
 And kennel there; yet there still bark’d and howl’d
 Within unseen.

Milton. (Holcroft 66)

The author of this account of the Gordon Riots emphasizes the mythology of the imperceptible and yet ultimately knowable Catholic other, especially by aligning the threat with the image of a poison that mixes with an innocuous or natural

⁷⁶ Haydon takes his quotation from Burke’s Papers: Sheffield, A., Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, Burke Papers, Bk. P. 8/24.

element, and with Milton's picture of sin as monstrous femininity. The lines from *Paradise Lost* that precede the lines the author of this account chooses to cite focus on the deceptive exterior image of femininity: "The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair, / But ended foul in many a scaly fold / Voluminous and vast..." (Milton 650-652). Here, the monstrous body of Sin is as malleable as the female body, and for the author of the *Sunday Magazine* account, is an example of Catholic (in)visibility.⁷⁷

This fear of the indefinable female other extends to those in positions of power (the government and the aristocracy) that, as Burke notes, encouraged the very "poison" (i.e. the idea that Catholicism is a deadly threat to national identity) that in turn encouraged the lower and middle-class mob to direct violence against the most visible Catholics:

It seems clear, then, that there was an enormous gulf between an enlightened élite and Parliament on the one hand and the Protestant Association and its plebeian supporters on the other. By bringing in a small parcel of concessions for the Catholic minority, the legislature had raked up in the minds of the latter groups the traditional spectre of a conspiracy aimed at re-establishing Popish power in the state. (Haydon 227-8)

Radcliffe's villainous aristocrats (both men and women) are violent heads of the domestic sphere, and the monastic or martial heads of "houses" that aim to subject women to suffering and death in order to consume more than they can digest. However, her seemingly middle-class heroines are also aristocratic by nature, and their consumption of narrative and identity indicates that the violence performed against them may at any point uncover a violence they perform against others, or themselves.

Poisonous Consumption and Bodily Imprints in *A Sicilian Romance*

This imperceptible poison of consumption plays an important role in Radcliffe's representation of the malleable female body in *A Sicilian Romance*. Most indebted to Sophia Lee's *The Recess*, *A Sicilian Romance*'s tale of repressed maternity and poisonous aristocratic passion takes place in Sicily. The threat of domestic violence in this work acts as a poison that disrupts the reader's consumption of the passionate female body. Four aesthetic scenes of mourning and death construct an understanding of consumption that places the reader's

⁷⁷ Haydon also notes that the rioters attempted to confirm that the property they destroyed actually belonged to Catholics: "...the crowds did not indulge in an orgy of indiscriminate looting but rather went to considerable trouble ... to ensure that it was Catholics (or supporters of the Relief Act) that they were harassing. They tried to get solid proof of whether a houseowner was a Papist or a Protestant, and although it is difficult to quantify how scrupulously they did this since accounts of such enquiries only occur incidentally in official papers and reports of subsequent trials, one is struck by the recurrence of this pattern in these sources" (228). This effort shows the mob's anxiety about not being able to visibly recognize Catholicism in the architecture or bodies of their victims, and also speaks to the fear of a repressed or buried Catholic past that is always threatening to undermine the constructs of English national identity.

body in direct relation to decaying corpses in *A Sicilian Romance*.⁷⁸ The maternal miniature and the deaths of Cornelia, Maria, and the Count act as didactic metaphors that show readers how they consume these bodies and imprint the image of consumption onto their own bodies. This early novel is a kind of originating waxen text, then, which Radcliffe moulds over and over again in the works that follow.

Julia's consumption of her mother's portrait and its effect on her image of herself are not unlike the consumption of portraits in the later novels, especially in terms of their role as mirrors of maternal identity that impress themselves upon the female viewers. Just as Lee's suffering mother, Mary Stuart, stands in for the loss of an entire way of seeing the nation, so too does Radcliffe's continual use of the image of the recognizable miniature act as a metaphor for the burial of identity, and the confusing aesthetics of mourning a repressed or lost identity. Louisa Bernini's picture captures Julia's full attention when she finds it:

... was a miniature of a lady, whose countenance was touched with sorrow, and expressed an air of dignified resignation. The mournful sweetness of her eyes ... the melancholy languor that shaded her features, so deeply affected Julia, that her eyes were filled with involuntary tears.... She almost fancied that the portrait breathed, and that the eyes were fixed on hers with a look of penetrating softness.... But what were the various sensations which pressed upon her heart, on learning that she had wept over the resemblance of her mother! ... Emilia, with an emotion as exquisite, mingled her tears with those of her sister. (27-28)

The appearance of the portrait initiates a long-delayed act of mourning; Julia sheds "involuntary tears" when she observes the sorrow, dignified resignation, mournful sweetness, supplication, and melancholy languor that the countenance of the image conveys. The ability for the miniature to "press" sensations upon Julia's heart depends upon it being an image of her mother, while its mimetic quality calls to mind the reality of the wax-work.

A repressed aspect of her cultural make-up, Julia's awareness of maternal tenderness is lost "before she was sensible of its value" (28), and when she mourns what she cannot "recall" she does what the gothic medium does for the readers of Radcliffe's novel: it gives them a chance to aestheticize and consume repressed identity. But the image of the suffering mother does not only impress itself on Julia's heart, it also impresses itself upon Emilia's countenance when they "mingle" their tears together. As a result of this triangular "mingling" of sorrow, Julia constructs Emilia as a mirror image of the picture. This is why when

⁷⁸ In fact, Julia and Hippolitus come into very close contact with decaying corpses when the banditti imprison them in an underground vault: "Their situation was the most deplorable that can be imagined; for they were now inclosed in a vault strewn with the dead bodies of the murdered, and must there become victims of famine, or of the sword. The earth was in several places thrown up, and marked the boundaries of new-made graves. The bodies which remained unburied were probably left either from hurry or negligence, and exhibited a spectacle too shocking for humanity" (166).

she accidentally stumbles upon her mother Julia recognizes her not from the portrait, but as “as she examined the features of the stranger; which were now rekindling into life [from fainting], she thought she discovered the resemblance of Emilia!” (174). Louisa Bernini exists on the borders of reality and is only recognizable between the portrait and its viewer, or awaking from a state of unconsciousness. She is neither wife, nor widow, nor spinster, and the only clear identity she embodies is that of buried mother. Julia associates her awakening body with the body of her sister because Louisa’s only “real” identity exists in her maternal role – and this is anchored in her body, and in her daughters’ response to the portrait, not the portrait itself.

Emilia’s passivity, which exhibits “feminine softness, [and] a tender timidity” (6) is a mirror of her mother’s “meek submission, and tender assiduities” (176). In contrast, Julia offers the balance of ideal femininity and passionate independence that Radcliffe’s text indicates is necessary: “Her eyes were dark, and full of fire, but tempered with modest sweetness” (6). Julia recognizes in her mother and Emilia the kind of malleable femininity that results in an aesthetic consumption resembling death – or life without agency; while Julia’s particular form of malleability aligns the reader with her perception of suffering. Isaac Disraeli’s 1791 description of viewing wax-works emphasizes their connection to the imagination of the other through language:

Wax-work has been brought sometimes to a wonderful perfection. We have heard of many curious deceptions occasioned by the imitative powers of this plastic matter.... If we contemplate with pleasure an insipid Portrait, how much greater is the pleasure, when, in an assemblage, they appear wanting nothing but that language and those actions which a fine imagination can instantaneously bestow! (419)

The viewer can make the wax figures come to life through the imagination of language and movement. Julia imagines language and movement, but she also relies on language and movement to assert herself, which makes her malleability one that impresses rather than is impressed upon (except by the reader’s imagination).

This alignment and aesthetic consumption of the dying female (and ultimately waxen) female body also occurs at the moment of the nun Cornelia’s death. Cornelia’s separation from her lover results in a physical decline that is symptomatic of her inability to define herself as a feminine ideal – instead she exists in the space of the nunnery but refuses to fully take on the identity of a nun. Her resultant existence between veil and body recalls Pope’s construction of Eloisa’s agency through her imagination of death. Cornelia tells Julia that “the moment of [her] last interview” with her lover “has been equally fatal to my peace and to my health, and I trust I shall, ere very long, be released from the agonizing ineffectual struggles occasioned by the consciousness of sacred vows imperfectly performed, and by earthly affections not wholly subdued” (124). Julia responds with admiration, love, and pity (124). In other words, Julia has the same emotional response to Cornelia’s tale as she does to her mother’s picture.

The aesthetic quality of Cornelia's death heightens this response, which acts as a meta-reference to the consumption of the female body in the gothic narrative. Julia is in the convent church when a funeral procession enters: "When they reached the high altar, the bier was rested, and in a few moments the anthem ceased. The *Abate* now approached to perform the unction; the veil of the dying nun was lifted – and Julia discovered her beloved Cornelia!" (136). Julia's discovery of Cornelia's dying body mirrors her discovery of the maternal miniature and her mother's live body (and the image of Emilia in it). Radcliffe narrates a lineage of maternal suffering that causes the reader to question the pleasure he or she takes in reading these dying characters' mutable bodies as they slowly become monuments to death.⁷⁹ Cornelia's "countenance was already impressed with the image of death, but her eyes brightened with a faint gleam of recollection, when they fixed upon Julia, who felt a cold thrill run through her frame" (136). Tied also to Julia's heterosexual love-match with Hippolitus (Cornelia is his sister), Cornelia represents the threat of a female inheritance of self-neglect and dissolution:

It was the nature of Cornelia's disorder to wear a changeful but flattering aspect. Though she had long been declining, her decay was so gradual and imperceptible as to lull the apprehensions of her friends into security. It was otherwise with herself; she was conscious of the change, but forbore to afflict them with the knowledge of the truth. (137)

Cornelia exhibits the mutability of a female "disorder," the imperceptible nature of disease and decay, and the refusal of ideal femininity to voice physical and mental suffering.

In contrast, Maria de Vellorno's death is a tableau of female passion and insanity – also resulting from mutability and disease. The reader consumes this scene, just as he or she consumes the death scene of Cornelia: the violence of the surprise is no less, and the "cold thrill" that Julia feels on viewing the dying body of a nun is repeated in the "horror" at the death scene of Maria: "...the door of the apartment was thrown open, and the servant ... rushed in. His look alone declared the horror of his mind, for words he had none to utter ... Ferdinand, seized with new terror, rushed the way he pointed to the apartment of the marchioness. A spectacle of horror presented itself" (190). Both suffering femininity and passionate femininity disintegrate boundaries between interior and exterior aesthetic identity. It might be helpful to remember Zumbo's wax models at this point – models that "give shape to ancestral phobias about coping with 'damp' death, which, throughout history, was deliberately marginalised by society as a

⁷⁹ Davidson links the fascination with this theme in the eighteenth-century to the progress of scientific theories about resemblance and inheritance: "... by reconceiving daughters' relationships to their fathers, scientific investigators would contribute to an increasing tendency in Britain to disinherit daughters at the expense of sons, a disenfranchisement that ironically would only heighten cultural investments in stories about fathers and daughters (one consequence being the imaginative spell *The Winter's Tale* and *King Lear* came to cast over the inhabitants of later eighteenth-century Britain)" (25).

carrier of diseases and, in broader terms, a vessel of misfortunes,” but which, nonetheless, represent “dusky-coloured, pungent fluids oozing from rotten flesh – the quintessence of death – [but which] were closely associated with love” (Ceglia 2). Recall, also the aesthetically pleasing female anatomical model, and the accounts of the Gordon Riots that focus on the poison of the “sons of Babylon,” which evokes the whorehouse alongside the poison of “Popery.”

With these images of the female body in mind, let us look at Radcliffe’s tableau of female passion: “Maria lay on a couch lifeless, and bathed in blood. A poignard, the instrument of her destruction, was on the floor; and it appeared from a letter which was found on the couch beside her, that she had died by her own hand” (190). Now let us look again, as Radcliffe has us do after she describes the above scene:

When the marquis quitted her [Maria], she was heard walking quick through the room, in a passion of tears... She descended to supper... it was believed that during the interval between supper, and the hour of repose, Maria de Vellorno contrived to mingle poison with the wine of the marquis.... It is probable that Maria perpetrated the fatal act [her suicide] soon after the dismissal of her woman; for when she was found ... she appeared to have been dead for some time. On examination a wound was discovered on her left side, which had doubtless penetrated to the heart, from the suddenness of her death, and from the effusion of blood which had followed. (192-193)⁸⁰

Maria’s actions are most threatening because they are “passionate,” they “mingle” substances together, and “penetrate” bodily boundaries; she embodies everything that eighteenth-century authors fear from the agency of female mutability. However, the Count’s inability to contain her means that Maria de Vellorno’s poisonous nature prevents him from ever again containing the virtuous and imperceptibly suffering female body. Instead, his attempt to poison Louisa Bernini is unsuccessful, while Maria’s attempt to poison him is successful. As the Count believes, “Heaven has made that woman the instrument of its justice, whom I made the instrument of my crimes; – that woman, for whose sake I forgot conscience, and braved vice – for whom I imprisoned an innocent wife, and afterwards murdered her” (191).

The suffering nun and the imprisoned mother are aligned in Radcliffe’s understanding of poison and aristocratic self-identity here, while the adulterous passionate woman both causes and undermines domestic violence. In the end, virtuous female inheritance relies on the existence of a poisonous passionate femininity that can counteract patriarchal violence. I think Radcliffe begins to draw her picture of mutability at this site of imperceptible illness, which works on

⁸⁰ Maria’s wound paradoxically mimics Christ’s wound in his side, and calls the reader’s attention to her (somewhat unorthodox) role as saviour in this domestic dispute. In an almost anti-sacred heart image, the passionate and volatile adulterer (because of her overly-passionate heart) murders the husband who threatens the ideal and virtuous wife. As the husband himself says, she therefore becomes the unwitting hand of god.

both the ideal and the less-than-ideal, and also works to complicate clear boundaries between the nunnery, aristocratic decay, and ideal domesticity. The word asylum takes on greater significance when we consider Radcliffe's obsession with death by poison – all of her villains suffer from the imperceptible disease that pays no attention to interior and exterior boundaries. Fear of this poison lies at the heart of the antithetical construction of femininity and of the aesthetics of ruin that constitute so much of eighteenth-century consumption – the malleability of feminine imagination and the mutability of the nun and nunnery become repressed and othered in an attempt to contain and dictate what it is to be English.

Ann Radcliffe's debts to antiquarian and gothic narratives of the English past continue into her last novel, *Gaston de Blondville* (published posthumously but completed in 1803, the same year that Jane Austen revised *Northanger Abbey*), which explores the impact of constructed national identity on social issues like justice and sanctuary; it posits that the spectre of supernatural haunting lies in the guilt of the human mind, and that spectres of all kinds will rise to the surface and offer justice and impact the human idea of itself more than perhaps her earlier works indicate. After framing the narrative as a manuscript from the era of Henry III, Radcliffe questions her antiquarian reader's credulity, and thus comments on the constructed nature of her seemingly supernatural history:

Perhaps, one better versed in antiquities would have found out, that several of the ceremonies of the court here exhibited, were more certainly those of fourth Edward, than of the third Henry, or the second Richard, and would have assigned the manuscript to a later period than that of the title, or than that afterwards alluded to in the book, whether written by monk or layman.... But at whatsoever period this 'Trew Chronique' had been written, or by whomsoever, Willoughton was so willing to think he had met with a specimen of elder times, that he refused to dwell on the evidence. (205)

Read with caution, Radcliffe warns – read the inconsistencies and temporal confusions with an awareness of what makes an impression upon the author and why he or she might be drawing on these inconsistencies. Do not be like the credulous antiquarian, but *look again* at the monastic, domestic, and waxen ruins that form the bulk of what we call narrative. Jane Austen takes Radcliffe's warning seriously, and the domestic ruins visible in Pope, Lee, and Radcliffe have an immense impact on Victorian ideas of monastic femininity and its role in the construction of gothic gender.

Conclusion

The Catholic Dressing Room: Tracing the Buried Nunnery into the Nineteenth Century

In order to draw together narratives of antiquarianism, nuns and nunneries, ruins, repression, inheritance, and the aesthetic and picturesque consumption of all of these Catholic elements of British gender and national identity, I will now turn to the country house and the dressing room as sites of the theoretical and economic consumption and imagination of femininity. The nunnery continues to be a site integral to imagining British domesticity in nineteenth-century literature. In fact, gothic narratives of repression, the female body, and domestic architecture become more clearly aligned with ideal femininity (and conversely critiques of that ideal) in later texts, which simultaneously bury the clear association of these problematic ideals with the repression of a Catholic past. Instead, monastic icons act as symbols of ideal or illicit femininity that decorate the dressing room and furniture of the country house.

The aesthetic appeal of the ruined nunnery becomes a surface that characters assume and consume and one which confounds barriers between domestic space and the female body. This consumption and imagination of monastic ruins in terms of ideal femininity is much the same as the consumption and imagination of domestic ruins that I have been discussing so far; after all, the nineteenth-century treatment of the topic is based on the foundations of an eighteenth-century obsession with the nunnery (as my dissertation shows). However, in addition to using the word consumption to denote ruin, destruction, absorption, and imagination, I will be using it to connect the reader's consumption of the text to the purchase and use of consumer goods, which become divested relics of femininity in these later texts. If earlier texts such as "Eloisa to Abelard," *The Recess*, and the novels of Ann Radcliffe imagine femininity through monastic architecture, the early nineteenth-century sees a clear move to imagine the architecture of the country house and interior domestic space (such as the dressing room) in much the same way; I argue that nineteenth-century novels bury the imagination of the nunnery beneath the surface of narratives of consumerism and sensation in order to show how domestic identity is rooted in what appear to be effaced modern surfaces.

A close reading of this site of repressed monasticism in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (composed 1798-9, completed 1803, published 1817) and in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-2) shows how the nunnery continues to inspire the imagination of femininity well into the nineteenth century, and in particular in texts that rely on a foundational gothic heritage. Both of these novels closely associate the architectural and ideological domestic sphere with the suffering or illicit female body, and both use the dressing room to explore these connections. By reading these sites side by side, I hope to gesture toward the ways that an eighteenth-century literary imagination of nunneries impacts future genres and ideologies of self and nation. Both authors also directly relate relics of past

female monasticism to sartorial consumption and marriage for money or rank; more clearly than ever they take the early eighteenth-century connections between the nunnery, the female body, and the reader's consumption of female suffering and make those connections a part of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century interest in industrial and commercial revolutions.

Architectural Erasure

The fact that Austen locates Northanger Abbey in Gloucestershire (Austen 110) points immediately to erasure and buried identity. There are very few records of nunneries in Gloucestershire after the Norman Conquest [figure 41], and the records that do exist of the pre-Conquest nunneries are somewhat unclear. There are certainly no records of a “richly endowed convent” in the style of Northanger Abbey that was turned into a country house at the time of the dissolution, although Francis Grose's account of the male monastery of Lanthony mirrors the situation of Northanger, since it stands “low in a valley, sheltered from the north and east by rising woods of oak” while Lanthony stands “in a deep and solitary valley, near the river Hodney, in Monmouthshire, encompassed with rocks, which almost exclude the light of the mid-day sun” (Grose, v.2 148). Austen describes Northanger Abbey in language that seems particularly influenced by the popular antiquarian descriptions of ruined monasteries and abbeys that abounded in the late eighteenth-century, and in a county that lacks any visible remains of female monastic history. Although Catherine looks forward to its “long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel” and she cannot “entirely subdue the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun” (Austen 111), it is not at all clear that Northanger Abbey once was a nunnery, because it could just as easily have as its foundation a male monastery such as Lanthony. This means that Austen depicts Northanger's monastic history as non-gender specific, which mirrors the burial and erasure of female monasticism in Gloucestershire's landscape.⁸¹

But Austen does not only imagine the foundation of Northanger Abbey as a buried form of monastic architecture, she also imagines that architecture in direct relation to bodies, and the histories of gendered bodies. As Catherine famously complains of history:

it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all – it is very tiresome: and

⁸¹ Austen also experienced refurbished monastic architecture first-hand when she attended a boarding school for girls in Reading, Berkshire, located in the gatehouse of Reading Abbey: “from 1785 to 1786 ... they [Jane and Cassandra] were pupils at Mrs La Tournelle's Ladies' Boarding School, whose premises were at the Abbey House in Reading” (Le Faye 20). Most critics and biographers, including Le Faye, connect this experience to Austen's description of Harriet Smith's boarding school in *Emma*, but the architecture and history of the space might have also impacted Austen's imagination of Northanger Abbey.

yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention ... and invention is what delights me in other books. (84)

Static and mutable female bodies both amount to imagination for Catherine, which is why she can be bored *and* excited by the possibilities of invented history. The absence of women is key in this passage; Catherine likes invention when it is the kind that Radcliffe employs (as my previous chapter shows) in order to draw attention to the consumption of the mutable and suffering female body. The spectres of the female Catholic past are delightful to Catherine as Radcliffe's texts uncover them for her readers, but troubling when they are buried beneath or erased by more modern forms of femininity.

Catherine's journey to Northanger Abbey elaborates on the relationship between consumption (in the economic sense of the word) and gothic narratives of femininity. As they travel toward Northanger, Henry Tilney relates the tale of gothic horror that Catherine expects to find when they arrive: "And are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as 'what one reads about' may produce? – Have you a stout heart? – Nerves fit for sliding panels and tapestry?" (124). But Catherine denies her role in Henry's constructed gothic fiction, except as a consumer; when he tells her that she will "discover a division in the tapestry ... and on opening it, a door will immediately appear – which door, ... you will, after a few efforts, succeed in opening, -- and, with your lamp in your hand, will pass through it into a small vaulted room," Catherine responds: "No, indeed; I should be too much frightened to do any such thing" (126). Henry ends his satirical treatment of Radcliffe when he comes to "these memoirs of the wretched Matilda" at which point, "Henry was too much amused by the interest he had raised, to be able to carry it farther; he could no longer command solemnity either of subject or voice, and was obliged to entreat her to use her own fancy in the perusal of Matilda's woes" (126). As is the case with Matilda's narrative in *The Recess*, the reader's consumption of suffering points here to the ethical work (as much as someone like Henry Tilney may laugh at it) the gothic narrative accomplishes when it implicates the reader in the characters' suffering.

Catherine forgets one form of consumption for another when they approach the Abbey and it appears to be more modern than she expects. Henry drives her "rapidly along a smooth, level road of fine gravel, without obstacle, alarm or solemnity of any kind," which strikes "her as odd." But when "a sudden scud of rain driving full in her face, made it impossible for her to observe any thing further" she "fixed all her thoughts on the welfare of her new straw bonnet" (127). Austen aligns Catherine's consumption of her "new straw bonnet" and the gothic mystique of an ancient abbey here; her satirical treatment of Radcliffe in this passage focuses on the assumption that intent and identity are visible on the surfaces of architecture and characters – a satirical treatment that is in fact more properly directed at Radcliffe's readers than at her works themselves, which actually entreat their readers to look more than once at surfaces and absences. The welfare of Catherine's straw bonnet is symbolically linked to the lack of

“obstacle” that sweeps her into the dangerous erasure of femininity imminent in the General’s modern version of the gothic.

Austen’s description of Northanger Abbey also highlights the invention and re-imagination of the Catholic past because many ruined nunneries were turned into country houses after the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, for example Lacock Abbey and Wilton House, both in Wiltshire. Lacock is especially applicable [figure 42] because its architecture combines medieval ruin and Gothic Revival architecture – leading to a lack of distinction between country house and convent: “The beautiful cloister and chapter house, built in a honey-coloured limestone, were incorporated into the house. The cloister became a major asset when Lacock was remodelled in Gothic Revival style by the architect Sanderson Miller in 1753” (Greene 188). Similarly, Wilton House [figure 43] was built on the site of “a sequestered Abbey” as William Watts explains, but was built up over several generations so that it signifies more as an English Country house than it does as a ruined nunnery (Watts, plate LXXXII).

As my analysis of early to late eighteenth-century literature shows, the many architectural and bodily boundaries that antiquarian and gothic narratives imposed and disturbed both arose from and problematized British categories of identity. In chapter two I discussed Pope’s early conflation of the classical and gothic, which flags the incoherence of aesthetic boundaries. In relation to this idea, I cited Lee Morrissey’s argument that after the 1740s “the natural represented by decay becomes preferable to the natural represented by order; the artfulness represented by rudeness becomes preferable to artfulness represented by a kind of polish” (94). Morrissey responds to a seemingly linear movement toward gothic identity that becomes more complex (as it appears to deny itself) and more uncanny as the century comes to its close. This kind of transformation is particularly applicable to *Northanger Abbey*, but it is not as simple as the aesthetics of decay or ruin surmounting the aesthetics of classical polish – Catherine looks for ruin at Northanger Abbey but finds only polish – the polish of modern taste, whether it is gothic or classical, covers over a real history of the medieval nunnery *and* the relics of Mrs. Tilney’s suffering.⁸²

The relationship between the medieval nunnery and eighteenth-century representations of medieval nuns and nunneries has been an important element of my argument about the representation of these spaces in literature. As I’ve argued throughout, the gender mutability and malleability of nuns was inherent in eighteenth-century responses to them, which express both anxiety and praise for such changeability, part of which has to do with both the erasure of and emphasis on gender in mediaeval monastic architecture. One of the ways that Gilchrist argues nuns gained agency in response to this internalisation of space is through

⁸² In part, the recovery of female monastic mutability leads to agency, but both Austen and Braddon worry about recuperating this mutability in the face of the accepted maternal/feminine ideals; both books show that this recovery of hidden maternity can be empowering and destructive, just as the glossing over of it with modes of consumption and generic literary production can similarly empower and disempower the subject.

the “collective spatial gestures” that “may be indicated through the development of nunnery plans” (19). At Northanger Abbey these gestures are not even visible in the floor plan (as they are at Lacock for example [figure 44]). Instead,

With the walls of the kitchen ended all the antiquity of the Abbey; the fourth side of the quadrangle having, on account of its decaying state, been removed by the General’s father, and the present erected in its place.... The new building was not only new, but declared itself to be so; intended only for offices, and enclosed behind stable-yards, no uniformity of architecture had been thought necessary. Catherine could have raved at the hand which had swept away what must have been beyond the value of all the rest, for the purposes of mere domestic economy. (147)

The memory of this masculine violence is not lost on eighteenth-century chroniclers of the medieval era; the struggle to define femininity and feminine space within male-oriented structures is one of the themes Radcliffe deals with in her work, and a task that Catherine also finds difficult because men such as General Tilney and his father build over, and bury past Catholic femininity (with its gender mutability) and men such as Henry Tilney refuse to acknowledge the violence of this action. Austen also explicitly connects this erasure of gothic architecture with modern “domestic economy” which implies a connection between interior domestic spaces and economic production and consumption.

Similarly, Braddon’s description of Audley Court aligns it closely with the architecture and history of the medieval English convent. In language that eerily echoes Austen’s, Braddon describes the position of her house as bordered by a wall “with espaliers, and shadowed on one side by goodly oaks, which shut out the flat landscape, and circled the house and gardens with a darkening shelter” (1). Remnants of the monastic foundation are immediately visible in the gardens of Audley Court. The narrator describes for the reader (constructed as the almost touristic viewer through direct address),

... the kitchen gardens, the fish-pond, and an orchard bordered by a dry moat, and a broken ruin of a wall ... everywhere overgrown with trailing ivy, yellow stonecrop, and dark moss. To the left there was a broad gravelled walk, down which, years ago, when the place had been a convent, the quiet nuns had walked hand in hand. (1)

The ruined nunnery is here overgrown not only with natural foliage and ivy, but also with the romantic aesthetic imagination of the “quiet nuns” who appear on the “broad gravelled walk” as though they are still part of the landscape.⁸³

⁸³ Aeron Haynie also contextualizes the ruin of Audley Court in terms of the class conflict inherent in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theories of the picturesque: “The picturesque emphasis on ruins privileges the old, and valorizes the landscape mellowed by time ... Equating old with ‘natural’ can be read as a reaction on the part of the landed gentry to the nouveau riche and to the gentry who abandoned their estates to seek commercial wealth in the expanding cities” (67). This construction of ruin is not dissimilar to the kind that Harries and Morrissey explore in their work on the relationship between architecture and literature. National identity, aristocracy, and the natural

Indeed, in 1861 nuns were not only imaginary, but also a very large part of England's changing religious landscape. As Susan O'Brien explains: "When in 1873 John Murphy published his defence of conventual life, *Terra Incognita: or, The Convents of the United Kingdom*, he estimated from returns made to him by clergy and superiors that there were some 3,000 Roman Catholic nuns living in 235 convents in England and Wales" (110). For nuns of the nineteenth century, the idealization of the role as a primarily internalized and domestic one took work to overcome despite the fact that nineteenth-century religious life tended to be "active rather than contemplative, and public rather than cloistered. While this matched the demands of the contemporary church, especially where it functioned in non-Roman Catholic states, the active apostolate for women had been pioneered only with difficulty" (O'Brien 111). In chapter one we saw that this struggle for an active life in reaction to ever-increasing limits on the female monastic public role characterized medieval nunneries as well, which indicates that the role of the nun always broaches questions of public and private femininity.

Although Audley Court contains elements of the female monastic past within its architecture, the conflict between Lady Audley's need to keep secrets in order to avoid confinement and poverty and Robert Audley's need to expose her internal identity complicates any clear construction of space in terms of the female monastic past or present. Lady Audley fits neither the active nor the contemplative roles of female monasticism, but her duality (as both an ideal and illicit woman) flags the constructed nature of femininity – just as nineteenth-century nuns' negotiation between the public and the private did. It is in her ability to control her own terms of identity and confinement that Lady Audley symbolizes what was threatening about both the medieval and the nineteenth-century nun – until, that is, Robert Audley (and the reader through him) consumes yet another narrative of the containment of female mutability.

The improved visibility of nuns in the nineteenth century may account for the fact that, unlike Austen, Braddon sets her country house in a county that boasts of one of the oldest nunneries in England. Barking Abbey, along with Audley End Palace (built on the site of Walden Abbey – a male monastery), provide architectural and geographic inspiration for the layered and uncanny presence of Audley Court. John Stevens notes of Barking in his 1722-23 *History of the Antient Abbeys*, "this Religious House is said to have been the first Nunnery

decay of monastic architecture all come into conflict with mass-consumption and industrialization during this period, and this conflict might also account for the equivocal place that Haynie sees Audley Court occupying: "The abandonment of Audley Court suggests an inability to imagine a peaceful merging of classes.... What does this imply about the texts' attitude toward its own readership? That would depend, in part, on whether one reads the tone of the final passage ... as mournful or triumphant" (73). If this tone is anything like that used to conceptualize the ruined domestic sphere of the nunnery (which I believe it is), then it is both mournful and triumphant because it mourns repressed Catholic identity at the very moment that it needs to triumph over it in order to construct British national identity.

in England,” and he constructs the history of the abbesses as one of ideal virtue from generation to generation (528). Stevens’ Catholic slant emphasizes the miraculous when he portrays the nuns’ bodies, and specifically the fact that when the Abbess St. Hildelid decided to move “the Bodies of several Holy Persons” to a “Place in the Church dedicated to our Blessed Lady ... a glorious Light from Heaven” shone on them accompanied “by a wonderful delightful Odour, and many other miraculous Signs” (529). George Isham Parkyns’ 1816 account expresses a different concern, focusing instead on the aristocratic power of the abbesses: “At length, its high power and domains placed the lady abbess paramount in all the manors in the hundred of Beacontre; and in later times she held from the crown an entire barony, as also did the prioresses of Wilton, Shaftesbury, and Winchester” (61). Parkyns does not mention the miracles that the early eighteenth-century Stevens does, but he does mention the geographic position of the Abbey and the fact that it must “occasionally have been much annoyed by unwholesome vapours arising from the contiguous marshes; and although its site is rather elevated, it could not, until the embankments were formed, but have been subject to frequent inundations” (62). In this way, he turns the “delightful odour” of the earlier account into “unwholesome vapours,” which mirrors the very similar movement between incorruptibility and decay that characterized descriptions of Rosamond’s body (as I discuss in chapter two).

Similarly, Lisa M.C. Weston finds a connection between the political landscape of Essex and the female founder Ethelburga’s body in early accounts of Barking Nunnery: “In both the Hodilred Charter and Bede’s frame narrative, Ethelburga’s body within her abbey provides a focus for the appropriation and renaming of a landscape by and for men ... for whom Ethelburga’s body is constructed and gendered within analogous regimes of blood and spiritual kinship” (18). Weston contrasts this construction of Ethelburga with the representation of her in an embedded narrative in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* called the *libellus*, which “implicates a variant narrative of the saintly female body and the landscape around it.... In the *libellus* narrative [a narrative of miracles], her gender is defined by her kinship with neither bishop nor male ancestors, but rather with the frame story’s anonymous women consecrated to God” (19). The eighteenth and nineteenth-century accounts of the nunnery pick up on these competing narratives when they focus on how bodies miraculously transform the site, and on the importance of aristocratic identity. Braddon reproduces these competing narratives, not as much through direct knowledge of Barking’s history, as through the gender ideologies that fiction and literature institute when they re-tell medieval monastic narratives such as that of Barking’s nunnery.

This richness of history and deepness of landscape contrast markedly with Braddon’s insistence on the dryness of the moat and of the all-important well at Audley Court, both of which she purposely aligns with lost monastic femininity. Like the nuns themselves, the well “had been of good service in its time, no doubt; and busy nuns have perhaps drawn the cool water with their own fair hands; but it had fallen with disuse now, and scarcely any one at Audley court

knew whether the spring had dried up or not” (4). If Austen emphasizes repression through architectural erasure, Braddon does so through architectural palimpsest; layers of narrative exist in every architectural object. As Patrick O'Malley astutely notices, “what Braddon’s sensation novel does is produce the Gothic in England, building its intricate plot of sexual duplicity as well as its symbolic architecture literally on top of a suppressed narrative of Catholic history” (104). Not only does Braddon build on a suppressed narrative of Catholic history, she also builds on an eighteenth-century treatment of the gothic that was acutely aware of the importance of that suppression to constructs of femininity. With her image of the well at Audley Court, Braddon foreshadows her narrative’s repression and discovery of maternity, attempted murder and madness – a story that relies just as heavily on the romantic notion of ideal monastic femininity as it does on the gothic representation of that same femininity as full of rebellious possibility.

The feelings of the visitor to Audley Court indicate that the ideal of the nunnery still exists within the architecture of the house, which also acts as a metaphor for the narrative’s reliance on repression and secrecy. The narrator describes the house and gardens together as a place where visitors feel

a yearning wish to have done with life, and to stay there for ever, staring into the cool fish-ponds ... a spot in which Peace seemed to have taken up her abode, setting her soothing hand on ... the shady corners of the old-fashioned rooms; the deep window-seats behind the painted glass ... ay, even upon the stagnant well, which, cool and sheltered as all else in the old place, hid itself away in a shrubbery behind the gardens, with an idle handle that was never turned, and a lazy rope so rotten that the pail had broken away from it, and had fallen into the water. (Braddon 2)

Rotten or romantic, the narrator places the options before the reader in an immediate appeal to his or her imaginative abilities.

Braddon constructs this uncanny description of the grounds and house by a highly symbolic method, and relies on the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic to convey a sense that every object means more than it at first suggests. The fish pond and walled garden recall Charles Alston Collins’s 1851 painting “Convent Thoughts” [figure 45], which uses Catholic symbolism to consider the constructed boundaries between interior and exterior worlds, and between virginity, maternity, passion and death. As John Whiteley explains:

The novice’s index finger marks a page illustrating the *Annunciation*, the moment when the angel tells the Virgin that she has been set aside for special grace. She is surrounded by many different species of lily flowers, the Virgin’s attribute, which also flank the picture on the frame ... inscribed ‘Sicut Lilium’, the opening words of a text from the Song of Solomon, conventionally thought to prefigure the Virgin of the New Testament.... The flower she holds, however, is a Passion Flower, symbol of the Crucifixion, to which her thoughts have turned. We know this as the missal is open at a picture of the Crucifixion. (32)

Braddon's description of the garden expresses a yearning for solitude that demands a contemplation of surfaces, and that relies heavily on the "seeming" nature of the domestic peace that reigns throughout the house and gardens. Like Collins' painting, *Lady Audley's Secret* invests surfaces with symbolic meaning.⁸⁴ It is the static nature of the landscape, the hidden corners of the building, and the stagnant well that offer this "seeming" peace, but the stagnant stillness merely covers over (with pleasing aesthetic exteriority) that which should reveal a history of the female monastic past.

This particularly female inheritance is also visible in the architecture of the mad-house that Lady Audley must face at the end of the novel, and the image of the repressed convent and stagnant well are once again aligned in her final confession (ultimately of maternally-inherited madness). Lady Audley progresses from the domestic "peace" of Audley Court, to the Belgian city of Villebrumeuse, an "old ecclesiastical town" (384) where she and Robert first stop at "a great stony quadrangle, which had been the approach to a monastery once, but which was now the courtyard of a dismal hotel" (385), and finally to a "*maison de santé*" of which Lady Audley says "in England we should call it a mad-house" (387). Robert Audley confirms the connection between this mad-house and Audley Court, when he claims that Lady Audley will achieve the kind of peace the visitor to Audley Court believes is possible:

You will lead a quiet and peaceful life, my lady, such a life as many a good and holy woman in this Catholic country freely takes upon herself, and happily endures unto the end. The solitude of your existence in this place will be no greater than that of a king's daughter, who, flying from the evil of the time, was glad to take shelter in a house as tranquil as this. (391)

Robert here conflates two kinds of asylum; he tells Lady Audley that she will be no different from those noble women who took shelter in a nunnery, while he simultaneously imposes an asylum upon her that is more reminiscent of imprisonment than it is of sanctuary. Lady Audley does not desire the static peace characteristic of the English imagination of the repressed convent. Instead, she wishes to construct her own internal and exterior spaces, but is ultimately unsuccessful because the fluid identity she desires is criminal to Victorian femininity.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Indeed, Collins' painting, which "reflects the heightened interest in Christian symbolism that inspired the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement" (Hilton 59), was defended by Ruskin, who spoke highly of "Collins's botany while glossing over his evident sympathy for Roman Catholicism" (Whiteley 32).

⁸⁵ This aim, too, is reminiscent of the unique position of nineteenth-century nuns. As O'Brien explains: "Nuns have experienced the historical invisibility which has been common to other groups of women and for the same reasons, but compounded in their case by the fact that invisibility has been a goal in its own right, and to have achieved it is counted a sign of success" (118). I think that the lack of current scholarship on the role of the nunnery in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English literature stems from an aim of invisibility that represses the role of nuns, rather than an aim on their part for public invisibility; and this invisibility results rather from

Just as she inherits madness from her mother, so too does she inherit the wish for a kind of mutable female monasticism, and the threat of that mutability causes her to fear constructions of femininity that aim to control and enclose what is unpredictable about it. As she tells Robert Audley, “I would kill myself and defy you if I dared. But I am a poor, pitiful coward, and have been so from the first. Afraid of my mother’s horrible inheritance; afraid of poverty; afraid of George Talboys; afraid of *you*” (392). A fear of maternal inheritance also informs Lee and Radcliffe’s earlier representations of the nunnery, and as we have seen, Pope’s Eloisa, Lee’s Matilda and Eleanor, and all of Radcliffe’s heroines have to negotiate the ways that they will inherit (or inhabit) maternal suffering. Catherine Morland notices that Captain Tilney builds over and modernizes such suffering in *Northanger Abbey*, and Lady Audley here realizes that it is not the existence of a Catholic nun she should fear, but the maternal inheritance of constructed identity that aestheticizes such an existence into something that it is not, something that denies its inherent instability and consumes that altered imagination to the peril of an assertive femininity like hers.

Bodily Relics

Northanger Abbey associates the gothic representation of female suffering with the similarly feminized heightened imagination, and *Northanger Abbey*’s classical architectural features veil, or dress, the ruined convent and the suffering wife and mother with modern renovation. When she finally gains access to Mrs. Tilney’s chamber Catherine is shocked at the lack of relics. “Astonishment and doubt” first seize her,

and a shortly succeeding ray of common sense added some bitter emotions of shame. She could not be mistaken as to the room; but how grossly mistaken in every thing else! – in Miss Tilney’s meaning, in her own calculation! This apartment, to which she had given a date so ancient, a position so awful, proved to be one end of what the General’s father had built. There were two other doors in the chamber, leading probably into dressing-closets; but she had no inclination to open either. Would the veil in which Mrs. Tilney had last walked, or the volume in which she had last read, remain to tell what nothing else was allowed to whisper? No: whatever might have been the General’s crimes, he had certainly too much wit to let them sue for detection. (155)

Catherine’s shame stems from her expectation of a room that contains feminine history; instead she finds a room full of the erasure of feminine history. The General’s renovations allow no connections between the monastic past, Mrs. Tilney’s life, and the current dressing room. This combination of gothic imagination and a classical lack of ornamentation leaves Catherine’s mind full of “astonishment,” “doubt,” “common sense,” and “shame.” In other words, she

their ill-defined space between the ideal domestic (or imagined private) sphere and the public sphere of social, material and cultural production and reproduction.

internalizes the ruin she seeks in the architecture, and then reforms her views into a practical understanding of her relationship to space through her shame for what she would have consumed of Mrs. Tilney's identity.

The lack of ruin leaves Catherine unsure about her role as the consumer of gothic suffering. Elizabeth Harries argues that ruins offer agency as well as control – she notes,

The imagination of ruin helped people ... to free themselves from the structures of the past, or at least to see them as temporary and mutable. Fragmentation – of buildings, of literary structures, of existing systems – presupposed a recognition of their constructed and historical character. And, in understanding something as historical, we loosen its hold over us. (85)

Catherine's wish to consume the ruins (or leftover objects) of Mrs. Tilney's existence stems from this desire to see the mutability hidden within the modernized convent, and so to gain agency despite the modernizing efforts of late eighteenth-century patriarchs like General Tilney. Instead, the erasure of Mrs. Tilney's objects of existence and the emptiness of interior spaces (like the Japanned cabinet that contains the apparently insignificant laundry list – 134-5, 137) are non-signifying spaces, and act as superficial constructions not unlike an architectural edifice. What matters is their internal connection to maternal inheritance, suffering and erasure. The interior space of the nunnery, then, is not all that different from the interior space of the dressing room, as gothic and domestic novels construct both of these spaces in terms of feminine consumption, agency, and confinement. As Tita Chico argues in her study of the eighteenth-century dressing room, novelistic reading and the dressing room are closely connected to ideas about private and public space because private reading “replicated the zone of intimacy that satiric and novelistic texts imagine when they peer into the dressing room; moreover, this exemplifies a central problematic of the dressing room trope: the representation of private life for the public's pleasure” (29). This connection between interior space and the public's consumption of an interiority that always represents a publicly-minded ideal is apparent in *Northanger Abbey* through the symbolic connection between objects' interiority and their apparent emptiness.

If spaces appear to be empty it does not mean they are empty. After all, General Tilney did modernize Mrs. Tilney's dressing room, and someone did remove the remains of her existence from public view. Similarly, the laundry list that Catherine finds belongs to the man whom Eleanor Tilney marries, and Austen's narrator connects him to “that collection of washing-bills” because she is “aware that the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable” (204). However, this discovery is not very different from Catherine's discovery of the modernity of Mrs. Tilney's dressing room; she expects – due partly to her gothic novel reading and partly to Henry's suggestion – “Not tables, toilettes, wardrobes, or drawers, but on one side perhaps the remains of a broken lute, on the other a ponderous chest which no efforts can

open, and over the fire-place the portrait of some handsome warrior, whose features will so incomprehensibly strike you, that you will not be able to withdraw your eyes from it" (125). The gothic imagination makes clear the connection between the suffering mother and her romantic objects of consumption, while the modern dressing room and manuscript amount to practical washing lists that foreshadow properly practical marriages which, because they glaze over the implications of maternal inheritance, require even more imagination. To this end, the narrator describes Eleanor's husband as "really deserving of her; independent of his peerage, his wealth, and his attachment, being to a precision the most charming young man in the world. Any further definition of his merits must be unnecessary; the most charming young man in the world is instantly before the imagination of us all" (204). Not only does Austen's satirical treatment of the ideal gentleman call into question Eleanor's happiness, it also indicates that not all narratives of ideal femininity and suffering are as visible as they are in gothic novels by authors such as Lee and Radcliffe.⁸⁶ Catherine feels "confident of somewhere drawing forth, in the shape of some fragmented journal, continued to the last gasp" a narrative of "the General's cruelty" (155), but her confidence is ill-founded; the story of Mrs. Tilney's life and suffering is one left entirely to the reader's imagination.

After imagining this veil and volume, Catherine finds that they are absent from the modern apartment. What she realizes, then, is that a combination of practical and imaginative femininity may be necessary in order for her to avoid becoming signified based on her superficial appearance. She decides that such a reading of identity means that human beings are ultimately confusing because there is no way to construct an interior that will not lead to ruin: "among the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad. Upon this conviction, she would not be surprised if even in Henry and Eleanor Tilney, some slight imperfection might hereafter appear; and upon this conviction she need not fear to acknowledge some actual specks in the character of their father" (161). Just as the eighteenth-century chamber buries a medieval understanding of gender malleability, so too can Catherine perform ideal femininity on the surface in order to signify her interior identity with more than just "nothing" (94). The gothic and monastic aesthetic offers the chance for characters such as Pope's Eloisa, Lee's Ellinor, or

⁸⁶ Chico notices the same oppression and agency in the dressing room that I argue exists in constructions of the nunnery in eighteenth-century texts. Her exploration of whether its signification changes when it moves from satire to domestic fiction pin-points another concern that I think still holds sway when authors like Austen and Braddon explicitly link the dressing room to the space of the ruined or imagined nunnery: "If, following the Richardsonian novel's labored separation of the satiric mode from the dressing room, the domestic novel comes to be the locale for the imaginary presence of the dressing room, then this transformation does not necessarily reflect a larger concern for the sufferings of women. Instead, this indicates a shift in representational strategies that envisages women as potentially – but not fully – intelligent agents, even though this potential is ultimately subsumed under the rubric of wifely and maternal selflessness" (32).

Radcliffe's Ellena to escape the static binaries that construct them. Like the narratives of the nunneries and ruins that inform eighteenth-century authors of the prototypical gothic, so to do their characters blur boundaries as Catherine learns to here, because she is a gothic novel reader. Reading gothic novels, as Harries notes: "requires a double perspective and apparently opposed reactions. Though these novels are not fragmented in the way sentimental novels often are, they implicitly prescribe a double reading: movement between absorption and doubt, imaginative belief and reason" (119).

Mrs. Tilney's "well disposed" dressing closets (157) offer the same kind of "memento of past folly" (161) that Catherine's narrator claims "even *she* could allow ... however painful, might not be without use;" and this memento is also representative of the work the wax figure does in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* when it acts as a divested Catholic icon. In addition, since Catherine includes "the mention of a chest or cabinet ... [and] the sight of japan in any shape" in her list, I believe it is safe to argue that *Northanger Abbey* attempts to obscure surfaces and dig up the origins of identity-construction simultaneously, in order to show that superficial and antithetical constructions of identity, which speculate on objects or veil foundations, actually *do* signify if one searches deep enough to find that the consumption of erasure uncovers real violence.

Similarly, the lack of maternal narrative in Mrs. Tilney's portrait foretells the lack of narrative visible in her dressing room. Before Catherine consumes Mrs. Tilney's "large, well-proportioned apartment" with its "handsome dimity bed, arranged as unoccupied with an housemaid's care ... bright Bath stove, mahogany wardrobes and neatly-painted chairs" (155), she attempts to recognize Henry and Eleanor in Mrs. Tilney's countenance. The portrait

... represented a very lovely woman, with a mild and pensive countenance, justifying, so far, the expectations of its new observer; but they were not in every respect answered, for Catherine had depended upon meeting with features, air, complexion that should be the very counterpart, the very image, if not of Henry's, of Eleanor's; -- the only portraits of which she had been in the habit of thinking, bearing always an equal resemblance of mother and child. A face once taken was taken for generations. But here she was obliged to look and consider and study for a likeness. She contemplated it, however, in spite of this drawback, with much emotion; and, but for a stronger interest, would have left it unwillingly. (153)

Part of Catherine's problem is that she is an outside viewer; she is a reader of Mrs. Tilney's maternity who has no direct familial connection to her identity. Mrs. Tilney's portrait is a narrative, an object, and a commodity of the type that complicates Catherine's wish to consume it; as Alison Conway puts it, portraits "blur categories that ought to remain distinct so that we are no longer able to discriminate between commodities and art" (19).

Not only do the portraits in eighteenth-century gothic novels confuse these categories for their female consumers, they also blur distinctions between the

viewer and the sitter, and the perhaps numerous (and partially invisible) identities of both. As I discuss in detail in chapter four, this kind of mutability is a particularly feminine and maternal one, and the identification that Radcliffe's characters have with the suffering subject in portrait form becomes a misidentification for Austen, and a re-identification for Braddon. Catherine does not see the maternal connection between the portrait and Henry and Eleanor, but it still fascinates her because this lack of inheritance means that the role of longsuffering mother and wife is one that need not continue on for generations. A face once taken does not have to be taken for generations, and with this satire of the gothic inheritance trope Austen indicates that the inheritance of feminine identity should be as questionable as the belief that a mother's imagination influences the appearance of her children.

In one sense this divests the suffering maternal portrait of its power to impress its image upon the viewer, but in another sense it empowers the viewer to reject one kind of femininity (longsuffering, ideal, and passive) for another kind (practical, consumer-based, satirical). Catherine misidentifies Mrs. Tilney's longsuffering expression as a familial one, when in fact it exists as a feminine trait and one that Catherine later personifies when the General ejects her from his household without warning. But Catherine does not have to reify Mrs. Tilney's particular brand of suffering. Instead, if a consumer such as Catherine constructs self-identity through the perception of ideal women like Mrs. Tilney, then perhaps she can create a new kind of maternal inheritance with the relics of the everyday that Mrs. Tilney lacks, but which are also the (invisible) symbols of her suffering femininity. As one who explores interiors and finds connections between gothic novels and modern dressing rooms or japanned cabinets (against all odds), Catherine can maintain a symbolic system of agency that may undo certain forms of gendered inheritance – she can reinvest domestic relics with their repressed Catholic mutability.

Lady Audley certainly attempts to maintain those symbols and that role, but Robert Audley's almost androgynous consumerism uncovers this symbolic past. In this sense, the role of feminine identity in *Lady Audley's Secret* relates directly to the self-conflict that Pope's Eloisa exhibits when she attempts to reconcile body and soul. The inheritance that Lady Audley attempts to secret away, and which is connected implicitly with her maternal identity, is not only madness, but also an antithetical construction that has much to do with her pseudo-interiority and suppressed maternity. Braddon's investigation into the need to repress the Catholic past in order to perform domesticity, a domesticity that is ultimately based on aesthetics that derive from that very past, encapsulates the idea of "domestic ruins" – or the undomestic (uncanny) construction of self – as I have been arguing for their role in English literature. The consumption that Catherine enacts at Northanger Abbey is similar to that of Robert Audley and George Talboys when they view Lady Audley's portrait, because they each uncover hidden maternal inheritance and identity by exposing what they imagine to be the interiority of the subject. The difference is that Catherine uncovers

suffering and feels guilt when she realizes her construction of Mrs. Tilney in order to consume that suffering, while Robert and Alicia Audley and George Talboys all attempt to reify ideal femininity, rather than deconstructing their consumption of it, as Catherine does.

Lady Audley's portrait depicts her as an incoherent aesthetic subject, which conveys just how antithetical ideal femininity is to the reader; but the characters who construct her as such are always attempting to give her a fixed interior identity that clashes significantly with her exterior aesthetics, rather than acknowledging the kind of malleability that portraits stand for in works like those of Ann Radcliffe and in their connection to monastic femininity. Krista Lysack argues that Lady Audley's portrait "is not a painting to be viewed effortlessly; rather, it highlights Lucy's status as the active manipulator of her self-presentation rather than the object of a mastering gaze, as a consumer rather than consumed" (65), but I think the distinction between consumer and consumed – as Catherine finds in *Northanger Abbey* – is much less clear than Lysack argues it is. Lady Audley's assumption of superficial identity leaves her in a position of both object and subject. Similarly, the fact that Braddon veils the portrait to begin with, briefly displays it, and re-veils it at the end of the novel suggests that it also enacts an important metaphor about the treatment of women's histories. Initially, the portrait stands "on an easel covered with a green baize in the centre of the octagonal chamber. It had been a fancy of the artist to paint her standing in this very room, and to make his background a faithful reproduction of the pictured walls" (69). Halfway through the novel, the portrait, now finished, hangs "in the post of honour opposite the window, amidst Claudes, Poussins, and Wouvermans, whose less brilliant hues were killed by the vivid colouring of the modern artist" (215). Finally, the painting becomes symbolic of the house itself, when it is closed up except to "inquisitive visitors" and "a curtain hangs before the pre-Raphaelite portrait: and the blue mould which artists dread gathers upon the Wouvermans and Poussins, the Cuyps and Tintorettis" (446). The past, once more adequately repressed, accumulates the mould and ruin that make it less threatening to the country-house visitor.

There is a close connection between the space the portrait inhabits (Lady Audley's chamber) and the objects in the room. Its veil links it with female monasticism, and the location of the chamber also uncovers links to a specifically sartorial monastic past. As Alicia Audley tells Robert and George, the passage to Lady Audley's rooms lies beneath the floor of her old nursery, where "a hiding-place so small that he who hid there must have crouched on his hands and knees or lain at full length, and yet large enough to contain a quaint old carved oak chest half filled with priests' vestments" (3) actually "communicates with her [Lady Audley's] dressing-room" (68). As O'Malley argues, "all of this book's deviances – religious and sexual – seem to be buried beneath the cheerful façade of familial domesticity. Shifting the traditional Gothic's setting from the Continent to England, Braddon makes Gothic anxiety no longer a foreign but a fundamentally domestic concern" (108). Despite Radcliffe's displacement of her narratives onto

foreign soil, it is not entirely correct to say that eighteenth-century gothic literature saw this anxiety as a foreign one. Sophia Lee certainly sets her tale of repressed Catholic past in the English landscape, and as my analysis of Radcliffe has shown, the connection between her narratives and English domesticity and political history is not a weak one. What is true about *Lady Audley's Secret*, and what I think O'Malley states quite clearly in his alignment of the familial with the deviant religious and sexual past, is that Lady Audley, her dressing-room, and the secret compartments that lead to it and that exist within it (such as the casket containing her son's hair and shoe) all utilize aesthetic forms (such as Gothicism and Pre-Raphaelitism) that emphasize the importance of female monasticism to the constructs of Victorian domesticity.

Braddon's emphasis on the painting's status as a Pre-Raphaelite work emphasizes the way that medieval aesthetics uncover the "monstrous" past:

No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait. It was so like and yet unlike; it was as if you had burned strange-coloured fires before my lady's face, and by their influence brought out new lines and new expressions never seen in it before.... but I suppose the painter had copied quaint mediaeval monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered, for my lady, in his portrait of her, had something of the aspect of a beautiful fiend. (71)

The Pre-Raphaelite painter acts under a divine inspiration when he uncovers another layer of Lucy Audley's bodily appearance, but he can do so because his own "bewildered" mindset reflects Lucy Audley's inherited madness; it also reflects Catherine Morland's opinion that there is an equal mixture of "good and bad" in every human subject, as well as Eloisa's struggle to reconcile her bodily passion with her soul's devotion. The description of the portrait also highlights indiscernible mutability and malleability when the narrator relies on the image of burning "strange-coloured fires" in front of it in order to bring about Lady Audley's external change in countenance. When the narrator revisits the idea of Lucy Audley's portrait it is to emphasize the saintly aspect of her appearance, rather than her fiendishness: "Lucy Audley ... might have served as a model for a medieval saint, in one of the tiny chapels hidden away in the nooks and corners of a grey old cathedral, unchanged by Reformation or Cromwell" (216). Not only does this description of Lady Audley underline her changeable layers of identity, it also draws on the duality of the Catholic saint in the Protestant mind – both illicit and holy, Lady Audley represents a significant kind of fluid identity reminiscent of the forgotten "grey old cathedral" of England's past. Not only this, but her physical appearance offers a window into the instability of her soul, as it is dictated by her superficial consumption of goods, or as it hints at her latent insanity.

In contrast, Robert Audley seems to indicate that the soul – that intangible indicator of human identity – cannot be inherited, when he asks how it is that George Talboys, “with his father perpetually before his eyes ... had not grown up after the father’s disagreeable model?” and answers himself, “because, while family noses and family chins may descend in orderly sequence from father to son, from grandsire to grandchild ... the spirit ... independent of all earthly rule, owns no order but the harmonious Law of God” (195-6). When he divests character or identity of any reliance on inheritance, Robert Audley makes Lucy Audley’s insanity a matter of religious pre-destination rather than maternal inheritance: only the “Law of God” has control over the goodness or badness of the human soul (to return to Catherine’s phrasing). This divests Lady Audley of any identity, as the objects of ideal domesticity that lead to the exposure of her interiority only show that interiority to be constructed primarily on her consumption of such objects – even hidden within them.

Unlike Mrs. Tilney’s dressing room, Lady Audley’s is full of half-consumed objects of femininity. The atmosphere is “oppressive” from “perfumes in bottles whose gold stoppers had not been replaced ... A bunch of hothouse flowers ... [wither] upon a tiny writing-table. Two or three handsome dresses lay in a heap upon the ground, and the open doors of a wardrobe [reveal] the treasures within,” while “scattered here and there about the apartment” are: “Jewellery, ivory-backed hair-brushes, and exquisite china” (69). Every object in this tableau insinuates exposure and decay, which in turn foreshadows the ruin that results from Lady Audley’s illicit consumption of upper-class femininity. The oppressive atmosphere of the room and its unorganized decomposition rely on the same aesthetics that make a ruined nunnery implicit in constructions of English national identity. The appearance of decay is aesthetically pleasing, but the equivocal space of containment or agency that lies at the heart of the female monastic ruin is unsettling because it draws attention to the emptiness of both constructed and ruined gender ideals. Lysack argues that “there is no essential self at the heart of Lady Audley” but rather, “Lucy’s consumer-driven self-fashioning ... reveals the constructed nature of gender and class.... her affiliation with a world of objects underscores the way in which there is no subjectivity prior to these objects” (66-67). Lysack’s argument shows how a proliferation of consumer objects in *Lady Audley’s Secret* draws attention to the same commodification of femininity that a lack of objects indicates in *Northanger Abbey*. The difference lies in the detection of constructed gender, and the role of the would-be consumer of that gender. Catherine Morland thinks it better to accept that people are equivocal at best, while Robert Audley assumes that he can uncover the hidden past, only to repeat its suppression. Catherine attempts to expose erasure only to be ejected from the place of discovery, while Robert re-buries what he unearths when he confines Lady Audley.

However, it is Luke Marks who uncovers the most troubling symbol of maternity at the heart of ideal domestic consumption. Luke finds a casket that contains “a secret drawer, lined with purple velvet.... There was not much in it ...

only a baby's little worsted shoe rolled up in a piece of paper, and a tiny lock of pale and silky yellow hair, evidently taken from a baby's head" (30). Lady Audley's burial of maternity in order to enclose herself in the aristocratic home makes her position nun-like, especially in terms of the Victorian imagination of the nunnery, rather than its reality. As Langland argues, "once visibility is necessary to the logic and economy of enclosure, then that class discourse must (re)produce the Victorian lady as asexual.... class claims demand the continually visible and, therefore, asexual or sexually immature female body" (10-11). However, as the exposure of her dressing room shows, Lady Audley hides a maternity and sexuality that is as fluid as that of any medieval English nun who leaves her husband and children to pursue a cloistered life.

Indeed, as Nicole Reynolds notices, "Lady Audley's boudoir offers a fluid, intermediary space, framed by the public antechamber and the private dressing room" (120) not unlike the nave or guest hall of a medieval cloister, which both allowed for communication between the nunnery and the outside world and ensured enclosure from that world. This multi-layered enclosure was more typical of nunnery architecture than monastery architecture, and reflected in turn the construction of the aristocratic castle. As Gilchrist explains, the architecture of the convent "represents an example of the way in which the female subject is both active in interpreting material culture, and complicit in being conditioned by it.... This process is apparent for medieval religious women in their rejection of communal dormitory and refectory in favour of separate households, or *familiae*" which mimic "the household arrangement familiar to women living in castles" (168). Both bounded by and hidden from male detection, the equivocal space of the convent speaks eloquently to the ultimately imagined nature of gender through centuries of English identity-formation.

This antithetical construction of femininity might best be understood by comparing Henry Tilney's understanding of domestic surveillance with that which Robert Audley expresses. Henry tells Catherine:

Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding.... Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? (159)

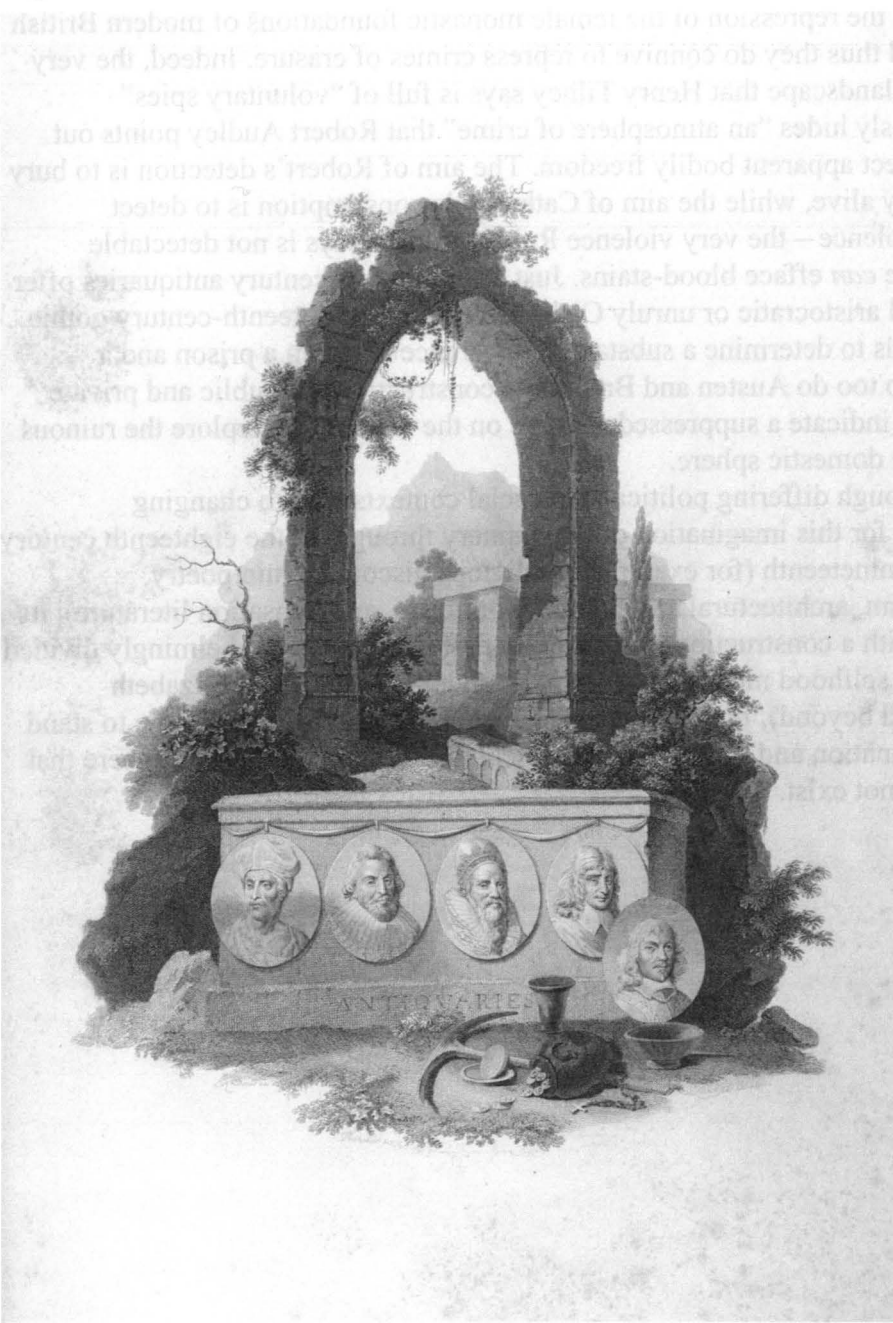
While Robert tells Lady Audley:

What do we know of the mysteries that may hang about the houses we enter? ... Foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs ... and have left no trace upon the spot where they were done. I do not believe ... in blood-stains that no time can efface. I believe rather that we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime, and breathe none the less freely. I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty. (140-141)

Henry's oft-quoted lecture to Catherine becomes more sinister in the light of Robert's association of crime with femininity. Education, law, and commerce are complicit in the repression of the female monastic foundations of modern British identity, and thus they do connive to repress crimes of erasure. Indeed, the very picturesque landscape that Henry Tilney says is full of "voluntary spies" simultaneously hides "an atmosphere of crime" that Robert Audley points out does not affect apparent bodily freedom. The aim of Robert's detection is to bury Lady Audley alive, while the aim of Catherine's consumption is to detect domestic violence – the very violence Robert Audley says is not detectable because time *can* efface blood-stains. Just as eighteenth-century antiquaries offer tales of ideal aristocratic or unruly Catholic nuns, and eighteenth-century gothic literature fails to determine a substantial difference between a prison and a sanctuary, so too do Austen and Braddon's constructions of public and private surveillance indicate a suppressed reliance on the nunnery to explore the ruinous nature of the domestic sphere.

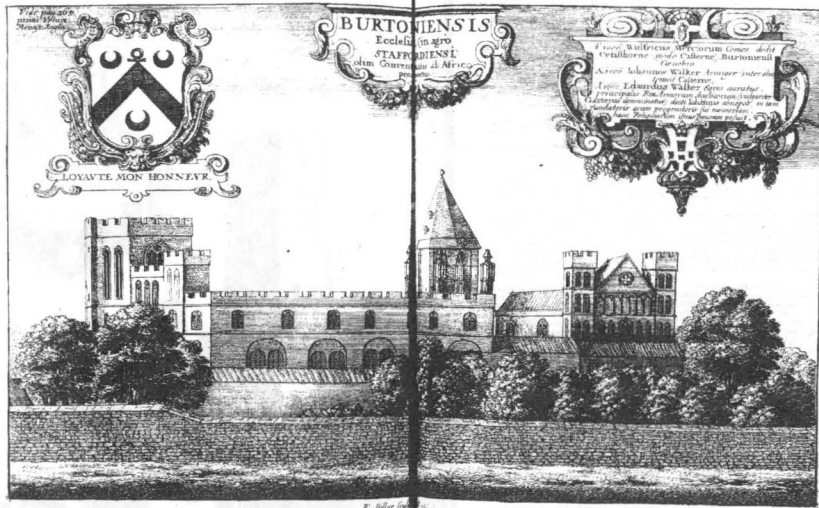
Although differing political and social contexts lead to changing implications for this imagination of the nunnery throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth (for example in religious discourse, ruin poetry, antiquarianism, architectural and literary Gothicism, and Sensation literature), its alignment with a construction of femininity that relies on overwhelmingly divided aesthetics of selfhood means that from Alexander Pope to Mary Elizabeth Braddon (and beyond), female monasticism and the monastic ruin come to stand for the imagination and critique of a coherent and gendered domestic sphere that simply does not exist.

Figure 1



Robert Bowyer, *A Series of One Hundred and Ninety-Six Engravings* (1812).
 Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library.

Figure 2



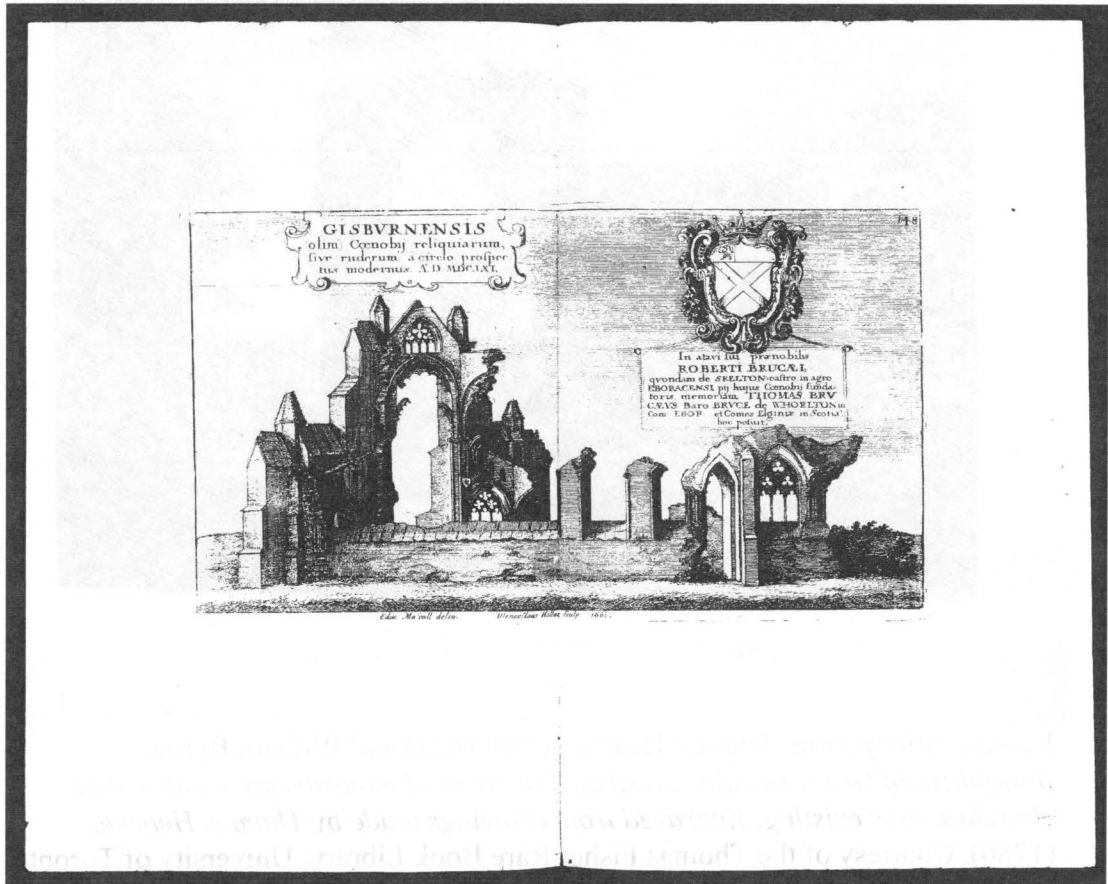
Burton-upon-Trent Abbey, engraved by Wenceslaus Hollar, from Dugdale's *Monastici Anglicani* [*Monasticon Anglicanum*], 1661. Accessed through Early English Books Online.

http://gateway.proquest.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:13430036

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http://gateway.proquest.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:13430036

Figure 4



Gisburn's Sawley Abbey, engraved by Wenceslaus Hollar, from Dugdale's *Monastici Anglicani* [*Monasticon Anglicanum*], 1661. Accessed through Early English Books Online.

http://gateway.proquest.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:13430036

Figure 5



Furness Abbey, from Thomas Hearne (1744-1817) and William Byrne. *Antiquities of Great-Britain: illustrated in views of monasteries, castles, and churches, now existing. Engraved from drawings made by Thomas Hearne.* (1786). Courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

Figure 6



St. Mary's Abbey, from Thomas Hearne (1744-1817) and William Byrne. *Antiquities of Great-Britain: illustrated in views of monasteries, castles, and churches, now existing. Engraved from drawings made by Thomas Hearne.* (1786). Courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

Figure 7



Foot, Sarah. *Veiled Women I: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England*. Ashgate: Aldershot, 2000. 38.

Figure 8



Map 1 Female religious communities in England, 871-1066

Foot, Sarah. *Veiled Women I: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England*. Ashgate: Aldershot, 2000. 18.

Figure 9



Map 4 Nunneries in England, 940–1066

[illegible]

English Nunneries founded after the Norman Conquest

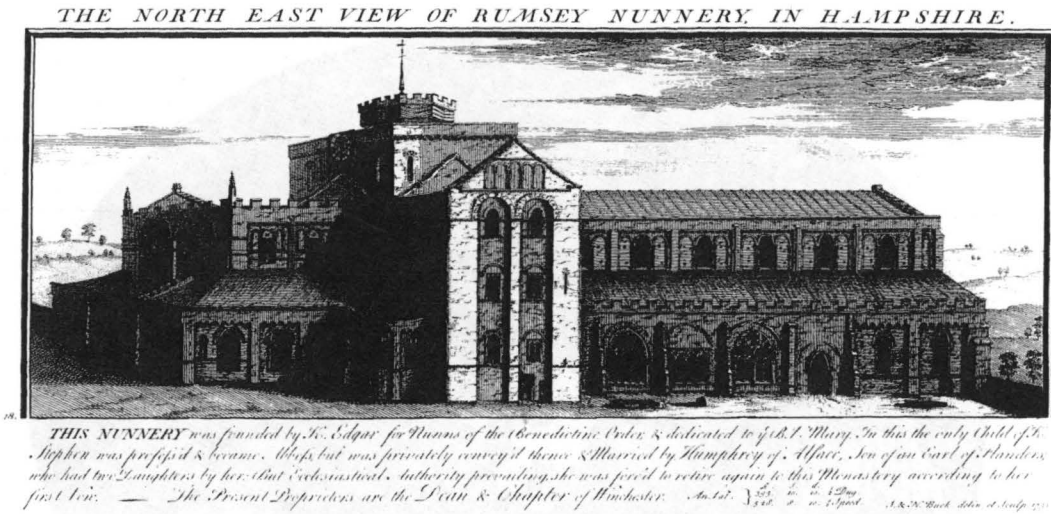
Thompson, Sally. *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. viii.

Figure 11



Knowles, David and R. Neville Hadcock. *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales*. London: Longman, 1971. Following page 565.

Figure 12



Buck, Samuel (1696-1779) [*A collection of engravings of castles, and abbeys in England by Samuel and Nathanael Buck.*] [London]: From ye Golden Buck Warwickstreet, near Goldensquare May, 1726[-39]. 14 parts. From ECCO website: *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group.
<http://galenet.galegroup.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/servlet/ECCO>

Figure 13



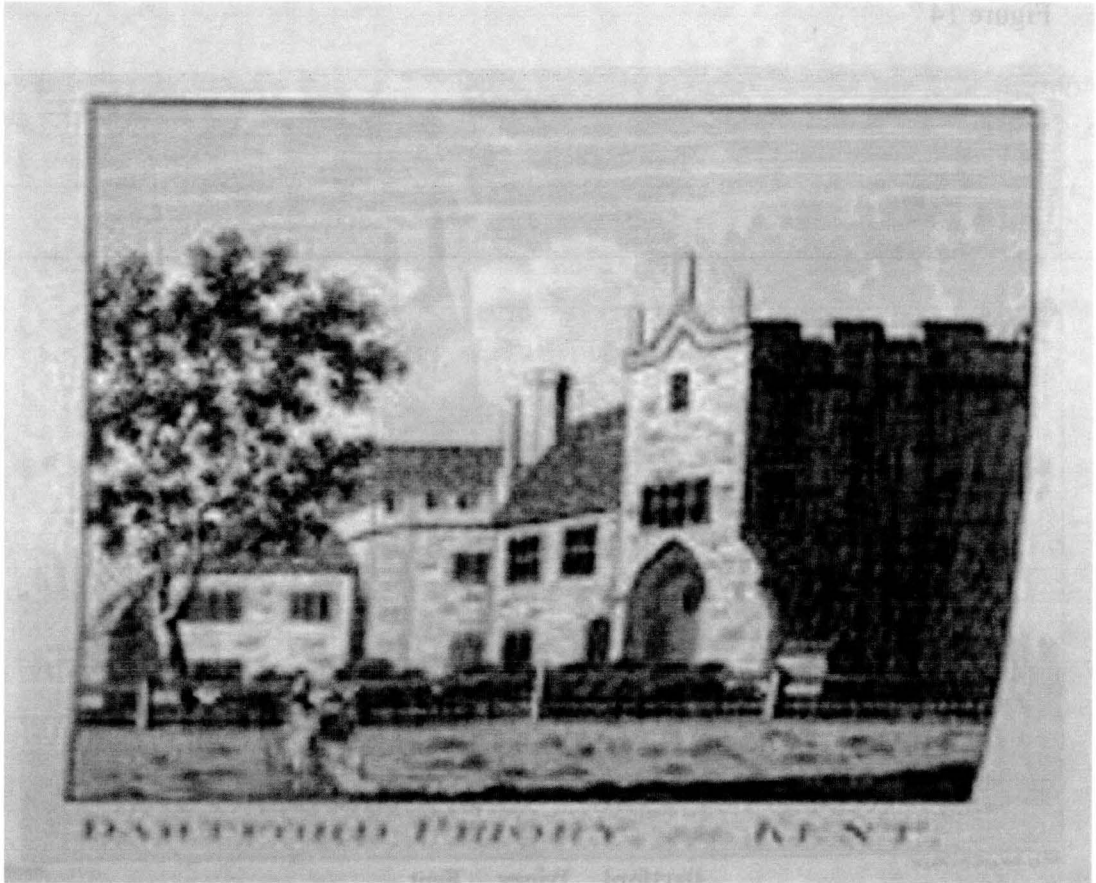
Rumsey Church, from Richard Bernard Godfrey, Ed. and Publisher, *Antiquarian Repertory* (1777). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library.

Figure 14



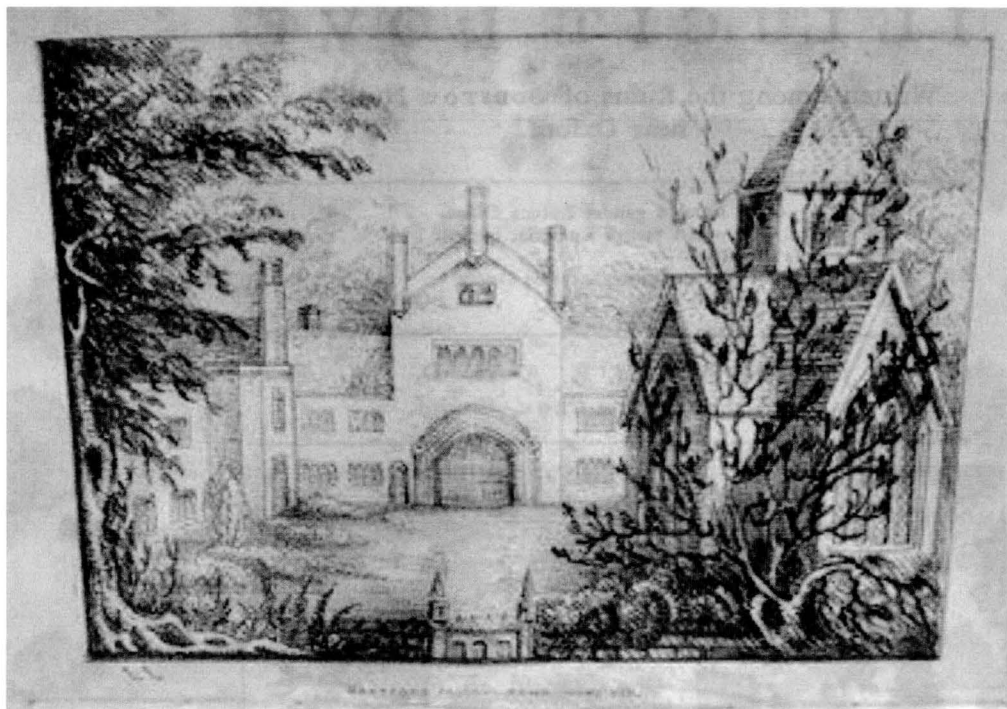
Grose, Francis. *The Antiquities of England and Wales* (Four Volumes). Volume III. London: S. Hooper, 1773 [1772]-76. Facing page 27. Drawn anno. 1753.
 From ECCO website: *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group.
<http://galenet.galegroup.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/servlet/ECCO>

Figure 15



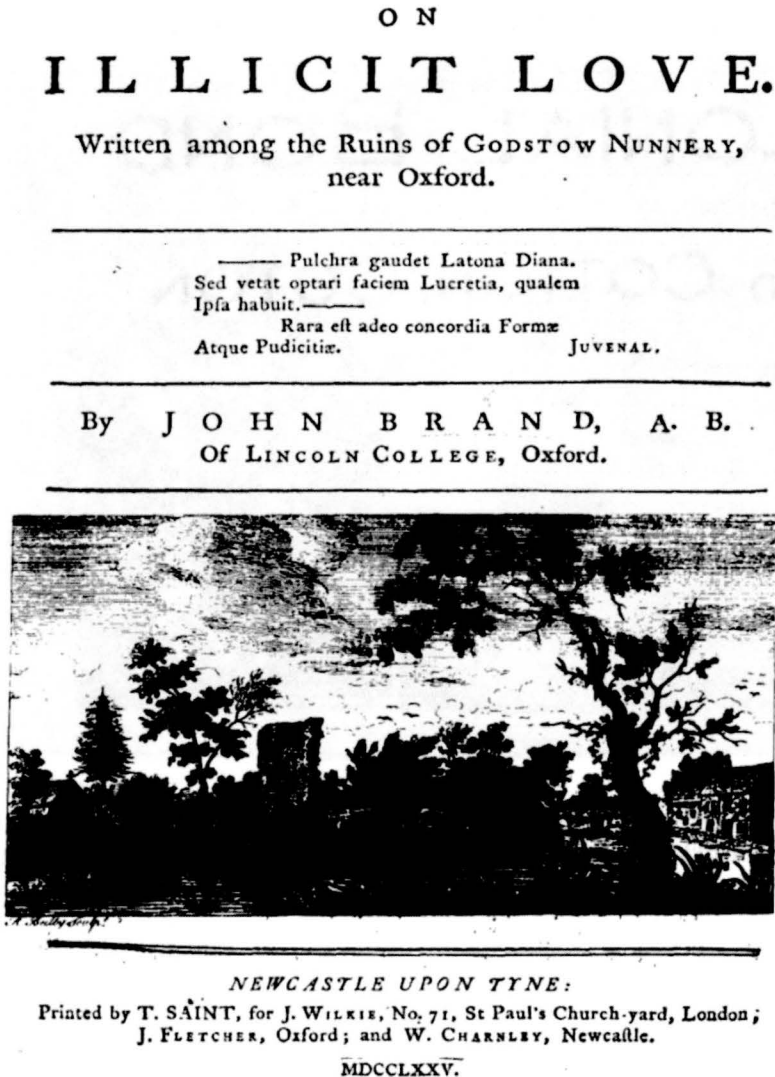
Newman, Frederick. *Curiosities and Beauties of England Displayed*. [1795?]
Upper right-hand corner, 2 pages following description of Dartford Priory.
Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art.

Figure 16



Dunkin, John. *The History and Antiquities of Dartford with Topographical Notices of the Neighbourhood*. Facing page 112. Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art.

Figure 17



Title page from John Brand's *On Illicit Love*.

From ECCO website: *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group.

<http://galenet.galegroup.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/servlet/ECCO>

Figure 18

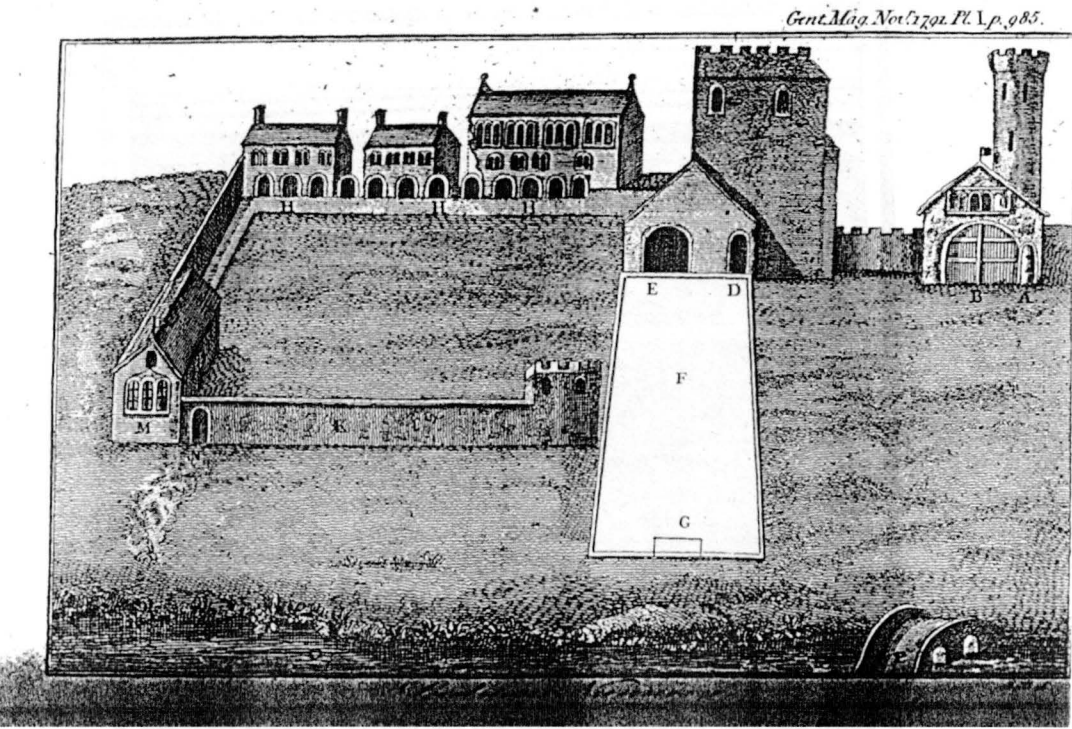


Illustration of Godstow Nunnery from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1791. Courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University.

Figure 19

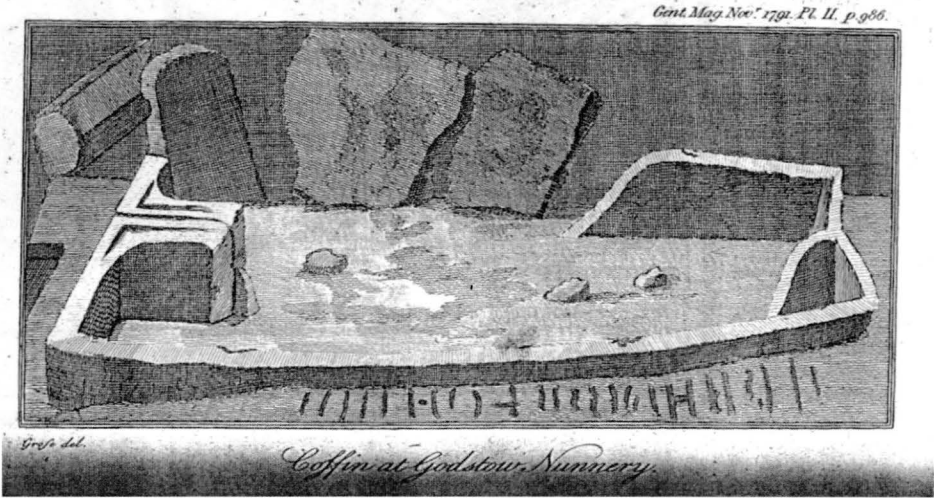


Illustration of a coffin at Godstow Nunnery from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1791. Courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University.

Figure 20



Frontispiece of John Hughes's translation of *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 1718. Engraved by Elisha Kirkall. Courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University.

Figure 21



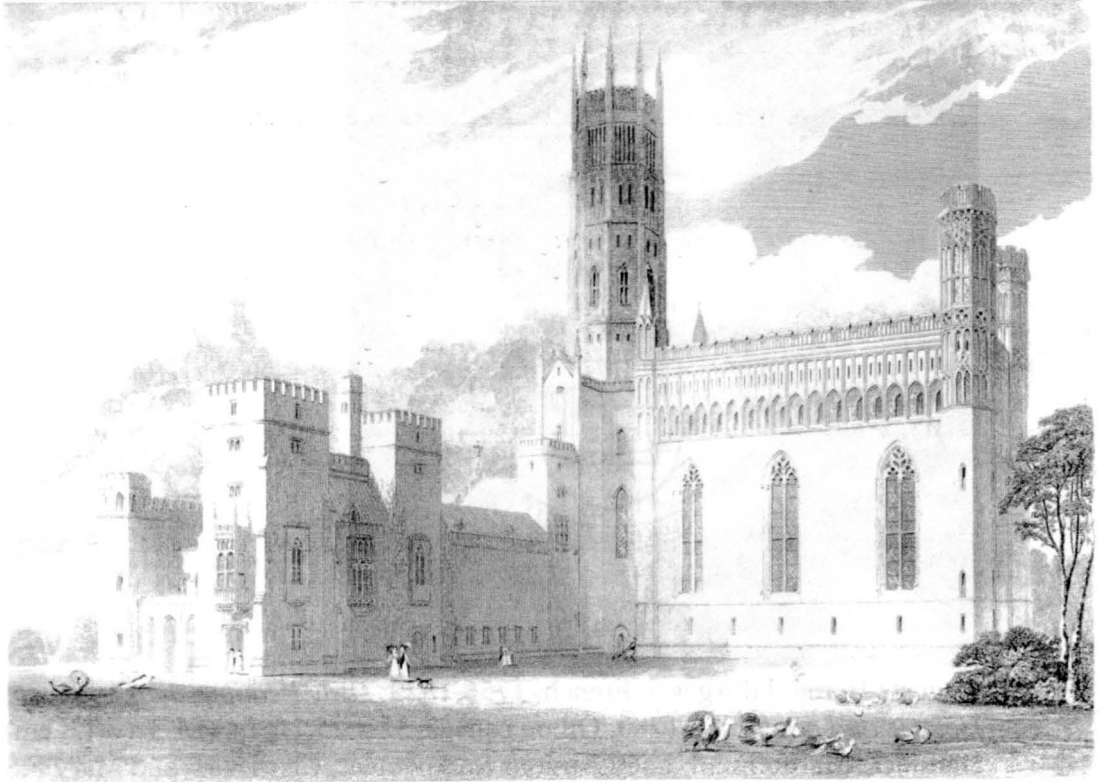
Auguste Bernard d'Agesci, French, 1756-1829, *Lady Reading the Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, c.1780, Oil on canvas, 32 x 25 1/2 in. (81.3 x 64.8 cm), Mrs. Harold T. Martin Fund; Lacy Armour Endowment; Charles H. and Mary F.S. Worcester Collection, 1994.430, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 22



Header for the preface to John Hughes's translation of *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 1718. Engraved by Elisha Kirkall. Courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University.

Figure 23



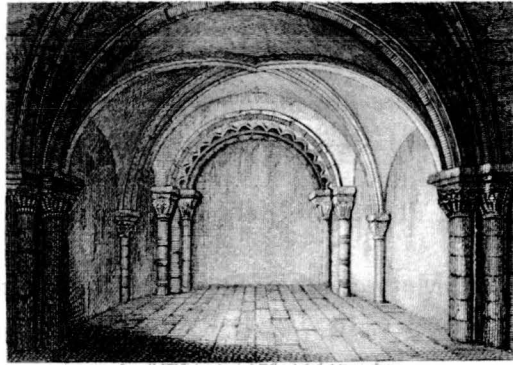
South East view of Fonthill Abbey, 1823. From John Britton's *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire* (1823). Courtesy of the William Beckford Collection. General Collection. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Figure 24

From James Storer, *The Antiquarian Itinerary*, Volume IV (1818).

A Vault at the end of the Conventual Church (Ely).

Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library.



A Vault at the end of the Conventual Church

Engraved by W. Storer from a drawing by W. Storer for the Antiquarian Itinerary
 Published for the Proprietors, &c. by W. Storer, New Bond, Street.

Figure 25

From *The Antiquarian Repertory*
 Volume II (1777), facing page 280.

Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library.



MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

*Engraved from a Drawing taken from an Original Picture
 now in the Church of St. Andrew in the City of Antwerp.*

Pub. & Sold by R. Dods, & W. Long, &c.

Figures 26 and 27

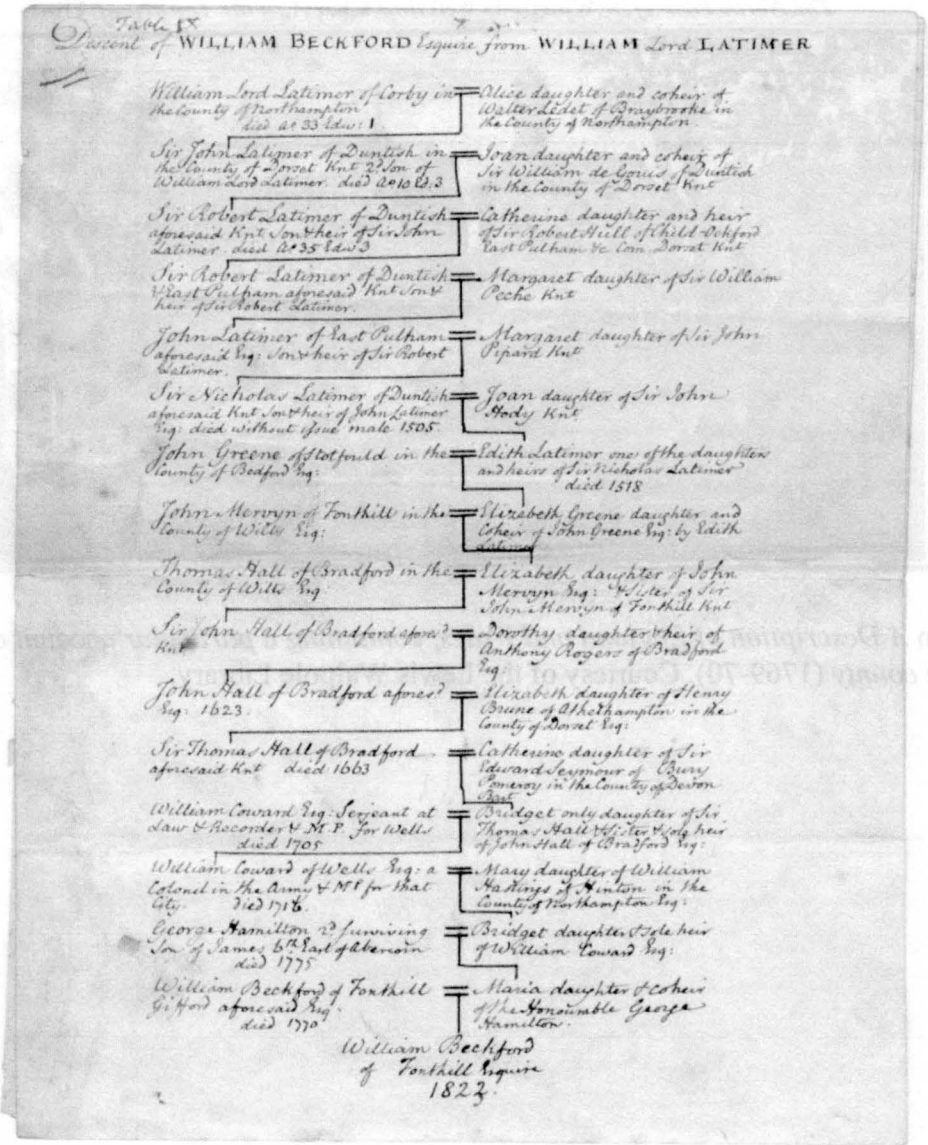
From Robert Bowyer, *A Series of One Hundred and Ninety-Six Engravings (in the line manner) by the First Artists in the Country, Illustrative of the History of England* (1812).

Right: Portrait of Mary Queen of Scots, died 1587, aged 45 (p. 118).

Left: Mary queen of Scots Previous to her Execution (p. 117).
 Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library.

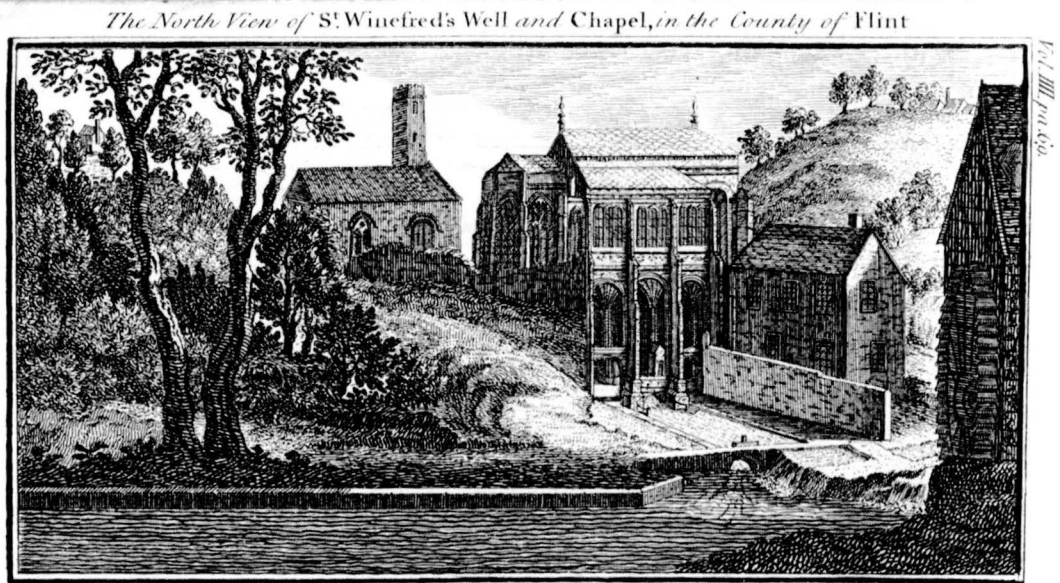


Figure 28



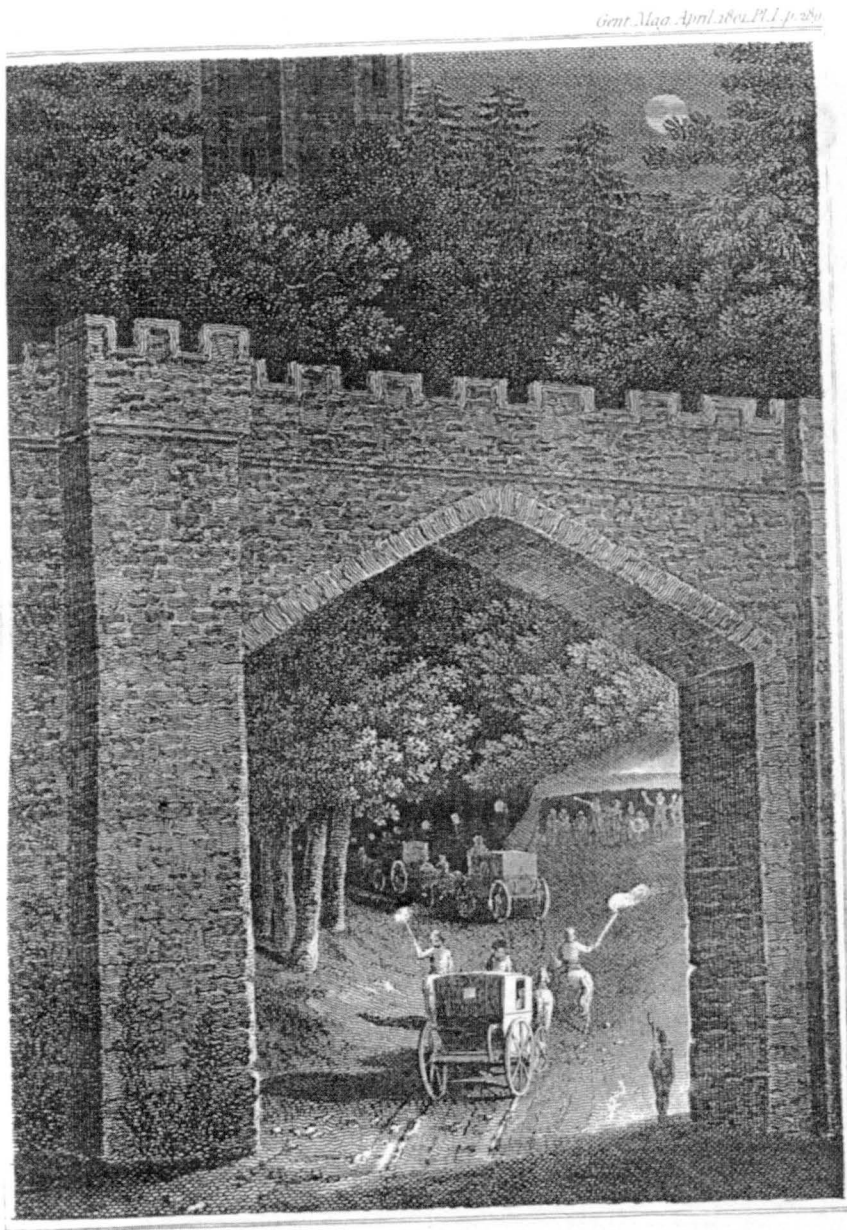
William Beckford's genealogical chart. Courtesy of the William Beckford Collection. General Collection. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Figure 29



From *A Description of England and Wales, containing a particular account of each county* (1769-70). Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library.

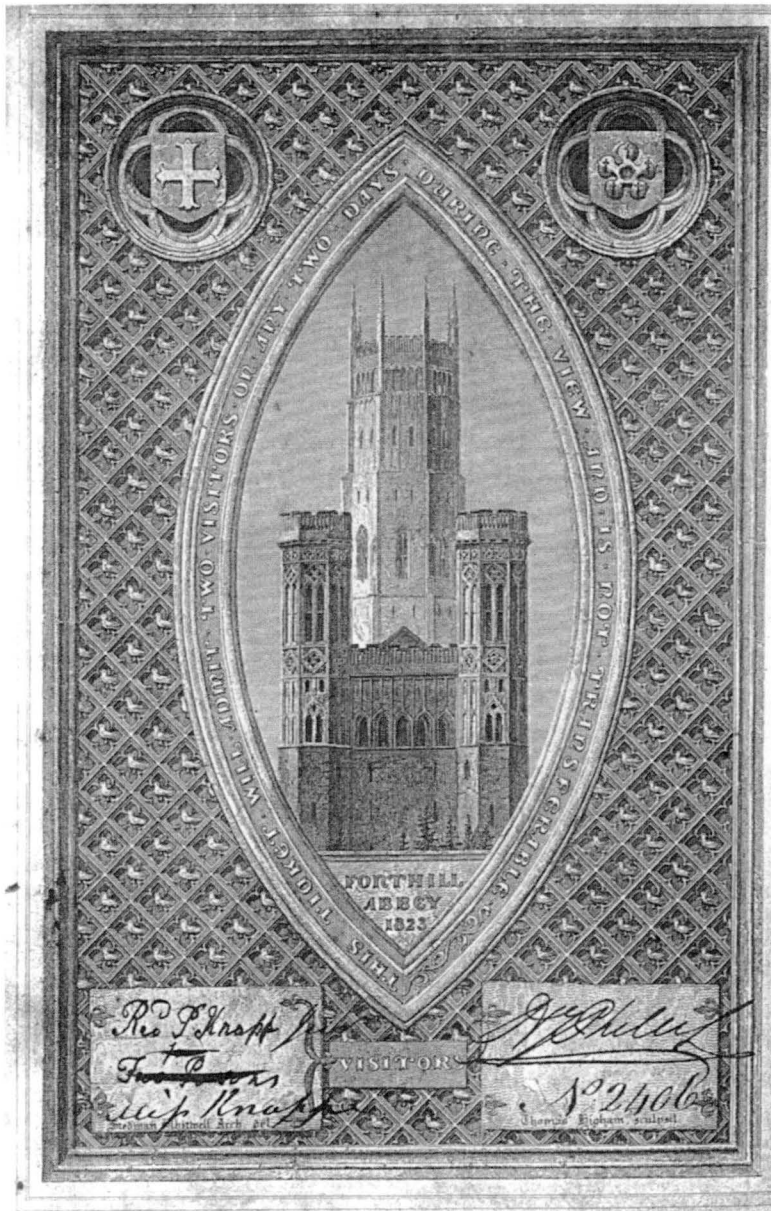
Figure 30



Lord NELSON'S Reception at FONTHILL.

“Lord Nelson’s Reception at Fonthill.” From *The Gentleman’s Magazine*. April 1801, page 296. Courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University.

Figure 31



Admittance ticket for the 1823 Auction at Fonthill. Tipped into the front of *A Catalogue of the Costly and Interesting Effects of Fonthill Abbey*. Courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University.

Figure 32



“Ruins of the Abbey of St. Edmund at Bury” *The Antiquarian Repertory* Vol. III (ca.1775-1786) Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library

Figure 33



“Netley Abbey” *The Antiquarian Repertory* Vol. IV (ca. 1775-1786) Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library

Figure 34



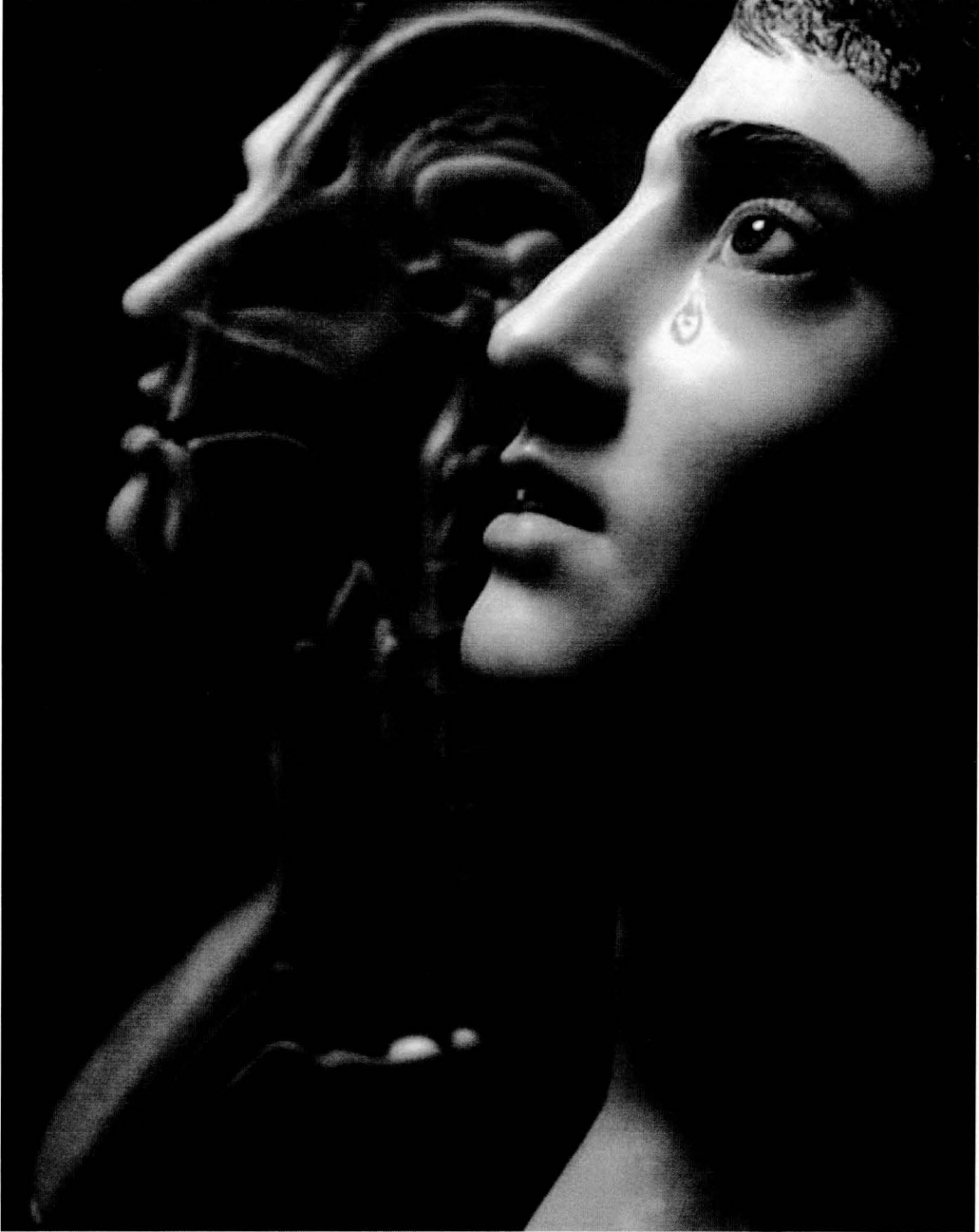
Thomas Hearne, “North Aspect of Furness Abbey” *Antiquities of Great Britain Vol. I* (1786). Courtesy of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

Figure 35



Furness Abbey, January 2007. Picture by the author.

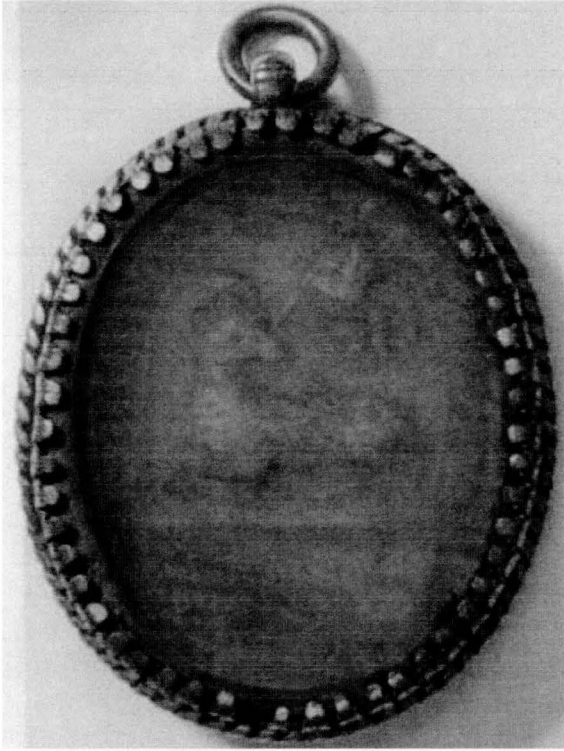
Figure 36



Woman with a Teardrop, or “La dame à la larme” (1748, coloured wax) by André Pierre Pinson (French, 1746-1828). Housed in Paris, Muséum national d’histoire naturelle (MNHN). This photo is from their website:

<http://www.mnhn.fr/museum/foffice/national/national/presse/photos/photographies_evt/fiche.xsp?IMGLIBREDROIT_ID=2095&MAN_ID=11494&idx=84&nav=liste> Copyrighted to Bernard Faye/MNHN.

Figure 37



18th-century Italian *Agnus Dei* of wax in a brass mounting.
 Courtesy of the European Network on the Instruments of Devotion (ENID)
 website: <http://www.enid.uib.no/texts/ryan_1.htm>

Figure 38



“The French Plague” or Syphilis, one of Gaetano Giulio Zumbo’s *Theatres*.
 Photo courtesy of curiousexpeditions.org

Figure 39



Gaetano Giulio Zumbo's wax *Head*. Photo courtesy of curiousexpeditions.org

Figure 40



The *Medici Venus* by Clementine Susini (1754-1814). Photo courtesy of curiousexpeditions.org

Figure 41



From Sally Thompson's *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Page viii.

Figure 42



Buck, Samuel (1696-1779) [*A collection of engravings of castles, and abbeys in England by Samuel and Nathanael Buck.*] [London]: From ye Golden Buck Warwickstreet, near Goldensquare May, 1726[-39]. From ECCO website: *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group.
<http://galenet.galegroup.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/servlet/ECCO>

Figure 43

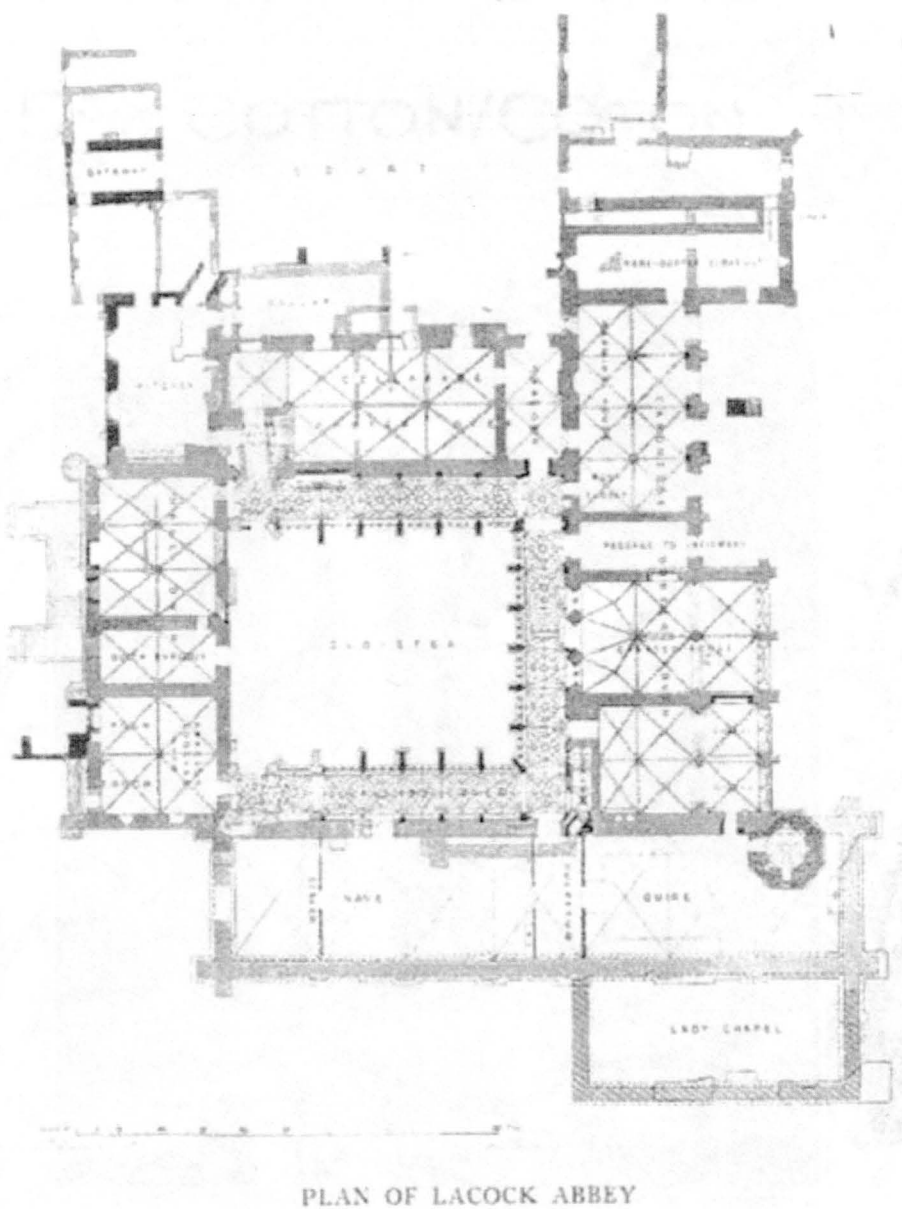


William Henry Widdowson

Watts, William, *The seats of the nobility and gentry, in a collection of the most interesting & picturesque views, engraved by W. Watts*. [Chelsea]: 1779[-86]. Plate LXXXII.

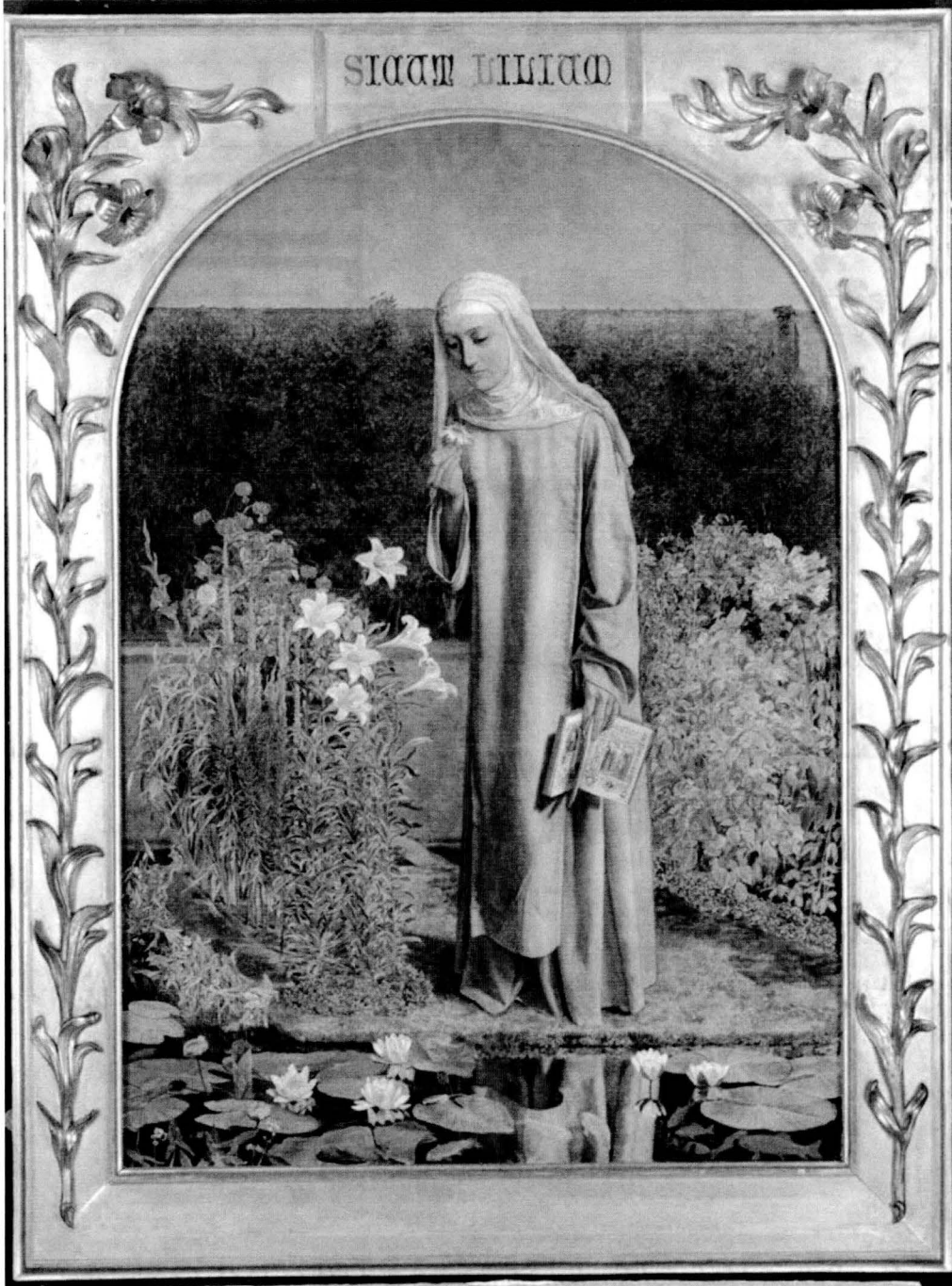
From ECCO website: *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group.
<http://galenet.galegroup.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/servlet/ECCO>

Figure 44



From Eileen Power, *Medieval English nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535*, Cambridge: University Press, 1922. Plate VIII

Figure 45



Charles Alston Collins, *Convent Thoughts*, c.1851. Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

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